THE ILLIBERAL TURN IN ADVANCED DEMOCRACIES

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Consolidation of substantive democracies requires the establishment of measures that go far beyond the procedural elements of democracy, the erosion of which is leading to the rapid rise of illiberalism across the globe. It is no longer possible to associate this phenomenon solely with the developing world or with those countries whose democracies have never truly reached the phase of consolidation. We now see the erosion of liberal democracy in various shapes and forms across advanced democracies in Europe as well as in the United States and beyond. Thus, we argue that the rise of illiberalism in advanced democracies should not be viewed as an isolated instance but as a natural outcome of an interconnected phenomenon that is rapidly gaining pace across the globe. As opposed to dominant accounts that resort to factors stemming from identity and/or economic considerations, we believe that the underlying reasons behind the rise of illiberalism in advanced democracies should be sought in multi-layered explanations that rest on the disconnect between globalization and democracy.

Globalization and Hyperconnectivity: Potentials and Risks

It is indeed the case that global integration is rising. The trade volume of goods, services, and investments between countries has soared from 24 percent to 39 percent of global gross domestic product in just over a decade.[1] It is the imperatives and outcomes of globalization that are simultaneously behind the prosperity as well as the risks and uncertainties faced by advanced democracies. Rising levels of **connectivity** across the globe have fueled and, in turn, bolstered globalization. Connectivity has intensified thanks to three key interconnected developments that contribute to affluence but at the same time pose significant risks and challenges that need to be managed. The first concerns the rapid development and spread of technological advances since the middle of the last century. Also known as the **Fourth Industrial Revolution**, the digital breakthroughs of our globalized era have a transformative impact on all spheres of life. The intensification of globalization is, in fact, largely due to the remarkable increase in digital flows in the last decade. While they can contribute to the efficiency of individual lives and increase global income levels by promoting future economic growth through raising productivity and efficiency, they also run the risk of leading to greater levels of inequality, particularly through disrupting labor markets.[2] There are different estimates of the extent to which actual jobs will be lost to automation in the next two to three decades, ranging from a projected 47 percent for the United States to the more optimistic scenario of 9 percent on average across OECD countries.[3] The digital revolution also bears other types of risks such as those concerning cyber and national security, as well as international terrorism, at a time when information and data flow rapidly within and across borders.

Globalization and ensuing connectivity not only entails fundamental technological change but also rapid **urbanization** across the world. We now see the rise of "global cities," attracting the bulk of nations', as well as the world's, economic activity and drawing the masses as inhabitants. A recent Brookings Report on Global Cities has drawn attention to the fact that while 29 percent of the world population lived in cities in 1950, more than half of the world's population today live in urban areas, with the numbers expected to increase to 66 percent mid-century.[4] Yet, urbanization also entails key risks and challenges. Particularly in the developing world, the large influx of people into urban centers places tremendous pressure on local governments' abilities to provide basic services, while exacerbating problems related to climate change and public health. Global cities attract migrants not only from within the same country but also from neighboring states and beyond. It is estimated that by 2030, over 2.7 billion more people will have migrated to a country other than their own for better work and life prospects.[5] This is expected to further fuel societal tensions based on race, ethnicity, and nationality as well as deepen economic inequalities—translating into growing estrangement with the political system, heightening concerns over security, and in certain contexts, bolstering support for far right and populist political movements that feed on such grounds.

The third and the final element of connectivity, closely related to urbanization, is the **expansion of the global middle class**. There were reportedly 3.2 billion people in the middle class by the end of

2016, constituting a market size of one-third of the global economy.[6] Three billion more people, almost exclusively from emerging markets, are expected to join the ranks of these new middle classes over the next two decades.[7] While the growth of the middle class may imply certain opportunities such as more investment in children's education and contributions to global economic growth through consumption, it might also entail a growing disillusionment on the part of these masses when it comes to states' increasingly strained delivery of services. There is little evidence today to suggest that middle classes will demand more democracy in cases where their expectations are not met.[8]

The risks and challenges posed by these three constituent elements of connectivity can put political decision makers in a difficult spot concerning the relationship between the type of measures that should be deployed in the management of these problems and democratic principles. In the current global political context with heightened security concerns, the management of these risks and threats, most notably in the fields of migration and inequality, are often sought in measures that contravene liberal principles in advanced democracies and elsewhere. While connectivity has the potential to lead to more prosperity, short-term foci on its perceived risks and the potential political costs that these risks may incur are paving the way for the prioritization of their immediate management through means that in the longer run could lead to isolation and inward-looking policies and further distancing from democratic ideals. This is discernable from the increasing **use of referendum** as the main vehicle deciding the fate of the political community; the widespread appeal of **strong leaders** who are usually above and even in conflict with their own political parties; and the **upsurge of populism** as a specific style of governance and ideology.

Disconnect Between Political Choices and Democracy

We have entered **an era of referendums** across the globe, from the British referendum over Brexit and the referendum for Catalonian independence in Europe to the referendum for independence in Northern Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government and the referendums for regime change in Italy and Turkey. There seems to be a cascading influence of separatist referendums claiming the right to a new nation-state, with constant speculations about whether Belgium, Italy, Scotland, Ireland, or even Germany may be next. The fact that a vast majority of these referendums are taking place in consolidated democracies suggests that even in cases where liberal democracy is taken for granted, the future of the political community is now decided less through pluralistic deliberation and representation and more through a majoritarian and polarizing instrument easily exploitable by the populist right, undermining the constituent elements of liberal democracy as well as (in the case of the EU) dynamics of regional integration. Hence, while referendum may be perceived and used as a fast and effective way of tackling a key issue in the political community, such as claims to a new state, membership of a regional organization, or regime change for the sake of attaining security in the face of perceived imminent threats, the exclusionary and polarizing nature of referendums runs the risk of undermining democracy under the banner of political efficacy and easily spreads beyond borders in our highly connected world.

This danger is more acute when referendums take place in the context of strong and often charismatic leadership such as in the case of Turkey and/or in cases where the populist surge is present such as in the UK. Therefore, if this is the era of referendums, then it is also **the era of strong leaders** in place of declining class-based mass parties. As observed in the cases of Erdoğan in Turkey, Orban in Hungary, or Modi in India, the leader is situated above the party, often at the expense of the hollowing or weakening of the party structure, thus leading to the personalization of politics and power. Even in established democracies such as Germany, the political party becomes increasingly embroiled in the persona of the leader. While strong leadership may be assumed by politicians and preferred by the electorates as an efficient mode of dealing with immediate challenges and risks especially in times of crisis and turmoil, it has a problematic relationship with liberal democracy. As political theory and comparative politics have taught us, the stronger the leader is, the less important the political process becomes. Key constituent elements of a liber-

al democracy such as representation, participation, and deliberation, as well as checks and balances, can often lose their significance in the context of strong leadership.

Finally, and in close relationship with these two eras, we claim that we have also entered **the era of populism**. Populism can be defined as a style of governance[9] and as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté général* (general will) of the people."[10] The populist upsurge is already a global phenomenon in advanced democracies and beyond thanks to the success of populist parties in Europe, as well as in countries like Hungary, Turkey, India, Thailand, and Venezuela. It has emerged as part of a new broader global political reality that cuts across geographic, economic, and political boundaries. Mudde identifies the three defining features of populism as *anti-establishment*, *authoritarianism*, and *nativism*.[11] Populist parties and leaders claim to be *anti-establishment* in the sense that they represent the voice of the ordinary people against the "elites" of the establishment, be it intellectuals, big business, or elected mainstream politicians. They are also highly *authoritarian* movements, which rely heavily on both the presence of a (often) charismatic leader and a preference for majoritarianism. These are not bottom-up movements that emerge as an end result of popular mobility: they constitute a new and specific mode of governance where majoritarian instruments such as referenda are preferred over a system which prioritizes checks and balances and the protection of minority rights. Finally, populism embodies *nativism* in the sense of favoring exclusion over inclusion and closure over cosmopolitan values, best reflected in these movements' anti-immigrant attitudes in the West and hostility towards ethnic and religious minorities elsewhere.

It is widely accepted that economic challenges such as the global recession, increasing levels of unemployment, and inequality; security challenges such as the rise of terrorist movements; and multiple global challenges such as migration, climate change, and the scarcity of natural resources are feeding into the rise of populism across the world. Populist parties and leaders seem to capitalize on the fears of the people through the discourse of "managing" and "containing" these "risks." Hence, they play into the sense of ontological insecurity across their citizens, conveying the message that "delivery" against these "immediate" risks trumps the significance of rights and freedoms.[12] The *inclusive* institutional system and discourse that lies at the heart of modern liberal democracy is now being attacked by an *exclusive* understanding of political institutions, representation, identity, and difference. This crisis of liberal democracy is also both evident from and closely intertwined with the existential crisis that is being faced by mainstream political parties in their weakening membership base, institutional structure, and failure in determining the political agenda. Party politics as a key pillar of liberal democracy is increasingly losing its relevance for modern-day politics. In a similar vein, since populist leaders detest all "intermediary powers" between the "people" and the "leader," in addition to the political party apparatuses, they also dismiss free and professional media as well as alternative voices from civil society, in turn severely limiting public debate over policy matters that lie at the core of liberal democratic politics.[13]

Against this background, it is safe to conclude that the retreat from democracy is not a unique or a country-specific phenomenon but a global one including advanced democracies. Its roots cannot solely be explained via economic and value-based considerations alone but need to be sought within the dynamics of globalization and connectivity as well as the measures that political actors, often with public support, utilize in the management of the risks and challenges that they pose. The ways in which specific country cases among advanced democracies have experienced and continue to live through the outlined constituent elements of globalization and connectivity—and their presumed contribution to the rise of referendums, strong leaders, and populism threatening liberal democracy—requires further investigation. This would help us in specifying the multi-layered and connected conditions that have given rise to illiberalism even in consolidated democracies, the complex mechanisms behind the conditions and manifestations, as well as the potential solutions to salvage democracy in a difficult era.

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