



Nordic Summer University



European Humanities  
University

## Proposal for a New Study Circle 2018-2020 **Patterns of Dysfunction in Contemporary Democracies Impact on Human Rights and Governance** A Joint Venture Between NSU and EHU.

This circle endeavours to study different patterns of dysfunction in contemporary democracies and in particular the insidious processes which undermine the traditional canons of liberal democracy, notably encapsulated in the rule of law and human rights.

Whether the insidious processes are illiberal depends partly, however, on which conception of democracy one cherishes. Defenders of representative democracy would consider as populist a too ready use of referendums, while supporters of some kind of direct democracy would consider it a democratic deficit not to do so. (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-38002820>) Defenders of the separation of powers would look gravely on attempts on the part of legislators to interfere with particular cases and judicial decisions, while staunch defenders of popular sovereignty would see few problems in this. Defenders of the rule of law would be concerned about the intrusion of values into government and administration. The defence of civilization, liberty and democracy would tend to overrule respect for law and individual rights. Depending on the point of view taken, evaluations about dysfunctions in democracy would differ. We should therefore be aware that the very conception of democracy we are using is part of the problem studied.

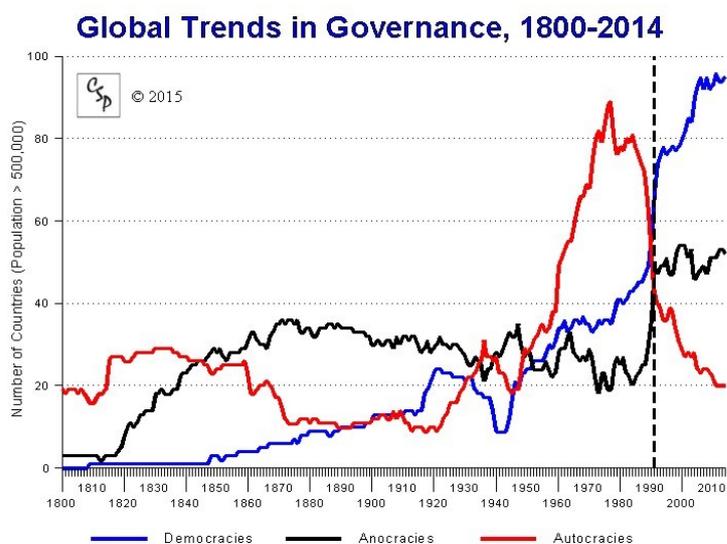
Many factors are involved in these insidious processes and the state of the various democracies can be seen as nodal points between different factors that are criss-crossing and thus creating a unique constellation: populism, nationalism, corruption, fear, social isolation, ignorance, poverty, luxury, injustice, rootlessness in its various forms are signs of unbalances within democracies on both the global, national and local levels.

Studying this theme, we will put a special emphasis on the situation in the Nordic and Baltic Countries and subsidiarily Eastern Europe. We will do this as a joint venture between the NSU and

EHU. With our respective roots in the Nordic area and the Baltics/Belarus, our two institutions will be able to contribute with their particular experiences. We think that the eroding processes in the established democracies of the Nordic area and those accompanying the democracy building in the Baltic/Eastern European area can illuminate each other. Provocatively, one might wonder whether they are not converging toward some kind of illiberal democracy.

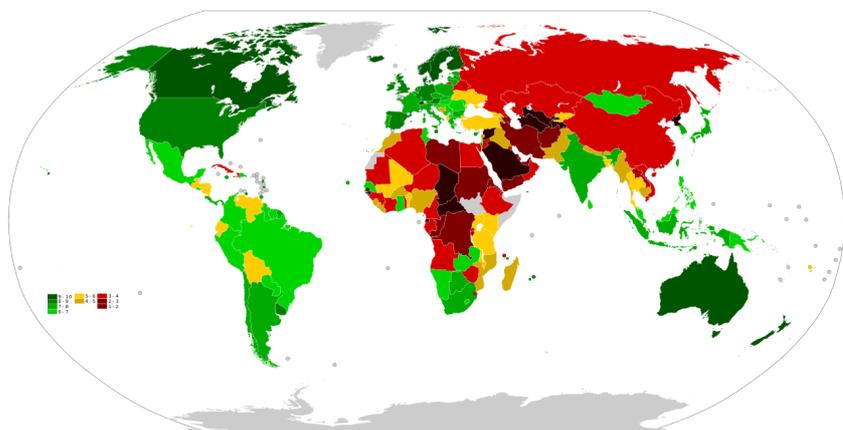
## State of the Art

The number of democracies in the world has been growing steadily. According to the Polity project the number of democracies started to outnumber autocracies sometime in the 1990s and since the tendency has been upwards though stagnating toward 2014.



Source: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>

According to Economist Intelligence Unit, only 20 countries were, however, full democracies in 2016. The number of flawed democracies was much bigger, namely 59. We therefore note that a large number of democracies are flawed, but even full democracies are challenged in these days.



Source: Based on Economist Intelligence Unit data – [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2015\\_Democracy\\_Index.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2015_Democracy_Index.svg)

Eastern Europe is central in order to understand what is happening in Europe at the moment. Many trends in contemporary European politics started here. In the second half of the 20th century Eastern Europe endeavoured to re-create civil society and develop solidarity anew. The failure of the democratic reforms of the 1990s is the key to understanding modern democracy in the grips of new undemocratic regimes. Here we see the consequences of equal and common citizenship without civic education and civic engagement, and of weak institutions, poor people without any chance of real political participation, lack of solidarity and governments depoliticizing society.

These tendencies are not absent from the Nordic countries. Nordic democracy has generally counted on legislators to show self-restraint, the Nordic supreme courts has nonetheless in varying degree taken on the function of constitutional review. We are very far from the US constitutional court and Nordic supreme courts thinks twice before they oppose the legislature. The former culture of self-restraint has seemingly given way to a more assertive legislative. The legislature also takes a growing interest in particular cases normally the prerogative of the executive. The new social media can, to some extent, re-create direct contact with politicians, but is this sufficient to assure a large well-informed electorate or is it quite the contrary?

We will study these themes in 6 sessions as follows:

### **1. Populism and democracy**

The reason for populist movements are many and we have probably not understood these movements properly yet. Reasons vary from country to country, but there seems to be some standards such as hostility to globalization and distrust of the so-called establishment, injury of justice. There is a strong wish to be heard, that one's vote count, and a feeling that they have been forgotten. In many countries populism has been fuelled by fear of immigration and social instability. It is often seen as a challenge to representative democracy. This was clearly illustrated by the Brexit referendum, where a parliamentary majority to remain was defeated by a popular vote to leave. Lately populism has surged as a consequence of the migration crisis. What are the ideological, social, economical suppositions of these parties? How should we understand them?

### **2. Globalization and democracy**

Economic globalization is made responsible for the loss of jobs; critics claim that benefits have been taken away by the elite. Who profited from globalization and where certain stretches of society abandoned along the road? What would the European societies have looked like without globalization? Politically, free trade and liberalization of capital movements have prompted some to ask, whether democratic decision-making decides anything any more. Are politicians only adapting to circumstances they do not control. Does free trade engage the member countries in fierce competition leading to lower levels of pay and working conditions? Are democratic institutions no longer able to decide about the kind of society which should be instituted? How should we cope with this in terms of justice? (<http://opendemocracy.us1.list-manage.com/track/click?u=9c663f765f28cdb71116aa9ac&id=1b0a762d04&e=20c21a5d20>)

### **3. The Digital Revolution and democracy**

Will the digital revolution, AI, robotic and other technologies maintain or advance democracy, or will they constitute an indispensable tool for emerging autocracies or totalitarian ideologies? The digital revolution enables global gossip, plebiscites, polls and populism which challenge representative democracy. The careful scrutiny of proposals for new legislation and its consequences, which at least ideally is part of representative democracy, is run over by various direct expressions of popular sentiment. Can these expressions no longer be channelled through these representative processes? Is the speed of the information flow simply too fast and reactions too immediate for representative democracy to connect with people. (<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/04/america-tyranny-donald-trump.html>) Is the huge

importance of the media fuelling this process, and what kind of manipulation does control of media allow within these processes to the detriment of democracy?

#### **4. Security and democracy**

Terrorism, social instability and other threats have considerably augmented measures of public control and surveillance leading to growing interference in the private life. The scandal surrounding the NSA monitoring of internet activity and collection of big data concerning telephone conversations did attract much attention, but other measures such as increasing video surveillance, checking of credit card data and the like has considerably enhanced the monitoring of the individual as well. Will such measures fragilize the citizen in relation to the control the very same citizen should exercise on its own democratic institutions and politicians? Are we about to construct the infrastructure for authoritarianism ready for take over when the political situation is ripe or have we found a reasonable compromise between security concerns and democracy?

#### **5. Democratic Deficit in the EU and Local Entities**

Several Nordic countries and all the Baltic countries are members of the EU. Questions of democracy in these countries are therefore linked to the EU. Is the EU undermining national democracies? How does EU participate in the regional and local levels? Many authors have argued for a democratic deficit, but others like Moravcsik and Majone have maintained that Europe is sufficiently democratic and compares reasonably well with democratic institutions elsewhere like those in the US. One might very well wonder whether a more democratic Europe or other institutional changes would silence eurosceptics or make them enthusiastic followers. Could a creative use the subsidiarity principle, however, be a way to conciliate national concerns with the EU?

#### **6. The Elite-People Gap**

To conclude we should consider the elite-people gap. Does it really exist? Who are the elite? Is this just a manipulating term? Do we rather have split societies, where some parts have profited while others were left behind? Is this phenomenon generational? Is it rather due to new yearnings of democracy, which the traditional model cannot fulfil? Should we consider new forms of democracy or political participation? Do illiberal democracies manage to fill the gap trading security (social, internal, external) against obedience? Is the elite-people gap somehow inherent in liberal democracies?

#### **Specific Outcomes**

1. Regarding publication, we have a close co-operation with the [Journal of Constitutionalism and Human Rights](#) in Vilnius (Lithuania) and with the journal [Nordicum-Mediterraneum](#) in Akureyri (Iceland). Papers from the predecessor circle have already been published in both journals. We also envisage a collective paper print publication.

2. In the predecessor circle we have had a substantial number of PhD students. They have used the circle to present papers and thus improve their skills in a context where they can get international response on their work from senior research fellows in a secure and informal environment, thus preparing them for entry into the international community of scholars. We will continue this effort.

3. As in the predecessor circle we will endeavour to unite field workers with scholars such that practical concerns and scholarly interests can mutually enrich each other. This should lead to a more informed practice and more practically minded scholarly research.

4. Within the framework of the circle it will be possible to elaborate a new discipline “The Edges of Contemporary Democracy”, which will be proposed as a part of the study programmes in partner Universities.

5. Winter sessions: We have the possibility to organize our winter sessions at EHU in Vilnius. We also have the possibility to do one session at the Danish Institute of International Studies in Copenhagen. We are envisaging collaboration with the Department of Global Studies at Gothenburg University.

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