

Department of Political Science
Chair of Global Justice

**Lessons from Giovanni Sartori and how to let them keep guiding us - Today's
relevance of the Theory of Democracy Revisited and what is to be done for
defending democracy**

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*Ai miei amici, per essere diventati miei fratelli.
A mia sorella, perché insieme saremo sempre una famiglia.
A mio padre, che con tutti i suoi silenziosi sforzi mi ha donato un mondo di possibilità.
A mia madre, perché nonostante si sentisse sgretolare, è sempre stata la mia roccia.
Perché tutto il (poco) buono che c'è in me
è merito suo.*

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Introduction

Despite being written by Giovanni Sartori some 32 years ago, the *Theory of Democracy Revisited Part One and Two* (hereafter referred to as *TODR I* and *TODR II* or plurally *TODRs*) remain an extraordinarily vivid theoretical framework through which understanding, analyzing and possibly ameliorating democracy. The idea behind this thesis might appear simple, but in light of the current situation, all the more necessary.

Indeed, democracy, its values and processes, are being threatened by old and never before-seen phenomena. And it is precisely when democracy is in crisis that a general theory is needed more than ever. Sartori's masterpieces will function as the compass to follow for navigating the troubled seas of our time so to incontrovertibly enshrining the importance of – and the mission invested in – the general theory of democracy: that of analyzing, finding and crystallizing the elements as well as the feasible circumstances needed for democracy to perform at its best, and to maintain, save and protect them while contemporarily allowing the necessary spaces for transforming the rest, so to give democracy the best possibilities not only to survive, but to thrive.

In order to achieve the aforementioned purpose, this dissertation has been divided in three different chapters, roughly mirroring the tripartite conceptual approach needed for comprehending and examining democracy through Sartori's lenses. As the first one chiefly covers the study of the two books that compose the *Theory of Democracy Revisited*, the second merges empirical and theoretical analysis so to render a complete picture of the current status of democracy, thus leaving to the final chapter the double-fold possibility of inquiring on the origins at the heart of democracy's situation as well as reflecting and exploring suggestions for fighting and reversing the trends plaguing democracy.

Considering this, the first chapter starts with a socio-historical introduction having the aim of helping to understand what pushed Sartori to re-write/revisit his "Democratic Theory" by investigating and reporting both the views that the Italian professor had on the society of the time as well as the history-shaping events of said period. This enables the following part to focus entirely on the study of Sartori's magnum opus on democracy, offering a comprehensive summary of the work, starting with giving a thorough framework of the various aspects and

types of democracy, hence including its minimalist and maximum definitions, necessary for then switching on covering Sartori's opera explaining:

- The tripartite characterization (limited majority rule; elective procedures and representational transmission of power) of what he intends for democracy
- The difference between peace and war-like view of politics, the importance of cognitive realism, the diversion between empirical and rational democracies and the latter's specific traits (proportional representation; parliament as the locus of sovereignty; governments as executives)
- The goal of political freedom, enacted by liberal-democratic constitutionalism, aiming at curbing power so to reverse the misunderstood slogan "all power to the people" to the more democratic one "all power to nobody", thus highlighting the importance of the interplay of democracy
- His motifs for wishing that a democracy should be a polyarchy of merit as well as a selective one
- Sartori's idea of (procedural) freedom from as the basis for every other type of liberty or equality and lastly,
- The moral basis of democracy and the fundamental union between liberalism and democracy itself

In concluding the introduction of the starting chapter, it is fundamental to say that this entire thesis, particularly the end of the first part, is embellished by having had the opportunity of studying and re-elaborating an unpublished paper, entitled "Victory and Crisis", written by Sartori for the *1994 Nobel Symposium on Democracy*, verging on the challenges that democracy had to face in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The second chapter commences by asking whether the Italian professor's ideas are still relevant today. Answers to this question would be manifold; however, granted their affirmative nature and apart from mental suppositions a perfect way to agree on Sartori's works' relevance would be to look at the current global status of democracy. The aim of this chapter is thus that of offering an empirical framework in order to discover the depth and range of the democratic

crisis. For doing so, real-world cases will be analyzed, departing from Trump's election to Brexit, overviewing the situation in Europe and the problems vexing even the most stable of democracies, for then passing onto the rise of what have been dubbed Illiberal democracies and the attempts for gaining new undemocratic global leadership by Russia and above all China. Empirical research will be co-aided by theoretical analysis so that the aforementioned real-world examples will be dissected through the lenses of six detectable phenomena that throughout his writings, Sartori considered as endangering democracy and that today represent the causes for its current crisis. Those are:

- Populism
- Forms of distrust in democracy
- Criticism of civil society (mainly focusing on the works of journalists and NGOs)
- Manipulation of preferences via new technologies
- Rise of illiberal democracy
- Ascent of the threat of digital authoritarianism

In bearing in mind that there is no such thing as a single cause that can be held responsible for the current state of the world, the origins of the above-stated six damaging tendencies compose the body of the first part of the last chapter of this dissertation. Said analysis will verge on Sartori's Homo Videns' clairvoyance and its interplay with Nichols' idea of the "Death of Expertise", Finn's notion of "Algorithmic Trust" and Greenfield's analysis on "Radical Technologies", thus forming the final structure for understanding why the political manifestations of these phenomena are jeopardizing democracy.

The contrast between democracy and one of its most fashionable alternatives, epistocracy, will open the conclusive sections of the thesis, composed of suggestions that will explore the new technological possibilities – blockchain, 3D printing, alternative management of the internet – for guaranteeing the continual defense of democracy as selective polyarchy while also investigating the elements that could generate the conditions for its transformation into a polyarchy of merit. Lastly, the analysis will convey on ways to fight off the illiberal and digital authoritarian menaces and address possible solutions – cognitive empathy and the possibility of rethinking materialism – for curing the crisis of ethics that Sartori deeply believed was plaguing modern democracies.

Chapter one. Studying the TODRs

1.1 Why were the TODRs written?

“The concept of democracy is entitled to be diffuse and multifaceted. This is so, among other reasons, because democracy largely is by now a name for a civilization or, better, for the political end product (to date) of Western civilization. Communism and socialism can be connected to a single major author -Marx- and assessed as deviations from, and implementations or negations of, Marx. Democracy is not amenable to a similar treatment; the towering single major author on democracy does not exist” (Sartori, p.3).

Solely this intro, magisterially written by Giovanni Sartori in his “*The Theory of Democracy Revisited*”, smartly suggests at least two things: the ambiguity and difficulty on writing on such an enormous topic as democracy and the need to define what democracy means. Holding true that no such primary author exists, surely Sartori is part of the rather small circle that so greatly contributed to the study, debate and understanding of democracy.

Nevertheless, the most important work of the Italian intellectual on this topic, “*The Theory of Democracy Revisited Part I*” and “*The Theory of Democracy Revisited Part II*” starts by admitting that “in the last decades we have progressively lost a mainstream theory of democracy” (Sartori, p.4). According to the author, four different traits can be ascribed as the cause of this phenomenon, starting from the comprehensive nature of the term democracy. As everyone asks to be considered democratic, the more the term assumes different characteristics, hence, the greater its diffusion, the greater its subsequent theoretical confusion. The second factor is represented by a similar confusion, this time arising from an intellectual trend that professes that words have a personal meaning, or better put that a person can freely stipulate the meaning of words.¹ Subsequently, Sartori hinges on what is dubbed the “Wertfreiheit” issue, guilty of causing the passage from “an excess of descriptivism to an excess of value advocacy” (Sartori, p.5).² The fourth and last point focuses on the emergence and differences between empirical and normative theories and the consequent difficulty of testing them, for not “all empirical theory is supposed to assess whether, and to what extent, the facts

¹ What the Italian professor later describes as “war on words” or stipulativism, see page 481 of the *TODR II*.

² For a not summarized understanding read page 4-5 of *TODR I*.

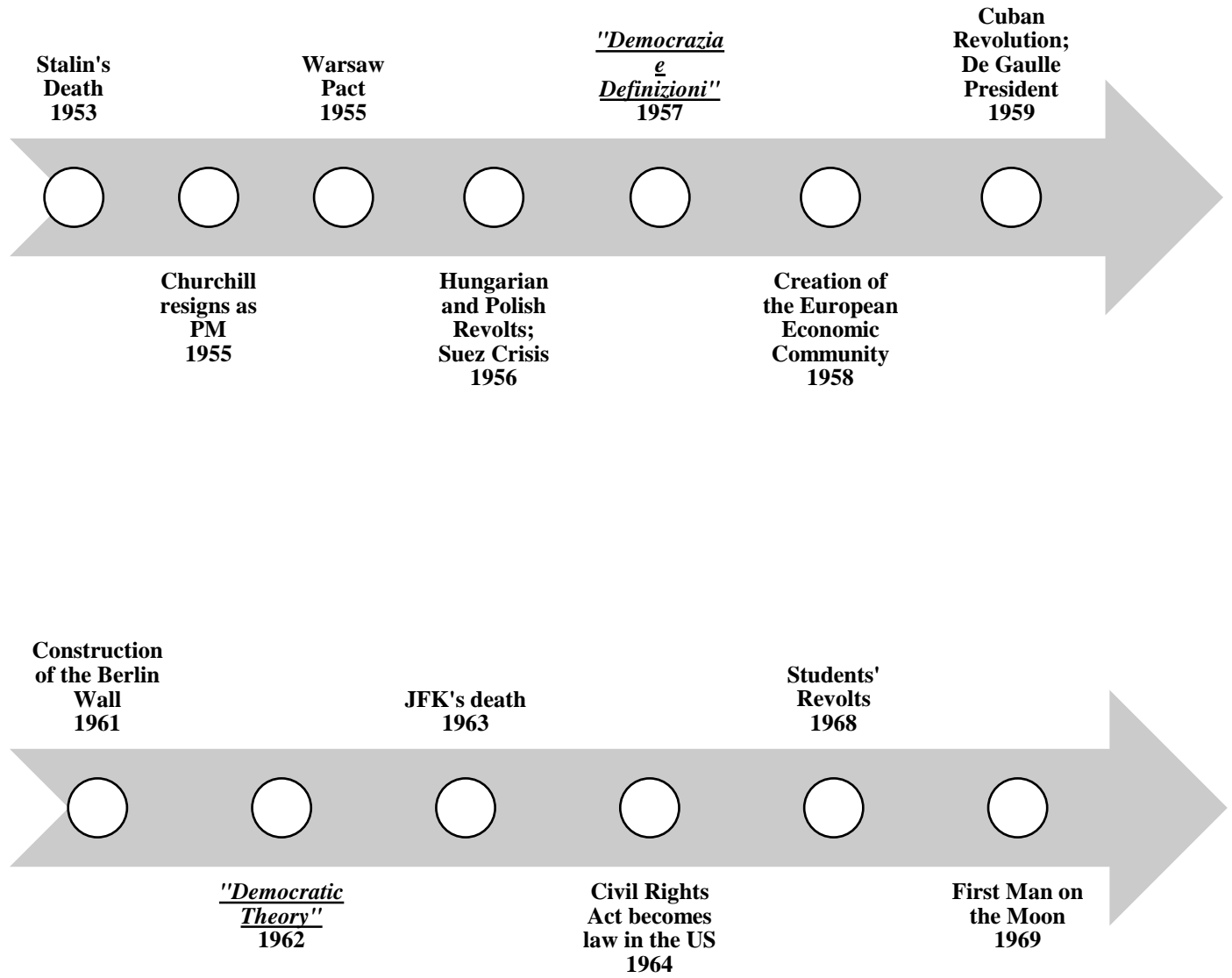
correspond to the theorization. Empirical theories may serve other purposes; but when they do abide by a testing purpose, as is most frequently the case, then we are not doing well. The theory of democracy as such is a *macrotheory* that largely hinges on generalizations. Conversely, the research that feeds the empirical theory of democracy produces *microevidence*, in the sense that the evidence is too small for the generalizations that it purports to test” (Sartori, p.6). Thus, finding the balance between macrotheory and microevidence is no easy thing.

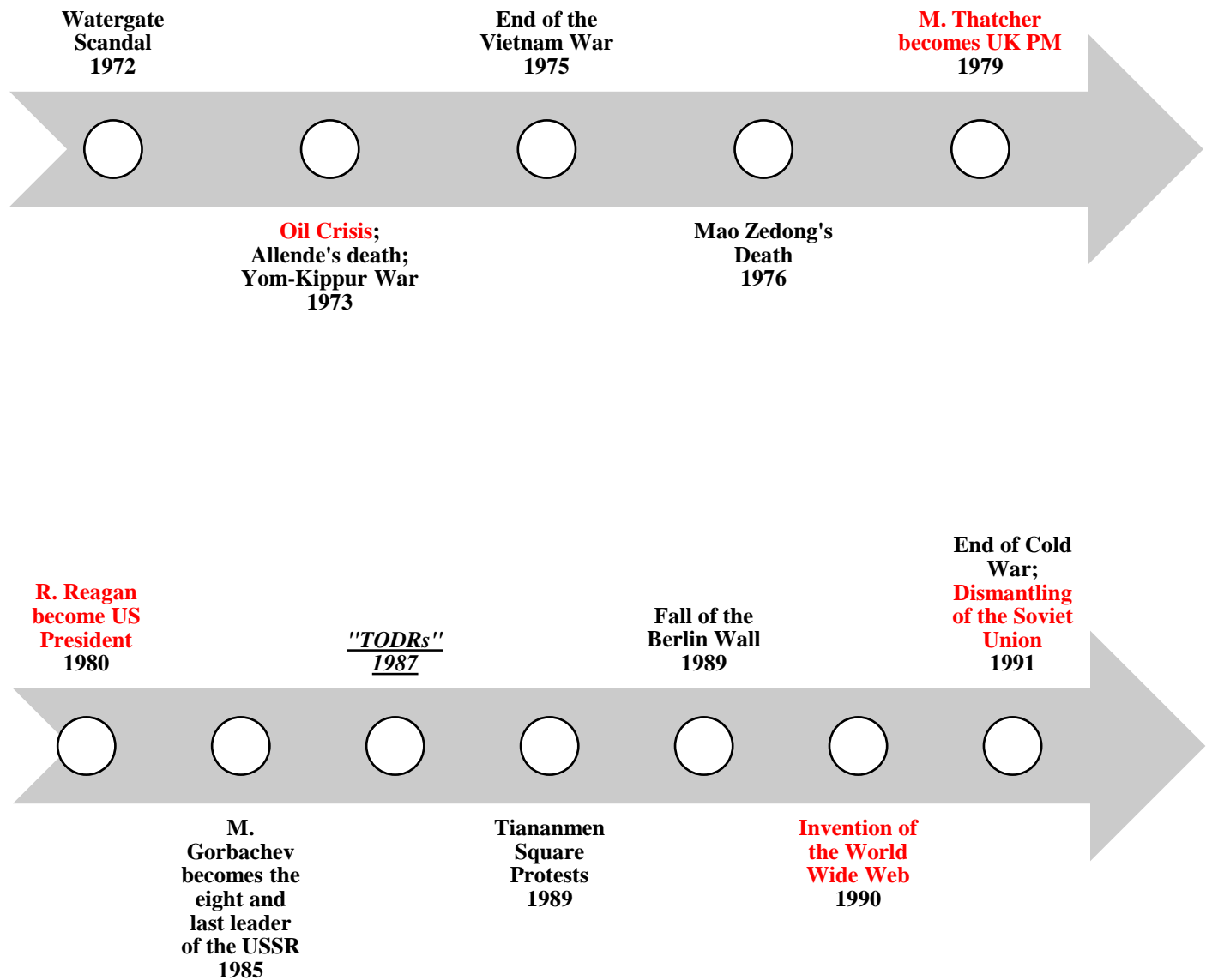
If one was to merely read without analyzing, (s)he could have been tricked into believing that the aforementioned four reasons are all that motivated Sartori to write the two volumes of the *TODR*. The question now becomes whether or not these four intentions encompass all the motives that pushed him into elaborating his magnum opus. Sartori would be greatly disappointed if one was to blindly accept what is written in a book and resist from inquiring further. Thus, the analysis must go deeper. For doing so, it is fundamental to look at the events of the time that shaped the world and his thought, or rather history and what creates history, humankind. This is why this subsection will offer a socio-historical framework, orderly diverting its focus firstly and briefly on the major historical happenings of the period and subsequently on its shared sociology, attempting to shed light on how, at the time, Sartori viewed society.

The period extending from 1957 to 1987 or rather from the publication of “*Democrazia e Definizioni*” (translated and published in English under the title of “*Democratic Theory*” in 1962) up to its reinterpretation and complete transformation into the *TODRs*, covers the majority of the second half of one of the most turbulent centuries in the history of human civilizations. Needless to say, being so immensely plentiful as well as not being the primary goal of this dissertation, this part will not touch every happening of significance occurred during the said period, rather its purpose is that of refreshing the readers’ memory on the major historical events, focusing specifically only on those surrounding the writing of the *TODRs*.

A useful visual instrument, such as the following timelines, are of great help for the realization of the aforementioned purpose.³

³ These timelines were created by my own, elaborating on insights from the splendid “*The Struggle For Europe – the turbulent history of a divided continent, 1945 to present*” by William I. Hitchcock.





After observing these timelines rendering a feeble idea of how many episodes shaped the world in a matter of 30 years, the eyes should momentarily stop, as suggested by the color, on the third and fourth arrow and focus on three main crucial points: The Oil Crisis of 1973 and the elections

of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.⁴

These events have been selected because all of them respectively symbolize, as it will later be showed, the source for the subsequent embodiment of a doctrine that from those moments onwards will become the global, or at least western, standard tenet for economic and sadly subsequent political thinking: Neoliberalism.

Answering to the questions of what is it? How did it come to the global scene? And recalling its subsequent history, should suffice for meeting the essential conditions required for giving a compelling report of the global events that influenced the world and the writing of the *TODRs*, thus allowing the attainment of the first aim of this subsection.

Neoliberalism is centered around the assumption that “the most effective way to produce and distribute goods and services is by allowing instrumentally rational individuals to exchange via the market. State regulations and national industries are, by contrast, seen as distortions and inefficiency holding back the productive dynamics inherent to free markets” (Srnicsek and Williams, p.51).⁵ Despite its geographically diverse origin and theoretical incubation time,⁶ neoliberalism came prominently to the global scene during the 1970’s as an answer to the dilemma of high inflation and high unemployment, both caused by various economic factors including the shock of oil prices. “The dominant Keynesian approach to the economy had argued that governments should stimulate the economy by putting money into it when unemployment was rising, but, when inflation was rising, take money out of the economy, to slow down price rises. In the 1970s, however, both problems arose simultaneously – rising inflation and rising unemployment, or ‘stagflation’” (Srnicsek and Williams, p.60). It is exactly the inutility of the habitual paradigm that opened up the possibility for new options; at this point, “the neoliberals found themselves well placed, since they had routinely argued that inflation was a necessary

⁴ Academic arguments highlighting the importance of these particular, singled out dates can be found in Karen R. Merrill’s book “*The Oil Crisis of 1973-1974: A Brief History with Documents*” as well as in David Harvey’s sharp analysis in “*A Brief History of Neoliberalism*”.

The reasons for justifying the selection of the invention of the World Wide Web will be elucidated further on in this chapter.

⁵ For the sake of intellectual honesty, it has to be said that the two authors regard neoliberalism in Gramscian terms as a global hegemonic power built around the ability of neoliberal academics to influence education, that of neoliberal think tanks of shaping policies and that of the media in diffusing them. For Srnicsek and Williams the truth of their affirmation resides to the fact that nowadays “this vision of how economics should operate is what both its critics and proponents take as a baseline” (Srnicsek and Williams, p.51).

⁶ For further information please read, p. 11-15 of Daniel Stedman Jones’ “*Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics*”.

outcome of the welfare state's unwillingness to break wage and price rigidity. They had both a diagnosis of the problem and a solution. Government officials who were uncertain about what to do in the face of crisis found a plausible story in neoliberalism" (Srniczek and Williams, p.61). And the story was to be adopted all around the globe.

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, the two personification of neoliberalism were respectively elected as Prime Minister of the UK and President of the United States in 1979 and 1980 (sworn into office in 1981) both maintaining power until 1990 and 1989. The IMF and World Bank steered towards this new course, and the neoliberal doctrine became permanently woven into the formation of the European Union as the fall of the Soviet Union paved yet another way in in the new economic and political life of Eastern European countries. Outside the West, already in the first years of the 1970's, forms of neoliberalism became dominant following military coupes in Chile and Argentina.⁷

Each and every outline of a historical scenario bear with itself two hidden messages to always keep in mind: nothing happens in a vacuum and that history is not an external, separate and independent entity, rather it is purely made by the complexity of thoughts and actions of men and women. Thus, no human act or reflections leave history intact.

If this is the case, then it is all the more important to examine the views that authors had on the humanity of their time, and in the particular instance of this dissertation, this might help in giving another insightful glimpse into the reasons that pushed Sartori in stating his opinions and revisiting/rewriting the *TODRs*.

According to the Italian thinker, just as too much satisfaction leads to dissatisfaction, Westerners have become so full of liberty and security as to grow contempt towards them, leading to an exhaustion of ideals.⁸ This crisis of ideals cannot be mistaken with anything else than a crisis of ethics which allowed people to transform into "utilitarian and self-serving animals" (Sartori, p.492) thus coming to be "from one generation to another, more and more economic minded" (Sartori, p.492). The problem resides on the fact that "there is no economic cure for noneconomic ills and, more generally, that an amoral (post-moral) person can hardly

⁷ For further information on the topic read Undurraga's paper "*Neoliberalism in Argentina and Chile: common antecedents, divergent paths*", available in pdf here: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rsocp/v23n55/0104-4478-rsocp-23-55-0011.pdf>.

⁸ Sartori refers to ideals as moral beliefs, see p.491 of "*The Theory of Democracy Revisited Part II*".

produce a good society” (Sartori, p.495). Therefore, the excessive assimilation of politics into economics, or vice versa, of economics into politics, formed the reason that pushed the “moral man (...) into the backstage” (Sartori, p.494) as the “rational man (...) came to the fore” (Sartori, p.495).⁹ In Sartori’s mind, this trend was enabled by the continuous technological progress. Only the most careful reader, at this point, would have notice that only three out of the four events written in red in the timelines, have been discussed so far. This fourth element was chosen first and foremost for its allegorical value, hence not for what it represented at that time but for its significance today: Sir Tim Berners-Lee’s invention in 1990, the World Wide Web.¹⁰ Probably just a handful of people at the time of this invention understood its true potential, a technology destined to change humanity forever.¹¹

At this point of the dissertation, its use is quite humbler, or rather that of symbolizing one of the results of the incessant pursue of progress – a process that Sartori calls “the acceleration of the time machine” (Sartori, p. 26) – behind the technological development that so significantly characterized the decades so far taken into consideration. For the Italian intellectual, the great technological advances of those years altered the speed of everyday life, augmenting it at every new discovery. This pattern was in turn allowed by people’s increasingly economic-mindedness, which led to the creation of “seated” rather than “chance offering” (Sartori, p. 496) societies. The above-indicated factors, along with the remembrance of two world wars and the incessant pursue of the myth of progress, contributed to generate a deep malaise among all societies’ strata, rendering people “weary, maladjusted, anxious and [...] frightened” (Sartori, p.496). Although refraining from this to be his last diagnosis, the just-portrayed climate impelled the Italian thinker to state that “it is not true that democracy matters to us; it is, instead, the benefit-dispensing, need-serving state. We are unconcerned about liberty and democracy because we are soft, we are materially minded and [...] bored with the familiar” (Sartori, p.496).

⁹ This is the same rational man portrayed in the earlier assumption for the description of neoliberalism found at page 10.

¹⁰ Academic proofs that underline the importance of the creation of the modern internet can be found in Johnny Ryan’s book “*A History of the Internet and the Digital Future*” along with Sir Berner-Lee’s “*Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web*”.

To expand knowledge on the origins, development and implications of the internet read: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2009/oct/23/internet-40-history-arpanet>.

¹¹ Opinions on the results and effects of this invention and its mass adoption will constitute the body of many reflections in other parts of this thesis and will be deeply analyzed later on.

Characterized by extreme velocity, anxiousness, unfit for elucubrations and deep thinking, societies appeared increasingly based on the mantra of immediate satisfaction of whatever desire in the least possible amount of time as gratification becomes uncertain and perhaps not as much pleasurable as in the moment of need. In the world described, space, time and care for long-term projects is virtually non-existent, creating an anthropogenic sphere in which thinking and ethics are replaced by speed and satisfaction at all costs, in which concern for democracy cannot find the space it deserves and requires in people's lives. Hopefully, it is easier now to understand why a general theory of democracy was, and still is, very much needed.

1.2 The TODRs

As already noted, Sartori's magnum opus is divided in two books, "*The Theory of Democracy Part I*" and "*The Theory of Democracy Part II*", comprising each eight chapters, for a total of 16. In both cases, the cornerstone upon which Sartori built his theoretical edifice revolves around his belief that the real and the ideal, what it is and what ought to be, or rather the descriptive and prescriptive theories of democracy have to mix together in order to create a well-founded, functional whole.

The first part is dubbed "The Contemporary Debate", and it centers on the realizability and rendition of ideals, or rather how ideals appear and are transformed from theory to the empirical world, and vice versa. The subtitle of the second book instead is "*The Classical Issues*" and, as the name suggests, it marks a shift of focus away from "fact-value tensions to trial-and-error process" (Sartori, p. xii) thus becoming more historical. Here, the Italian intellectual describes the gargantuan procedure that democracy underwent to be what it is today, stating that "from the time city democracy was first conceived and practiced in ancient Greece, it has taken humankind more than two thousand years to invent and establish a viable large-scale democracy. Since political systems are human-made and conceived, the invention of present-day democracies hinges on, and is best traced in, the history of ideas and ideals. (...) Still, no such machinery would be in place had it not been for an endless painstaking thinking about power, coercion, liberty, equality, laws, justice, rights, representation." (Sartori, p. xii). Thus, here Sartori implicitly highlights his disdain for stipulativism while emphasizing, since democracy is and always will be prone to failure, the importance of words as bearer of experiences and historical lessons.

As it will hopefully be obvious at this point, the second subsection of the first chapter will contain a comprehensive summary of the *TODRs*, starting from giving a thorough framework of the various aspects and types of democracy necessary for switching on covering Sartori's work explaining:

- The tripartite characterization (limited majority rule; elective procedures and representational transmission of power) of what he intends for democracy
- The difference between peace and war-like view of politics, the importance of cognitive realism, the diversion between empirical and rational democracies and the latter's specific traits (proportional representation; parliament as the locus of sovereignty; governments as executives)
- The goal of political freedom, enacted by liberal-democratic constitutionalism, aiming at curbing power so to reverse the misunderstood slogan "all power to the people" to the more democratic one "all power to nobody", thus highlighting the importance of the interplay of democracy
- His motifs for wishing that a democracy should be a polyarchy of merit as well as a selective one
- Sartori's idea of (procedural) freedom from as the basis for every other type of liberty or equality and lastly,
- The moral basis of democracy and the fundamental union between liberalism and democracy itself

Recalling the very first pages of this dissertation, according to the Italian thinker a general theory of democracy is being increasingly lost and "the central element of this enfeeblement is, in my diagnosis, the debasement of the vocabulary of politics. Up until 1940s people knew what democracy was and either liked it or rejected it; since then we all claim to like democracy but no longer know (understand, agree) what it is" (Sartori, p.6). Hence it is time to start trying to define, thus understanding, what democracy is.

One of the first ever attempt to define democracy did not linger on its institutional, instrumentalist or normative aspects; rather it focused on the procedural one. According to

Joseph Schumpeter, “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Schumpeter, p.269). Naturally, notwithstanding its usefulness, clarity and conciseness, this definition cannot stand alone for it excludes features that are vital to a democracy as there is no mention of freedom, accountability, responsiveness and representation, let alone socio-economic aspects. A colossal leap forward in solving the riddle of defining democracy was accomplished by Robert Dahl, who in his “*A Preface to Democratic Theory*” of 1956, enlarged the procedural notion by focusing on two main concepts: contestation and mass participation. According to his thinking, contestation was chiefly consisting of 3 main elements – right to form parties, freedom of press and associational autonomy – whereas participation was to include the right to vote, fairness of election and universal suffrage. At this point, the American professor came up with the idea of formulating a minimalist definition of democracy, or rather a list composed of easily empirically controllable traits that establish a threshold between what ought to be considered democracy and what not. Dahl identified four main features:

- 1) “Universal male and female suffrage
- 2) Free, competitive, periodic and fair elections in a representative democratic framework, with mass politics and guaranteed voting right.
- 3) More than one political party or at least another party that participates elections with a realistic chance of winning office.
- 4) Different and alternative sources of information” (Morlino, p.25)

These characteristics imply the right to run and hold office, freedom of expression and associational autonomy. Furthermore, it is quintessential to attach to this itemization two other features, or rather independence from external power and respect for civic and social rights.

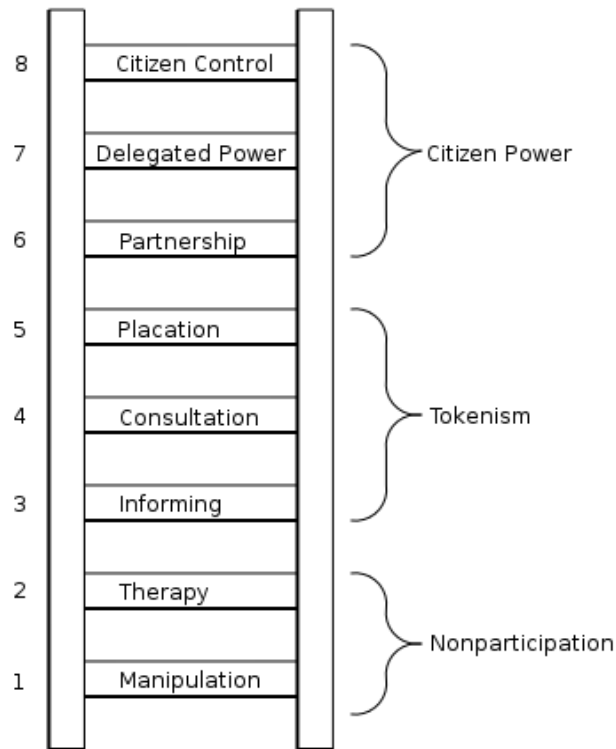
By virtue of logic, a minimalist definition of democracy suggests a maximum one that deals with principles and ideas and is particularly serviceable for political scientists and students for measuring and defining qualities deepening. Naturally, given the ceaseless changing of principles and ideas, no consensus can be reached on what can be considered a maximum definition of democracy. Yet, this has not stopped scholars from identifying and cataloguing its

different types ranging from liberal, responsive, participatory and deliberative to associative, egalitarian, good governance and good democracy.

- *Liberal* democracy encompasses the classical normative notion of democracy, bringing together fundamental rights (i.e. rule of law) and electoral procedures (i.e. universal suffrage). The main goal of liberal democracy is that of allowing legitimate political decision to be taken while merging the various societal disagreements and conflict of interests. This ambiguity between pluralism and consensus is rendered possible by the fact that once laws are emanated, they are mandatory for everyone. The democratic framework allows these laws to correspond to popular will, tested by the results of periodical elections. Competition, participation and accountability are thus its key features supplemented by effective freedoms.
- *Responsive* democracy, as the name suggests, finds its main tenet in the belief that the decisions of those who govern perfectly reflect the wishes of the governed. In order to be realizable, citizens' preferences, especially regarding the shared public good, must be clear and derive from a vast knowledge of the political landscape. As it is easy to imagine, for this particular form of democracy, is quite hard to find empirical correspondence.
- Proponents of *participatory* democracy regard freedom and participation as its fundamental characteristics. According to Sherry Arnstein,¹² the ultimate objective of this type of democracy is the redistribution of power, comprising both the notions of authority and influence, in favor of the citizens. Being a bottom up approach, the American writer used the metaphor of a ladder for highlighting and explaining the ways through which citizen and their groups

¹² For the complete version of the article, read “*A ladder of citizen participation*”, available in pdf here: <http://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/Arnstein%20ladder%201969.pdf>.

could increase their access to decision-making power.



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- *Deliberative* democracy centers around the idea that the core of democratic processes should not stand on the competition for the prevalence of one or more of the conflicting interests found in society. Rather it posits that political decisions should originate from reasonable and fair debates among citizens, and that through these iterations, people can determine what courses of action, policies or processes best serve the common public good. As a matter of fact, it requires greater effective direct democracy than the liberal type.¹⁴
- The idea behind *associative* democracy is that citizens from all society's strata form groups, organizations and associations to protest or incentivize changes. This kind of organized civil society ensures, along with the state, the protection of

¹³ The graph below is taken directly from Arnstein's above-mentioned article.

¹⁴ Many scholars are diffident towards the empirical realization of this type of democracy. For a critique of deliberative democracy please read Jason Brennan's "*Against Democracy*" and in particular the third chapter found at p. 54-73. Various arguments proposed by Brennan will be discussed later in other parts of this dissertation.

people's rights as well as a framework for cooperation and amelioration of economic activity.

- *Egalitarian* democracy is largely drawn upon Rawls' sumptuous book "*A theory of Justice*".¹⁵ Considering the Rawlsian system of priorities (i.e. equal liberties over equal opportunities which in turn precede equal resources) and following the two axioms of his theory – equality of opportunities and the original position along with its main characteristics, the veil of ignorance and the maximin strategy – this type of democracy revolves around Rawls' maxim, according to which "all social values – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage" (Rawls, p. 54). Maintaining all other forms of liberal rights and liberties, it is easy to infer that in this type of democracy, equality possesses absolute importance.
- One of the most famous approach of the current as well as the last decade was spurred by the successful research, promoted by the World Bank, of individuating viable and various indices to measure *good governance*. In their paper, Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi did just that. Nevertheless, prior to detecting the six criteria, the authors had to define governance. They were successful in this endeavor as well, coming up with the following statement: governance can be defined as "the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes (a)The process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; (b) The capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and (c)The respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them" (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, p. 6). The indicators they found are: transparency and control of corruption, rule of law, regulatory quality,

¹⁵ This tiny subsection assumes prior knowledge of the Rawlsian theory of distributive justice. For more information read "*A theory of Justice*". If novices to the ideas of the American intellectual, Will Kymlicka's "*Contemporary Political Philosophy: an introduction*" offers a splendid starting point for understanding the basics of Rawlsian, and many others, theories.

government effectiveness, political stability and absence of violence and voice and accountability.¹⁶

- Any definition of good should entail a definition of quality. In regard to *good democracy*, Morlino identifies three types of quality: in terms of results, content and procedure. The first refers to a democracy that pleases its citizens and therefore is broadly legitimated; the second portrays a scenario where the various communities that made up a society are free and treated equally and the last instead, detects quality in terms of procedure when governments are accountable to the demands of the population, whose interests are sought by government actions under the protection offered by the rule of law. Hence, for the Italian intellectual, a good democracy can be defined as “a stable institutional structure that realizes the liberty and equality of citizens through the legitimate and correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms” (Morlino, p.11).

In addition to the aforementioned types, in the *TODRI*, Sartori describes the origins and the characteristics of three additional kinds – social, industrial and economic as well as the difference between macro/micro democracy- prior to portraying the characterizing traits of his present-day democracies.

- *Social* democracy finds its roots in various Tocquevillian writings elaborated after his visit to the United States where the French thinker remained impressed by the standards of equality entrenched in the North American democracy. In contrast with aristocracy, this type of democracy describes “a society whose ethos requires of its members to conceive themselves as being socially equal” (Sartori, p. 9). Furthermore, the above-written description can also be applied to what are labelled *primary* democracies, or rather those voluntary associations and minute communities which provide “the societal backbone and infrastructure of the political superstructure” (Sartori, p. 9). Prior to ending his analysis, Sartori appears eager to clearly differentiate between social and socialist democracy. As the former is seen as the result of a bottom up approach, the latter originates from

¹⁶ For an in-depth explanation of the criteria, read p. 4 of “*The Worldwide Governance Indicators*”.

a top-down practice; “social democracy is first of all a way of life, while socialist democracy is above all a way of governing” (Sartori, p.9).

- In a similar fashion, the words of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, contained in their book “*Industrial Democracy*”,¹⁷ gave life to this particular type that mirrors the ancient Greeks’ direct democracy, switching the inhabitants of the Polis with the industrial workers. Therefore, the industrial plant is seen as the locus where workers govern and manage themselves.
- If the first two kinds of democracies identified thus far by Sartori were well suited for being pinned down by a definition, delineating *economic* democracy is a far more slippery endeavor. It is exactly for this reason that the Italian thinker claimed that at least three different conceptions were needed to fully describe and grasp it. The first two definitions are related to other two previously analyzed ideas, whereas the third derives from Marxist theory. Concerning the first description, Sartori points out that just as social democracy focuses on the equality of conditions of society’s members, economic democracy revolves around the concern for the equalization of resources and fortunes. Nevertheless, the label economic democracy may also entail a sense that is far closer to industrial than social democracy, focusing on the possibilities of workers to gain access and power over economic assets, rather than re-distribution. The Marxist doctrine instead states that “political democracy has no value in itself, no intrinsic reason for being, for it is only the instrument of the domination of the exploiters over the exploited” (Sartori, p. 10). This is so, simply because the full realization of the communist ideal entails the disappearance of politics and its apparatuses in favor of a conflict-less, classless and self-governing society.¹⁸ For Sartori then, according to Marxist theory, “an ‘*economic democracy*’ is nothing more and nothing else than a ‘*communist economy*’” (Sartori, p.10).

¹⁷ For further information, read “*Industrial Democracy*” or refer to “*A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*” wrote by the same authors.

¹⁸ Given the various academical discordances as well as versions of Marxist thought, in order to form an unbiased opinion on his most well-known book, I would first and foremost recommend reading Marx’s own words, available for free here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>.

- The classification of the aforementioned types of democracy served, in the mind of the Italian intellectual, a very specific purpose, or rather that of enunciating the difference in between macro and microdemocracies and the implied superiority of the former.¹⁹ For Sartori, “democracy in the political sense is a large-scale *macro-democracy*, whereas the group-centered and plant-centered democracy are small-scale *microdemocracies*. This is the same as saying that political democracy – in the acceptance of the term that has persisted for some twenty-five centuries – is the superordinate *sovereign* democracy, whereas the other democracies are, inevitably, *subordinate* democracies” (Sartori, p.11). This passage already offers a crystalline glimpse on Sartori’s way of reasoning and opinions on democracy for it enucleates his idea that political democracy has to be considered the necessary condition for whatsoever type of democracy citizens around the world might root for.

The last step to take for completing the hopefully useful framework portrayed so far and needed for competently analyzing the *TODRs* is reporting what Sartori thought to be the defining features of his present-day democracy. These traits can be reduce to three elements: the change in the size of democracies, passing from the minute number of members of the *polis* to the multitude of modern nations’ citizens; the “dramatic acceleration of history, of the time machine” (Sartori, p.26) and the consequent, continuous and increasing velocity of mobility symbolized by the fact that “in western societies fewer and fewer people live and die where they are born; and this is the uprooting of community” (Sartori, p.26).²⁰

This list concludes the ensemble of necessary information required for diving, in the following paragraphs, into the complexity of the *TODRs*, remembering after all these sections that “to avoid starting out on the wrong foot we must keep in mind, then, that (a) the democratic ideal does not define the democratic reality and, vice versa, a real democracy is not, and cannot be, the same as an ideal one; and that (b) democracy results from, and is shaped by, the

¹⁹ The reader should keep in mind that according to the Italian thinker, saying political democracy is the same as saying democracy; his view is expressed in the following passage: “The word *demokratia* was coined in the fifth century B.C., and from that time until roughly a century ago it has been a political concept. That is to say, democracy meant *political democracy*” (Sartori, p. 8).

interactions between its ideals and its reality, the pull of an *ought* and the resistance of an *is*” (Sartori, p. 8).

Following the index present at the beginning of this subsection, it is now time to orderly analyze what Sartori thinks democracy is.

“Modern democracies hinge on (a) limited majority rule; (b) elective procedure; and (c) the representational transmission of power” (Sartori, p.30). Prior to dissecting these three elements, it would be wise to introduce one of the conditions that the Italian intellectual considers to be necessary for the creation and survival of democracy, or rather procedural consensus. This term, not to be confused with basic consensus,²¹ is used to indicate the acceptance, by society’s members, of a set of shared views on conflict-resolving solutions and norms to follow. Having clarified this matter, it is possible to move forward and examine the first characteristic: limited majority rule and the consequent issue of minority rights. According to Sartori, the meaning of these two terms changes in relation to the context in which they are used and referred to. In particular, the Italian intellectual identifies three main settings: constitutional, electoral and societal. The first one is “where the expression ‘majority rule and minority rights’ acquires its most precise meaning and a particular prominence. If the opposition is hampered, harassed, or stamped on, we may thus speak of ‘tyranny of the majority’ in the constitutional meaning of the expression” (Sartori, p.133). Hence, in this case, the focus of democracy’s concerns resides on the guarantee and protection of minority rights. In the second context instead, the wording “tyranny of the majority” is voided of meaning for a majority simply represents the winning portion (i.e. the one that collects most votes) of the electorate whereas a minority has to be regarded as comprising those who failed to obtain a majority. “The point therefore is that, in voting, the minority has no rights: it consists of those whose vote was lost- period” (Sartori, p.134). Thus, in this context, the majority is simply the most numerous minority in society. In the last framework, the significance of tyranny of the majority changes again, coming to embody “the tendencies of society to impose its own ideas and practices, i.e., to impose conformity, finding in the majority principle a principle of legitimization” (Sartori, p.135) as feared by Tocqueville and Mill.

²¹ “In résumé, basic consensus, or consensus on fundamentals (the value beliefs that structure our belief system), is a *facilitating condition*, though not a necessary condition of democracy. This is a consensus that democracy may acquire as an end product” (Sartori, p.91). For further information, read subsection 5.2 “*The issue of Consensus*”, from page 88 to page 92.

Despite the various contexts and meanings attached to them, the aforementioned trait – limited majority rule – refers to “the hierarchical structuring of collectivities” (Sartori, p.131) or rather to the vertical dimension of democracy, whereas the other two – elective procedure²² and representational transmission of power – deal with its horizontal nature.

The tripartite description of democracy allowed Sartori to highlight the fundamental importance of minority rights, considered as a requisite condition for the functioning of a democracy. It is precisely the interchange of power and protection between majority and minority that represent the dynamics of the democratic process; were one of the two groups cease to have such liberty, equality and security, it would be impossible to keep referring to it as existing in a democracy.

In defense of his view on the importance of the neutrality of cognitive realism,²³ Sartori states that the boundaries of an essential divergence have been wrongly drawn on the difference between an ideal-less and ideal-laden vision of politics. As a matter of fact, for the Italian professor, the real distinction is “between (a) a *warlike view* of politics; and (b) a *peace-oriented, legalitarian view* of politics. In the former, force monitors persuasion, might establishes right, and conflict resolution is sought in terms of the defeat of the enemy – of the ‘other’ looked on as a *hostis*. In the latter, force is kept in reserve as an *ultima ratio*, as a last and worse reason, and conflict resolution is sought by means of covenants, courts and ‘rightful’ procedures” (Sartori, p.41). This difference implies that whoever cherishes democracy and its components has already picked a side as “prior to whatever else it may be, pluralism is the belief in the value of diversity. And believing in diversity – in a dialectics of diversity – is antipodal to believing in conflict” (Sartori, p.92).

Being the quest of defining and classifying essential tasks of knowledge and understanding, Sartori analyzes rationalistic (generally embodied by the French type) and empirical (Anglo-American kind) democracies.²⁴ History offers a useful starting point for tracing back the dissimilarities in between the two; as Anglo-American democracies represent the end product of

²² Chiefly comprising everything that revolves around opinion formation. The body of this topic will be analyzed later in the subsection regarding epistocracy.

²³ “The question, for what or for whom does political realism take side? becomes a frivolous question. For the answer is, very simply, that cognitive realism does not side with any side. Any correct descriptive proposition, any empirically verified statement, is a ‘realistic’ statement. Thus, political realism is nothing less, but nothing more, than the factual ingredient of any and all policies”. (Sartori, p.43)

²⁴ For an unfiltered account, read subsection 3.6 “*Rational Democracy and Empirical Democracy*” from pages 51 to 55.

a long and tortuous process of fighting for rights and amelioration of conditions, the French counterpart finds its birth from the sparks of revolutionary breaks from the past. However, their greatest difference originates from the fact that “rational democracies are construed deductively and rigorously from premise to consequence, joining one link of the chain to the next one as tightly as possible; whereas the construction of empirical democracies largely results from feedbacks and, in this sense, from inductive elements” (Sartori, p. 53). Logically, this is why, despite sharing a common aim (i.e. popular sovereignty), the two possess such diverging traits, as for rational democracies the only viable concept of representation is proportional representation; the symbol and the locus of sovereignty has to be the parliament and governments “should only be (as the wording says) ‘executives’, i.e., executors of the wills that precede the governmental will. In a deductive chain of reasoning all of the above is a must, a set of necessary logical consequences” (Sartori, p.54).

As the reader would certainly know, the word democracy comes from the Greek *demokratia*, literally meaning power of the people. However, regarding this matter things are a bit more complex, hence the reader should not be tricked, by this simplistic spell, into thinking that the aforementioned definition encapsulates the true essence of democracy. In order to unravel his thoughts on this issue, Sartori provided a definition of political freedom, viewed as “an instrumental and *relational freedom* whose essential purpose is to create a situation of freedom, the conditions for freedom” (Sartori, p. 301). These conditions describe the aim of political freedom as its problem “always lands at the search for *rules* that do curb power” (Sartori, p.306). Historically, protection by ways of law has been incorporated by three main traditions: Greek, Roman/English and Liberal.²⁵ The latter follows the doctrine of constitutionalism, based upon the existence of a written constitution regarded as the highest law of a country, comprehending fundamental rights and ways to enhance and protect them. This entails the combination and presence of guarantees for the protection of civil rights and liberties, the separation of powers and mechanisms of checks and balances in order to ensure that citizens are shielded from political abuse of power and coercion while also exercising influence over the

²⁵ According to Sartori, “the Greeks understood well that if they did not want to be ruled tyrannically, they had to be governed by laws. But their idea of law oscillated between the extremes of sacred laws, which were too rigid and immutable, and conventional laws, which were too uncertain and shifting”. (Sartori, p.307) The Romans instead had the merit of introducing a new concept of legality which was to be the base for the development of the English Rule of Law.

public decision-making process.

It is easier now to realize why Sartori started with the definition of political freedom for untangling the problem of defining the essence of democracy. As it has been demonstrated, for the Italian intellectual, the aim of political freedom is to curb power; this goal is best attained through liberal constitutionalism and *garantismo*, the only setting that enables democracy to be its truest version of itself, allowing “the sine qua non condition for the people to ‘have power’ in any meaningful sense of the expression is that they impede any unlimited power. This is the condition that must be intransigently respected throughout our efforts to maximize the ideal, that is, throughout efforts to add more power to the power that the people actually wield. In terms of our feedback rule this entails that the principle ‘all power to the people’ must be gradually modified, as a democracy develops itself, into the principle *all power to nobody*” (Sartori, p.72).

No discussion verging on a general theory of democracy can be considered relevant without examining two of the most discussed concepts in the history of humankind: equality and freedom. In the *TODR II*, Sartori discusses at length both ideas, so much so as to dedicate them, and their implications, two chapters, respectively 11 and 12.²⁶ Starting with the issue of equality, the Italian professor classifies types and criteria of equality listed in the tabs below²⁷

TABLE 12.2 TYPES OF EQUALITY

I.	Juridico-political equality
2.	Social equality
3.	Equality of opportunity as <i>equal access</i> , i.e., equal recognition to equal merit (as in the career-open-to-talent formula)
4.	Equality of opportunity as <i>equal start</i> (or equal starting points) i.e., as equal initial material conditions for equal access to opportunities
5.	Economic sameness, that is, either the same wealth to each and all, or state ownership of all wealth

²⁶ Hence, would this subsection be unclear, read Ch. 11 on “*Liberty and Law*” at p. 298-328 and Ch. 12 on “*Equality*” at p. 337-362.

²⁷ These graphs are found respectively at p. 345 and p. 348 of the *TODR II*.

TABLE 12.2 CRITERIA OF EQUALITY

I.	The same to all, i.e., equal shares (benefits or burdens) to all
2.	<p>The same to sames. i.e., equal shares (benefits or burdens) to equals and therefore unequal shares to unequals – and here four subcriteria are prominent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proportionate equality, i.e., shares monotonically allocated in proportion to the degree of extant inequality b. Unequal shares to relevant differences c. To each according to his merit (desert or ability) d. To each according to his need (basic or otherwise)

However, following the same procedural discourse as before, prior to examining these types and criteria, definitions are needed. For Sartori, “to have inequality, all that is demanded of us is to let things follow their course. But if we are to seek equality we can never afford to relax. (...) a society that seeks equality is a society that fights itself, that fights its inner law of inertia” (Sartori, p. 337). Given this state of affairs, two problems ensue: one is connected to the ambiguity of the term equality and another is the result of this ambivalence. The noun equality carries a double significance, as it conveys both the idea of sameness (i.e. possessing identical traits) and a sense of justice (i.e. equal in rights, equal in front of the law etc.) This ambiguity is what stands behind the issue of equal treatment: “equal treatment and equal results are not only diverse in themselves; they also reflect divergent underlying approaches. The view underlying equal treatment is that human beings should be treated equally (with respect to *x*, *y*, and *z*) *in spite of* their being different, while the view underlying equal outcomes is that human beings *should not be different* and must be reinstated in their pristine nondifferences. (...) the predicament, bluntly put, is this: to be made equal (in outcome), we are to be treated unequally” (Sartori, p. 351).

It is at this point that the types and criteria previously listed come handy. However, for the Italian intellectual, the fundamental question regarding equality remains how to successfully²⁸ augment

²⁸ For Sartori, a successful maximization of equality would entail the answers to the questions of equality in what and for whom.

it. For doing so, a criterion for judging the aforementioned criteria and subsequently guide strategies aimed at maximizing equality is needed; and it is exactly represented by the cumulative nature and symmetry of the different criteria of equality.²⁹ In turn, this measure leads to three strategies: “(a) there is one *major Equality* that includes all the others; (b) greater equality is achieved by *adding* all the singles or partial equalities together; (c) increasing equality is attained by *better rebalacings* of inequalities” (Sartori, p.355). The most careful reader would have already correctly guessed which of the three is Sartori’s favorite approach; indeed, only option *c* would entail the best maximization of equality but in turn, this could happen only by following the Rawlsian scheme in which an unequal distribution/treatment is allowed only if it advantages the least favored part of society.³⁰

The third and previous point of the index showed how, in Sartori’s opinion, political freedom incorporates the classic notion of negative freedom (i.e. freedom from), also known as protective freedom. The Italian intellectual does not claim that this kind of freedom is the only existing type or that it should be cherished as the most important; he simply argues that, following procedural reasoning, political freedom represents the basis, the necessary condition for the existence of all other liberties and equalities³¹ or in Sartori’s words: “just as political freedom (freedom *from*) is the preliminary and enduring condition for all the powers of liberty, for all freedoms *to*, for exactly the same reasons it is also the preliminary and enduring condition for all the powers of equality” (Sartori, p. 358).

All the arguments thus far analyzed, as well as the remaining two, were used by the Italian thinker in order to put forth his idea that a democracy should not only be a selective polyarchy, but one of merit.³² Sartori starts by highlighting the facts that no matter how theoretically splendid, real world societies cannot be leaderless and, as Plato and Aristotle understood, “the principle of democracy is corrupted not only when the spirit of equality is lost,

²⁹ To read about the specific interplay and compatibility or incompatibility between the criteria, see p. 354-355.

³⁰ As already described at p. 14.

³¹ For Sartori, the totality of freedoms, or “*complete freedom* may be said to imply the following five traits: (a) independence; (b) privacy; (c) capacity; (d) opportunity; and (e) power” (Sartori, p. 303).

³² The idea of polyarchy was firstly found in Dahl’s “*Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*”. Hence for deeper information refer to the book.

In p. 166 Sartori states that “democracy should be a *selective system* of competing elected minorities [...] a *selective polyarchy*”. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines polyarchy as: “concept coined by the American political scientist Robert Dahl to denote the acquisition of democratic institutions within a political system that leads to the participation of a plurality of actors. Polyarchy, which means “rule by many,” describes the process of democratization, in contrast to democracy itself”, link available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/polyarchy>

but also when the spirit of extreme inequality is assumed” (Sartori, p. 167). To this, Rousseau echoed that “it is manifestly against the laws of nature, no matter what way we define them, that ... an imbecile leads a wise man” (Sartori, p.167). Thus, the problem presents itself as such: as the vertical dimension of democracy fundamentally rests on the treatment of its horizontal counterpart (i.e. every subsequent aspect that results from what society considers equality to be), societies are left with the choice of what equalization parameter to use and apply to interact and manage its citizens. However, the answer to this enigma was displayed in the previous subsection; the way to proceed is, in fact, to follow the Rawlsian maxim for the redistribution and rebalancing of inequalities, “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and office open to all” (Rawls, p. 60).³³ If this was to be the setting, then the democratic system would perfectly mirror a *polyarchy of merit*.

Nonetheless, Sartori does not stop here but further advances in order to provide more food for thought. As democracy should always strive to protect and improve its two tenet, freedom and equality, it should possess a model of reference for ameliorating them. In particular, regarding equality, granting the fact that it is humans’ nature to constantly judge each other on the basis of their qualities, the question becomes who society should take as a paragon to mend itself. Sartori finds this frame of reference in “*elite value parameters* (...) that (...) provide ‘reference’ on the basis of their virtues if, and only if, they have virtues. (...) Equality concretely elicits an upgrading, a value lift, when linked with the ‘elite’- provided that the term is construed as a reference group and entered into a reference theory of elites” (Sartori, p. 169). In this passage Sartori tries to convey the idea that when faced with the inevitable choice of how to equalize, upward or downward, societies should always select an archetype to reference to, in order to keep ameliorating. He asserts that the best way for doing so is taking elites, hence equalizing upwards, as the example to follow *if and only if* elites are understood not in the economic/corporatist sense but in their ancient meaning or rather as a group composed by the best elements of the communities that display the qualities and characteristics that society’s members should aspire to possess.

³³ For referencing to the other, previously written, Rawlsian principle please see p. 18 of this dissertation.

Recollecting the various types of democracy previously analyzed and gluing them together with these last arguments, it is increasingly clear that, whenever not specified, when Sartori writes about democracy, he means Liberal Democracy.³⁴ As it has been showed,³⁵ what constitutes liberal democracy is precisely the interaction between liberty and equality, or better put, equality via freedom. “The interplay between the liberal and democratic components (...) can be portrayed thus: the first is especially concerned with political bondage, individual initiative, and the form of the state; the second is especially sensitive to welfare, equality, and social cohesion. What we have, then, is a composition, a compound” (Sartori, p. 386). The aforementioned union is not of small significance, as for the Italian intellectual, democracy in absence of liberalism cannot exist or “in plain terms, that together with the demise of liberal democracy, democracy dies too – regardless of whether we are referring to it in its modern or its ancient form, whether it is a democracy based on freedom of the individual or one that only requires that power be exercised by the collective *plenum*” (Sartori, p. 393) .

The various subsections of this thesis were designed to offer a helpful framework of reference, so to link, in the easiest possible way, the different elements that compose it. Hence, it is not a fortuitous case that the second subsection closes on the same intellectual thread of the first. As a matter of fact, the latter exposed the views that pushed Sartori to state and explain that democracy is living an ethical crisis. This last paragraph closes the circle around it. The only way in which a crisis of ethics happens is because the moral structures upon which that concept is built are withering away. This entails that, for Sartori, democracy possesses moral basis: “the moral foundations of any free polity have to do with the sense of *dutifulness*, with the understanding that rights involve obligations, and that there is a value and a gratification in doing things ‘for nothing’, gratis. There is no such thing as a free lunch, but there is such thing as free giving, as acting *amore Dei*. But dutifulness, doing in exchange for nothing, and the like, have long been eroded by an economic-like vision of politics. And if this is the argument, then I do subscribe to the view that the present-day crisis of democracy is very much a crisis of ethical foundations” (Sartori, p. 242). Those foundations, according to the Italian thinker, are based on

³⁴ For further evidences to support this claim, read Ch. 13 of *TODR II*, to be find at p. 367-393, entitled “*Liberism, Liberalism, and Democracy*”.

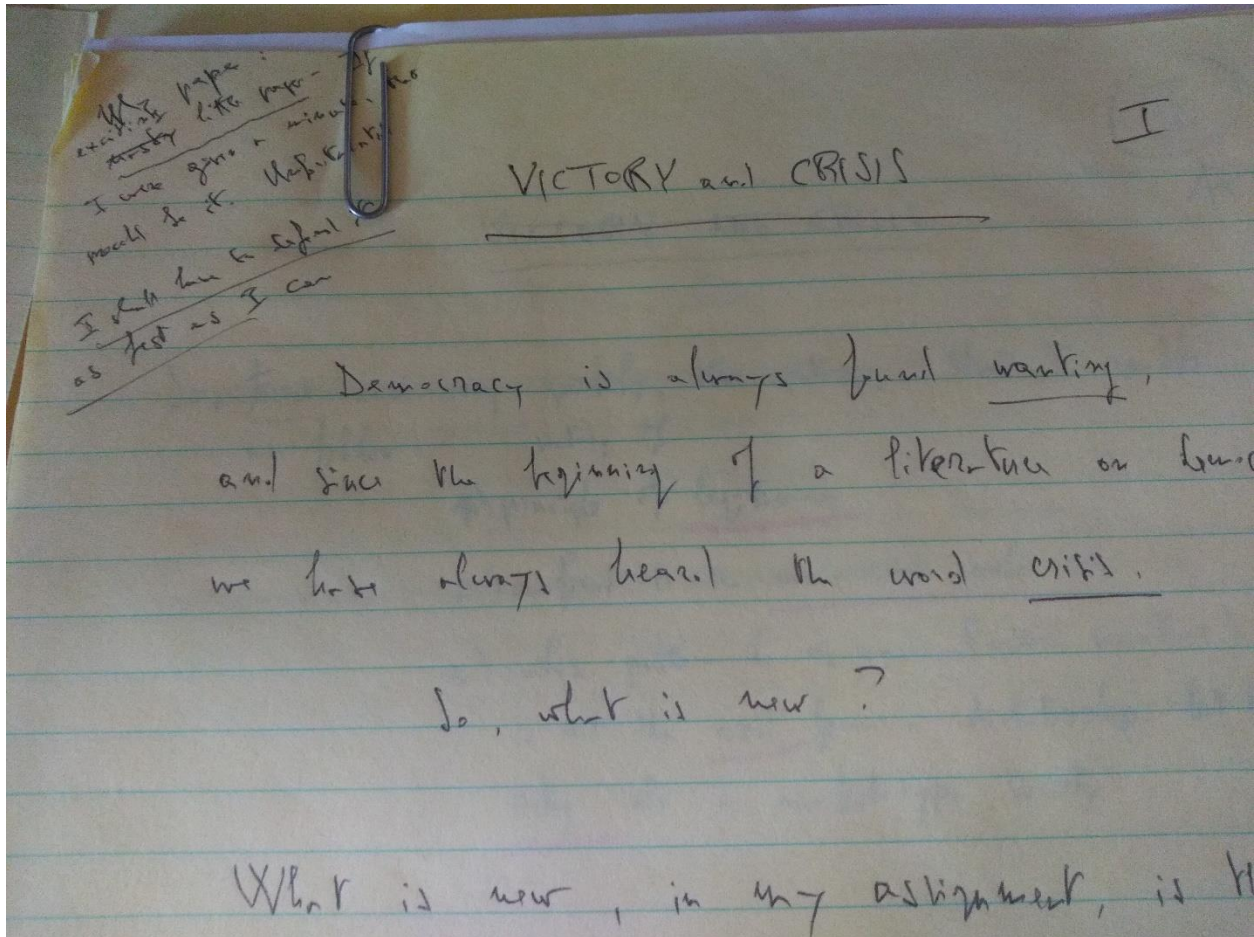
³⁵ See p. 16 of this thesis.

two forms of morality, the aforementioned Kantian morality of altruistic deeds and the *Gesinnungsethik*,³⁶ or rather the seeking of morally-just actions in spite of their consequences.

This last paragraph signals the end of the first chapter. In bearing in mind, the interplay between its various parts, this section offered a socio-historical introduction aimed at shedding light upon what events and ideas motivated, influenced and inspired Sartori to write the *TODRs*. The analysis of the features and types of democracy, in addition to provide some clarity, hopefully enabled the reader in better understanding the *TODRs*, summarized in six different points. This allowed me to display Sartori's thoughts, opinions and ideas on the strength and weaknesses of democracy, passing from its simplest conception – “a system in which *no one can choose himself, no one can invest himself with the power to rule and, therefore, no one can arrogate to himself unconditional and unlimited power*” (Sartori, p. 206) – to a moral ensemble that, through its constitutional/garantiste setting, curbs and tames the powers of the non-elected, protects minorities as well as fundamental rights and thanks to its tripartite structure safeguards and enhances liberty and equality, allowing procedural freedom (from) to ideally offer the basis for its transformation into a polyarchy of merit.

³⁶ Weber differentiates between *Gesinnungsethik* and *Verantwortungsethik*, or rather between moral action regardless of consequences or accountable to them. For further information, read p. 242 of the *TODR I*.

1.3 A Coda on the TODRs: Victory and Crisis



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As predeterminedly pointed out by the last event highlighted in the timelines, few years after the publication of the *TODRs*, the academic and civil world alike were shocked by the collapse of the Soviet Union. This subsection analyzes the observations, on such historical happening, made by Giovanni Sartori and collected in an inedited paper entitled “Victory and Crisis”, written by the Italian professor in occasion of the *Nobel Symposium on Democracy* held at the university of Uppsala, from 27-30 August 1994.

³⁷ Picture taken at Giovanni Sartori’s and his wife’s, Isabella Gherardi, house where most of the Italian professor’s notes are.

While directly opposing Fukuyama's naivete, ³⁸ the Italian intellectual claims that the relation for the downfall of soviet-style communism – the last principal dictatorial regimes that throughout the 20th century represented democracy's main adversary – should not endure for too long, for challenges were far from being over. Indeed, the breakdown of the USSR originated two unprecedented circumstances: if on one hand it certified democratic superiority by leaving democracy with no viable ideological or external opponent, on the other, as Sartori notes, it generated the unique condition in which for the first time in humanity's history, people were living without an antagonist to fight. "Living without external enemy is like living in an attenuated state of gravity. Will the pressures that keep us together succumb to forces that tear us apart? My sense is that while it becomes ever more difficult to resist democracy, at the same time it becomes ever more difficult to sustain successful democracy" (Sartori, p. 2). From here is clear how Sartori's worries and focus shift from an external to an internal dimension, disclosing his fear that, from this moment onwards, democracy itself represented its most formidable adversary. Accordingly, as reported by the Italian professor, the crisis in victory that democracy was bound to face was ascribable to two main macrospheres, labelled the fragility of ideas and the power of technologies. The former is composed of 4+1 arguments, ³⁹ namely normativism, critical thinking, anti-elitism and demo inflation.

Although, the first and third concepts were discussed in the previous subsection, and obviously more extensively in the *TODRs*, ⁴⁰ with the second notion, Sartori correctly predicted the contemporary dangerous inclination of sterilely criticizing and mistrusting democracy, offering, already in 1994, a powerful method for framing and combatting such phenomena: "any genuine critical disposition cannot be systematically biased, and must be willing to criticize itself. Conversely, any serious and responsible criticism should be monitored by two questions. First, where do I wish to land, which is the end-state? And, second, which are the alternatives? By rejecting something, do I have a something else to replace it? I seldom hear these questions raised, let alone answered. The day is being largely carried, rather, by a mindless and simplistic

³⁸ Though never directly mentioning in the paper. To expand on Fukuyama's thought, read his most famous work, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

³⁹ The +1 being the "attack on rationality", a leitmotif throughout the *TODR II*, that forms the conceptual basis of what Nichols would later call "death of expertise". Such concept will be discussed at length in chapter three of this dissertation.

⁴⁰ For the discussion on normativism, read the opening chapter of the *TODR I* "Can Democracy Be Just Anything?", from page 3 to 18. To expand on anti-elitism, please see subsection 6.8 "Anti-Elitism Revisited" starting at page 156.

debunking, by what I call ‘againstism’ (...) engaged in deconstruction and neglectful of construction” (Sartori, p. 9).

Turning to the problem of demo-inflation, numerous arguments presented in the analysis of the *TODRs*⁴¹ display the idea that democracy “quintessentially requires a self-forming public opinion which is of the public (not merely in the public) and is somewhat informed of (...) public matters” (Sartori, p. 12). However, according to the Italian thinker, the knowledgeable and participatory opinion-formation processes of democracy were and are continuously being hindered by the force of technologies – thus showing the overlapping of the first with the second macrosphere – and particularly that of the TV. For Sartori, the television thwarts human’s capacity of abstractive thinking, breeding a new type of men, the seeing man, whose intellect arrives as far as his gaze does, and that is destined to replace his reading counterpart. “The Gutenberg man saw (thought) the world in concepts; the McLuhan man simply (and unthinkingly) sees the world in images. And the point not only is that the ambit of images is infinitely smaller than the ambit of concepts (...) but also, and especially, that seeing does not provide, per se, any mental grasp and control of anything. Homo Videns gets excited by the soccer’s world cup, is only lukewarm when shown the fall of the Berlin Wall, and has no understanding of obscure ‘abstractions’ such as the general good” (Sartori, p. 13).⁴² The risk here depicted is nothing less than causing the jeopardization of the entire construction of democracy, creating a demos without any capability for responsible participation and/or formation of opinions, thus critically endangering democracy’s ability to function as a good government and increasingly paving the way for new crisis to arise.⁴³

Even though remaining unpublished, various ideas conveyed in this paper, along with those examined in the *TODRs*, will form the fundamental bulk of the theoretical framework that will be used throughout this thesis for analyzing and understanding the current status of democracy. In fact, as it will be shown later, the expanded notion of “againstism” would be of

⁴¹ All chiefly enclosed in chapter 5 of the *TODR I* “*Governed Democracy and Governing Democracy*”, in particular subsection 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 starting at page 86.

⁴² The notion of the Homo Videns and its implications will be taken up again and discussed extensively in the third chapter of this thesis.

⁴³ Sartori himself in one of the last pages of this paper writes: “What is peculiar, then, to the crisis that follows democracy’s victory over communism and that – we sense – is looming ahead? I have answered, taking the long view, that ‘feeble thinking’ is largely responsible for our predicaments. However, it is the ‘force of technology’, the era of the video-power, that worries me most” (Sartori, p. 15).

paramount importance for dissecting the various modern forms of distrust in democracy; the concept behind the power of technologies will constitute the basis of a book that Sartori would write only five years later, in 1999, that would become famous with the title of “Homo Videns”, a masterpiece of clairvoyance needed for comprehending the societal and political trends of the 21st century. Lastly, demo-inflation will help explaining the depth of the dangerous consequences that preferences’ manipulation and modern information wars have on democracy and its processes.

With his direct and mordant style, the Italian professor is able, once again, to vividly warn us to be aware of the dangers of constructing a democracy without a responsible and active demos and to always bear in mind that democracy should never be taken for granted. With each and every of his writings, Sartori gifts us with intellectual pebbles, which followed altogether, guide and point the trail to pursue for understanding, ameliorating and studying democracy.

Chapter two. Democracy Today

After having analyzed Sartori's magnum opus, the first question that should arise in the reader's mind is whether or not the *TODRs* are still relevant nowadays. An affirmative answer would logically draw its arguments from Sartori's primary hypothesis, or rather that a mainstream theory of democracy is being lost. This would consequentially entail that, in the current world, democracy itself is in crisis. As it will later be demonstrated by empirical and theoretical analysis, unfortunately, this happens to be the case.

Yet, the contemporary significance of the *TODRs* should not be ascribed to a single element, no matter how towering. Indeed, the Italian thinker's volumes are still important because democracy is far from being a monolith that, once put in place, works effortlessly. The "war on words" and the stipulativism denounced by Sartori are still ranging and influencing academical thinking; epistocratic proposals are on the surge along with the reappearance of mainstream populist and far-right movements, showing an alarming lack of historic memory from every side of societies, not only from the new generations that never experienced the horrors of dictatorships and totalitarianisms, and that risk to grow accustomed, or worse contempt, towards democratic duties and rights, taking them for granted while ignoring the sacrifices that other people have made to allow them to experience freedom and equality. Lastly, would it be truly possible to infer that the traits that portrayed society in the 80's do not describe the society of 2010's? That people are not maladjusted, anxious, economic-minded, consumeristic and overstimulated by the ever-increasing velocity of everyday life anymore?

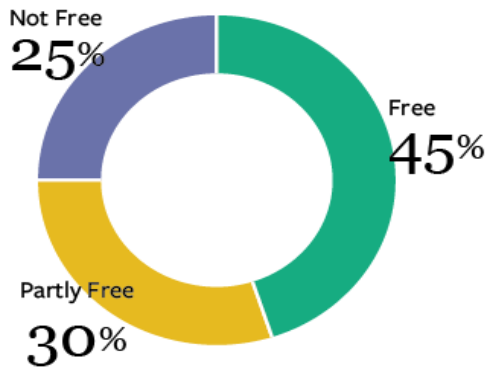
For these, and many more reasons, the *TODRs* are still relevant today.

Granted the affirmative answer to the rhetorical question, and besides my own mental supposition, a perfect way to either agree or not on the present relevance of Sartori's work would be to look and analyze the current status of democracy. Once again, graphics offer a useful starting point.⁴⁴

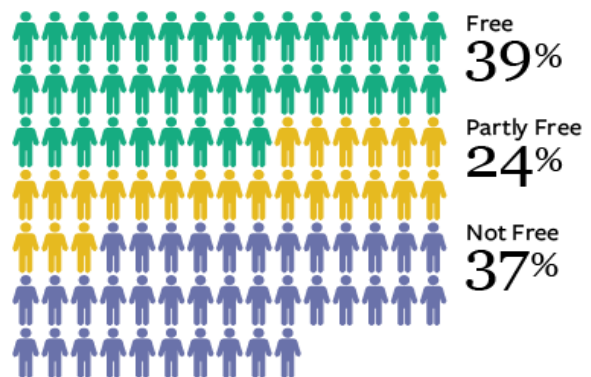
⁴⁴ Given the ongoing discussion of this thesis, I will not focus on Eurasia, Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa because, as the infographics on the next pages show, dismally, these regions are terribly plagued by authoritarian dictatorships and it will be cruel and illogical to write about the crisis of democracy in macro-regions where the majority of the population still has to experience the benefits, rights and duties that a democratic framework carries.

Freedom in the World 2018 Status by Population and Country

Global: By Country



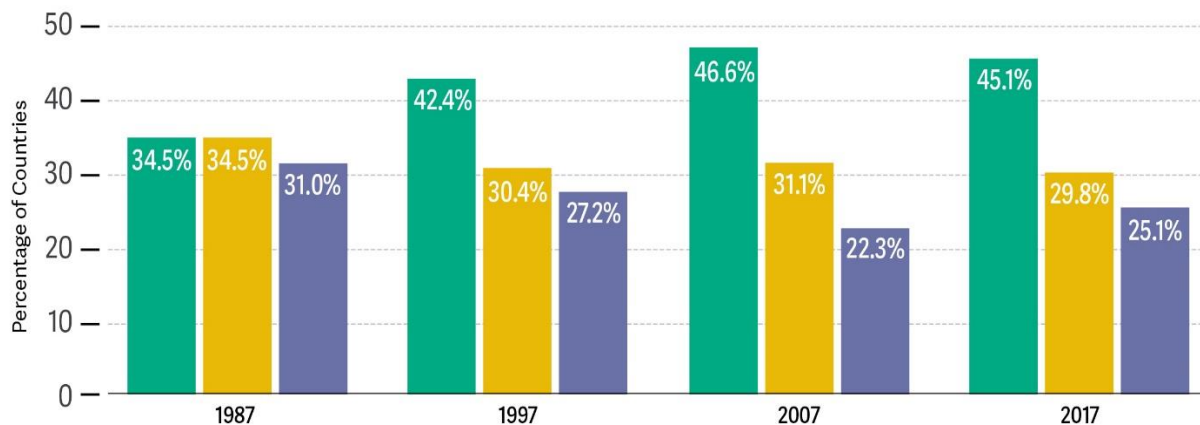
Global: By Population



www.freedomintheworld.org

FREEDOM IN THE BALANCE

After years of major gains, the share of Free countries has declined over the past decade, while the share of Not Free countries has risen.

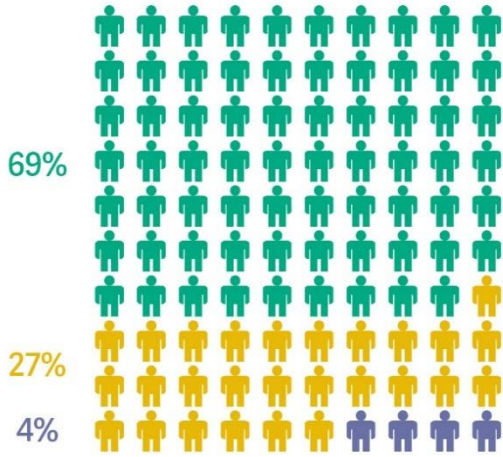


⁴⁵ These infographics are taken from the *Freedom in the World 2018* Report, commissioned by Freedom House and available for free in pdf here:

https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FITW_Report_2018_Final_SinglePage.pdf.

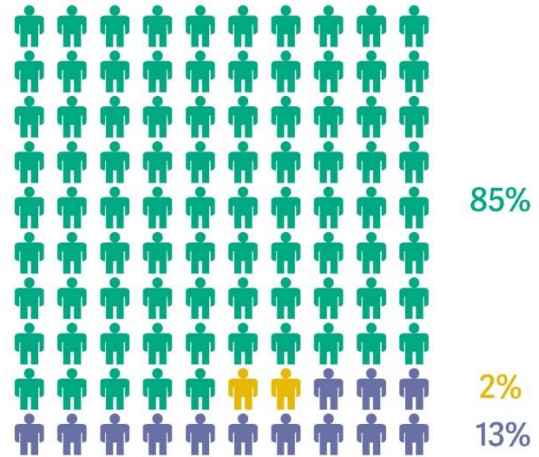
AMERICAS: STATUS BY POPULATION

Total population
992.3 million

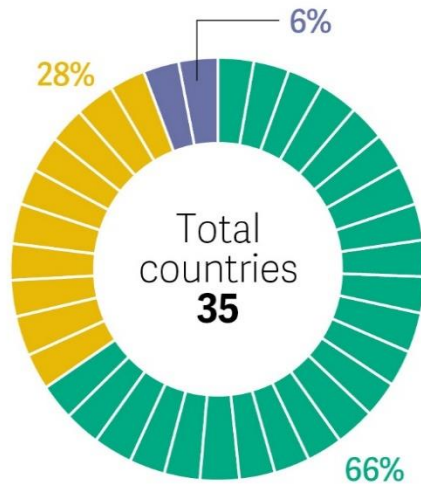


EUROPE: STATUS BY POPULATION

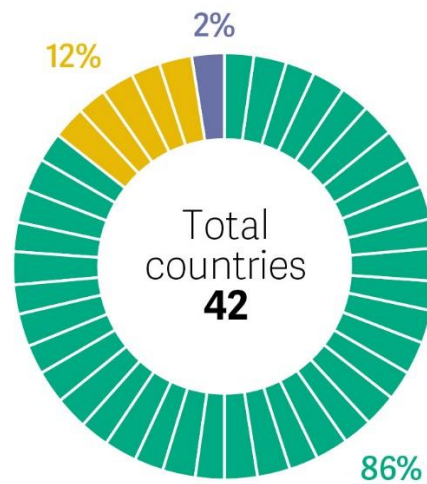
Total population
618.1 million



AMERICAS: STATUS BY COUNTRY



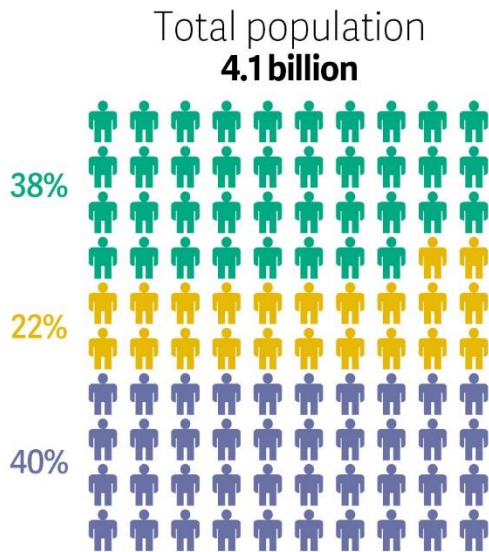
EUROPE: STATUS BY COUNTRY



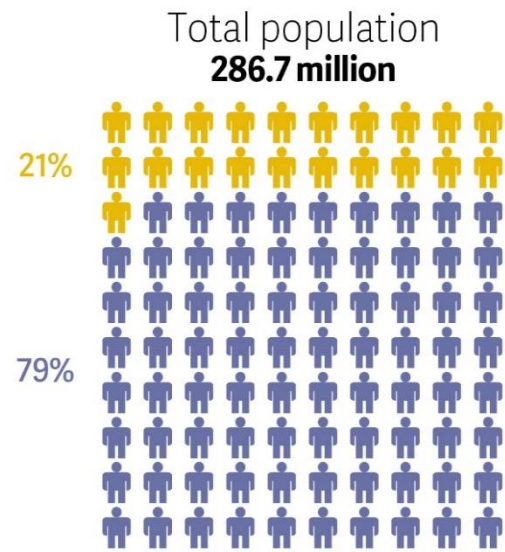
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⁴⁶ The following schemes are orderly taken from the subsequent pages of the aforementioned report: *Freedom in the balance* p. 6; *Americas*, p. 13; *Europe*, p. 18, *Asia-Pacific*, p. 16; *Eurasia*, p. 17; *Middle East and North Africa*, p. 19 and *Sub-Saharan Africa*, p. 21.

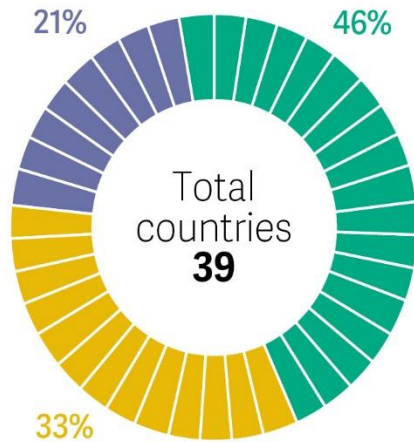
ASIA-PACIFIC: STATUS BY POPULATION



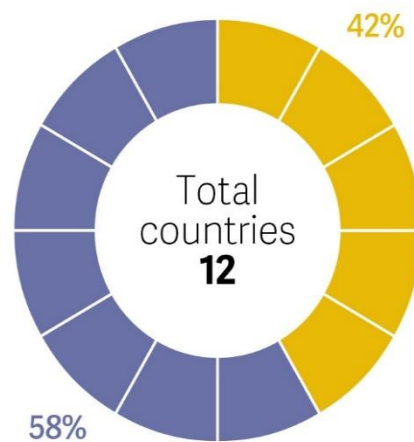
EURASIA: STATUS BY POPULATION



ASIA-PACIFIC: STATUS BY COUNTRY



EURASIA: STATUS BY COUNTRY

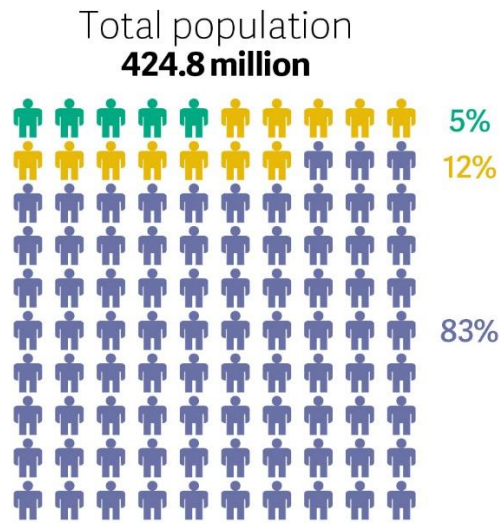


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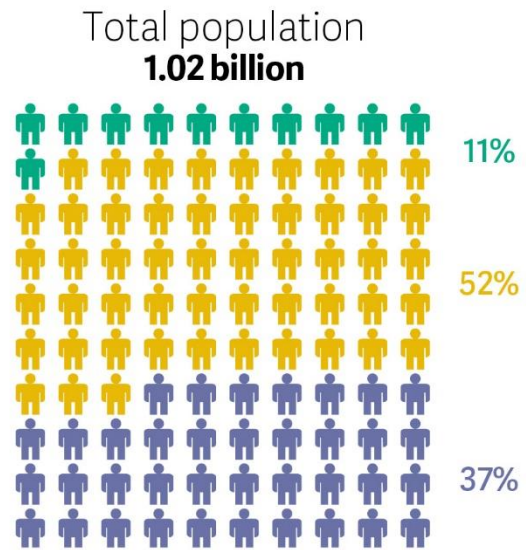
⁴⁷ “*Freedom in the World 2018* evaluates the state of freedom in 195 countries and 14 territories during calendar year 2017. Each country and territory is assigned between 0 and 4 points on a series of 25 indicators, for an aggregate score of up to 100. These scores are used to determine two numerical ratings, for political rights and civil liberties (...) A country or territory’s political rights and civil liberties ratings then determine whether it has an overall status of Free, Partly Free, or Not Free. The methodology, which is derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is applied to all countries and territories, irrespective of geographic location, ethnic or religious composition, or level of economic development” (Abramowitz, p.4).

For the complete explanation of the methodology used in the Report see: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2018/methodology>.

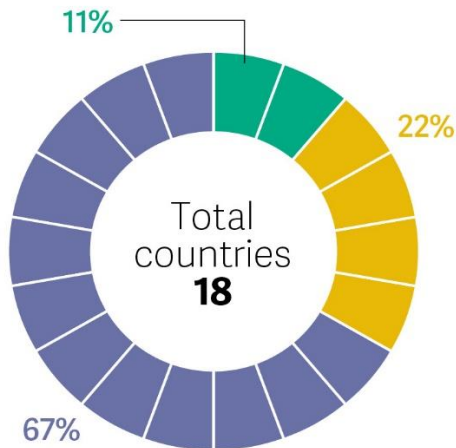
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: STATUS BY POPULATION



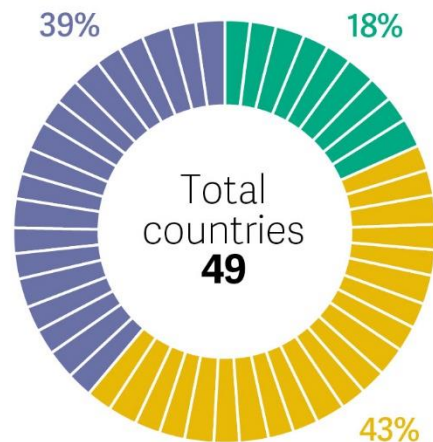
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: STATUS BY POPULATION



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: STATUS BY COUNTRY



SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: STATUS BY COUNTRY



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⁴⁸ These infographics fruitfully portray the negative trend currently faced by democracy worldwide. The global population is almost perfectly tripartite in “free” (39%) and “not free” (37%), with the remaining 24% living in countries considered “partly free”. Out of the six macro-regions (Americas, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa), Europe is where the highest aggregate percentage of “free” people live (85%) whereas Eurasia, Middle East and North Africa represent the exact opposite of the spectrum, having a “not free” population respectively of 83% and 73%. The aforementioned numbers on population pale in comparison to those found in Asia-Pacific, which thanks to its staggering 4.1 billion population, houses both the largest democracy in the world (India) and the most ferocious global undemocratic competitor (China).

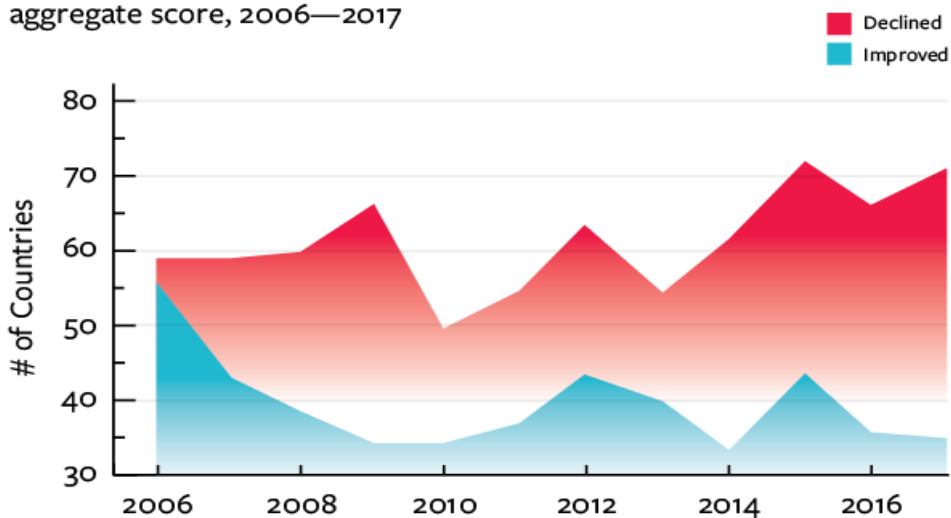
Notwithstanding the different meanings and importance that scholars and laypeople alike singlehandedly attach to the term democracy,⁴⁹ despite the various metrics or points of view so far analyzed, one cannot refuse to agree that democracy is indeed in crisis.

This crisis is global, and its origins are not necessarily recent.

According to Freedom House,⁵⁰ one of the most distinguished independent NGOs dedicated to the study and diffusion of democracy, 2018 marked the 12th consecutive year of decline in global freedom, meaning that since 2006, 113 countries experienced democratic worsening while merely 62 witnessed an amelioration of their statuses.⁵¹

Twelve Years of Decline

Number of countries that declined and improved in aggregate score, 2006—2017



www.freedomintheworld.org

⁴⁹ For the sake of clarity, when the term democracy is implemented, and not otherwise specified, it refers to liberal democracy, duly described both at pages 16 and 29.

⁵⁰ Freedom House offers an impeccable framework for the analysis of democracy. Its methodology not only perfectly mirrors the common understanding that freedom and equality are the quintessential traits of a democracy, but also rests and supports Sartori's claim that *freedom from* represents the basis for whatever type of freedom and of equality a democracy could sponsor. It is precisely protective freedom (and its various ramifications which consequentially appear in the Freedom House Report's results) that enables the existence of all the characteristics needed for minimally define a democracy, or rather for detecting what can and cannot be considered a democracy. Minimalist and maximalist definitions of democracy were already discussed from pages 13 to 21 of this thesis.

⁵¹ Following graph taken directly from: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>.

These last years have been characterized by already seen and brand-new phenomena. The former includes the resurgence of populism, once a defining trait of third-wave democracies and now vigorously appearing in the political lives of the wealthiest nations on Earth, along with a general distrust in democracy, either commanded by the search for alternatives – epistocratic⁵² or/and illiberal above all – or pushed by the contempt related to democracy’s alleged inefficiency, as well as a trend of increasing negative criticism for the work of NGOs, journalists⁵³ and experts. In this instance, the middle ground is held by the rise of illiberal democracies, generally following the narration of the ascend of a strong man who claims to embody popular discontent and gains electoral strength by finding a culprit to blame for all of society’s perceived malaise (nowadays the choice for who to blame is usually cast upon immigrants or, more generally and traditionally, minorities). Whereas the brand-new phenomenon is the visible political effect of voters’ preferences’ manipulation via Internet, a new dystopian evolution of what Sartori called “videocracy”, that along with fake news and misinformation have transformed themselves from annoyances to proper election-altering tools, to be deployed in information wars. These tendencies have paved the way for what is perhaps the strongest challenger to liberal democracy in the 21st century, digital authoritarianism. This model, to be fully embodied by China in the upcoming years, is defined by a bundle of online control and censorship that uses surveillance, AI, and machine learning tools to monitor, subjugate, direct, command and decide how the lives of citizens should be lived.

The aim of this subsection is that of offering an empirical framework in order to discover the depth and range of the democratic crisis thus coming to an agreement on the relevance and need of a general theory of democracy. For doing so, real-world cases will be analyzed, departing from Trump’s election to Brexit, overviewing the situation in Europe and the problems vexing even the most stable of democracies, for then passing onto the rise of what have been dubbed Illiberal democracies and the attempts for gaining new undemocratic global leadership by Russia and above all China.

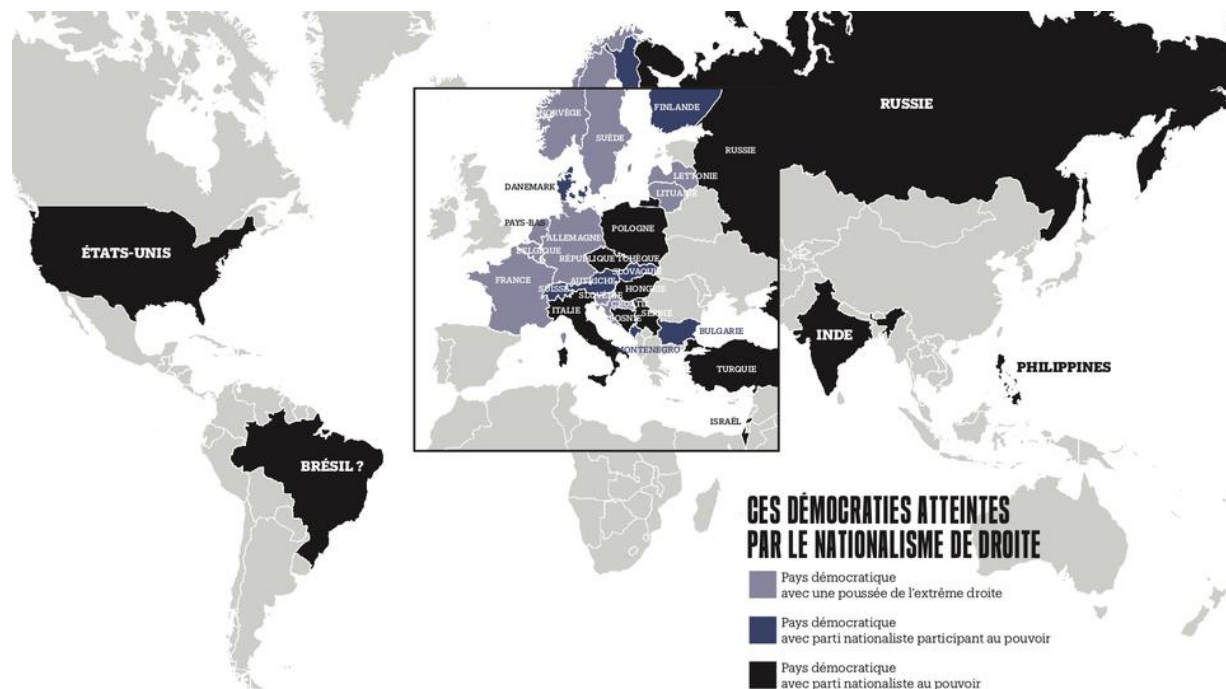
⁵² Epistocracy will be discussed at length in chapter three of this thesis.

⁵³ So much so that, in order to call the general attention on this trend, the popular magazine *Time* nominated as their Person of the Year, journalists that risk their lives to fight for freedom against despotic rule: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/times-person-of-the-year-honors-jamal-khashoggi-and-the-guardians-of-the-truth>.

Obviously, empirical research alone will not suffice for achieving the above-stated purpose. Hence, it will be corroborated with theoretical analysis so to blend the two together, following the same intention that inspired the writing of the *TODRs*. In order to do so, empirical analysis will be dissected through the lens of six detectable phenomena that throughout his writings – especially *TODRs* and *Homo Videns* – Sartori viewed as endangering democracy and that today represent the causes for its current crisis. As already hinted in the previous pages, those are:

- Populism
- Forms of distrust in democracy
- Criticism of civil society (mainly focusing on the works of journalists and NGOs)
- Manipulation of preferences via new technologies
- Rise of illiberal democracy
- Ascent of the threat of digital authoritarianism

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⁵⁴ Picture taken from an online article written by Laurent Joffrine for *La Libération*, available at: https://www.liberation.fr/france/2018/10/26/les-droites-radicales-fondent-sur-le-globe_1688207?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook#Echobox=1540733342.

The above-described traits can be empirically detected in the events that shaped this decade starting from Donald Trump's election and the subsequent manifestation of intent to withdraw the US from their global leadership position as champions of democracy. What was once considered the land of the free has now become the guiding light of populism. Few events of the current decade have shaken the worldwide political landscape as much as Trump's election, and its magnitude still has to be completely understood. The former tycoon-now-President stormed global and American politics, and in little time transformed and credited practices that were deemed unthinkable for the President of the United States (such as, for example, appointing family members to senior advisers' posts).⁵⁵

Hints of what was to come were already present in his electoral slogan – America First or its modern variant of Make America Great Again – a catchphrase invented before the outbreak of World War II by American isolationists pursuing to stop the upcoming US intervention. This was exactly the first message sent by the Trump administration, or rather the retreat of the United States from their position of global leaders and protectors of democracy. The intention was not to remain ineffectual as the new President took significant and symbolical steps in this new direction by withdrawing the biggest polluter in the history of nations from the Paris Agreement,⁵⁶ the only viable existing framework for globally tackling the single greatest threat to the survival of the human species, global warming. However, that signaled just the beginning of Trump's actions. The *Freedom in the World 2018* Report states that “the United States now receives a score of 86 out of 100 points. While this places it below other major democracies such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, it is still firmly in the Free category. Nevertheless, a three-point decline in a single year is rare for an established democracy. In particular, Freedom House is closely watching President Trump's verbal attacks on the press and their potential impact on the public's access to free and independent news media” (Abramowitz, p.3). Trump's criticisms towards the work of NGO's and journalists have been one of the

⁵⁵ The sentence refers to Jared Kushner's hiring as a senior adviser, see: <https://www.dw.com/en/trump-appoints-son-in-law-as-senior-adviser/a-37070046>.

For a more complete view, read: <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/10/03/justice-department-legal-memos-presidents-appoint-relatives-243395>.

⁵⁶ Please see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-climate-usa-paris/u-s-submits-formal-notice-of-withdrawal-from-paris-climate-pact-idUSKBN1AK2FM>.

For further information on carbon polluters, refer to: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/01/climate/us-biggest-carbon-polluter-in-history-will-it-walk-away-from-the-paris-climate-deal.html>.

defining characteristics of his young presidency, popularizing the term fake news,⁵⁷ sponsoring absurd conspiracy theories⁵⁸ and going so far as to strip CNN's reporter Jim Acosta of his White House credentials after the journalist questioned the veracity of Trump's metaphor that regarded the Central American migrant march an invasion.⁵⁹ President Trump does not limit his attacks on the press as he scornfully refers to judges who alt his resolutions and slanders professionals from the law enforcement and federal intelligence departments⁶⁰ whilst favoring damaging decisions for the future of the Web.⁶¹ Notwithstanding all of these, the President's favorite targets are minorities. His electoral campaign was based on the necessity of building a wall for the length of the borders between Mexico and US aimed at allegedly reducing the numbers of illegal immigrants entering North America; this necessity was based on Trump's repeated belief that "when Mexico send his people, they are not sending their best (...) they're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people".⁶² As Trump is accused of crediting and legitimizing racist overtones in public discourses,⁶³ Latin Americans are far from being the only minority attacked; African Americans, Muslim (particularly after the much-discussed Travel Ban), Women⁶⁴ and the LGBTQ+⁶⁵ communities all came under fierce

⁵⁷ Please read: <http://time.com/5362183/the-real-fake-news-crisis/>.

⁵⁸ Please see: <https://www.businessinsider.com/donald-trump-conspiracy-theories-2016-5?IR=T#questions-about-a-former-bill-clinton-aides-suicide>.

⁵⁹ For deepening the understanding of the topic, refer to both the following articles: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/07/media/trump-cnn-press-conference/index.html> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/07/us/politics/trump-cnn-acosta-white-house.html>.

⁶⁰ To expand on the issue, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/us/politics/giuliani-comes-firing-trump.html>.

⁶¹ The sensitive topic of Net Neutrality, and its repeal, will be discussed at length in other parts of this thesis; for having an overall view read: <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/11/net-neutrality-fcc-ajit-pai-monopoly> ; <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/14/technology/net-neutrality-rules.html>.

⁶² Quote taken directly from Katie Reilly's article on *Time*, available at: <http://time.com/4473972/donald-trump-mexico-meeting-insult/>.

As a matter of yesterday, referring to the time this subsection is being written (i.e. 12/12/18), the President stated that he would prefer shutting down the government rather than compromising on the funding for the construction of the wall, as he required additional \$5 billion to the Congress for the project. For updates and useful fact-checking see: <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/12/11/trump-border-wall-congress-budget-1055433> and <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/11/675892744/fact-check-trump-says-a-lot-of-wall-has-been-built-as-he-demands-we-build-more?t=1544614040270>.

⁶³ For the opinion of *The Washington Post's* columnist Max Boot, read: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/president-trump-is-normalizing-racism/2018/05/30/7d5f726e-6417-11e8-a768-ed043e33f1dc_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c4a1591c5b13.

⁶⁴ Chiefly referring to the intense protests staged prior and after the election of Justice Kavanaugh, for more information read: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/04/kavanaugh-supreme-court-protests-washington> and <https://qz.com/1414949/the-women-protesting-brett-kavanaughs-supreme-court-appointment/>.

⁶⁵ Please see: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-trauma-of-the-trump-administrations-attacks-on-transgender-people>.

criticism, so much so as to push the *Telegraph* writer Claire Cohen to track every sexist remark publicly made by the US President. ⁶⁶ Nevertheless, perhaps the most unsettling situation involving Trump's presidency derives from voters' preferences' manipulation and the Russian meddling in the presidential elections of 2016. ⁶⁷ Unlikely anything else seen before, the aforementioned elections were subject to a significant degree of influence from external powers. *The Freedom in the World 2018 Country Report for the United States* declares that "In early January 2017, top U.S. intelligence agencies issued a more comprehensive assessment, finding that the Russian leadership had carried out a broad campaign to undermine public faith in the democratic process, denigrate Clinton, and aid Trump's election chances. It included hacking of multiple targets, such as both major political parties and some electoral boards, as well as propaganda disseminated by Russian state media. Revelations later in 2017 centered on Russian agents' alleged exploitation of leading social media platforms to spread divisive and misleading messages among U.S. voters. Facebook alone reported in October that tens of thousands of such Russian-linked posts may have reached 126 million Americans during the election cycle". ⁶⁸ Furthermore, US Intelligence discovered that the leaking of personal documents of the Clinton campaign was executed by the Russian government.

In a little more than a year, President Trump shocked the American political world, blazing a brand-new trail for the populist leaders around the globe to follow.

The aforementioned global leadership vacuum was and will be continually left unfulfilled by a grotesque, lost, childish and fragmented European Union that instead of rising to the challenge has muddled itself in divisions and inefficiency, the only possible result from the lack of wisdom and long-term vision of the most important European nation states to create a social and political union rather than an economic ensemble, thus leaving more and more ground and simultaneously observing the increase of populist and far-right movements in Germany (Alternative für Deutschland), Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs or FPÖ) France (Front National now Rassemblement National) Italy (5 Stars Movement and the League) the

⁶⁶ For a complete reading, refer to: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/politics/donald-trump-sexism-tracker-every-offensive-comment-in-one-place/>.

⁶⁷ For having a thorough framework regarding the issue read: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/09/20/us/politics/russia-interference-election-trump-clinton.html>.

⁶⁸ Quote taken directly from *The Freedom in the World 2018 Country Report for the United States*, available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/united-states>.

Netherlands (Partij voor de Vrijheid or PVV for short), Sweden (Sverigedemokraterna, SD), Denmark (Dansk Folkeparti, DF), Poland (PiS), Hungary (Fidesz) and the rest of the extended Visegrád group; a tendency popularly exemplified by the Brexit Referendum result in 2016.⁶⁹

In a swift, transalpine move, populism has perhaps found its most fertile soil in the cities and villages of the Bel Paese. Despite sharing her identical political views, unlike Le Pen, Matteo Salvini did enter in a government coalition. As a matter of fact, during the March 2018 national elections the two parties now in power, the League – which in an act plentiful of significance dropped the adjective northern from its name – and the Five-Stars Movement, ran as rivals. The former in a center-to-the-neo-fascist coalition led by the seemingly everlasting Silvio Berlusconi, the latter alone.⁷⁰ Not too late afterwards, for Italian temporal standards, did the two competitors realize that they had much more in common than they thought; both are profoundly anti-establishment (despite the League’s presence in different Berlusconi’s governmental coalitions); both are highly critical of experts,⁷¹ NGOs, international organizations and of the European common currency; both are markedly Eurosceptic and admirers of Putin and Trump. Thus, the alliance was formed.

Of the two, Salvini and his voters base are remarkably more Trumpian, sharing his anti-immigration rants, attacks on minorities and NGOs,⁷² sponsoring of dubious appointments,⁷³

⁶⁹ A useful article enlisting the main far right parties in Europe is available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/world/europe/europe-far-right-political-parties-listy.html>.

Having being written in 2016, few things must be added such as the coming of power of the League in Italy and of Vox in Spain, following their recent success in Andalusian’s election:

https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/12/03/inenglish/1543831474_046256.html.

⁷⁰ For further information regarding the results of the elections read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/mar/05/italian-elections-2018-full-results-renzi-berlusconi>.

⁷¹ “When Tito Boeri, a respected professional economist who heads Italy’s national pensions system, pointed out that it would collapse without a steady flow of immigration, Salvini said Boeri would soon be looking for another job.” The direct citation was taken from Alexander Stille’s article, commissioned by *The Guardian*, and available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>.

⁷² For a more complete view on the topic see: <http://www.onuitalia.com/2018/06/05/replying-to-mr-salvini-statement-on-immigration-the-un-praises-the-ngos-lifesaving-work-in-the-mediterranean/>.

⁷³ The appointment of Marcello Foa as Rai’s, Italian national broadcaster, president has been the subjects of fierce debates, for more information read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/26/fake-news-journalist-made-chair-of-italys-state-broadcaster>.

skillful use of social media ⁷⁴ and casting fond eyes to Putin and his money. ⁷⁵ Nonetheless, Salvini possesses and displayed all the abilities of a modern, resourceful political leader. In a matter of four years, he took a decaying regional party and transformed it in Italy's most influential one. How? He successfully reverted the old narrative of Padania being exploited by the rest of the country (a change of intent signaled by the remodeling of the party's name), shifting the focus from "Roma Ladrona" to Brussels, thus enlarging the blame of Italy's problems not on the laziness of its southern inhabitants but on immigration, technocratic European elite, international organizations and banks. The consequences did not take much to appear as "Salvini's rise to power has heightened concerns in Italy about the escalation of racist and xenophobic violence in the country. Dozens of attacks on black people and Roma have been recorded in the last year, all over Italy, from Treviso in the north to Gioia Tauro in the south, including Florence and Rome. The attacks range from drive-by shootings with air guns, in which the attackers were reported to shout "Salvini!" to the assassination of a Malian trade unionist campaigning for fair pay for migrant workers (...) After a torrent of criticism for his anti-migrant policies – culminating with the headline 'Get behind me Salvini' ⁷⁶ on the cover of Italy's largest Catholic magazine – Salvini responded with a favorite phrase of Mussolini: 'many enemies, much honor.' He also insisted that the idea of widespread Italian racism was 'an invention of the left'". ⁷⁷ Particularly troublesome and disdainful was the fascist terrorist attack committed by Luca Traini, a 28-year old skinhead, that shot and injured six people simply in virtue of them having a black skin. ⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Particularly insightful are the following interviews and inquiries, investigating on "la bestia", literally "the beast" the social media propaganda algorithm used by Salvini and his social media team:

<https://www.rollingstone.it/politica/la-bestia-ovvero-del-come-funziona-la-propaganda-di-salvini/420343/>; <http://espresso.repubblica.it/palazzo/2018/08/23/news/la-propaganda-social-di-matteo-salvini-ora-la-paghi-tu-e-ci-costa-mille-euro-al-giorno-1.326194>; http://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2018/09/03/news/rocco-casalino-luca-morisi-e-gli-altri-chi-gestisce-ministero-propaganda-1.326445?refresh_ce. For an English version verging on similar investigation, please refer to: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/07/26/matteo-salvini-italys-de-facto-leader-is-instinctively-authoritarian>.

⁷⁵ Investigative journalists' works casted light on the connection between far-right parties across Europe receiving funds from Putin: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/europe-s-far-right-enjoys-backing-russia-s-putin-n718926>. Among them also appeared Salvini's League, as certified by an investigative report by the Espresso: http://espresso.repubblica.it/inchieste/2018/02/09/news/matteo-salvini-russia-riciclati-1.318144?refresh_ce.

⁷⁶ Article available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/30/europe/salvini-mussolini-italy-intl/index.html>.

⁷⁷ Citation taken from Alexander Stille's article, commissioned by *The Guardian*, and available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>.

⁷⁸ For amplifying the knowledge of the aforementioned event, read: http://www.ansa.it/english/news/2018/02/07/left-sounds-alarm-on-fascist-resurgence-after-macerata-4_8d291f9f-93bd-4785-9868-9b9a375d0085.html; <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/italian-neo-nazi-gets-12-years-in-prison-for-shooting-african->

All these facts make perfect sense and are the logical result of the words of an Interior Minister whose first actions, once in power, were to call for a census of the Roma population⁷⁹ and refusing safe harbor to a ship that had just rescued migrants from a sinking boat.⁸⁰ However Italian governing populism also has a second face, that of the 5 Stars movement. While overtly professing to be neither left nor right and pledging to never make alliances with old parties, the movement found a natural partner in the League, appropriating various electoral successful as well as democracy-endangering Salvini's practices such as the continuous attacks on the press⁸¹ – which were met by fierce response from Italian journalists' organizations.⁸² Furthermore, the political movement founded by Beppe Grillo, embodies another previously mentioned feature, the disdain for experts. According to their narrative, Italy's problems are inseparably linked with the sins of greedy politicians and technocrats who profited at the expenses of honest, working Italians. Just like Trump and his spreading of hoaxes and conspiracy theories, their hidden message conveys the idea that the opinion of a person, usually formed by freely reading articles on the internet, is tantamount in value and authority to a scientific fact.

Would this to become the general perception and belief of whatsoever population, dark times would loom ahead of them. For now, the attitude of the 5-stars movement brought dangerous⁸³ and comical⁸⁴ results, but if nothing is done the situation will only worsen, rendering it increasingly difficult, even for Italians, to find something to laugh about.

[migrants-1.6529261](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/italian-sentenced-12-years-african-migrants-shooting-181003173220025.html) ; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/italian-sentenced-12-years-african-migrants-shooting-181003173220025.html>.

⁷⁹ For further information, refer to: http://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2018/06/18/census-of-roma-people-coming-up-salvini-5_866c7f2c-0639-4a32-95ca-2f3189b293bd.html.

⁸⁰ For deeper knowledge over the Aquarius case, read: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/06/12/italys-matteo-salvini-refuses-to-let-a-boat-full-of-migrants-land>.

⁸¹ In order to start understanding the entire diatribe, see: <https://www.dw.com/en/italy-five-star-leader-lashes-out-at-the-press-threatens-to-cut-funds/a-45509438> ; <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/italys-di-maio-threatens-to-punish-unfriendly-newspapers/>.

⁸² Please read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/13/italian-journalists-respond-with-fury-to-m5s-insult>.

⁸³ The 5-stars movement has been accused of sponsoring anti-vax groups and the consequent surge of measles cases in Italy. For more info see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/11/rise-of-italian-populist-parties-buoys-anti-vaccine-movement> and <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/23/italys-five-star-movement-blamed-for-surge-in-measles-cases>.

⁸⁴ The Italian public mocked the five-stars MP Laura Castelli on two different occasions: when she refused to declare, albeit being a political representative, whether she was in favor or against the euro and when she admitted of not knowing who was going to be responsible for printing the paper badges necessary for implementing the “reddito di cittadinanza”, a very modified version of the idea of Universal Basic Income, proposed by Minister Luigi Di Maio. The reader can read about both episodes here: <https://video.repubblica.it/politica/la7-l-onorevole-castelli-e-il-referendum-sull-euro-voterebbe-si-o-no-non-lo-so/291657/292266> ; <https://www.lastampa.it/2018/11/28/italia/reddito-di-cittadinanza-Y1hpXnNH1kiARxW3WFoA2H/pagina.html>.

Even the most powerful and stable democracies in the world have been vexed by seemingly perceived solution-less problems such as the influx of immigrants and refugees, used to augment the fear of the “other”; a strategy appearing to be eroding what Scandinavians truly consider to be their gold, social trust.

As a matter of fact, the European Nordic countries’ social welfare system has always represented a complex riddle to economists worldwide that fail to understand how an arrangement so prone to free-riding and cheating sustains and creates the world’s highest standards of living.

“Regarding traditional factors of production, most experts agree that human capital (education and vocational training) explains approximately half of a country’s economic level, whereas physical capital explains approximately one fourth. However, the economists cannot explain the remaining fourth of a nation’s wealth, which means that they must have overlooked something (...) This flaw in economic theory may be due to a missing link: social capital, here measured in the form of social trust” (Svendsen, p. 62). Social trust can be defined as the belief that an unknown person will stick and not break or diverge from society’s given norms. Here is where trust and social trust fundamentally differ as the former entails at least various degrees of knowledge about the subject chosen to trust whereas the latter is directed and focuses on strangers. The benefits of trust are easy to explore as “when trust prevails, more transactions can take place at lower costs, and predictability and production in society will increase, because formal measurement and enforcement of all transactions is no longer necessary. This implies that if the members of a society generally trust each other, they may obtain higher collective economic growth than in similar societies without mutual trust (...) Similarly, trust in institutions means that political decision-makers can implement regulations more easily, because the citizens have no fear of being double-crossed. They know that their tax money is being invested properly, and that they will gain a satisfactory profit in the form of common goods – they get their money’s worth. Furthermore, the need to control the behavior of the citizens is greater in low-trust societies than in high-trust societies” (Svendsen, p. 63). Hence it is not a coincidence that the four Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland along with another northern European country, the Netherlands) are constantly found in the top five spots of the worldwide rank for General Trust in the World Value Survey.⁸⁵

However, this gold is rapidly being exhausted by the bombast discourses of far-right parties. In

⁸⁵ For analyzing and studying the ranks and their variation see: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.

the aforementioned countries, their anti-immigration rhetoric evolved from the threat of immigrants stealing jobs – a difficult narrative to believe in very economically wealthy countries – to the cultural threat represented by immigration, portrayed as a phenomenon destined to destroy cultural homogeneity as well as national identity. Their enunciated intention is thus very clear: the immigrants come from a different culture and therefore it is impossible to trust them as it is impossible to know whether they will adhere to our society’s socio-economic norms. And this message is resonating with the electorate. Emblematic of this situation is the last Swedish election in which the far-right party SD has gained the 17.6% of the votes.⁸⁶ In the Netherlands, the famous xenophobic Partij voor de Vrijheid or PVV for short won enough votes to become parliament’s most numerous opposition group. The party is led by Geert Wilders, a strenuous advocate for the de-Islamization of his country, also famous for his anti-immigration rants that costed him a conviction for discrimination.⁸⁷ The situation is not particularly brighter in Denmark where the DF, the Dansk Folkeparti, an extreme-right party, won, during the 2015 general elections, 37 seats in the Folketing.⁸⁸ Waves of international shock hit the jagged coasts of Denmark after Immigration Minister Inger Stojberg’s proposals of housing and confining the nation’s most unwelcomed immigrants on an isolated deportation island, previously home to a center for the study of contagious animals’ maladies.⁸⁹

2.1 On Populism, Identity and Manipulation

As seen so far, one of the clearest signs of democratic crisis is represented by the general popular disaffection towards democracy, usually motivated by an actual distrust of it. Here is essential to pinpoint that this mistrust differentiates itself in between negative and constructive criticism and while the former seems to prevail in the political world, the latter, which lately has taken the form of epistocratic proposals, would later be examined to show that democracy is not left alone as academics and experts keep elaborating new ways for helping it survive and thrive. Along with the increasingly widespread distrust, as the three examples thus far considered

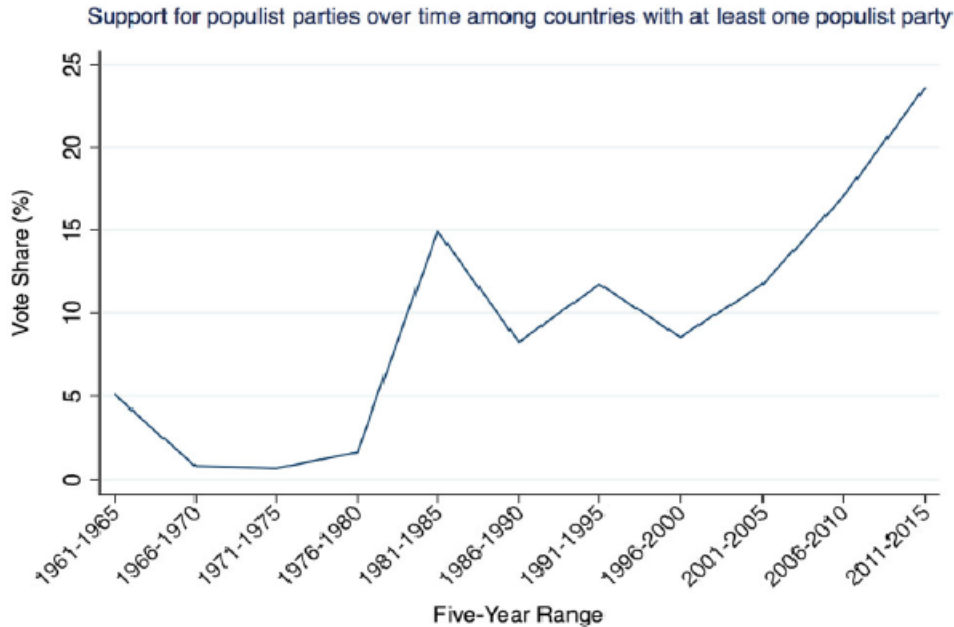
⁸⁶ For more information read: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/09/swedish-election-far-right-on-course-for-sizeable-gains-in-vote>.

⁸⁷ More about the story can be found here: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/09/anti-islam-dutch-mp-geert-wilders-found-guilty-discrimination/>.

⁸⁸ For seeing the entire composition of the Danish Parliament refer to: <https://pollofpolls.eu/DK>.

⁸⁹ For additional information, visit: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/03/world/europe/denmark-migrants-island.html>.

showed, populism has found its way back into the political life of the most advanced countries in the world.



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By changing in the recent years its locus from third-wave democracies and modernizing countries, populism has undergone a historic transformation resurging vehemently in the political life of the richest countries on Earth. Historically, populism composes itself of a twofold, antithetic approach: it can either be directed towards including the ostracized people into the political system or adopted to manipulate peoples' vote in favor of a strong man that will use this electoral legitimacy to limit fundamental rights and create an illiberal democracy.

One of the most successful attempts for explaining the mutation of populism was endeavored by Dani Rodrik. The professor at the Harvard Kennedy School identifies two main cleavages thanks to which it is possible to discern whether populism will lean to the left or to the right of the political spectrum. The first cleavage revolves around the ethnic-cultural-religious motifs whereas the second is mainly economic, characterized by the opposition between wealthy elites vs low income groups with no access to power. If the political debate whirls around the first distinction, then the populist movement will essentially be right-wing; if the struggle focuses on

⁹⁰ Graph taken from p.14 of Dani Rodrik's article "Populism and the Economics of Globalization", available in pdf here: https://drodrik.scholar.harvard.edu/files/dani-rodrik/files/populism_and_the_economics_of_globalization.pdf.

the second theme then it will be left leaning.⁹¹ Examples of the first are AFD in Germany or Salvini in Italy whilst the second can be impersonated by Sanders in the US or Syriza in Greece.

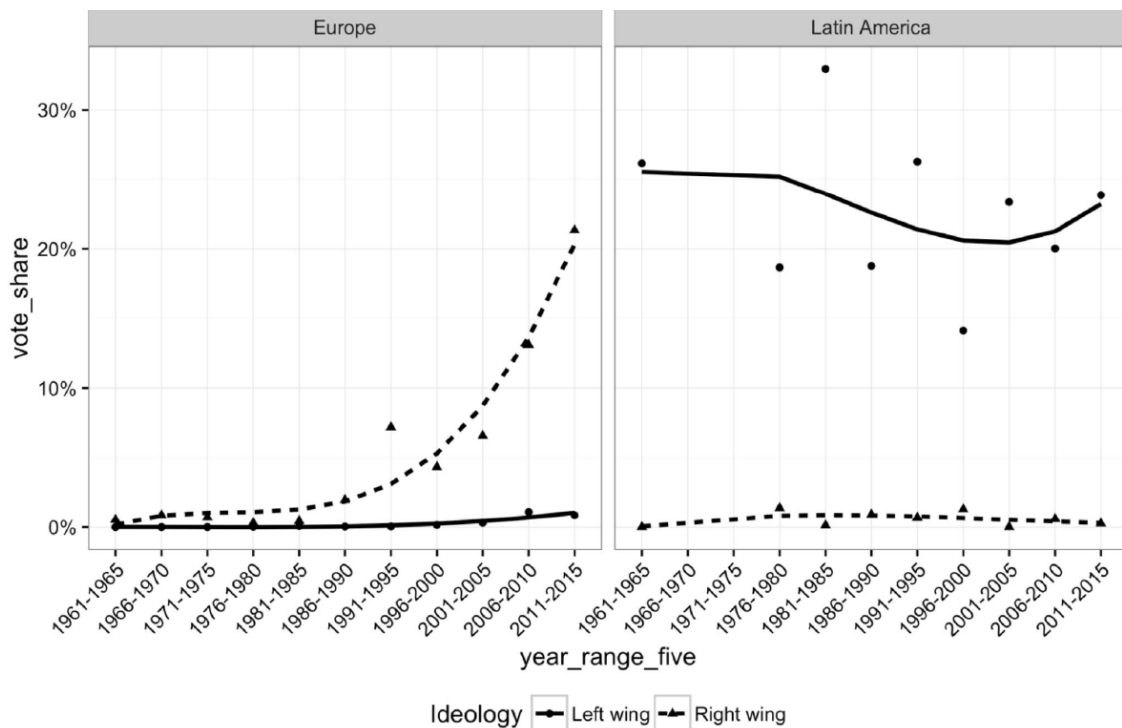


Figure 4 Contrasting patterns of populism in Europe and Latin America. Notes: See Appendix for sources and methods.

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Rodrik is able to come to these conclusions after tracing the socio-economic reasons for the re-appearance of populism. The American professor does not “claim that globalization was the only force at play – nor necessarily even the most important one. Changes in technology, rise of winner-take-all markets, erosion of labor-market protections, and decline of norms restricting pay differentials all have played their part. These developments are not entirely independent from globalization, insofar as they both fostered globalization and were reinforced by it. But neither can they be reduced to it. Nevertheless, economic history and economic theory both give us strong reasons to believe that advanced stages of globalization are prone to populist backlash” (Rodrik, p.2). By focusing on the distributive aspects of globalization, he argues that the economic openness along with the removal of past barriers, such as the entrance of China in the

⁹¹ To expand on this difference please read p.13 of the above-cited Rodrik’s article.

⁹² Scheme taken from p.2 of the same article.

WTO,⁹³ endemically create winners and losers. It is precisely the presence or absence of safety nets for the losers of globalization, generally embodied by a State's welfare programs, that has to be seen as the main cause for the resurface of populism.

This distinction is also at the heart of what differentiates⁹⁴ American and European populism: the former, given the absence of the aforementioned safety nets, is much more prone to focus on assaulting custom tariffs rather than the latter which, precisely because of widespread welfare programs, is increasingly hostile to migrants.⁹⁵

Few topics have been so relevant in last years as immigration, and subsequently identity. Rodrik's explanation on modern populism shed a light at the importance that these two correlated phenomena have in today's world. Yet, identity and its traits have long been studied, among other illustrious experts, also by Zygmunt Bauman. According to the Polish professor, saying that "modernity brought the disembedding of identity is a pleonasm" (Bauman, p. 28). In fact, the concept of identity was already conceived in its essence as a problem, containing within itself all the quandaries related to it. Thus, for Bauman, identity would never be a clearly defined phenomenon, if not in its disembedded and problematic form. By placing so much emphasis on the importance of identity, the Polish author believed that, the postmodern world became incapable of generating solidarity; as time passed and societies evolved, people "started to transform the space needed for building identity in a desert. They realized that deserts cannot hold marks. The easier it is to leave a footprint, the easier it is to delete it. All it takes is a buff of wind. And deserts are windy places. It soon became evident that the problem was not how to build an identity, but how to maintain it" (Bauman, p.35). And this revealed to be a much more complicated and conflictual endeavor.

For the Polish Intellectual, every single existing society, each in its particular way, has created, throughout history, what its members dub foreigners, or rather people "who don't adopt the cognitive, moral or aesthetic maps of the world" (Bauman, p.55). As easily inferable, in

⁹³ For further information regarding China's entrance in the WTO and its effects, please read the article "*The China Shock: Learning from Labor Market Adjustment to Large Changes in Trade*" Written by Autor, Dorn and Hanson, available at: <https://economics.mit.edu/files/12751>.

⁹⁴ To inquiry further on the subject please read p. 6 of Rodrik's article.

⁹⁵ For example, a study conducted by Becker, Fetzer and Novy, regarding Brexit, examined (along with other phenomena that will be discussed in this and the following chapter, i.e. most notably education) the relevant importance that austerity and immigration had on Leave voters. Study available in pdf here: <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1480.pdf>.

Bauman's thought, the term foreigner does not solely refer to people coming from different nations but is enlarged to encompass persons that are perceived by a society as able to undermine particular behavioral models,⁹⁶ traditions or are simply regarded as obstacles for society's members' obtainment of general welfare. Hence, the construction of the order enacted by each society entailed at its base waging war against the foreigner, or better against whoever was deemed to be atypical. For Bauman, in order to win this war, two reciprocal and alternative tactics were employed: assimilation (rendering identical whoever was different) and exclusion (confining, through ghettos, imaginary or concrete walls, the diverse). By tracing a compelling parallelism between his own idea of freedom and Sartre's notion of viscosity,⁹⁷ the Polish author offers a useful framework for comprehending the importance that immigration has in modern politics and in the current populist/far-right backlash. For Bauman, freedom is, at its essence, a relationship of power: "I'm free only insofar as I can act following my will and achieving the objective I have in mind" (Bauman, p. 69).

Just like viscosity complicates freedom of movement, the mere presence of foreigners/immigrants impedes, in the minds of society's members, their perceived enjoyment of freedom. For this reason, the societal and political resentment towards immigrants increases when people feel to have less power (control) and diminishes at the augmenting of the perceived sensation of more freedom. The manipulation of the fear of viscosity perfectly explains modern xenophobic accounts, which all rest on the assumption of an untouched, immaculate, safe harbor – generally represented by the nation of belonging – outside of which lays a dangerous world that the immigrants are trying to bring into our home. It is precisely the exacerbated narrative and portrait revolving around this sense of perpetual conflict, reduction of the enjoyment of liberties and the incompatibility of different cultures living together that xenophobic parties around the world use to falsely mystify the perception⁹⁸ of citizen and gain electoral support.

Coming back to more empirical analysis, it is now time to examine the political and perilous consequences that the manipulation of widespread distrust in democracy can have.

⁹⁶ Thus theoretically reinforcing the scientific evidences on the erosion of Social Trust in Scandinavian countries. For refreshing the mind revisit the corresponding subsection in chapter two.

⁹⁷ For the full rendering of the concept please read Jean Paul Sartre's "*L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*".

⁹⁸ To expand knowledge on the topic examine Ipsos researches and studies on the "*Perils of Perception*", available at: <https://perils.ipsos.com/> or complementarily read Bobby Duffy's book "*The perils of perception: Why we're wrong about nearly everything*".

More than failing to surge to the new global leadership position, one of the greatest faults of the European Union was to allow, while contemporarily still financing them, the flourishing, within the continental cradle of democracy, of one of its most dangerous adversaries, its illiberal counterpart. The trend and the origins of this idea are ascribable to the same person, Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian Prime Minister. If one was to analyze all the policies enacted by Fidesz from their rise to power in 2010 up to nowadays, they would all point to the same single aim: tightening Orbán's control, thus weakening the independent institutions of the country. This process started with the amendment of the constitution that narrowed, in spite of EU legislation, the jurisdiction of the constitutional court, substituting many judges with allegedly Fidesz trustees.⁹⁹ Orbán also replaced the independent Fiscal Council with a new one under his control, mirroring another of his significant moves when he proceeded to create a new press authority, chaired by Orbán's loyalists, invested with the power of sanctioning media organizations. This massive consolidation of power would not have been possible without the successful attempt of stigmatizing and silencing the work and voices of the NGOs. A new legislative bill, named "Stop Soros", became law requiring nongovernmental organizations that receive foreign funding at least equal or superior to 26'000\$ per year to declare themselves foreign-supported and reveal the identity of their donors. Failure to comply to these standards would result in harsh sanctions.¹⁰⁰ The just-mentioned law along with the discriminating CEU legislation¹⁰¹ were considered outrages by the European Union, which voted, for the first time in its history, for opening the procedure to sanction one of its member states.¹⁰²

Yet, the key missing element for understanding and solving the riddle of why would Fidesz go to such lengths as to risk sanctions from the EU, is Orbán's willingness of building and promoting, in the heart of Europe, a new model, that he calls Illiberal Democracy. The terminology originates from one of the Hungarian PM's speeches, particularly the one made at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp when he stated that "there is a

⁹⁹ For further information, read: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-constitution-idUSBRE92B00M20130312>.

¹⁰⁰ In order to expand knowledge on the topic, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-election/hungarys-fidesz-signals-swift-ngo-crackdown-after-orban-election-win-idUSKBN1HG1DG?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>.

¹⁰¹ For discovering and possessing more information on the bitter quarrel read: <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-ceu-story/>.

¹⁰² News regarding the EU Parliament vote can be found here: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-hungary/eu-parliament-pushes-hungary-sanctions-over-orban-policies-idUSKCN1LS1QS>.

race underway to find the method of community organization, the state, which is most capable of making a nation and a community internationally competitive.... [T]he most popular topic in thinking today is trying to understand how systems that are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies, and perhaps not even democracies, can nevertheless make their nations successful”.

¹⁰³ In his moderately short discourse, he explained to the world his intentions and the features that Hungary and illiberal democracies should possess: the sturdy presence of a strong state that control society, virtually non-existent, or at most, weak oppositions, majoritarianism, contempt towards pluralism, NGOs ¹⁰⁴ and civil society as well as a feeble system of checks and balances.

¹⁰⁵ “The message here is important. For many, illiberalism’s defining feature is intolerance toward minority groups: the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community, Roma, Muslims, refugees and migrants of all sorts. But in Hungary and elsewhere, illiberal government signifies something much more comprehensive than the prime minister asserting that ‘every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk,’ and that refugees bring ‘gangs hunting down our women and daughters’—two of Orbán’s more incendiary declarations. The Hungarian leader is instead telling us that illiberalism involves a wholesale rejection of liberal values and democratic norms, with all that this implies for politics and governance. Fidesz’s ‘reform’ efforts have been less concerned with the repression of unpopular minorities than with the creation of a system in which the institutions of pluralism are hollowed out and the ruling party’s dominance is assured over the long term” (Puddington, p.36).

In today’s Poland, the term solidarity no longer refers to Lech Walesa and his nation’s struggles, rather it points to the bond between Fidesz and PiS, Orbán and Kaczyński, Hungary and Poland, the duopoly of illiberal democracies in the heart of the European Union. The two countries shared a common narrative (the breakaway from the Soviet Union, embracement of the

¹⁰³ The entire transcript of the speech, from which this quote is taken, can be found at:

<http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp>.

¹⁰⁴ Orbán reiterated his negative view on a speech made on March 2016 when he declared “if we want to organize our national state to replace the liberal state, it is very important that we make it clear that we are not opposing nongovernmental organizations here, and it is not nongovernmental organizations who are moving against us, but paid political activists who are attempting to enforce foreign interests here in Hungary”. The entire transcript from which this excerpt is taken can be found at: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-15-march>.

¹⁰⁵ Comparison has been drawn between Orbán and Putin, for expanding on this topic please see: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/June2017_FH_Report_Breaking_Down_Democracy.pdf. In particular p.37 of the aforementioned report.

EU, newly found economic prosperity) and now appear destined to partake a common future (the road to autocracy), reinforcing each other from external attacks.¹⁰⁶ From their rise to power in 2015, winning 235 seats in the Sejm,¹⁰⁷ the ultraconservative PiS mirrored the actions of its Hungarian counterpart, having the same goal in mind: the creation of the new model of illiberal democracy. And just like in Hungary, the judicial system immediately became the primary target, preeminently the Constitutional Tribunal, an independent body whose function is that of assessing government's legislation. As his first measure, president Andrzej Duda rejected to sworn in three new judges to the aforementioned tribunal, nominating instead candidates of his choosing despite the Constitutional Court ruling favoring the judges and stating the President's obligation to appoint the three judges he refused to register. In spite of this, PiS proceeded on, passing legislation that reduced the term of Constitutional Tribunal's judges as well as appointing one of the party's trustee as chief justice.¹⁰⁸ These policies pushed the head of Poland's highest Constitutional Court to declare that the country is diving into autocracy.¹⁰⁹ However, PiS actions were far from being over. In an attempt to re-write history, the government proposed a bill that would sanction whoever would dub "Polish death camps" the internment camps built on Polish soil by Nazi Germany in World War II.¹¹⁰ Another bill that already became law established conditions that allow banning counter-manifestations in proximity (within 100 meters) of demonstrations considered of national importance; a potentially ghastly measure considering the government support of the 60'000 nationalists that marched on Polish Independence Day carrying white supremacy banners.¹¹¹ Last but not least, the PiS concentrated all the efforts on subjugating the media, replacing "the management at the public television and radio broadcasters. Since then, the public television station's evening news program has become

¹⁰⁶ The previously discussed EU sanctions on Orbán are impossible, given that in the moment of voting in favor of such proposal, Orbán's closest ally, Poland would veto them, being fully aware that were the situation reversed, Hungary would do the same.

¹⁰⁷ For additional information on the results of the Polish general election of 2015, read:

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-election/polands-euro-sceptics-win-outright-majority-in-parliament-idUSKCN0SL1XH20151027>.

¹⁰⁸ For further information, refer to: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/23/this-is-what-the-gradual-erosion-of-rule-of-law-looks-like-in-poland/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2aa60bd64c21.

¹⁰⁹ Please visit: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/18/poland-is-on-road-to-autocracy-says-high-court-president>.

¹¹⁰ For expanding on the topic, read: <https://www.ft.com/content/67532c78-e62d-11e5-a09b-1f8b0d268c39>.

¹¹¹ For more information on the content of the counter demonstration bill see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-politics-constitution-idUSKBN16N2KH>.

For expanding knowledge on the march, visit: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/12/white-europe-60000-nationalists-march-on-polands-independence-day>.

a mouthpiece for the PiS government, lauding its daily successes at home and abroad. The party leadership has also mulled ways of dampening criticism from private media outlets, which have split over the government's actions. Underlying this effort is a worrying suspicion of the press, both domestic and foreign, that is visible in PiS politicians' interactions with journalists and in a thwarted 2016 proposal to restrict reporters' access to the parliament" (Chapman, p.2)

Furthermore, the government also called for what they dubbed "repolonization" a term that has heavy "political connotations, as some PiS politicians argue that foreign-owned media outlets carry deliberately unfavorable coverage of the current government in an effort to undermine it" (Chapman, p.8). In addition to these trends, the war against pluralism and freedom of expression is being fought with the most modern means. Thanks to the justification for the need of preventing terrorist attacks - albeit Poland has not experience one since 1939 - a new law was passed granting, to Polish domestic intelligence, unlimited access to sensible data without requiring permissions from any judicial body as well as giving them the ability to shutdown websites, making Poland one of the first still democratic nations to use internet and telecommunications shutdowns, marking another dark step towards digital authoritarianism.

Many of the phenomena thus far described, crystallized throughout one of the most important events of UK history: Brexit.

On Thursday, 23rd June 2016, millions of UK voters were called to the ballot boxes to express their popular will on a referendum regarding whether or not the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. More than 30 million people went to state their saying. The results came in, Britain and Wales voted in favor of Brexit, Scotland and Northern Ireland against it, yet the aggregate results showed that Leave won by a slight margin, 51,9% to 48.1%.¹¹² Conservative appeared enthusiast, national sovereignty was finally starting to get back in the hands of Englishmen and women, as Michael Glove predicted the referendum's result when he stated in an interview with "Faisal Islam (...) on Sky News on 3 June that 'the British people have had enough of experts'"¹¹³, signaling that even continental Europe was soon to be affected by the same political trend previously analyzed and witnessed in the US: the increasing shared criticism

¹¹² Data are taken from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>.

¹¹³ The quoted excerpt is from David Runciman's article, published on *The Guardian* and available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/oct/05/trump-brexite-education-gap-tearing-politics-apart>

towards the work of journalists, experts and NGOs.¹¹⁴ Proofs of the danger of this pattern followed ensue when “a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (...) confirmed that ‘educational opportunity was the strongest driver’ of the Brexit vote. Again, there were plenty of other factors at work – including a significant generational divide. Older voters were far more likely to vote leave, which partly helps to explain the education gap, since the rapid expansion of higher education in recent decades means older voters are also much less likely to have attended university. But the Rowntree report concludes that educational experience was the biggest single determinant of how people voted. Class still matters. Age still matters. But education appears to matter more”.¹¹⁵

Nonetheless, the results were clear, David Cameron resigned¹¹⁶ and Theresa May became the second woman Prime Minister in the history of the United Kingdom. Article 30 of the Lisbon Treaty was summoned on the 29th March 2017, scheduling the UK exit from the European Union on the same day and month of 2019. On the 10th December 2018 the European Court of Justice declared that “the UK could cancel Brexit without the permission of the other 27 EU members and remain a member of the EU on its existing terms, provided the decision followed a ‘democratic process’. Prime Minister Theresa May¹¹⁷ has warned Conservative MPs thinking of voting against the deal she has reached with the EU that they risk ‘no Brexit at all’. This is a reference to another referendum, which is backed by some MPs, who want the public to be given the final say, with the option to remain in the EU”.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, after several months of negotiations, the UK and the EU were able to formulate a Brexit agreement. Said text, is split in

¹¹⁴ For the sake of intellectual honesty and despite the political propaganda surrounding Brexit, it has to be said that even the current UK government highlighted the damaging economic deal that Brexit represents. For further information, read: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/28/world/europe/uk-brexit-economy.html?rref=collection%2Fnewseventcollection%2Fbritain-brexit-european-union&action=click&contentCollection=europe®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=6&pgtype=collectio.

¹¹⁵ Direct quote taken from David Runciman’s article, published on *The Guardian* and available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/oct/05/trump-brexit-education-gap-tearing-politics-apart>

¹¹⁶ Agenda setting was politically fatal for Cameron; this concept will be analyzed further on throughout this chapter. For more information on Cameron’s resignation, please read: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/mar/30/david-cameron-i-was-right-brexit-referendum>.

¹¹⁷ At the time of the writing of this paragraph (i.e. 13/12/18) Theresa May had just won against a vote of no-confidence, promoted by MPs of her same party, prior to the Parliament vote on the draft agreement negotiated by the UK PM.

¹¹⁸ Quotation taken from Alex Hunt’s and Brian Wheeler’s article, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>.

two parts, a legally-binding resolution of 585 pages covering the withdrawal deal ¹¹⁹ - chiefly composed on proposition for abstaining from the reconstruction of a physical border in Northern Ireland, freedom of movement and other rights and duties regarding EU citizens living in the UK and vice versa and the monetary sum that the UK has to pay to the EU, estimated at around £39 billion – and a not legally-compulsory report of 26 pages regarding the future relations between the two entities. ¹²⁰

The road towards Brexit or its suspension still lays murky and unclear far ahead, yet, especially following the election of Donald Trump, it represented the symbolic starting moment for the spreading of populism across Europe, showing the true power of Agenda setting.

Indeed, a third defining trait of the global crisis of democracy is the brand-new feature of preferences' manipulation via Internet. In reality, preferences' manipulation is a longstanding tradition in the marketing world that is being more frequently used in politics. Resting on the assumptions that democracy is messy, electoral results are path dependent and that voting requires knowledge in numerous fields that not all voters possess, the simplest way for altering political preferences is through Agenda setting. This method involves giving priority and salience in parties' programs to those topics that are regarded as more appealing in terms of electoral/seat gaining perspective. Bear in mind that more often than not, the most urgent, needed and efficient policies hardly ever coincide with what are deemed to be the most attractive measures for gaining electoral strength.

The most widespread method for altering preferences is microtargeting which is essentially divided in three steps:

- Identification of vulnerable voters
- Conveying of a specific message (usually related to the modification of agenda's priorities)

¹¹⁹ The complete text is available in pdf here: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/draft_withdrawal_agreement_0.pdf. A useful summary concerning the aforementioned text can be found at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-46237012>.

¹²⁰ The full report is available in pdf here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759021/25_November_Political_Declaration_setting_out_the_framework_for_the_future_relationship_between_the_European_Union_and_the_United_Kingdom_.pdf.

A helpful guide regarding the report, can be found at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-46303751>.

- Progressive manipulation of preferences so to obtain the desired outcome

Naturally these tendencies were rendered possible by the extreme transformation that media underwent in the last years, along with the emergence of an Internet culture that increasingly convinces users that an opinion is just as worthy as a fact, a habit perilously endorsed by political leaders and uninformed citizen groups. All these trends reinforce other dangerous behaviors making the public believe that it is ok for a minister to criticize NGOs' and journalists' works without realizing how fundamental both are for the healthy functioning of a democracy.¹²¹

All this held true, and worrisome, before the unveiling of the Cambridge Analytica scandal.¹²² Since then, the reality became even nastier. The scandal opened a Pandora box whose implications cannot be reversed. What Cambridge Analytica essentially did, was blending microtargeting with the most advanced data extraction and profiling techniques, so to create a new algorithmic method for successfully find and define the psychological profile of each and every voter in a specific region of the world and mold it at will during periods leading to one of the most fundamental features of democracy and its processes, voting. Without consent from millions of people, personal data was collected and then used to “know what kinds of messaging you’d be susceptible to, including the framing of it, the topics, the contents, the tone, whether scary or not (...) so [to know] what you’d be susceptible to and when you’re going to consume that and how many times we need to touch you with that in order to change how you think about something”.¹²³ It might well be the case that the term Orwellian is overused and abused nowadays, yet nothing comes close to fit so perfectly the discover and the implications of this monstrous propaganda machine. In a worrisome resurgence of warlike view of politics,¹²⁴ information weapons are being built and deployed in order to win new information wars that aim at disrupting the shared, common understanding at the basis of every functioning

¹²¹ All the aforementioned tendencies have been empirically analyzed in the various cases examined throughout this chapter.

¹²² Not being the objective of this thesis, I would not linger on how the scandal was discovered nor on who are its protagonists. For acquiring knowledge on the above-mentioned happenings, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>.

¹²³ This quote is taken from my transcription of Christopher Wylie’s interview, the former employee-turned-whistleblower that helped unveiling the scandal of Cambridge Analytica. The interview by *The Guardian* is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXdYSQ6nu-M#action=share>.

¹²⁴ The reader would surely remember Sartori’s distinction between war and peace-like views of politics analyzed at p.23 of this thesis.

society so to re-create it on new foundations.¹²⁵ Cambridge Analytica sold this possibility to whoever was willing to pay for its services,¹²⁶ generating content and then putting it online so that “websites would be created, blogs would be created, whatever it is that we think this target people would be receptive to, we would create content on the internet for them to find, and then they see that and then they click it and they go down the rabbit hole until they start to think something differently”¹²⁷ Thus signaling the trespassing from propaganda techniques to active manipulation of unconscious users, rotating around their confirmation bias.¹²⁸

Political propaganda may have always existed, but it never had such depth, scope and pervasiveness. Without action, manipulation will find no obstacle and only improve, becoming deeper, more far-reaching, scarier and possibly dooming democracy. Would you really want to live in a world where voters’ psychology can be subtly targeted so to convince them to vote for a policy with the same easiness that marketing influences them to shop for a brand rather than another?

2.2 Fight for the New World Order

Information wars are the cutting-edge technological tip of the iceberg in the fight for the new world order. In the indifference of the US and the problems threatening to make the EU collapse, the world stage is set and the global leadership vacuum is being fulfilled by the remaining two global superpowers: China and Russia.

The former has created a never before seen propaganda and censorship apparatus, shamelessly exploiting its enormous economic sway to buy influence and support allied repressive governments in Africa as well as Southeast Asia. Along similar lines, Russia’s mission is that of

¹²⁵ This is the fundamental idea behind Steve Bannon’s Breitbart doctrine. To inquire further on the topic, read: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump>.

¹²⁶ There are various investigation on the presence and connection of Cambridge Analytica in various parts and elections in the world, see: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/03/20/cambridge-analyticas-reach-went-far-beyond-the-u-s-elections/?utm_term=.4ca29e6d17d0.

Furthermore, other testimonies revealed alleged connections between Cambridge Analytica and Aggregate IQ, an agency used by the Vote Leave to help circumventing election spending limits throughout the Brexit referendum: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/mar/24/brexit-whistleblower-cambridge-analytica-beleave-vote-leave-shahmir-sanni>.

¹²⁷ Quote taken directly from the same Wilyie’s interview cited above.

¹²⁸ Confirmation bias, and many other similar types, will compose the body of various arguments that will be analyzed at length in the following chapter.

weakening and dismantling democratic unions and institutions, financing xenophobic parties across Europe, launching election-altering disinformation campaign, or old fashion-ly invading countries.

After cementing his power for almost two decades, Vladimir Putin was re-elected in March for serving his fourth term as Russia's President, amid certified vote frauds.¹²⁹ “Ultimately, though, voting-day violations were largely irrelevant. This election was rigged long before the first vote was cast. The defining feature of Russia's 2018 presidential vote was that it was an election without choice. Two major opposition figures who had planned to run against Putin were absent from the ballot on Sunday. Boris Nemtsov, former deputy prime minister and leader of the People's Freedom Party, was shot and killed in February 2015 on a bridge in front of the Kremlin. Alexei Navalny, a prominent anti-corruption campaigner, was barred from running, thanks to a trumped-up Russian court sentence that was assessed by the European Court of Human Rights as ‘arbitrary’. It isn't difficult to win when your opponents are not on the ballot”.

¹³⁰ Yet, it is precisely thanks to the silencing of opponents¹³¹ and a strenuous grip on the media that Putin was able to continuously reign Russia for 18 and ongoing years. Using co-optation, exile and incarceration, since his rise to power in 2000, the Russian President was able to gain utter control of the media; “today, the three major Russian TV channels are either directly owned by the state, operating as state enterprises (Channel One and VGTRK, or All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company), or owned by a subsidiary of one of Russia's largest oil and gas companies, Gazprom (NTV). So are two of Russia's three major news agencies, Rossiya Segodnya and Tass. Later, larger independent online news outlets such as Lenta.ru were subjected to hostile takeovers by loyalist editorial teams picked by the Kremlin”.

¹³² Without free press, the former KGB officer was facilitated in scaling his total control on

¹²⁹ For further information read and watch the reportage of different Reuters' journalists available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-election-fraud-exclusive/exclusive-at-a-russian-polling-station-phantom-voters-cast-ballots-for-the-tsar-idUSKCN1BN15P>.

¹³⁰ Quote taken directly from Vladimir Kara-Murza's article on *The Washington Post*, available at:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2018/03/20/why-putins-sham-election-shows-what-hes-afraid-of/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.41f8ae928cda.

¹³¹ The reader would surely remember the homicide of Anna Politkovskaya, one of the fiercest opponents of Putin's government and actions, shot dead - after having been poisoned two years earlier - in 2006. For refreshing the memory, read: https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/01/books/review/Meier-t.html?ref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FPolitkovskaya%2C%20Anna&action=click&contentCollection=timestopic®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=41&pgtype=collection.

¹³² Quote taken directly from Alexey Kovalev's article on *The Guardian*, available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/24/putin-russia-media-state-government-control>.

information, moving on the verge of the ultimate frontier: internet censorship and new forms of online surveillance. The first step towards this direction was taken on July 2017 when Putin signed a bill, that became effective on November of the same year, imposing limitations on the use of VPNs, the virtual private networks usually employed for accessing sites that are geoblocked or unavailable in a country.¹³³ “Other new provisions from the past year require communication apps to register users under their real names, so that they can be identified by law enforcement agencies. And antiterrorism provisions that came into force in July require telecommunications firms and other companies to store the content of users’ online communications for up to six months, in addition to metadata, and provide the Federal Security Service (FSB) with unfettered access to both. The most high-profile example of Russia’s enforcement of data sovereignty involves Telegram. The secure messaging app was widely used to hold private conversations in what is otherwise a heavily policed environment. In April, authorities blocked the service due to its refusal to comply with laws that require tech companies to make encrypted data accessible to the FSB” (Shahbaz, p.15). However, new technologies are also the trojan horse used by Putin for dismantling and weakening democracy, alternating old and cutting-edge methods. The meddling in the American elections,¹³⁴ albeit being the most famous and successful attempt of manipulating and altering voters’ preferences via internet, is hardly the last as “since then, security researchers have discovered further breaches of data affecting 198 million American, 93 million Mexican, 55 million Filipino, and 50 million Turkish voters” (Shahbaz, p.1). While Putin’s aim is one, the resources he uses are manifold. As democracy, for both Russia and China alike, represents the single biggest threat to the flourishing of their respective oppressive regimes, Putin openly cooperates and finances Eurosceptic parties¹³⁵ in order to undermine, in a much subtler way, the functioning of one of his biggest rivals, the EU. Nonetheless, for creating chaos, the Russian President does not need to go to such subtle and long-term lengths as the war in Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of Crimea demonstrated.

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¹³³ To expand the topic see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-41829726>.

¹³⁴ As the reader would surely remember, the issue has been analyzed at length in the subsection referring to the current status of American democracy, to be found at pp. 43-45.

¹³⁵ For investigating over the connection between Putin and said parties, please read: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/europe-s-far-right-enjoys-backing-russia-s-putin-n718926>.

¹³⁶ A useful summary on the events that occurred in both Ukraine and Crimea can be found at: <https://www.thebalance.com/ukraine-crisis-summary-and-explanation-3970462>.

Looking at Putin's Russia, none of the minimum criteria for defining a democracy are present, nor will they be in the next 6 years. What is worse for Russians and democracy supporters around the world is the fact that authoritarianism does not disappear when a dictator goes away. This type of system, more often than not, irreparably undermines the social fabric of a country, so much as to render the return of democracy impossible. Sadly, it seems that Putin was able to irredeemably dissect society at his own, tsarist will.

While Putin's aim is chiefly that of reinforcing his power and weakening democracy, Xi Jinping strives for global domination, supplanting democratic values for authoritarian practices, freedom of speech for propaganda, opposition and minority protection with censorship and manipulation, freedom with control.

The Chinese itching desire to model the world stems from its leaders' faith of being fully capable of molding societies at their will, trusting that for achieving world leadership, all they need to do is globally scaling up what they did domestically. Since his coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping moved swiftly in order to realize his vision. Standing strong on the legacy of the past leaders – total absence of political opposition, of pluralism, participation, freedom of expression and rule of law – Mr. Xi tightened the CCP's control over the media, and particularly internet, cracking down any civil or social movements not directly commanded by the Communist Party while simultaneously purging his detractors within said party thanks to an impromptu anti-corruption campaign,¹³⁷ thus firmly consolidating his undisputed leadership. A perfect test for assessing the nation's strength and widening ambitions came in 2014 when massive protests erupted in Hong Kong denouncing China's failure of maintaining its promises of granting full autonomy to the city-state. Previously a British colony, Hong Kong returned to China in 1997, following the "one country, two systems" tenet which guaranteed a high degree of autonomy and freedom nowhere else experienced in mainland China.¹³⁸ Once a thriving movement, pro-democracy activists are nowadays losing influence and ground against Beijing. Silencing of leaders,¹³⁹ electoral defeats

¹³⁷ For more information, refer to: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-03-06/xi-jinpings-new-watchdog>.

¹³⁸ For greater insight on the history of Hong Kong and its recent relationships with China, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-44674982>.

¹³⁹ For reading over leaders' arrests, visit: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-42714022>.

and shrinking academic freedom¹⁴⁰ installed an apparently irremediably fear in the heart of the population, which now seems convinced of handing over their yellow umbrellas to the omnipresent Chinese government.

In a matter of few years, Xi Jinping made extremely clear that there is no space, neither physical nor digital, for democracy in China.

A space destined to shrink worldwide as the CCP's leader sets the course for securing all the necessary conditions for aspiring to true global leadership, via what has been named the Chinese Imperial turn. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines empire as “a major political unit having a territory of great extent or a number of territories or peoples under a single sovereign authority”.¹⁴¹ Mr. Xi's China and his ambitions perfectly fit into the description. After observing the retreat of the US as world hegemon, China is rapidly taking all the necessary steps, possessing far greater capacities than Russia or the EU, to obtain the new position. By definition, (especially modern) empires are extensive, expensive and in expansion since the gargantuan maintenance costs of the entire apparatus push the colonization of new markets which in turn is transformed into increasing geopolitical influence. This is exactly the rationale that guided China's new investments policies in Africa, avertingly focusing on infrastructure construction and raw materials extraction. Even if at the moment the total amount of US investments rotates around a \$58 billion figure while the Chinese is at \$40 billion, the Chinese government, starting from 2014, sworn to invest additional \$175 billion in the following ten years, dwarfing the American proposal of \$14 billion.¹⁴²

Learning from the lessons of previous empires, Chinese intentions are not satisfied with the conquered economic and political superiority in Asia and Africa but continuously strive for greater goals, using the old roman formula of “dividi et impera”. Mirroring the strategy adopted in Africa, Mr. Xi employs his nation economic superpower to buy influence and support from

¹⁴⁰ To expand knowledge on the topic, useful information can be found at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-democracy-insight/as-china-tightens-squeeze-soul-searching-for-hong-kongs-democracy-movement-idUSKCN1HA0L3>.

¹⁴¹ One can also see the definition on the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empire>.

¹⁴² In order to analyze the various facts and figures regarding investments, see the following articles: <https://bigthink.com/matt-davis/chinas-growing-influence-in-africa> and <https://nai.uu.se/news/articles/2018/02/20/095540/index.xml>.

To read about how Xi Jinping keeps supporting his nation's commitment regarding African investments, see: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/09/03/asia/focac-china-africa-development-intl/index.html>.

the EU's poorer countries, as testified by the "16+1" China-led initiative,¹⁴³ launched for fostering cooperation and investments between five Balkan and 11 EU nations with the Asian giant. "Chinese companies, backed by state banks, have announced an estimated \$15bn in investments in infrastructure and related industries (...) While modest compared with the EU's structural funds, which amount to about €80bn for Poland alone for the 2014-20 budget round, the promised investments have been welcomed by the beneficiaries".¹⁴⁴

The true underlying will beneath this group, copying and perhaps surpassing Putin's, is that of enfeebling and internally dividing the European Union, hand-picking the most vulnerable countries so to push to crumbles the Chinese democratic competitor.

The last two CCP annual congresses have testified the immense accumulation of power that Xi Jinping was able to centralize on himself, prompting many to draw comparisons with the most famous leader of the past, Mao Zedong. In March 2018, 21 constitutional changes were ratified by the Chinese parliament, removing the two-terms presidential limit thus essentially entitling Mr. Xi to life-long presidency.¹⁴⁵ However, even of greater, though certainly less flamboyant, importance was the 2017 congress where the Chinese President presented his vision for transforming China into a cyber-superpower¹⁴⁶ thus inaugurating the field where Xi Jinping will bet all his chips for winning global hegemony: the worldwide substitution of democracy with digital authoritarianism. Obviously, the replacement of democracy entails, as first step, the mass adoption of its technological counterpart's practices; and China, with its Belt and Road Initiative, private companies and AI technology, is moving exactly in that direction: it "was once again the worst abuser of internet freedom in 2018, and over the past year, its government hosted media officials from dozens of countries for two- and three-week seminars on its sprawling system of censorship and surveillance. Moreover, its companies have supplied telecommunications hardware, advanced facial-recognition technology, and data-analytics tools to a variety of governments with poor human rights records, which could benefit Chinese intelligence services as well as repressive local authorities. Digital authoritarianism is being promoted as a way for

¹⁴³ For further information on the aforementioned group, read: <http://ceec-china-latvia.org/>.

¹⁴⁴ Quote taken directly from James Kynge's article on *The Financial Times* available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/16abfb2a-cf9b-11e7-9dbb-291a884dd8c6>.

¹⁴⁵ Please see: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/china-xi-jinping-expected-secure-lifetime-presidency-180311062057325.html>.

¹⁴⁶ To expand knowledge on the topic, a suggested reading can be found at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/zte-huawei-china-trump-trade-cyber/563033/>.

governments to control their citizens through technology, inverting the concept of the internet as an engine of human liberation” (Shahbaz, p.1). The BRI initiative is one of the most ambitious projects in humankind’s history, a trillion-dollar plan aimed at interlinking the economies of China with other 65 countries.¹⁴⁷ However, the aforementioned initiative also includes a digital BRI, pledging to connect millions of people through this new technological Silk Road without mentioning that all the internet traffic would be monitored by Chinese intelligence agencies. Naturally, state-owned and private companies are helping the government in reaching Mr. Xi’s objectives: “State-owned China Telecom, China Unicom, and China Mobile are laying down the digital Silk Road, with fiber-optic links to Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan, and Nepal, among other countries. A company called H3C has already won contracts to build the telecommunications network for airports in Nigeria and the port of Gwadar in Pakistan. Huawei is building Latin America’s largest public Wi-Fi network in Mexico, Bangladesh’s 5G mobile network, and Cambodia’s 4.5G service, and is advising the Kenyan government on its “master plan” for information and communication technologies” (Shahbaz, p.8). If all these measures, as well as their dangerous consequences, appear hypothetical and still laying far ahead in the future, in China they are already nightmarish reality.

The Chinese National People Congress passed, in 2018, the Cybersecurity Law¹⁴⁸ obliging companies to force users to register with their real names, prohibiting foreign firms of sharing/transmitting what is deemed, by the Cyber Administration of China, inappropriate as well as ensuring that Chinese data remain within the national borders. The law empowers the CCP to decide what netizens are allowed or not to do. Straight out of a Black Mirror episode, the Social Credit System will be the masterwork of the Chinese technodystopian efforts. To be nationally adopted in 2020, the system, thanks to a mix of AI, facial recognition, on and offline behaviors, will classify people in term of their social trustworthiness, granting bonuses to those with high scores and punishing, for example by banning them on planes and trains, those with a low one.¹⁴⁹ However, in China, repressive AI technology is already being used: “One of the

¹⁴⁷ For a more detailed explanation, visit: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>.

¹⁴⁸ English translation of the abovementioned legislation can be found at: <https://www.newamerica.org/cybersecurity-initiative/digichina/blog/translation-cybersecurity-law-peoples-republic-china/>.

¹⁴⁹ For additional information about the system and its current sample tests, read: <https://www.merics.org/en/blog/chinas-social-credit-systems-are-highly-popular-now>.

most alarming developments this year has been the uptick in state surveillance. In the western region of Xinjiang, home to the country's Uighur Muslim minority, facial recognition technology and other advanced tools are being used to monitor the local population and thwart any actions deemed to harm "public order" or "national security." Leaked documents and other evidence revealed in August suggested that as many as a million Muslims may be held in internment camps in Xinjiang, where they endure a "reeducation" process meant to forcibly indoctrinate them" (Shahbaz p.6).¹⁵⁰

The extent and depth of China's force and ambitions must be considered the wake-up call to whoever stands in favor of liberty and equality. Xi Jinping possesses all the necessary means for transforming his nation into the world leader. Democracy has found in digital authoritarianism its rival for the next generations to come which will have to decide in what reality they will want to live in. As of today, the only certainty is that one is in crisis while the other is thriving. And unfortunately, the one in crisis is the one for which humans should root for.

This last paragraph concludes the investigation over the current status of democracy, the body of this thesis' second chapter.

The real-world cases' analysis of USA, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, UK, Russia, and China and their theoretical interplay with the six phenomena suggested by Sartori, render one incontrovertible fact: democracy is in crisis.

And when democracy is in crisis, a general theory of democracy is needed more than in any other cases. The empirical and theoretical framework thus far described, displayed to the reader how populism, distrust in democracy, criticism for the work of experts, journalists and NGOs, rise of illiberal democracies, voters' preferences manipulation via internet and the birth of digital authoritarianism not only are global-reaching phenomena that are weakening democracy, they relentlessly aim to replace it. However, no matter how unpromising or desperate the global situation appears, hope should be far from being lost as there is plenty of room and possibility to fight back and defend democracy. Starting from understanding what originated these causes.

¹⁵⁰ For reading about the presence of ghastly evidences of Uighurs' internment camps, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/world/asia/china-muslim-camps-xinjiang-uighurs.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article®ion=Footer>.

Chapter three. Origins and Proposals

3.1 Origins of the current crisis of Democracy

All the phenomena that will be illustrated in the following paragraphs bore political consequences – comprehensively observed in chapter two – that cause, deepen and reinforce the crisis of democracy. Hence, from the previous chapter, one condition still has to be bore in mind: there is no such thing as a single cause that can be held responsible for the current state of the world. Rather, those subsections portrayed and explained, a series of elements that by interacting, influence and support each other, thus nourishing the realm that altogether damages democracy. Prior to even attempting to answer such a hard question as “what originated these causes?”, it is essential to pinpoint two facts: that complex problems do not have immediate or easy explanation, hence simplistic solutions and arguments must be refused and, secondly, that delineating, understanding and trying to explain these quandaries might be a big leap forward but it is by no means sufficient or a panacea thanks to which all global problems are solved. Concrete action is still, and much, needed.

The various causes and explanations portrayed do not merely subject themselves to causal relationship. That will be way too naïve and also false. Rather, they mix and merge, changing and developing each in particular ways, giving rise to the two macro-spheres that I labelled, in general manner, origins of the modern crisis of democracy and causes of these trends. The underlying thread of the analysis of the origins will be constituted by Giovanni Sartori’s clairvoyance, manifested in his ability to correctly predict, already in 1999 with his *Homo Videns*, the major problem that democracy was bound to face in current times. Its interplay with Nichols’ idea of the “*Death of Expertise*”, Finn’s notion of “*Algorithmic Trust*” and Greenfield’s analysis on “*Radical Technologies*” will form the final structure for understanding why the political manifestations of these phenomena are jeopardizing democracy. Yet, it is fundamental to assert, as it will later be demonstrated, that the dangers of the modern, hyperconnected and monopolistic internet do not limit themselves to reducing humans’ critical thinking ability but evidently move even deeper, as China’s digital authoritarianism and further examples are commencing to illustrate.

A useful starting point can surely be a nowadays often overlooked fact: the economic omnipresence in politics.¹⁵¹ Meaning that, today's political debate seems to be, for almost its entirety, rotating around economic matters whilst increasingly less on matter of principles, justice, ethics and ideas. And while this is not a bad thing per se, as democracy is supposedly the system through which better allocating resources after fairly discussing them, its excess is. Corroborating Marx's idea that democracy can suffer from the pervasive presence of economics, it is growingly easier to witness how economic practices increasingly become entrenched in politics, altering it and creating new phenomenon like political microtargeting which led to its most pervert form becomes voters preferences' manipulation via Internet, thus causing immense weakening and damage to key features of the democratic process such as the formation of opinions, participation and competition.

However, such perilous tendencies are far from being supported solely by the just-mentioned instance. Indeed, recalling the first chapter of this thesis, and in particular, the "Victory and Crisis" paper, Sartori believed that the single greatest threat to the formation of knowledgeable opinions, responsible participation and thus democratic competition, was ascribable to the sheer power of technology, and in particular that of the TV. As a matter of fact, according to the Italian professor, all the aforementioned processes presuppose the ability of citizens to think abstractly. This is exactly where the problem resides, for in his prophetic book, *Homo Videns*, Giovanni Sartori conceptualizes that the *tele-viewing* reduces humans' ability of critical thinking.

According to the Italian intellectual, the tele-viewing's effects result from TVs' nature of "producing a permutation, a metamorphosis that regards the very nature of the homo sapiens. TV is not simply a communication medium; it is at the same time *paideia*, an 'anthropogenic' means, that is, a medium which generates a new Anthropos, a new kind of human being" (Sartori, p. 14). Hence, Sartori's attention converges on the change from homo sapiens' reasoning ability to homo videns' mere perception caused by the encompassing and passive use of TV or other "visual" media that precludes children and thus adults from forming an abstractive attitude, consisting of the ability to form general concepts, critical thinking and the

¹⁵¹ As the reader would surely remember, such argument was already covered in the first chapter, preeminently in pages 29-30. In order to expand on the topic, please read chapter 8.8 of the *TODR I "A Coda on the Cost of Idealism"* to be found at pages 240-247.

elaboration of the existence of various points of view. In his own words: “Homo sapiens (...) owes all his knowledge and all his progress in understanding to his abstractive capacity (...) our capacity to deal with political, social, and economic reality in which we live, and even more our capacity to subject nature to human being is based exclusively upon thinking through concepts, which are invisible and inexistent entities to the naked eye (...) Summing up: all the knowledge of homo sapiens develops in the realm of the *mundus intelligibilis* (made up of concepts, and mental conceptions) which is not, in any circumstances, the *mundus sensibilis* perceived by our senses. And the point is this: television inverts the progress from the perceptible to the intelligible and reverses it into the *ictu oculi*, i.e. into a return to mere sight. Television produces images and effaces concepts: but by doing so, it atrophies our abstracting capacity and, consequently, all our capacity for understanding” (Sartori, p. 22).

Notwithstanding being written more than two decades ago, Sartori’s words appear so vividly striking because they not only perfectly describe our present but also offer a penetrating, correct prediction of how our near future will be like.

In spite of the fact that I do not necessarily believe that the Internet forcibly represents the evolution of the TV – regardless of its various attempts of overtaking its role thanks to its variety of forms i.e. Netflix and Instagram – I nevertheless believe that the TV has offered the framework, the *mundus sensibilis*, in which the modern internet is developing, and we humans with it. Being aware of the strength of this affirmation, it is essential to analyze the argument in its completeness, thus refusing extremization. What Sartori is against is not TV per se; not the medium but the way it is used, or better put, the message it generally conveys.¹⁵² By rendering salient topics otherwise absolutely unworthy of attention, television helps creating a dull, insipid cultural broth – from which the manners that dictate how internet is used also derives – that numbs and impoverishes citizens’ intellectual stimuli and capacities.

As the image prevails the word, eidetic culture and its consequences abruptly return to the fore and it is precisely the analysis of these effects that crystallize Sartori’s idea and suppositions into undeniable facts. Since viewing, or better tele-viewing enfeebles the understanding and changes humans from sapiens to videns – hence with reduced critical thinking

¹⁵² To expand on the discussion, read subsection six of the third chapter of the *Homo Videns*, entitled “*and Democracy?*” to be found from page 105 to 109.

ability – the original emancipatory capacity of the internet is invariably compromised,¹⁵³ for the latter would not be utilized, by its tele-grown users, as the most advanced instrument for accruing knowledge thus far invented by people, but as another source for leisure, trivializing its contents and original mission so to reach the maximum possible audience.¹⁵⁴

The consequences of the reduction of people’s independent and critical thinking have been, and still are, abysmal for democracy. Looking back¹⁵⁵ at all the elements that characterize a democracy, competition and opinion formation have been completely altered, passing from the dangers of tele-directed opinions,¹⁵⁶ aimed at replacing models of cognitive authorities with the rule of the image, to those of the internet phenomena of fake news and preferences’ manipulation, techniques that have the sole intent of allowing everyone to become a cognitive authority without possessing any critical thinking skill or degrees of expertise. And these mechanisms are working, successfully molding practices and sentiments, creating the conditions for which “it’s never been so easy to pretend to know so much without actually knowing anything. We pick topical, relevant bits from Facebook, Twitter or emailed news alerts and then regurgitate them (...) What we all feel now is the constant pressure to know enough, at all times, lest we be revealed as culturally illiterate. So that we can survive an elevator pitch, a business meeting, a visit to the office kitchenette, a cocktail party, so that we can post, tweet, chat, comment, text as if we have seen, read, watched, listened. What matters to us, awash in petabytes of data, is not necessarily having actually consumed this content firsthand but simply knowing that it exists — and having a position on it, being able to engage in the chatter *about* it. We come perilously close to performing a pastiche of knowledgeability that is really a new model of

¹⁵³ Sartori is particularly eager to argue how the effects of the tele-viewing inevitably influence the ways in which the internet is used and thus inexorably internet itself. To inquire further, see subsection seven, “*Internet and cybersnavigation*”, of *Homo Videns*’ chapter one, from pages 29-36.

¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, options (i.e. visual thinking) to invert this trend exist, as Oliviero demonstrates: “educational strategies must aim on the one hand at providing children with the intellectual means for a critical consumption of mass-media and on the other hand at educating visual thinking [ARNHEIM 1997] through the figurative arts, which permits the restoration of the abstract-categorical aspect of perception. [...] An education of and to thinking is necessary then [SANTI 2005; SANTI 2006; STRIANO 1999; STRIANO 2003] through which homo tele-videns acquires (again) the faculty of inquiry, the abilities of reasoning and complex thinking, in order to avoid relapsing into meaninglessness and to bolster the democratic (that is communicative and inquiring, as Dewey taught us) way of life”(Oliviero, p.10).

His paper on “Educating Homo Videns” can be found in pdf here: <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/5120/512051707006.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ For refreshing the memory, please refer to chapter one of this thesis, in particular focus on page 14 to 30.

¹⁵⁶ In the *Homo Videns*, Sartori dedicates an entire chapter on this particular issue, hence for further information read the aforementioned chapter, to be found at page 40 throughout page 71.

know-nothingness”.¹⁵⁷ Offering a stage where people can perform and lash out their opinion *ad infinitum* is merely a method designed to trick citizens into feeling empowered without letting them realize how damaging the excessive abundance of information, its immediacy and purely consumeristic overtone, is for democracy. As Sartori perfectly understood, “every increase of *demo-power* must correspond to an increase of *demo-knowledge*. Otherwise democracy becomes a system of govern where the most incompetents make the decisions. Which means it becomes a suicidal governing system” (Sartori, p. 92).

One of the key traits of a democracy is its requirement for the active and responsible engagement of every segment of the population. Television and its influence in shaping the modern internet as well as the modern human, helped people losing, or better, trade their critical thinking ability in exchange for leisure, comfort or social inclusion, causing and permitting them to endanger others, themselves and democracy.

The importance of Sartori’s clairvoyance should not be reduced to his ability of correctly predicting, more than twenty years ago, phenomena that nowadays compose our ordinary life’s experiences; rather it should be recognized and cherished for having, already at the time, spearheaded such theoretical trail, proposing arguments and possible solutions that today’s authors and experts recognize as fundamental explanatory factors for understanding and studying the (causes and) origins of the current crisis of democracy. Indeed, as it will later be showed, Sartori’s arguments on the attack on rationality as well as his notion of againstism¹⁵⁸ unequivocally resemble the idea behind the concept of the death of expertise; moreover, the Italian professor’s warning on the dangers of constructing a democracy without demos seems to have materialized as Algorithmic Trust – the increasing dependence on, and mindless acceptance of, technological developments – implicitly suggests the evolution from *Homo Videns* to *Homo Fidens*. Lastly, the explanation offered by Greenfield on how our society came to assume its current form, indubitably mirrors Sartori’s considerations on the various societal circumstances that, if left unresolved, would have translated into democracy-endangering practices.

The second chapter of this dissertation provided theoretical and empirical insights onto the hazardous consequences that the various forms of distrust in democracy and its processes

¹⁵⁷ Quote taken directly from Karl Taro Greenfeld’s article on *The New York Times*, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/25/opinion/sunday/faking-cultural-literacy.html>.

¹⁵⁸ For refreshing the memory, see subsection 1.3 “A coda on the *TODRs: Victory and Crisis*” of this dissertation.

possess. ¹⁵⁹ As demonstrated, according to Sartori, the roots of these tendencies were to be found on the construction of a general public discourse that, by vilifying rationality, increasingly focused on mindlessly criticizing everything whilst always refusing to propose viable, alternative options. Although anti-intellectualism stances from what was deemed an increasingly ignorant public are as old as humans' memory, ¹⁶⁰ ranging from the times of Aristotle to those of Chomsky, the danger and depth of these new manifestations pushed the development of an innovative notion, that of the death of expertise.

In his must-read book, Tom Nichols perfectly frames the situation: “the death of expertise is a different problem than the historical fact of low levels of info among laypeople. The issue is not indifference to established knowledge; it’s the emergence of a positive hostility to such knowledge (...) it represents the aggressive replacement of expert views or established knowledge with the insistence that every opinion on any matter is as good as every other” (Nichols, p.20).

Following the same regressive method that will be used for this entire section, it is proper to inquire on what were the environments that created the soils for this phenomenon to flourish. Among those, two are of main particular interest regarding the crisis of democracy: proven scientific ignorance and the role of the internet as a magnifying lens. In the just mentioned book, Nichols collects a series of scientific effects to show that the tendency to disprove expertise and authority is far more embedded in humans than we think. And for democracy enthusiasts, this is bad news. All of humankind suffers from the Dunning Krueger effect, magisterially summarized in “the dumber you are, the more confident you are that you’re actually not dumb” (Nichols, p.43); the above average effect, for which *nomen omen*, everyone thinks that they are above average; or again, lack of metacognition, the skill of realizing that one is not particularly good at something by stepping back and reflecting on it. Additional ones are the confirmation bias according to which people look for information that only support their personal views and refuse

¹⁵⁹ Most prominently see again the analysis on the USA, Italy, Hungary and Poland, to be found in the second chapter of this thesis.

¹⁶⁰ As the words written by the Spanish thinker José Ortega y Gasset in 1930 serve to testify: “In the intellectual life, which of its essence requires and presupposes qualification, one can note the progressive triumph of the pseudo-intellectual, unqualified, unqualifiable, and, by their very mental texture, disqualified. [...] I may be mistaken but the present-day writer when he takes his pen in hand to treat a subject which he has study deeply, has to bear in mind that the average reader, who has never concerned himself with this subject, if he reads does so with the view, not of learning something from the writer, but rather, of pronouncing judgement on him when he is not in agreement with the commonplaces that the said reader carries in his head” (Ortega y Gasset, p.16).

to believe in facts that debunk them; the backfire effect in which “people redouble their efforts to keep their own internal narrative consistent, no matter how clear the indications they’re wrong” (Nichols, p.131) or the equality bias, a recurrent behavioral pattern that has been observed in various group studies, showing that when asked for an opinion on a particular matter, the less knowledgeable people, not wanting to be considered stupid, tend to intervene constantly, whereas the more qualified, desiring not to be excluded, invariably refuse of pointing to others their own mistakes in order to avoid showing how constantly right they are. ¹⁶¹

By rightly indicating that it is not that experts are always right, just that they are less likely to be wrong in their area of competence than laypeople, the American author is just as right as to realize that the Internet is not the culprit for the diffusion of these effects, rather a magnifying lens for observing the attitudes of people and citizens. Nonetheless, the fact that internet should, and rightly so, not be treated as the omni comprehensive scapegoat onto which reversing all the problems that societies are currently facing, does not consequentially entail that it is blameless or that it should be considered as such, since it is true that internet “has accelerated the collapse of communication between experts and laypeople by offering an apparent shortcut to erudition. It allows people to mimic intellectual accomplishments by indulging in an illusion of expertise provided by a limitless supply of facts” (Nichols, p.106). The algorithms of search engines are nothing more than the entirety of the above-described biases transposed on screen. Searching in modern internet, creates and reinforces the so-called filter bubble, ¹⁶² augmenting the belief that whatever the user thinks is right, is actually right thus trapping netizens in an endless cycle of confirmation bias.

“Internet is like artillery support: a constant bombardment of random, disconnected information that rains down on experts and ordinary citizens alike, deafening all of us while blowing attempts

¹⁶¹ Along with those, it is possible to add another phenomenon explored by Jason Brennan in his book *Against Democracy*, that of rational ignorance, which will later be analyzed. The aforementioned biases would be consistent with the discoveries of Jonathan Haidt, claiming that the human brain was evolutionary structured to form coalition and winning arguments so to be part of a group rather than for pursuing truth. More on his research can be found at: <https://www.edge.org/conversation/a-new-science-of-morality-part-1>.

¹⁶² The term filter bubble was invented by internet activist Eli Pariser, appearing in his book, "*The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*". For further information and complete definition read the following articles: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kalevleetaru/2017/12/18/why-was-2017-the-year-of-the-filter-bubble/#29254a7d746b>; https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/01/14/facebook-invites-you-to-live-in-a-bubble-where-you-are-always-right/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f1bbfd967f3 and <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/jan/08/eli-pariser-activist-whose-filter-bubble-warnings-presaged-trump-and-brexit>.

at reasonable discussion” (Nichols, p. 107). For the aforementioned reasons, Internet appears to create a false belief that an opinion is tantamount to a fact precisely because it changes the way humans consume information, read and above all think, thus becoming, just like Sartori’s television, an anthropogenic mean.

As (bad) television is the creating medium of the Homo Videns, internet breeds and transforms the latter from Videns to *Fidens*, not only expanding Sartori’s worries of producing a demos with reduced critical thinking ability but, adding to it, one that is ever-more trusting of machines, whilst increasingly becoming more ignorant on the ways they function.

This concept is better labelled under Ed Finn’s notion of Algorithmic Trust which rests upon the idea “that we are increasingly automatizing technological systems, ceasing to perceive them as forces that shape our world and simply accepting their functionality and design imperatives on a subconscious level (...) the easy slide to a dependency on logic and, increasingly, computational approximations of reality” (Finn, p. 40).

The term algorithm has been one of the most discussed words of recent years. Being cross-sectional and implemented in a vast array of disciplines, from calculus to cybernetics and computer science, at its most basic level can be defined as a method for resolving a problem (usually a mathematical one) in a limited number of passages that usually involve the repetition of an ordering. Nowadays, each and every of the so-called Internet Giants develop and modify their own algorithms in order to offer to their users, services that would satisfy whatever their clients desire. As a matter of fact, these last years have witnessed the starting of a new internet gold rush as Silicon Valley’s biggest players implicitly announced their longing to transform, control, recreate, reconduct and adapt as many human deeds as possible to the sheer ability of their algorithms, from investing in stocks to grocery shopping, from driving to finding love. This is the crucial node in which Algorithmic Trust becomes extremely dangerous. Indeed, the tendency exemplified by this notion, sustains and fabricates a narrative for which algorithms appear as divine or alien technology rather than ways for creating products scrupulously engineered by a handful of companies. As Ian Bogost notes: “Here’s an exercise: The next time you hear someone talking about algorithms, replace the term with ‘God’ and ask yourself if the meaning changes. Our supposedly algorithmic culture is not a material phenomenon so much as a devotional one, a supplication made to the computers people have allowed to replace gods in their minds, even as they simultaneously claim that science has made us impervious to religion.

It's part of a larger trend. The scientific revolution was meant to challenge tradition and faith, particularly a faith in religious superstition. But today, Enlightenment ideas like reason and science are beginning to flip into their opposites. Science and technology have become so pervasive and distorted, they have turned into a new type of theology".¹⁶³

Technologies have arrived to a point where they simplify people's lives to such a great extent that the average person is now willing to renounce asking any question about them just for having the possibility of consuming and ripping off more and more of their benefits, incapable of realizing that humans are on the verge of a new era where computers will give answers that people will only partially grasp and that scientists will not fully understand.¹⁶⁴ "This may not seem so different from the typical doctor's visit or lawyer's advice today, where an ordained expert gives you a solution to a problem without giving you new insight or context. But of course you can pester that person to explain his or her thinking, and you can often learn a great deal from the emotional affect with which he or she delivers the judgment. It's not so easy to do that with a black box machine that's specifically designed to keep that decision-making apparatus secret".¹⁶⁵

And yet, if not even the experts, the most brilliant minds of humanity can fully validate and understand machine responses, why does the vast majority of people and enterprises seem to want to keep relentlessly moving in that direction? What truly guides this process? By virtue of logic, answers to such questions cannot bestow a single response. In this instance, an appropriate explanation entails a double-fold take. At least in part, the quest for continuous progress and the strive for knowing infinity are fundamental traits of the human species, after all according to Umberto Eco, the goal of culture is "to make infinity comprehensible. It also wants to create order -- not always, but often. And how, as a human being, does one face infinity? How does one attempt to grasp the incomprehensible? Through lists, through catalogs, through collections in

¹⁶³ Quote taken directly from Ian Bogost's article on *The Atlantic*, available at:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/01/the-cathedral-of-computation/384300/>.

¹⁶⁴ The most sci-fi passionate reader would surely remember that this argument was magisterially exemplified in one of Douglas Adams' books where the supercomputer Deep Thought, after millions of years of calculation gives humans the answer to the fundamental questions regarding the meaning of life and the universe, which is 42.

¹⁶⁵ Excerpt cited directly from Ed Finn's article for *Issues in Sciences and Technologies*, available at: <https://issues.org/perspective-algorithm-of-the-enlightenment/>.

museums and through encyclopedias and dictionaries”.¹⁶⁶ Hence, it seems logical that as technology developed, people started to increasingly organize their universal knowledge through algorithmic and computational thinking schemes. However, the current dangers of unbridled technological developments are direct consequences of the effects caused by our transformation from humanity videns to humanity fidens. New technologies are progressively designed to stop their users from questioning the reality that surrounds them; very few people wonder why, granted that these products are so amazing and helpful in carrying out daily tasks, are they available for free? What are the hidden interests in making a product gratis to everyone? And just as society in the 80’s no longer had time or cared about democracy,¹⁶⁷ the consumers of the new millennium gladly accept the imperatives imposed by companies and their products, mentally gliding over what the real motives of these companies might be, how are these products obtained,¹⁶⁸ how and if these tech giants could really be held accountable in case of misconduct¹⁶⁹ and above all, what are the true costs of having these technologies?

All is forgiven, all is forgotten, as long as brand-new gadgets and devices keep on invading, comforting and satisfying us. The vast majority of the developed world did not realize, or worse chose to ignore, our complete dependency on these new technologies as it becomes increasingly difficult to perform even the most human basic tasks – writing, thinking, reading – without resorting to them. We collectively need to start realizing that “algorithms aren’t gods. We need not believe that they rule the world in order to admit that they influence it, sometimes profoundly. Let’s bring algorithms down to earth again. Let’s keep the computer around without fetishizing it, without bowing down to it or shrugging away its inevitable power over us, without melting everything down into it as a new name for fate. I don’t want an algorithmic culture,

¹⁶⁶ The quote is directly taken from Eco’s interview for *Der Spiegel*. To read the full interview, visit: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/spiegel-interview-with-umberto-eco-we-like-lists-because-we-don-t-want-to-die-a-659577.html>.

¹⁶⁷ As already analyzed in chapter one. For refreshing the memory, please re-read page 11 to 13 of this dissertation.

¹⁶⁸ For reading more over the scandals (including 14 suicides and unsafe working conditions) on the Chinese factory that assembles iPhones, refer to: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/18/foxconn-life-death-forbidden-city-longhua-suicide-apple-iphone-brian-merchant-one-device-extract>.

To discover more on the inhumane child labor employed to mine cobalt in Congo for creating smartphones’, computers’ and electric cars’ batteries, see: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/business/batteries/congo-cobalt-mining-for-lithium-ion-battery/?noredirect=on> and <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/oct/12/phone-misery-children-congo-cobalt-mines-drc>.

¹⁶⁹ 2018 will surely be remembered also for the Cambridge Analytica scandal, to refresh the memory about the ghastly discover and its implications, visit: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election> as well as <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>.

especially if that phrase just euphemizes a corporate, computational theocracy. But a culture with computers in it? That might be all right”.¹⁷⁰

If nothing is done, people will become unable to observe reality or participate in its processes without mediating it with their algorithmic lenses. And here, with algorithmic lenses, I do not mean Google Glasses.

In his extraordinary book, *Radical Technologies*, Adam Greenfield synthesizes the two main ideas of the previous subsections while simultaneously portraying three peculiar circumstances which help explaining the rise of this new reality. As a matter of fact, first and foremost, in today’s world, “the most basic task we undertake in life involve a new sector of actors, technical standard bodies, supranational and non, as well as hackers into the innermost precincts of our lives (...) secondly all the convention and arrangements that constitute our daily life move at a much higher speed, that of digital innovation” (Greenfield, p.13) and lastly the author is puzzled by the similarity of the objects people use to carry out the most diverse endeavors; after all we employ the same device for video-calling, organizing a fundraiser, checking bank accounts, summoning strangers to guide us to the airport or ordering food, all at distance of a touch on a screen we carry in our pockets. His analysis helps understanding the conditions that gave life to this new state of affairs; however, as reality unfolds, it presents people and societies with new problems; problems that are, in turn, generated by the way around which the system developed and fostered by the lack of awareness, common understanding and of a shared legislative and political framework. As thoroughly demonstrated, such quandaries and their possible consequences were predicted and studied by Sartori already in the *TODRs*.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, it is fundamental to keep bearing in mind that it is the combination of various factors that helps the explanation.

Coherently to this general view, Greenfield posits that smartphones and other technologies “have altered the texture of everyday life just about everywhere, digesting many longstanding spaces and rituals in their entirety and transforming others beyond recognition”

¹⁷⁰ Quote taken directly from Ian Bogost’s article “The Cathedral of Computation” on *The Atlantic*, available at : <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/01/the-cathedral-of-computation/384300/>.

¹⁷¹ Such as for example, the sense of anxiety derived from the increasing velocity of daily lives due to the unbridles technological development. For refreshing the memory, see pages 11 to 13 of this thesis. For expanding on the topic, read chapter 16 of *TODR II*, to be found at pages 491 to 507 and subsection 2.2 “*The People in Mass Society*” of the *TODR I*, from page 25 to 28.

(Greenfield, p.9). Hence, internet by changing the way we think, behave and consume information modified people's daily lives becoming, just like Sartori's Tv, an anthropogenic mean, forging a new humanity with still fully unstudied consequences, that are now starting to unravel.

The most worrisome trait, as proved empirically in chapter two and showed theoretically in this and the following subsections, is that "in the world as we've made it, *those who enjoy access to networked services are more capable than those without*" (Greenfield, p.24). As the new reality is completely constructed around technology's omni-comprehensiveness, technology itself becomes a necessity. Yet, under present conditions, it is impossible to use and maximize all the benefits that such technologies bring, or at least as they intended to bring, without yielding something in return: our personal data.

Even if the potential consequences of this are beyond dystopian, the great majority of people keeps on allowing and trusting these technologies in their daily lives, failing to realize that the third parties that collect our data will obviously act on behalf of their own interests which only occasionally intersect our own. Yet not even scandals¹⁷² seem to shake public opinion as we keep "*straightforwardly trading our privacy for convenience*" (Greenfield, p. 26).

Almost unchecked, companies are given the green light to transform their wildest dreams into reality. Their only obstacle is to keep numbing the consumer, a task they masterfully perfected. Along with the reduction of humans' actions to algorithms, a perfect example of one of the technological new frontiers is portrayed by the rise of the so-called intelligent assistants, such as Google Home or Amazon's Dash Button.¹⁷³ Once again, the promise of simplifying daily lives hides their true aim: "to permit the user to accomplish commercial transactions as nearly as possible without the intercession of conscious thought, even the few moments of thought involved in tapping out commands on the touchscreen of a phone or a tablet" (Greenfield, p. 37). At this point, it should not be too difficult to see how taken all together, these practices, environments and reality pose a gigantic threat to democracy. Greenfield's book is an excellent guide for sailing and observing the troubled seas of our time, it wakes the reader by constantly

¹⁷² The reader would surely remember the examples of the Russian meddling in the US Presidential election of 2016 and the scandal of Cambridge Analytica, just to cite two major events of the past year.

¹⁷³ Amazon describes its product as: "a Wi-Fi connected device that ensures you never run out of your essential (...) products ever again. When you are running low on your favorite products at home, simply press Dash Button and relax while your order is fulfilled and delivered (...) Amazon Dash Button is a stress-free device built to make your life easier." Description taken from: <https://www.amazon.com/Dash-Buttons/b?ie=UTF8&node=10667898011>.

reminding that “where technology is concerned, *nothing* happens automatically, nothing happens for free, and if you are not very, very careful, you might just wind up achieving an outcome at the widest variance with any you intended” (Greenfield, p. 303). Thus, in the efforts of keeping the benefits that technology brings to humanity while attempting to stop this new reality from becoming a nightmare, an English cyberneticist, Stafford Beer, has donated us a compass through which direct our efforts, reminding us to always evaluate a technology for what it actually does rather than what it promises to do. In light of these last two considerations, the fundamental question regarding China’s digital authoritarianism thus becomes not whether Chinese dystopian technologies will actually function but whether citizens end up believing “that they do, and acts on that belief. In the end, the greatest threat of overtransparency may be that it erodes the effectiveness of something that has historically furnished an effective brake on power: the permanent possibility that an enraged populace might take the streets in pursuit of justice. In this light, these algorithms should be seen for what they really are: a series of technological counters to liberty, and steps toward the eclipse on freedoms we have enjoyed since the dawn of the modern public” (Greenfield, p. 242).

It is hopefully easier by now to see how Sartori’s farsightedness helps explaining the origins of the current crisis of democracy. The tele-viewing then, algorithmic trust now, have reduced humans’ ability of critical and independent thinking. This allowed the death of expertise to flourish by diffusing, also via Internet, the abovementioned scientific effects, simultaneously supported and created both by a culture that sustains that somebody’s opinion is just as worthy as a scientific fact and by people’s passive willingness to accept the reality around them, increasingly molded around the desires of few tech companies. Surrounded by this numbing to-be technodystopian environment and lacking critical and independent thinking skills people/citizens/voters became more easily manipulated, even by charismatic strong men who find absurdly simplistic answer (i.e. blame the immigrant) to gigantic problems (recession, climate change, inequalities, migration, disappearance of privacy, unsustainable lifestyle etc. etc.).

Just like a dog that bites its own tail, in an endless circle of this self-(r)enforcing atmosphere, the modern crisis of democracy is served.

3.2 Ways for fighting back

The empirical and theoretical analysis of the previous chapters incontrovertibly suggests that we are all asked once more to consciously take part in the gargantuan trial-and-error process that constitutes democracy. This is so because, as its very same nature recommends and analysis showed, if democracy is to endure, it has to evolve once again. This truth enshrines the importance and the mission invested in the *TODRs* and in the general theory of democracy: analyze and crystallize the elements as well as the feasible circumstances needed for democracy to perform at its best, and to maintain, save and protect them while contemporarily allowing the necessary spaces for transforming the rest, so to give democracy the best possibilities not only to survive, but to thrive.

In order to do just that, as Sartori suggested, it is of paramount significance to highlight the importance of the general awareness of knowing what democracy is, what it stands for, the expectations to rely on it as well as its limits. The best way for achieving said purpose is to contrast democracy with one of its most fashionable alternatives, epistocracy.

Nonetheless, this entire thesis would not be complete if suggestions were not to be included. Such proposals would be nowhere near to offering compelling and complete solutions for the modern maladies of democracy. Rather, their aim is to tentatively point out the topics upon which research should focus in the upcoming years, so to hopefully generate findings and propositions that will constitute the basis of the next trial-and-error process for the necessary transformation of democracy. These suggestions will explore the new technological possibilities for guaranteeing the continual defense of democracy as selective polyarchy while also investigating the elements that could generate the conditions for its transformation into a polyarchy of merit. Furthermore, the analysis will convey on ways to fight off the illiberal and digital authoritarian menaces and address possible solutions for curing the crisis of ethics that Sartori believed was plaguing modern democracies.

In a seemingly forgotten tradition, critiques were considered an essential part of every learning endeavor, respectively aimed at changing, either by finding alternatives or improving, the subjects towards which they were directed. The latter has been precisely the goal of the newfangled criticisms of democracy, which lately have taken the form of epistocratic proposals,

advised by academics such as Jason Brennan. Truth to be told, neither epistocracy nor its recent formulations are original or new: they descend from Plato's idea that political decisions should be taken solely by the most knowledgeable members of society, thus excluding the rest. Nevertheless, Brennan's views offer a different glimpse on the dysfunction at the heart of contemporary democracy and hence are worth investigating.

According to the American professor, democracy's crisis is inherently ascribable to the psychology of voters.¹⁷⁴ More precisely, voters can be clustered into three different categories: "*Hobbits* are mostly apathetic and ignorant about politics. They lack strong, fixed opinions about most political issues. Often they have no opinions at all (...) *Hooligans* are the rabid sports fans of politics. They have strong and largely fixed worldviews. They can present arguments for their beliefs, but they cannot explain alternative points of view in a way that people with other views would find satisfactory (...) *Vulcans* think scientifically and rationally about politics. Their opinions are strongly grounded in social science and philosophy. They are self-aware, and only as confident as the evidence allows" (Brennan, p.4). The problem resides in the fact that Vulcans are and always will be the minority of voters, thus sooner or later, but inevitably, dooming democracy. This is the cornerstone upon which the entire construction of epistocracy is based for "epistocrats need not to assert that experts should be bosses. Epistocrats need only suggest that incompetent or unreasonable people should not be imposed on others as bosses" (Brennan, p. 17) In his book, Brennan takes a step further, by erecting around the just-stated argument, cases that supposedly show how epistocracy is to be deemed superior to democracy – on instrumentalist grounds.¹⁷⁵ The majority of these arguments rotate around one of the essential traits of democracies, voting.

For the American author, voting is superfluous and citizens should deliberately free themselves from this right in order to build an epistocratic society. Brennan claims that the reasons to support his view are various; first and foremost, he considers the right to vote merely a valuable psychological artifact, nothing more than a symbolical attachment that people link to power and licensing. For realizing this truth, citizens need only to apprehend that democracy empowers

¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Sartori pointed out how the ghastly ignorance of the average voters was one of the most confirmed political research findings. His views will be discussed later on, nonetheless, to expand on the topic please see subsection 5.5 "*Electoral Democracy*", to be found from pages 102 to 110.

¹⁷⁵ Assuming readers' knowledge on the difference between instrumentalism and proceduralism, information on the two concepts are available in Brennan's book "*Against Democracy*", specifically from page 10 to 14.

groups and not individuals precisely because individual vote's influence is infinitesimal, as the American professor is eager to demonstrate: "I have approximately 1/210,000,000 of the legal voting power in the United States. I have actively opposed my country's military endeavors for the last ten years. It is not as though by voting against hawkish candidates, I reduced US bellicosity by 1/210,000,000th. I have stopped not a single bullet from being fired. I have had no effect whatsoever" (Brennan, p.110). Moreover, the contemporaneous overwhelming presence in society of hobbits and hooligans and the existence of democratic structures render politics a 0-sum game and people in it, situational enemies.¹⁷⁶ In light of these facts, for Brennan, the only possible solution is that of surrendering the useless right to vote and let Vulcans decide on citizens' public lives.

Even though criticizing real models with abstract alternatives is an old stratagem, it does not subsequently entail that Brennan does not raise any valid points.¹⁷⁷ Since its publication, "Against Democracy" attracted a great deal of interests and criticisms, yet despite whatever opinion, Brennan's book possesses the undeniable merit of reminding citizens to never take political systems for granted and to continuously question the existing status in search for better alternatives.

Rather than analyzing each and every single point made by Brennan, the best option is, once again, to resort to Sartori and his extraordinary foreknowledge, for it is his resilient and constant insistence on the need of having a shared, general awareness on what democracy is that still constitutes the best counterargument to epistocratic claims.

For Sartori, if democracy is to survive, it has to avoid becoming the embodiment of the continuous exchange between the two trends thus far analyzed: a government of the less-knowledgeable over the experts, or a technocratic government without democracy. For this to happen, Sartori extensively highlighted the importance, for all people alike, of knowing what democracy is, stands for, its limits and therefore the expectations to tailor on it.

¹⁷⁶ In order to expand on this view, please read pages 231 to 245 of "Against Democracy", corresponding to the last chapter dubbed "Civic Enemies", available from page 231 to 245.

¹⁷⁷ In particular, his insistence on the relevance of Rational Ignorance offers a useful framework for understanding the bias that subjugate the majority of voters. In fairness, Sartori too already explored Rational Ignorance and its implications in the *TODR I*, specifically at p. 106. Furthermore, once reconciled with Brennan's idea of the non-existent weight of individual votes, arguments could be made in favor of the plural voting epistocratic proposition as a method for increasing what Sartori dubbed demo-power by entrusting with far more relevance demo-knowledge.

Recalling chapter one of this thesis, democracy can be described as a representative system of government whose primary aim is that of curbing the power of the non-elected. This simple and short definition already confronts Brennan's claims on various grounds. Firstly, democracy is regarded as being electoral, thus accentuating the fact that elections do not carry out or implement policies, they simply establish who will do so.¹⁷⁸ "The referent of the word *people* is not the referent of the word *state*. We may speak of the democratic state as a 'people's state' to indicate that a bridge is now connecting the two banks – but a bridge does not replace the banks, it presupposes them. No matter how much we toy with the sentence 'the people are the state,' the state is not *the* people but only a *few* people in high place, and indeed placed *above* the people. (...) The issue is thus: What can the *outsiders*, the people, do about the state *insiders*? (...) the best we can do *from the outside* is curtail the power of the insiders; and the surest way of doing so is to diffuse power" (Sartori, p. 429).

Here resides the major problem with epistocracy, or with the other alternatives tried in the course of history, for they all lack a mechanism for ensuring that arbitrary decisions and powers of the non-elected would never be imposed on people. In a democracy, this is done by depersonalizing, rendering accountable and spreading power throughout all the groups that compose a society. Epistocracy lacks this framework for there would be nothing to bound Vulcans and their decisions, no instruments for deciding who the few experts with a right to vote should be and above all it would allow the existence of all-too-powerful and unaccountable decision-makers.

Notwithstanding all of this, every coin has its other face, and democracy greatest strength is also one of its vulnerabilities. Due to its very same nature and mission, democracy "neither presupposes nor requires competency (Sartori, p. 430),¹⁷⁹ it is more often than not inefficient, its processes are painfully slow and prone to generate disasters. "The implication is that if we demand democracy a steeped-up process of rational and global transformation, we are asking too much" (Sartori, p. 430). So why should we keep preferring democracy?

The answer to this question crystallizes Sartori's intention of emphasizing the importance for the

¹⁷⁸ Sartori further expands this argument by stating that all political theories based on the supposed benefits coming from allowing only rational voters to vote are to be refused for rationality, a least in political science, is not definable "be that as it may, a 'rational parameter' either misrepresents reality (as when the issue voter is deemed to be rational) or puts impossible demands on the demos, and thereby, on the entire edifice of democracy" (Sartori, p. 110).

¹⁷⁹ Otherwise, was this not to be the case, Sartori claims that the whole concepts of same right and importance of each voter will have no plausible justifications.

general public of knowing what democracy is, because recognizing its limits signifies understanding the expectations that we could feasibly rely on democracy, accepting the price of slowness and inefficiency for maintaining intact the best framework so far conceived in the history of humanity, for taming power. Yet, as amply demonstrated, democracy enthusiasts should not be satisfied with what has been achieved as there is, and always will be, more space for amelioration. This is why, laypeople and academics alike should never stop striving at improving democracy.

Nevertheless, in face of what has been thoroughly examined throughout the various parts of this thesis, democracy is much more than a framework for taming power.¹⁸⁰ It constitutes a moral ensemble that thanks to its constitutional/garantist setting curbs the power of the non-elected, protects and enhances freedom and equalities while allowing protective freedom (from) to offer the basis for its transformation into a selective polyarchy as well as one of merit. This last subsection will hinge on how new technological developments might create the conditions for turning Sartori's vision into reality. Yet, before partaking into this final conceptual journey, it is fundamental to possess a compass, more precisely two, to follow. Firstly, the analysis that will compose the bulk of the following parts are nothing more than propositions suggesting the various fields onto which academic research and efforts should focus, thus fueling and ensuring the trial-and-error process fundamental for democracy to burgeon. Being mere suggestions, my aim is simply that of shedding a light on the possibilities and limits that these technologies have, for a detailed account of all of them would require much more than the next various paragraphs. Secondly, it is of paramount importance to remember that "our current infrastructure tends to shape our societies into individualistic, carbon-based, competitive forms, regardless of what individuals or collectives may want (...) therefore (...) the choice of which technologies to develop and how they are designed is primarily a political matter" (Srnicek and Williams, p. 145). Technologies are imbued and reflect the existing power relations found in society, hence the possibility of democracy to transform into a polyarchy of merit via new technologies rests upon efforts for discovering and implementing tools that will allow citizens to control the direction of technological development.

¹⁸⁰ Said discussion was already taken in chapter one, particularly from pages 13 to 30.

3.3 Selective Polyarchy and Blockchain

In chapter six of the *TODR I* Sartori lays out his idea that democracy should always long for amelioration, in particular aiming to be “a *selective system* of competing elected minorities” (Sartori, p. 166) or rather, a selective polyarchy. Recalling the notion of the previous chapters, it should not be impossible to determine that the basic concepts, at the heart of Sartori’s desire for this transformation, are protection (from) and diffusion of power. In recent years, nothing has come closer to embodying these two traits than the blockchain.¹⁸¹ “A blockchain is a distributed computing architecture where every network node executes and records the same transactions, which are grouped into blocks. Only one block can be added at a time, and every block contains a mathematical proof that verifies that it follows in sequence from the previous block. In this way, the blockchain’s ‘distributed database’ is kept in consensus across the whole network. Individual user interactions with the ledger (transactions) are secured by strong cryptography. Nodes that maintain and verify the network are incentivized by mathematically enforced economic incentives coded into the protocol”.¹⁸²

The architecture of the modern internet diverges significantly from its original design, which nicely mirrored the egalitarian framework of democracies. Nowadays, it is essentially built on software hosted on servers, managed in a tightly centralized/hierarchical fashion, by enterprises, corporations or individuals that netizens collectively entrust in the hope that their data would remain private or that at least would not be exchanged with third parties without their consent. The proof of concept behind the invention of the blockchain aims at fundamentally disrupting the current status as it proposes “a means for the cryptographic verification of identity, a universal ledger with the properties of transparency and persistence, and a procedure for the consolidation of agreement among parties, all founded on a diffused, decentralized, serverless architecture that is very difficult to eradicate, or even hinder, by any means short of dismantling the network itself” (Greenfield, p. 146). It is hard not to notice the extraordinary analogy between Sartori’s

¹⁸¹ This subsection, albeit trying to offer a summarized explanation, assumes various degrees of knowledge about what a blockchain is. For understanding the basics of blockchain, Melanie Swan’s book “*Blockchain: Blueprint for a New Economy*” offers a perfect starting point.

¹⁸² Quote taken directly from Ethereum site, available at: <http://www.ethdocs.org/en/latest/introduction/what-is-ethereum.html#a-next-generation-blockchain>.

idea and Satoshi Nakamoto's intention: protecting and diffusing power by replacing centralized servers with a community of peers.¹⁸³ Transforming from 1.0 to 2.0 and now 3.0, the central idea behind blockchain is being molded and applied in numerous fields, so much so as to altering the concept of organization. Vitalik Buterin, the founder of Ethereum,¹⁸⁴ sought to achieve exactly that when, through the creation and implementation of smart contracts,¹⁸⁵ he decentralized the idea of organizations itself,¹⁸⁶ inventing the DAO. "The ideal of a decentralized autonomous organization is easy to describe: it is an entity that lives on the internet and exists autonomously, but also heavily relies on hiring individuals to perform certain tasks that the automaton itself cannot do".¹⁸⁷

Perhaps, one of the most unique characteristics of the DAO is its versatility, the manifest intention of voiding it of any particular form so to be used for the greatest number of possible purposes. For good and for bad.

Enthusiasts of horizontal democracy readily praised both DAOs and blockchain as the new perfect instruments for rapidly creating and managing, through clear-cut and precise decisional methods, horizontal groups. Belonging to a DAO would also allow every single member to participate in discussion and debates while being sure that, in virtue of the required time-stamp technology, every peer would have enough time to think and elaborate before voting on any proposals. Blockchain functions could also cover the ensuring of transparency in elections¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ To expand further on the idea behind cryptocurrencies and blockchains, read Bitcoin's Whitepaper, available in pdf here: <https://bitcoin.org/bitcoin.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ For more information, Ethereum's Whitepaper can be found at: <https://whitepaperdatabase.com/ethereum-eth-whitepaper/>.

¹⁸⁵ "a smart contract is a mechanism involving digital assets and two or more parties, where some or all of the parties put assets in and assets are automatically redistributed among those parties according to a formula based on certain data that is not known at the time the contract is initiated". The quote is taken from Buterin's article available at: <https://blog.ethereum.org/2014/05/06/daos-dacs-das-and-more-an-incomplete-terminology-guide/>.

¹⁸⁶ Buterin regards organizations as a "combination of two things: a set of property, and a protocol for a set of individuals, which may or may not be divided into certain classes with different conditions for entering or leaving the set, to interact with each other including rules for under what circumstances the individuals may use certain parts of the property". Excerpt taken from the same aforementioned article.

¹⁸⁷ Quote taken directly from Buterin's article "*DAOs, DACs, DAs and More: An Incomplete Terminology Guide*", appeared on: <https://blog.ethereum.org/2014/05/06/daos-dacs-das-and-more-an-incomplete-terminology-guide/>.

¹⁸⁸ For example, Agora is a "project spun out of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne, has created a blockchain voting platform dedicated to ensuring transparent and verifiable elections around the world. This is done by anonymously storing votes in an immutable ledger, thereby offering instant access to election results. The Swiss-based company provided unprecedented insight into the Sierra Leonian Presidential Election process in March of this year, by demonstrating the benefits of a blockchain-based system, meaning safe storage and public availability of election data, as well as a fast tallying process that allowed results representative from the area, 4 days ahead of the manual count, to be delivered". Excerpt taken from: <https://medium.com/@trade.io/bringing-democracy-to-the-world-through-blockchain-with-agera-ec360b92f28a>. For more information, read Agora

and greatly increasing the efficiency of every public administration willing to open its doors to this technology, rendering cheating the system nearly impossible. However, DAOs' versatility also embodies the present limits of this technology. Following their cutting-edge nature, DAOs are still heavily unregulated and hence, particularly prone to frauds. Still, their greatest deficiency lies at the core of the idea that pushed the creation of this invention: profit. And in business, profits do not have to necessarily reconcile with democratic values. As a matter of fact, while officially being open to everyone, every DAO has barriers to participation so that in order to enter in the organization, would-be members are required to buy the so-called "vote tokens" – given in whatever cryptocurrency the DAO runs on. This implies that once bought, these tokens permit the members to apportion the profits accrued by the organization but also entails that each member bear voting rights equal to the amount of token purchased, thus ultimately creating structural imbalance.

Whenever trying to weight in the future implications that this giant, trustless spreadsheet would have on the world, to the two compasses cited at the beginning of this subsection, we should add the one previously offered by Stafford Beer. No expert can know for certain whether the blockchain would become another instrument in the hands of governments or if it will promote the definitive withering away of the state; whether it will allow the state to become a DAO where every citizen is an equal stakeholder¹⁸⁹ or whether "the libertarian roots of these technologies will (...) portend not the democratization of governance but its full privatization, in a world where only those with a bend of mind to understand the arcana of cryptofinance have the means to prevail" (Greenfield, p. 180). What is certain is that, all this will depend on how we will collectively decide to manage technological development.

Whitepaper, available in pdf at:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b0be2f4e2ccd12e7e8a9be9/t/5b6c38550e2e725e9cad3f18/1533818968655/Agora_Whitepaper.pdf.

¹⁸⁹ To expand on the idea please read the paragraph dedicated to the "*Green Plenty*" in Greenfield's book at pages 288 to 290.

3.4 Polyarchy of Merit, 3D Printing and the Value of Education

Just as protective freedom represents the indispensable democratic prerequisite for taming power, synthetic freedom and its adoption, epitomizes the essential condition for transforming democracy into a polyarchy of merit.¹⁹⁰ For inquiring further on this topic, once again, definitions are needed. As freedom from ensures citizens liberty from arbitrary impositions and interferences, it also considers equals people with different capacities to act.¹⁹¹ That is why, this notion needs to be complemented with that of synthetic freedom which “recognizes that a formal right without a material capacity is worthless. Under a democracy, for example, we are all formally free to run for political leadership. But without the financial and social resources to run a campaign, this is meaningless freedom” (Srniczek and Williams, p. 79). Only the union between these two ideas can form the basis for sustaining a merit-based polyarchy, or rather a democracy where “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and office open to all” (Rawls, p. 60). In light of this, the question now becomes whether there exist any developments or circumstances that could favor the rise of a modern, Rawlsian society. As the American professor attached two conditions to his maxim for redistribution, the answer cannot be anything less than double-fold, examining first issues over the rebalancing of socio-economic inequalities and then those on office and positions open to all.

Just like value, socio-economic inequalities, derive from scarcity. Apart from automation,¹⁹² the only present technology purely aimed at creating a post-scarcity world is 3D printing. “At issue is nothing left than the final defeat of material scarcity. Just what does it mean to us, as individuals and societies? We’ve lived with scarcity for so long, have so long enshrined it at the very heart of our assumptions about value, choice and necessity, that is

¹⁹⁰ This concept has been duly explained throughout chapter one. For the original analysis please read p.169 of Sartori’s *TODR I*.

¹⁹¹ To expand on the various implication of protective or negative freedom, please read Friedrich Hayek’s “*The Constitution of Liberty*”.

¹⁹² Whose theory, economic and political consequences deserve a book of their own.

For inquiring on the forecasted worldwide impact of this process – figures predict that in the next two decades 47 to 80% of the current jobs will be automated –read Frey’s and Osborne’s paper on “The future of employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?” available on pdf here:

https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf. For a more encompassing account on the possibilities and limits of this technological tendency, please read Srniczek’s and Williams’ “*Inventing the Future*” and chapter seven of “*Radical Technologies*”, found at pages 183 to 217.

difficult to imagine the contours of a life unmarked by it” (Greenfield, p. 89).

The origins of the concept of 3D printing trace back to a 1966 conceptual experiment¹⁹³ performed by Jon Von Neumann where he envisaged an instrument that would be able to re-create any material object, including a copy of itself, that humans desired, by transforming the surrounding elements of the environment. Decades, open-source software and Maker Movement¹⁹⁴ after, this instrument came to life under the form of 3D printers.¹⁹⁵ In his “The Zero Marginal Cost Society” Jeremy Rifkin describes said incredible invention as open-source software that “directs molten plastic, molten metal, or other feedstocks inside a printer, to build up a physical product layer by layer, creating a fully formed object, even with moveable parts, which then pops out of the printer (...) Like the replicator in the *Star Trek* television series, the printer can be programmed to produce an infinite variety of products. Printers are already producing products from jewelry and airplane parts to human prostheses” (Rifkin, p. 89). The American author argues that such technology would become the dominant mode of production of the next, third industrial revolution as its widespread adoption would entail the democratization of the means of production, rendering obsolete questions on who should own them. This is all to be achieved by uniting Fab Labs¹⁹⁶ and community workshops so to unleash the post-scarcity revolution. At first glance the wonders and benefits that 3D printing carries are undeniable: by being completely directed through software, creating things would no longer require manual work but access to internet and a 3D printer – two things that governmental institutions should start to consider as public goods, facilitating their availability to everyone. As software are open-source, their content is free from intellectual property and patents, allowing people to exchange

¹⁹³ The book where this experiment was conceived is “*Theory Of Self Reproducing Automata*”.

¹⁹⁴ To read more on the origins and the accomplishments of said group, visit: <https://makerfaire.com/maker-movement/> or read <https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2015/apr/04/tooling-up-civic-visions-fablabs-and-grassroots-activism>.

¹⁹⁵ The origins of the RepRap, the first 3D printer produced is available at: <https://m.all3dp.com/history-of-the-reprap-project/>.

¹⁹⁶ “The Fab Lab was born at the MIT Center for Bits and Atoms that grew out of the MIT Media Lab with the mission of providing a laboratory to which anyone could come and use the tools to create their own 3D-printed projects. Gershenfeld’s Fab Foundation charter emphasizes the organization’s commitment to open-access, peer-to-peer learning. The labs are outfitted with various types of flexible manufacturing equipment, which includes laser cutters, routers, 3D printers, mini mills, and the accompanying open-source software. Setting up the fully equipped lab costs around \$50,000. There are now over 70 Fab Labs, most in urban areas in highly industrialized countries, but many, surprisingly enough, are in developing countries where access to the fabricating tools and equipment” (Rifkin, p. 94.)

instructions on how to make the widest array of things and prices to go increasingly down.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, 3D printing could be the engine that pushes the new sustainable production,¹⁹⁸ taking up far less materials than its factory counterpart, aiming at augmenting, as technology ameliorates, the quantity and percentage of re-usable and recyclable resources from production waste. Lastly, as Von Neumann dreamt, 3D printers can also re-print their own parts, thus avoiding costly retooling.

However, the optimism, benefits and implications surrounding this technology are based on various assumptions that need to be unveiled and analyzed. What proponents “celebrate and invest much hope in is an as-yet notional practice of manufacturing that is simultaneously *distributed*, that is to say, locally available, just about everywhere; *on-demand*, able to satisfy needs as and when they emerge; *short-run*, or capable of producing only as many iterations of a thing as actually needed, without unduly imposing retooling or reconfiguration costs; *materially agnostic*, able to make useful things from a wide variety of base materials, and to fabricate the necessary components for the kind of complex, heterogeneous objects we generally encounter in everyday life; and *circular*, that is, able to recover and make use of waste products generated in the course of production. And above all, what they are imagining is a material production that is *ultra low-cost*” (Greenfield, p. 91) both in terms of price of replicators and of the materials needed to print objects. Nonetheless, would these criteria be met, supposedly few people would oppose a government that subsidizes free 3D printing workshops that the less advantaged members of society could use to have the products (or at least their tridimensional replica) that the most advantaged normally buy without problems. Yet, in present conditions, it is still much faster and cheaper driving to the mall and buy products from the global south rather than create them with 3D printers.

Conceivably then, we are still far from living in a post-scarcity world where 3D replicators, after rebalancing inequalities, paved the way for their complete elimination. Still, this does not entail that such technology could not help forming the conditions for democracy to

¹⁹⁷ It is possible to buy a high-precision 3D printer at \$1500. For additional information, see: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-04-26/3d-printers-make-whatever-you-want>.

¹⁹⁸ For more information on the sustainability of 3D printing please read “*Sustainability of 3D Printing: A Critical Review and Recommendations*” by Zhi-Chao Liu, Qihong Jiang, Yang Zhang and Tao Li, available in pdf at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308970924_Sustainability_of_3D_Printing_A_Critical_Review_and_Recommendations.

become a polyarchy of merit. Perhaps, rather than replacing every object on earth, its most helpful use would be that of spearheading the new trail for a less consumeristic consumption, re-giving importance to the lost art of repairing and recovering, hence immensely helping the environment. This newly found shared, common view, along with state subsidized district-scaled 3D printing workshop, could truly modify our understanding of poverty and scarcity, changing its theoretical coordinates from lack of possessing things to the more nuanced idea of dependency on someone or something for satisfying everyday life's fundamental needs. This shift in focus would render increasingly understandable the reasons for which socio-economic inequalities should be distributed according to the Rawlsian difference principle. After all, if the abovementioned limits of 3D printing could be overcome "proposals that would have seemed guilelessly utopian or even science-fictional not so long ago acquire a certain credibility. And if these few stumbling blocks really are all that stands between us and the prospect of an equitably distributed material abundance on Earth, it's incumbent upon us to ask what surmounting them would require" (Greenfield, p. 92).

The full realization of a polyarchy of merit entails a second condition, that of office and positions available to everyone. This second principle of justice means that, in a Rawlsian society, positions of influence and answerability must be attainable to all, thanks to a twofold view of equality regarded both as occupations open to all ¹⁹⁹ and of fair opportunities. ²⁰⁰ Apart from the most logical and discussed answers – ministerial, institutional and legislative efforts to guarantee equality, fairness and openness to selections and occasions for every society's member – on how to ensure the realization of these conditions, and considering the tendencies analyzed in the second chapter of this dissertation, this subsection will humbly focus on the value and importance of education, aiming at re-discovering how its effects positively help democracy as well as openness and fairness of opportunities.

Despite a difficult reduction to categories, it is possible to state that education possesses societal, instrumental and intrinsic value, thus producing a, at least, formal, general consensus on the belief that educational opportunities should be equal to everyone. As extensively

¹⁹⁹ For the non-summarized conceptions, please read chapter two "*The Principles of Justice*" of Rawls' "*A theory of Justice*".

²⁰⁰ For a classic critique of Fair Equality of Opportunity, also known as FEO, please read Arneson's "*Against Rawlsian Equality of Opportunity*", available at: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1004270811433>.

documented,²⁰¹ education positively correlates with health and wealth signifying that its levels enormously influence people's lives chances in terms of occupational success and haleness, hence sponsoring the opinion that these chances should not be determined by arbitrary circumstances such as gender, race or social class. On top of this, education has profound social value.

Recalling its responsible participatory nature, democracies need to generate "citizens who are capable of participating in the project of shared governance. The correlation between educational attainment and civic participation is strong and well-documented: educated citizens have more opportunities to obtain and exercise civic skills, are more interested in and informed about politics, and in turn, are more likely to vote".²⁰² All societies prosper from knowledgeable individuals who are responsive to preferences and forge social surplus.

Even if there is no direct correlation between higher levels of education and shrewdly political knowledge,²⁰³ education underlines so many fundamental aspects of democracy; in the upcoming years, informatic education will play a major role in the effectiveness of the future online information wars; awareness of what democracy is and stands for can be truly general and shared only if citizens are educated, and the same goes for the formation of autonomous public opinion, another essential trait of democracy.²⁰⁴ Lastly, unbiased education is one of the most effective weapons for combatting whatever type of discrimination prevents authority offices and influential positions to be open to all.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Read Francisco H.G. Ferreira's research "*Education for the masses? The interaction between wealth, educational and political inequalities*", available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-0351.00087>.

²⁰² Quote taken directly from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/equal-ed-opportunity/>. To expand on the relation between levels of education and civic participation please see "*Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*" by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry Brady.

²⁰³ Sartori himself in the *TODR I* stated that "if education includes education in or about politics, then it goes by definition that the two things increase together. But one can be highly literate and yet remain politically illiterate. There is no compelling reason why a general growth of the levels of instruction should specifically reflect itself in a growth of politically informed publics" (Sartori, p. 106)

²⁰⁴ So much so that Sartori dedicates to election, governing and opinion-formation, the entirety of chapter five of the *TODR I*, starting from page 86 to page 123. For the specific explanation on the importance for democracy and its processes of autonomous formation of opinions, please read p. 110.

²⁰⁵ The most famous kinds of discrimination cover race, social class and gender. For knowing more on gender gap, visit: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/business/women-pay-gap/?utm_term=.6dd4c1424f52. For reading over racial and class discrimination and their implication see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/17/minority-ethnic-britons-face-shocking-job-discrimination> and <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/03/19/upshot/race-class-white-and-black-men.html>. For insights on other types of less famous but still obnoxious discriminatory judgments, such as the anti-mom bias, refer to: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/opinion/workplace-discrimination-mothers.html>.

In order to become a full polyarchy of merit, democracy must “combat arbitrary discrimination against individuals on the basis of race and ethnic background and (...) create equal educational opportunity for the culturally disadvantaged so that they can fairly compete with those not so disadvantaged for the prestigious and socially desirable and useful places in our credential societies” (Nielsen, p.138). It is fundamental that the academic and the political worlds return to stress the importance that education has and the benefit it brings; let us fight against the modern tendency of discrediting expertise and revive the long-standing tradition that regards education as the cornerstone upon which all persons should develop their characters.

3.5 A New Management of the Internet

The dream of living in a society structured along the two aforementioned principles is continuously endangered by the fact that many modern inequalities have their roots in the poorly managed and regulated developments of modern technologies, chiefly those based on the internet.

Democracies need to have the courage for imagining a new management of the internet, starting to treat and consider it not only as a basic right²⁰⁶ but also as a public good²⁰⁷ managed by citizens, thus reviving its original emancipatory function and disrupting as well as avoiding the formation of enormous accumulations of power in the hands of few companies or despotic governments. This claim is based on the logical results of the previous analysis and considerations. Indeed, granting technology’s central role and omnipresence in the endeavors of modern society’s life, it is extremely complicated not to agree with the observation that “in the world as we’ve made it, *those who enjoy access to networked services are more capable than those without*” (Greenfield, p.24). If this is the case then, paying for connecting to the internet – when such thing could easily be available for free, or at least highly subsidized –²⁰⁸ is exactly where inequality starts.

²⁰⁶ Steps in this direction were taken by the UN as can be read in the “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue” available at: https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf.

²⁰⁷ A public good can be defined as “a product that one individual can consume without reducing its availability to another individual, and from which no one is excluded” which is then also considered as non-excludable and non-rivalrous. Definition taken directly from: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/public-good.asp>.

²⁰⁸ Examples on the actualization of such proposals will be examined later. However, it is worthy to note that a possible solution, i.e. peer-to-peer communities, was already extensively analyzed in previous subsections.

This reality facilitated the creation of a system where, as already examined, it becomes increasingly difficult to use and maximize all the intended benefits that modern devices carry without yielding something in return: be it personal data or money for connecting to the web. Obviously, “nothing forces anyone to buy from Amazon, of course, any more than anyone is forced to sign up for a profile on Facebook, search with Google, or use Apple computers, and there remain wide swathes of the planet where one can go weeks without overtly encountering any of their products or services (...) yet it is already difficult, and becoming more difficult still, for anyone to equip themselves with modern technology without being subject to the totalizing influence of the Stacks” (Greenfield, p. 284). What is worse is that under present conditions, we can either exercise our right to the internet as long as we submit to the wills of a handful of technological companies or decide not to equip our life with the benefit of modern technologies, thus starting in a disadvantaged position in society.

The harsh reality is that, as data became the oil of the 21st century, Stacks²⁰⁹ and ISPs²¹⁰ surged to embody modern monopolies. Their cutting-edge nature allows them to thrive in almost any conditions, even from outmoded definitions. Stacks, along with internet service providers, might not be monopolies in the classical sense of determining the price²¹¹ – though the repeal of net neutrality, and new legislation on privacy,²¹² might even favor that – but they are and act as monopolies of control. Taking just two examples, Google alone possesses 92% of internet search’s market share, while Facebook owns the 66% of social network’s share.²¹³ And whenever any of them feels that a potential competitor is gaining worrisome momentum, they simply buy it, crushing competition and rendering innovative start-ups their global R&D

²⁰⁹ Stacks are defined as “a small number of commercial enterprises whose size and concentrated technical competence now span much of the terrain of ordinary experience: Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook, with Microsoft trailing a considerable distance behind” (Greenfield, p. 275)

²¹⁰ Internet service providers, instead, retain also their ability of influencing the price and limiting access to competitors. To know more, see: <https://muninetworks.org/content/new-infographic-market-has-spoken-market-broken>.

²¹¹ According to Friedman, “Monopoly exists when a specific individual or enterprise has sufficient control over a particular product or service to determine significantly the terms on which other individuals shall have access to it” (Friedman, p. 120). For inquiring further on this discussion see: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/30/nationalise-google-facebook-amazon-data-monopoly-platform-public-interest> and <https://qz.com/work/1460402/google-facebook-and-amazon-benefit-from-an-outdated-definition-of-monopoly/>.

²¹² To expand on this worrisome development, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-internet-trump-idUSKBN1752PR>.

²¹³ Data taken respectively from <http://gs.statcounter.com/search-engine-market-share> and <http://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats>.

laboratory.²¹⁴ Stacks continue to grow exponentially, generating profits through the same single aim: “mediate and monetize everyday life to the maximum possible extent” (Greenfield, p. 283).

Arguments analyzed throughout this thesis offer compelling reasons for which, scientists and citizens alike, should direct their efforts in finding solutions and proposals for a new management alternative to that of the monopolistic Internet.

Internet was born thanks to public efforts and cannot die privately; in fact, “most of the innovation on which Silicon Valley depends comes from government research, for the simple reason that the public sector can afford to take risks that the private sector can’t. It’s precisely the insulation from market forces that enables government to finance the long-term scientific labor that ends up producing many of the most profitable inventions. This is particularly true of the Internet. The Internet was such a radical and unlikely idea that only decades of public funding and planning could bring it into existence. Not only did the basic technology have to be invented, but the infrastructure had to be built, specialists had to be trained, and contractors had to be staffed, funded, and in some cases, directly spun off from government agencies”.²¹⁵

The road for finding solution passes also on how we collectively intend to manage monopolies. The most frequent strategies are either dismantling them, for example by forbidding perilous acquisition or mergers, thus nullifying the conditions for their rise, or regulate them in order to ensure that they provide some sorts of public services. With internet monopolies these two options, albeit representing fundamental steps forward, will not suffice. A third, feasible solution would then be that of creating and financing public alternatives, in this case, publicly directed and owned internet infrastructures like municipal broadband, as the success of the one in Chattanooga, Tennessee demonstrates.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Facebook has even developed an algorithm that notifies it whenever a potential competitor is arising: https://thenextweb.com/insider/2017/08/10/facebooks-new-early-bird-spy-tool-is-just-the-tip-of-the-iceberg/#.tnw_ezMs7XS7.

Google also purchases an astonishing number of enterprises: “The search giant’s mergers and acquisitions team set new records in 2010 and 2011 for the sheer number of companies it acquired. Last year alone it bought up 25 companies, one every two weeks. If you count the firms acquired for patents and intellectual property, the total number is a whopping 79”. Quote taken directly from: <https://www.theverge.com/2012/9/17/3322854/google-startup-mergers-acquisitions-failure-is-a-feature>.

²¹⁵ Excerpt taken directly from Ben Tarnoff’s article for *Jacobin*, available at:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/08/internet-public-dns-privatization-icann-netflix>.

²¹⁶ “If the most hated ISP in the country is Comcast, the most popular is EPB, a public utility owned by the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Consumer Reports ranks EPB the best American ISP, and the reason is obvious: it charges reasonable rates for some of the fastest residential speeds in the world. Also, it doesn’t punish poor people: Chattanoogaans who can’t afford those rates are eligible for subsidized high-speed plans.” Excerpt taken from:

As the idea of curbing power by diffusing it rendered democracy the best governing framework to live under, it should also find space in guiding the new management of the internet. “Instead of trying to escape the bigness of the Internet, we should embrace it — and bring it under democratic control. This means replacing private providers with public alternatives where it’s feasible, and regulating them where it’s not. There is nothing in the pipes or protocols of the Internet that obliges it to produce immense concentrations of corporate power. This is a political choice, and we can choose differently”.²¹⁷

In wrapping up this final part, our conceptual journey perfectly rejoices, in a circular fashion, the last pages of the first chapter as the fight for democracy also crosses the attempt of facing the crisis of ethics that pervades it. In both of his *TODRs*, Sartori reserves lengthy spaces for denouncing the crisis of morality and ethics ravaging modern democracies.²¹⁸ According to the Italian professor, people no longer cared to sustain and nurture democracy as their only interests commenced shifting exclusively towards ripping all its benefits, increasingly becoming utilitarian, wearied, egoistic and materially-driven. Furthermore, to worsen the situation, this evolution, coupled with the subsequent augment of disregard towards education and inequalities, brought the erosion of the moral basis at the heart of democracy: a feeling of dutifulness, of acting just for the sake of helping others, that has been progressively replaced by an economic vision for which an action has always to result in a gain of some sort. In light of this, the thesis cannot end in any other way if not by asking whether any proposals or suggestion to reverse the aforementioned tendencies exist.

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/nov/29/net-neutrality-internet-basic-right-america-trump-administration>. For verifying the rankings see: <https://www.consumerreports.org/phone-tv-internet-bundles/people-still-dont-like-their-cable-companies-telecom-survey/>.

To read on Chattanooga’s success, visit: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/04/technology/fast-internet-service-speeds-business-development-in-chattanooga.html>.

²¹⁷ Extract from: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/08/internet-public-dns-privatization-icann-netflix>.

²¹⁸ For refreshing the mind, please read again pages 11-13 and 29-30 of this thesis. For the original considerations, please see pages 492-496 and 241-247, respectively of *TODR II* and *I*.

3.6 Cognitive Empathy and the Possibilities of Re-thinking Materialism

Discussing materialism, intended as the continuous accumulation of possessions, presupposes a shared notion of abundance. Yet, defining abundance is a tricky quest for abundance is in the eye of the possessor, whereas Earth resources are not.²¹⁹ As Sartori observed, western society lives under the hegemonic belief that ties happiness and accumulation, sponsoring the idea that the more people possess, the happier they will be. However, various scientific findings controvert and reverse this view, proving the validity of Sartori's observations, claiming that the increasingly materialistic needs and desires end up saddening people, contributing to their state of malaise.²²⁰

Researches show that levels of happiness follow a bell-shaped curve, at first augmenting and then after a tipping point,²²¹ declining. Not surprisingly, the unhappiest people on Earth are those living below the threshold of extreme poverty, attempting to meet basic life's needs with just two dollars per day. However, "as the poor are lifted out of poverty, they begin to experience happiness. Each advance in income, wealth, and security makes them happier. But here's where it becomes surprising. When individuals reach an income level that provides the basic comforts and securities of life, their level of happiness begins to plateau. Additional increases of wealth and accompanying consumption triggers diminishing marginal returns in overall happiness, until

²¹⁹ Sustainability might be in fact much easier to define as it represents: the relative steady state in which the use of resources to sustain the human population does not exceed the ability of nature to recycle the waste and replenish the stock. Ecological footprint is a direct measure of the demand human activity puts on the biosphere" (Rifkin, p. 274) Currently, the whole global population is yearly consuming what our planet is able to produce in 1.7 years, to expand further, read: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jul/23/earths-resources-consumed-in-ever-greater-destructive-volumes>.

²²⁰ For example, researchers Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener in their "Will Money Increase Subjective Well-Being?" found out that "People who prize material goals more than other values tend to be substantially less happy, unless they are rich. Thus, more money may enhance SWB when it means avoiding poverty and living in a developed nation, but income appears to increase SWB little over the long-term when more of it is gained by well-off individuals whose material desires rise with their incomes. Several major theories are compatible with most existing findings: A. The idea that income enhances SWB only insofar as it helps people meet their basic needs, and B. The idea that the relation between income and SWB depends on the amount of material desires that people's income allows them to fulfill." This excerpt, and the whole research, are taken and available from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1014411319119>. More researchers concluding with similar findings can be read at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1162/016366000560665> and https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267743492_The_Relationship_Between_Materialism_and_Personal_Well-Being_A_Meta-Analysis.

²²¹ "Layard's research shows that individual happiness rises until the average individual income hits about \$20,000 per year—the minimum comfort level—after which additional increases of income result in diminishing returns in the level of happiness" (Rifkin, p. 277). For more information, read Richard Layards' book "*Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*".

a point is reached, after which happiness actually reverses course and individuals become less happy” (Rifkin, p. 276). Not only accumulation endangers people’s welfare, but its exacerbated drive robs individuals of our true nature: being social creatures. “As their materialism comes to define their lives, it also shapes their relationships with others. In a world driven by material success, every relationship becomes a means to advance that end. Others are treated expediently and become reduced to instruments to accumulate more wealth. The sought-for prize of human warmth and affection becomes ever more elusive as the world of the materialist becomes divided into two realms—mine versus thine” (Rifkin, p.279). This consideration uncannily resembles Sartori’s aforementioned observations while implicitly offering an unlikely opening to a new path to explore: that of empathy.

In recent years, thanks to a combination of incredible scientific breakthroughs ²²² and general misperception, few concepts have been as discussed as empathy. Although being the subject of much debate, ²²³ empathy can be generally defined as “any mental activity on part of the observer that is triggered in the perceptual encounter with an external stimulus and that has to be understood as being constitutive for our comprehension of an object qua object”. ²²⁴ This view then, regards empathy as a feeling characterized by two main, complementary traits: understanding and caring. While the former – comprehending what another person is feeling – is a necessary step, it, alone, cannot render the totality of the empathetic experience which has to necessarily entail, after said comprehension, the sentiment of caring about what the other person cares about. While usually being associated with sensitivity, empathy needs to start being considered for what it truly represents: one of the most dominant forces of social change throughout humankind’s history. ²²⁵

²²² Most notably, the discovery of the so-called mirror neurons. For further information, refer to:

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/oct05/mirror.aspx>.

²²³ To expand on the discussion on the various conceptualizations of empathy, read “*Toward a New Conceptualization of Ethnocultural Empathy*” by Chato Rasoal, Jakob Eklund and Eric M. Hansen, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0099278> or “*Compassion: An Evolutionary Analysis and Empirical Review*” by Goetz, Keltner and Simon-Thomas, doi:10.1037/a0018807.

²²⁴ Quote taken from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/empathy/>.

²²⁵ Various evolutionary theories linger on the importance of empathy, from Darwin – that referred to it as sympathy – claiming that “Sympathy will have been increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring” (Darwin, p. 130) to Hrdy in her “*Mothers and Others: the evolutionary origins of mutual understanding*”. Evolutionary functions of empathy also regard it as an alluring trait to possess for favoring mate selection or alliances with non-kin.

Considering the public popularity upholstering this term, it is fundamental to state that this subsection is imbued in the cognizance that empathy represents no panacea for solving all society's and democracy's problems. Nevertheless, the opposite also holds true and in order to reject both sides of the spectrum, it is important to avoid its demonization. In his book "Against Empathy", Paul Bloom argues that "Empathy is a spotlight focusing on certain people in the here and now. This makes us care more about them, but it leaves us insensitive to the long-term consequences of our acts and blind as well to the sufferings of those we do not or cannot empathize with. Empathy is biased, pushing us in the direction of parochialism and racism" (Bloom, p. 9). In short, the American psychologist states that empathy, in virtue of its function as a spotlight, might push people to help solely someone they empathize with, while refusing to help the others and hence represents a damaging force for it thwarts humans' capacity for rational thinking by invalidating our moral schemes. But is this really the case? Does empathy really disrupt people's logical capacities and moral compasses? For answering, let us imagine someone walking in the streets and noticing at some point, a clochard beseeching for food or clothes. Most likely, if the walker stops and perhaps starts interacting with the clochard, his empathy will push him to buy a croissant or a cappuccino for helping the homeless person. Certainly then, were the walker to encounter ten other clochards during his/her promenade, (s)he will not aid all of them but probably will return home having helped only the person (s)he empathized with. At this point, what is to stop the walker from thinking that, even though (s)he assisted only one person, all the clochards probably share the same difficult living conditions and that perhaps as a member of a civic association, (s)he could devise some solutions for helping those without a home? Empathy? It seems highly illogical and unlikely for the simple reason that the capacity of feeling empathy does not run counter to rational thinking but can nicely complete it. I can imagine what it feels to live segregated or in poverty after having heard or read the stories of people living in caste systems or of those being displaced by war and famine. The empathy I feel towards them does not impede me, in any way, to take at heart the abysmal conditions under which *all* people in these situations live, and to come up with ideas that would help all of them, not simply those whom I read or heard stories about.

It would be unwise to suggest that empathy should be the sole moral compass of a person. But it can surely be a supplement to it, helping to restore the Kantian morality of "acting *amore Dei*" (Sartori, p. 242) thus highlighting and retaining empathy's power of rendering

salient a topic and co-assisting rationality in tackling and solving the problem, just for the sake of helping others without rewards, if not that of knowing to be actively contributing to the creation of a powerful narrative that can help, by recovering dutifulness, dragging democracy out from its ethical and moral crisis.

Conclusions

The tripartite nature of this thesis permitted the rendering of a detailed exploration of the *TODRs*, as their interplay with other Sartorian works and notions offered a comprehensive framework for understanding the causes and origins of the current crisis of democracy, hence offering me the possibility to reflect on the impact that the new technological developments might have in the fight for democracy.

Bearing in mind the interaction between its various parts, the first chapter offered a socio-historical introduction aimed at shedding light upon what events and ideas motivated, influenced and inspired Sartori to write the *TODRs*. The analysis of the features and types of democracy, in addition to provide some clarity, hopefully enabled the reader in better understanding said masterpiece, summarized in six different points. This allowed the display of Sartori's thoughts, opinions and ideas on democracy, which came to be defined as a moral ensemble that, through its constitutional/garantiste setting, curbs and tames the powers of the non-elected, protects minorities as well as fundamental rights and thanks to its trilateral structure safeguards and enhances liberty and equality, allowing procedural freedom (from) to ideally offer the basis for its transformation into a polyarchy of merit.

The empirical and theoretical inquiry of the second chapter instead rendered one incontrovertible fact: that democracy is indeed in crisis.

The real-world cases' analysis of USA, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and China and their theoretical interaction with the six phenomena suggested by Sartori, not only portrayed to the reader how populism, distrust in democracy, criticism for the work of experts, journalists and NGOs, rise of illiberal democracies, voters' preferences manipulation via internet and the birth of digital authoritarianism represent global-reaching phenomena that are weakening democracy, but also, the ways in which they relentlessly aim to replace it. Nonetheless, as the conclusive chapter showed, options for fighting back and defending democracy still exist, starting from understanding what originated the aforementioned causes.

Said analysis was rendered possible chiefly thanks to Sartori's farsightedness and his extraordinary ability not only of predicting, decades *avant la lettre*, phenomena that today

compose our daily life's experiences, but of theoretically analyzing them, proposing arguments and possible solutions that today's authors and experts recognize as fundamental explanatory factors for understanding and studying the origins of the current crisis of democracy. In fact, the theoretical trail spearheaded by the Italian professor's clairvoyance – along with its connection to the notions of “death of expertise”, “algorithmic trust” and “radical technologies” – facilitated such explanation, elucidating how the tele-viewing then, algorithmic trust now, have reduced humans' ability of critical and independent thinking; allowing in turn, the death of expertise to flourish by diffusing, also via internet, a culture that sustains that somebody's opinion is just as worthy as a scientific fact and characterized by people's passive willingness to accept the reality around them. A reality increasingly molded around the desires of few tech companies.

Surrounded by this numbing to-be technodystopian environment and lacking critical and independent thinking skills people/citizens/voters became more easily manipulated, even by charismatic strong men who find absurdly simplistic answer (i.e. blame the immigrant) to gigantic problems (recession, climate change, inequalities, migration, disappearance of privacy, unsustainable lifestyle etc. etc.) thus endlessly nourishing the self-(r)enforcing atmosphere at the heart of the modern crisis of democracy. Despite the apparent gloominess of the situation, academics and laypeople alike continuously keep seeking alternative ways for fighting back. As the last chapter demonstrated, with appropriate attention and modifications, new technologies and awareness can be employed to reverse and cure the trends and phenomena that are deeply damaging democracy.

Still, apart from those suggestions, hope should not be lost yet for another reason. Indeed, as thoroughly held throughout the thesis, nothing happens in a vacuum. Bearing this in mind, it is essential to recall one last time, the Italian professor's eagerness to constantly reminding us that the entire edifice of democracy would not exist “had it not been for an endless painstaking thinking about power, coercion, liberty, equality, laws, justice, rights, representation” (Sartori, p. xii). Thus, in order to save democracy this is exactly what we should do.

Democracy's survival rests on our collective decision of partaking, once more, in the gargantuan trial-and-error process that constitutes it.

This is why, 32 years after, Sartori's *TODRs* and thoughts are still the best compass to follow for directing our general efforts for protecting and ameliorating democracy, for their mission was and still is, that of gifting us with a framework for examining the elements and the feasible

circumstances needed for democracy to perform at its best in order to save, maintain and protect them, whilst allowing the necessary spaces and instruments for transforming the rest, so to give democracy the best possibilities not only to survive, but to thrive.

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Summary

Introduction

Despite being written by Giovanni Sartori some 32 years ago, the *Theory of Democracy Revisited Part One and Two* (hereafter referred to as *TODR I* and *TODR II* or plurally *TODRs*) remain an extraordinarily vivid theoretical framework through which understanding, analyzing and possibly ameliorating democracy. The idea behind this thesis might appear simple, but in light of the current situation, all the more necessary.

Indeed, democracy, its values and processes, are being threatened by old and never before-seen phenomena. And it is precisely when democracy is in crisis that a general theory is needed more than ever. Sartori's masterpieces will function as the compass to follow for navigating the troubled seas of our time so to incontrovertibly enshrining the importance of – and the mission invested in – the general theory of democracy: that of analyzing, finding and crystallizing the elements as well as the feasible circumstances needed for democracy to perform at its best, and to maintain, save and protect them while contemporarily allowing the necessary spaces for transforming the rest, so to give democracy the best possibilities not only to survive, but to thrive.

In order to achieve the aforementioned purpose, this dissertation has been divided in three different chapters, roughly mirroring the tripartite conceptual approach needed for comprehending and examining democracy through Sartori's lenses. As the first one chiefly covers the study of the two books that compose the *Theory of Democracy Revisited*, the second merges empirical and theoretical analysis so to render a complete picture of the current status of democracy, thus leaving to the final chapter the double-fold possibility of inquiring on the origins at the heart of democracy's situation as well as reflecting and exploring suggestions for fighting and reversing the trends plaguing democracy.

Chapter one. Studying the Theory of Democracy Revisited

1.1 Why were the TODRs written?

“The concept of democracy is entitled to be diffuse and multifaceted. This is so, among other reasons, because democracy largely is by now a name for a civilization or, better, for the

political end product (to date) of Western civilization. Communism and socialism can be connected to a single major author -Marx- and assessed as deviations from, and implementations or negations of, Marx. Democracy is not amenable to a similar treatment; the towering single major author on democracy does not exist.” (Sartori, p.3).

Solely this intro, magisterially written by Giovanni Sartori in his “*The Theory of Democracy Revisited*”, smartly suggests at least two things: the ambiguity and difficulty on writing on such an enormous topic as democracy and the need to define what democracy means.

In order to do just that, it is essential to provide a socio-historical framework for examining the reasons that motivated Sartori to re-write/revisit his magnum opus on democracy by focusing on the views that the Italian professor held on society as well as the history-shaping events of that time.²²⁶ The period extending from 1957 to 1987 or rather from the publication of “*Democrazia e Definizioni*” (translated and published in English under the title of “*Democratic Theory*” in 1962) up to its reinterpretation and complete transformation into the *TODRs*, covers the majority of the second half of one of the most turbulent centuries in the history of human civilizations. Influenced by the oil crisis of 1973, neoliberalism’s rise to power and continuous technological developments,²²⁷ people became “from one generation to another, more and more economic minded” (Sartori, p.492) which rendered them “weary, maladjusted, anxious and [...] frightened” (Sartori, p.496). Hence, according to the Italian thinker, just as too much satisfaction leads to dissatisfaction, Westerners have become so full of liberty and security as to grow contempt towards them, leading to an exhaustion of ideals.²²⁸ Characterized by extreme velocity, anxiousness, unfit for elucubrations and deep thinking, societies appeared increasingly based on the mantra of immediate satisfaction of whatever desire in the least possible amount of time as gratification becomes uncertain and perhaps not as much pleasurable as in the moment of need. In the world described, space, time and care for long-term projects is virtually non-existent, creating an anthropogenic sphere in which thinking and ethics are replaced by speed and

²²⁶ The intellectual motives – comprehensive nature of democracy, stipulativism, the “*Wertfreiheit*” issue and the difficulty of testing empirical and normative theories – that favored the loss of a general theory of democracy and that pushed Sartori to elaborate the *TODRs* will flow into the bulk of the theoretical analysis that represent the heart of both the second and third chapter of this thesis.

²²⁷ Arguments highlighting the importance of these particular, singled out dates can be found in Karen R. Merrill’s book “*The Oil Crisis of 1973-1974: A Brief History with Documents*” as well as in David Harvey’s sharp analysis in “*A Brief History of Neoliberalism*” and Sir Berner-Lee’s “*Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web*”.

²²⁸ Sartori refers to ideals as moral beliefs, please see p.491 of *TODR II*.

satisfaction at all costs, in which concern for democracy cannot find the space it deserves and requires in people's lives. Hopefully, it is easier now to understand why a general theory of democracy was, and still is, very much needed.

1.2 The TODRs

As already noted, Sartori's magnum opus is divided in two books, "*The Theory of Democracy Part I*" and "*The Theory of Democracy Part II*", comprising each eight chapters, for a total of 16. In both cases, the cornerstone upon which Sartori built his theoretical edifice revolves around his belief that the real and the ideal, what it is and what ought to be, or rather the descriptive and prescriptive theories of democracy have to mix together in order to create a well-founded, functional whole. No discussion on democracy can be considered relevant without trying to dissect what this term refers to.

One of the first ever attempt to define democracy did not linger on its institutional, instrumentalist or normative aspects; rather it focused on the procedural one. According to Joseph Schumpeter, "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter, p.269). Naturally, notwithstanding its usefulness, clarity and conciseness, this definition cannot stand alone for it excludes features that are vital to a democracy as there is no mention of freedom, accountability, responsiveness and representation, let alone socio-economic aspects. A colossal leap forward in solving the riddle of defining democracy was accomplished by Robert Dahl, who in his "*A Preface to Democratic Theory*" of 1956, enlarged the procedural notion by focusing on two main concepts: contestation and mass participation. According to his thinking, contestation was chiefly consisting of 3 main elements – right to form parties, freedom of press and associational autonomy- whereas participation was to include the right to vote, fairness of election and universal suffrage. At this point, the American professor came up with the idea of formulating a minimalist definition of democracy, or rather a list composed of easily empirically controllable traits that establish a threshold between what ought to be considered democracy and what not. Dahl identified four main features: "Universal male and female suffrage; free, competitive, periodic and fair elections in a representative democratic framework, with mass politics and guaranteed voting right; more than one political party or at least another party that participates elections with a realistic chance

of winning office; different and alternative sources of information” (Morlino, p.25). These characteristics imply the right to run and hold office, freedom of expression and associational autonomy. Furthermore, it is quintessential to attach to this itemization two other features, or rather independence from external power and respect for civic and social rights.

By virtue of logic, a minimalist definition of democracy suggests a maximum one that deals with principles and ideas and is particularly serviceable for political scientists and students for measuring and defining qualities deepening. Naturally, given the ceaseless changing of principles and ideas, no consensus can be reached on what can be considered a maximum definition of democracy. Yet, this has not stopped scholars from identifying and cataloguing its different types ranging from liberal, responsive, participatory and deliberative to associative, egalitarian, good governance and good democracy.

The study of the *TODRs* elucidates how, whenever not specified, when Sartori writes about democracy, he chiefly refers to its liberal form.²²⁹ Liberal democracy encompasses the classical normative notion of democracy, bringing together fundamental rights (i.e. rule of law) and electoral procedures (i.e. universal suffrage). Its main goal is that of allowing legitimate political decision to be taken while merging the various societal disagreements and conflict of interests. This ambiguity between pluralism and consensus is rendered possible by the fact that once laws are emanated, they are mandatory for everyone. The democratic framework allows these laws to correspond to popular will, tested by the results of periodical elections. Competition, participation and accountability are thus its key features supplemented by effective freedoms.

Comprehensively summarizing the *TODRs* is by no means an easy endeavor. Thus, the best way to proceed is to theoretically highlight the major notions, ideas and debates that form the spine of this work. First and foremost, it is fundamental to assert that for Sartori, “Modern democracies hinge on (a) limited majority rule; (b) elective procedure; and (c) the representational transmission of power” (Sartori, p.30). Apart from this tripartite characterization, the Italian intellectual extensively focuses on the importance of recognizing that the boundaries of an essential divergence have been wrongly drawn on the difference between an ideal-less and ideal-laden vision of politics. As a matter of fact, for the Italian professor, the real distinction is “between (a) a *warlike view* of politics; and (b) a peace-oriented, *legalitarian view*

²²⁹ For further evidences to support this claim, please read Ch. 13 of *TODR II*, to be find at p. 367-393, entitled “*Liberism, Liberalism, and Democracy*”.

of politics. In the former, force monitors persuasion, might establishes right, and conflict resolution is sought in terms of the defeat of the enemy – of the ‘other’ looked on as a *hostis*. In the latter, force is kept in reserve as an *ultima ratio*, as a last and worse reason, and conflict resolution is sought by means of covenants, courts and ‘rightful’ procedures” (Sartori, p.41). This difference implies that whoever cherishes democracy and its components has already picked a side as “prior to whatever else it may be, pluralism is the belief in the value of diversity. And believing in diversity – in a dialectics of diversity – is antipodal to believing in conflict” (Sartori, p.92). From these first two points onwards, Sartori’s attention is drawn to establish both the goal of political freedom as well as the function of protective freedom. In order to unravel his thoughts on these issues, Sartori provided a definition of political freedom, viewed as “an instrumental and *relational freedom* whose essential purpose is to create a situation of freedom, the conditions for freedom” (Sartori, p. 301). These conditions describe the aim of political freedom as its problem “always lands at the search for *rules* that do curb power” (Sartori, p.306). Thus, according to the Italian intellectual, the best system tested throughout the history of humankind for taming power is represented by the liberal doctrine of constitutionalism, based upon the existence of a written constitution regarded as the highest law of a country, comprehending fundamental rights and ways to enhance and protect them. This entails the combination and presence of guarantees for the protection of civil rights and liberties, the separation of powers and mechanisms of checks and balances in order to ensure that citizens are shielded from political abuse of power and coercion while also exercising influence over the public decision-making process. From here, it should be easily inferable to notice how, for Sartori, protective freedom represents the basis for every other type of liberty or equality, as political freedom incorporates the classic notion of negative freedom (i.e. freedom from). The Italian intellectual does not claim that this kind of freedom is the only existing type or that it should be cherished as the most important; he simply argues that, following procedural reasoning, political freedom represents the basis, the necessary condition for the existence of all other liberties and equalities ²³⁰ or in his words: “just as political freedom (freedom *from*) is the preliminary and enduring condition for all the powers of liberty, for all freedoms *to*, for exactly the same reasons it is also the preliminary and enduring condition for all the powers of equality”

²³⁰ For Sartori, the totality of freedoms, or “*complete freedom* may be said to imply the following five traits: (a) independence; (b) privacy; (c) capacity; (d) opportunity; and (e) power” (Sartori, p. 303).

(Sartori, p. 358).

The last two conceptual macroareas cover Sartori's motifs for wishing that a democracy should not only be a selective polyarchy, but one of merit ²³¹ as well as his analysis on its moral foundation. Indeed, for the Italian thinker, democracy possesses a distinctive moral basis: "the moral foundations of any free polity have to do with the sense of *dutifulness*, with the understanding that rights involve obligations, and that there is a value and a gratification in doing things 'for nothing', gratis. There is no such thing as a free lunch, but there is such thing as free giving, as acting *amore Dei*. But dutifulness, doing in exchange for nothing, and the like, have long been eroded by an economic-like vision of politics. And if this is the argument, then I do subscribe to the view that the present-day crisis of democracy is very much a crisis of ethical foundations" (Sartori, p. 242). Those foundations, according to the Italian professor, are based on two forms of morality, the aforementioned Kantian morality of altruistic deeds and the *Gesinnungsethik*, ²³² or rather the seeking of morally-just actions in spite of their consequences.

This last paragraph signals the end of the first chapter that displayed Sartori's thoughts, opinions and ideas on the strength and weaknesses of democracy, passing from its simplest conception – "a system in which *no one can choose himself, no one can invest himself with the power to rule and, therefore, no one can arrogate to himself unconditional and unlimited power*" (Sartori, p. 206) – to a moral ensemble that, through its constitutional/garantiste setting, curbs and tames the powers of the non-elected, protects minorities as well as fundamental rights and thanks to its tripartite structure safeguards and enhances liberty and equality, allowing procedural freedom (from) to ideally offer the basis for democracy's transformation into a polyarchy of merit.

²³¹ The idea of polyarchy was firstly found in Dahl's "*Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*". Hence for deeper information please refer to the book.

In p. 166 Sartori states that "democracy should be a *selective system* of competing elected minorities [...] a *selective polyarchy*". The Encyclopedia Britannica defines polyarchy as: "concept coined by the American political scientist Robert Dahl to denote the acquisition of democratic institutions within a political system that leads to the participation of a plurality of actors. Polyarchy, which means "rule by many," describes the process of democratization, in contrast to democracy itself", link available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/polyarchy>

²³² Weber differentiates between *Gesinnungsethik* and *Verantwortungsethik*, or rather between moral action regardless of consequences or accountable to them. For further information, please read p. 242 of the *TODR I*.

Chapter two. Democracy Today

Notwithstanding the different meanings and importance that scholars and laypeople alike singlehandedly attach to the term democracy,²³³ despite the various metrics or points of view so far analyzed, one cannot refuse to agree that democracy is indeed in crisis.

This crisis is global, and its origins are not necessarily recent.

According to Freedom House,²³⁴ one of the most distinguished independent NGOs dedicated to the study and diffusion of democracy, 2018 marked the 12th consecutive year of decline in global freedom, meaning that since 2006, 113 countries experienced democratic worsening while merely 62 witnessed an amelioration of their statuses.

Consequently, the aim of this subsection is that of offering an empirical framework in order to discover the depth and range of the democratic crisis thus coming to an agreement on the relevance and need of a general theory of democracy. Obviously, empirical research alone will not suffice for achieving the above-stated purpose. Hence, it will be corroborated with theoretical analysis so to dissect it through the lens of six detectable phenomena that throughout his writings – especially *TODRs* and *Homo Videns* – Sartori viewed as endangering democracy and that today represent the causes for its current crisis. Those are:

- Populism
- Forms of distrust in democracy
- Criticism of civil society (mainly focusing on the works of journalists and NGOs)
- Manipulation of preferences via new technologies
- Rise of illiberal democracy
- Ascent of the threat of digital authoritarianism

²³³ For the sake of clarity, when the term democracy is implemented, and not otherwise specified, it refers to liberal democracy, duly described in the previous pages.

²³⁴ Freedom House offers an impeccable framework for the analysis of democracy. Its methodology not only perfectly mirrors the common understanding that freedom and equality are the quintessential traits of a democracy, but also rests and supports Sartori's claim that *freedom from* represents the basis for whatever type of freedom and of equality a democracy could sponsor. It is precisely protective freedom (and its various ramifications which consequentially appear in the Freedom House Report's results) that enables the existence of all the characteristics needed for minimally define a democracy, or rather for detecting what can and cannot be considered a democracy. Minimalist and maximalist definitions of democracy were already discussed from pages 10 to 16 of this thesis.

The above-described traits, albeit with different degrees of intensity, can be empirically detected in the events that shaped this decade starting from Donald Trump's election to Brexit, including the situation in Europe and the problems vexing even the most stable of democracies as well as the rise of what have been dubbed Illiberal democracies (Hungary and Poland) and the attempts for gaining new undemocratic global leadership by Russia and above all China. As a matter of fact, these last years have been characterized by already seen and brand-new phenomena. The former includes the resurgence of populism, along with a general distrust in democracy, either commanded by the search for alternatives – epistocratic or/and illiberal above all – or pushed by the contempt related to democracy's alleged inefficiency, as well as a trend of increasing negative criticism for the work of NGOs, journalists ²³⁵ and experts. In this instance, the middle ground is held by the rise of illiberal democracies, generally following the narration of the ascend of a strong man who claims to embody popular discontent and gains electoral strength by finding a culprit to blame for all of society's perceived malaise (nowadays the choice for who to blame is usually cast upon immigrants or, more generally and traditionally, minorities). Whereas the brand-new phenomenon is the visible political effect of voters' preferences' manipulation via Internet, a new dystopian evolution of what Sartori called "videocracy", which along with fake news and misinformation have transformed themselves from annoyances to proper election-altering tools, to be deployed in information wars. These tendencies have paved the way for what is perhaps the strongest challenger to liberal democracy in the 21st century, digital authoritarianism. This model, to be fully embodied by China in the upcoming years, is defined by a bundle of online control and censorship that uses surveillance, AI, and machine learning tools to monitor, subjugate, direct, command and decide how the lives of citizens should be lived.

By changing in the recent years its locus from third-wave democracies and modernizing countries, populism has undergone a historic transformation resurging vehemently in the political life of the richest countries on Earth. Historically, populism composes itself of a twofold, antithetic approach: it can either be directed towards including the ostracized people into the

²³⁵ So much so that, in order to call the general attention on this trend, the popular magazine *Time* nominated as their Person of the Year, journalists that risk their lives to fight for freedom against despotic rule: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/times-person-of-the-year-honors-jamal-khashoggi-and-the-guardians-of-the-truth>.

political system or adopted to manipulate peoples' vote in favor of a strong man that will use this electoral legitimacy to limit fundamental rights and create an illiberal democracy.

One of the most successful attempts for explaining the mutation of populism was endeavored by Dani Rodrik. The professor at the Harvard Kennedy School identifies two main cleavages thanks to which it is possible to discern whether populism will lean to the left or to the right of the political spectrum. The first cleavage revolves around the ethnic-cultural-religious motifs whereas the second is mainly economic, characterized by the opposition between wealthy elites vs low income groups with no access to power. If the political debate whirls around the first distinction, then the populist movement will essentially be right-wing; if the struggle focuses on the second theme then it will be left leaning.²³⁶ Examples of the first are AFD in Germany or Salvini in Italy whilst the second can be impersonated by Sanders in the US or Syriza in Greece. Rodrik is able to come to these conclusions after tracing the socio-economic reasons for the re-appearance of populism. The American professor does not “claim that globalization was the only force at play – nor necessarily even the most important one. Changes in technology, rise of winner-take-all markets, erosion of labor-market protections, and decline of norms restricting pay differentials all have played their part. These developments are not entirely independent from globalization, insofar as they both fostered globalization and were reinforced by it. But neither can they be reduced to it. Nevertheless, economic history and economic theory both give us strong reasons to believe that advanced stages of globalization are prone to populist backlash” (Rodrik, p.2). By focusing on the distributive aspects of globalization, he argues that the economic openness along with the removal of past barriers, such as the entrance of China in the WTO,²³⁷ endemically create winners and losers. It is precisely the presence or absence of safety nets for the losers of globalization, generally embodied by a State's welfare programs, that has to be seen as the main cause for the resurface of populism. This distinction is also at the heart of what differentiates²³⁸ American and European populism: the former, given the absence of the aforementioned safety nets, is much more prone to focus on assaulting custom tariffs rather than

²³⁶ To expand on this difference please read p.13 of Dani Rodrik's article “Populism and the Economics of Globalization”, available in pdf here: https://drodrik.scholar.harvard.edu/files/dani-rodrik/files/populism_and_the_economics_of_globalization.pdf

²³⁷ For further information regarding China's entrance in the WTO and its effects, please read the article “The China Shock: Learning from Labor Market Adjustment to Large Changes in Trade.” Written by Autor, Dorn and Hanson, available at: <https://economics.mit.edu/files/12751>.

²³⁸ To inquiry further on the subject please read p. 6 of Rodrik's article.

the latter which, precisely because of widespread welfare programs, is increasingly hostile to migrants.²³⁹

Few topics have been so relevant in last years as immigration, and subsequently identity. Rodrik's explanation on modern populism shed a light at the importance that these two correlated phenomena have in today's world. Yet, identity and its traits have long been studied, among other illustrious experts, also by Zygmunt Bauman. In tracing a compelling parallelism between his own idea of freedom and Sartre's notion of viscosity,²⁴⁰ the Polish author offers a useful framework for comprehending the importance that immigration has in modern politics and in the current populist/far-right backlash. Just like viscosity complicates freedom of movement, the mere presence of foreigners/immigrants impedes, in the minds of society's members, their perceived enjoyment of freedom. For this reason, the societal and political resentment towards immigrants increases when people feel to have less power (control) and diminishes at the augmenting of the perceived sensation of more freedom. The manipulation of the fear of viscosity perfectly explains modern xenophobic accounts, which all rest on the assumption of an untouched, immaculate, safe harbor – generally represented by the nation of belonging – outside of which lays a dangerous world that the immigrants are trying to bring into our home. It is precisely the exacerbated narrative and portrait revolving around this sense of perpetual conflict, reduction of the enjoyment of liberties and the incompatibility of different cultures living together that xenophobic parties around the world use to falsely mystify the perception²⁴¹ of citizen and gain electoral support.

As already mentioned, third defining trait of the global crisis of democracy is the brand-new feature of preferences' manipulation via Internet. In reality, preferences' manipulation is a longstanding tradition in the marketing world that is being more frequently used in politics. Resting on the assumptions that democracy is messy, electoral results are path dependent and

²³⁹ For example, a study conducted by Becker, Fetzer and Novy, regarding Brexit, examined (along with other phenomena that will be discussed in this and the following chapter, i.e. most notably education) the relevant importance that austerity and immigration had on Leave voters. Study available in pdf here: <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1480.pdf>.

²⁴⁰ For the full rendering of the concept please read Jean Paul Sartre's "L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique".

²⁴¹ To expand knowledge on the topic please examine Ipsos researches and studies on the "Perils of Perception", available at: <https://perils.ipsos.com/> or complementarily read Bobby Duffy's book "The perils of perception: Why we're wrong about nearly everything".

that voting requires knowledge in numerous fields that not all voters possess, the simplest way for altering political preferences is through Agenda setting. This method involves giving priority and salience in parties' programs to those topics that are regarded as more appealing in terms of electoral/seat gaining perspective. All this held true, and worrisome, before the unveiling of the Cambridge Analytica scandal.²⁴² Since then, the reality became even nastier. The scandal opened a Pandora box whose implications cannot be reversed. What Cambridge Analytica essentially did, was blending microtargeting with the most advanced data extraction and profiling techniques, so to create a new algorithmic method for successfully find and define the psychological profile of each and every voter in a specific region of the world and mold it at will during periods leading to one of the most fundamental features of democracy and its processes, voting. Political propaganda may have always existed, but it never had such depth, scope and pervasiveness. Without action, manipulation will find no obstacle and only improve, becoming deeper, more far-reaching, scarier and possibly dooming democracy. Would you really want to live in a world where voters' psychology can be subtly targeted so to convince them to vote for a policy with the same easiness that marketing influences them to shop for a brand rather than another?

Information wars are the cutting-edge technological tip of the iceberg in the fight for the new world order. In the indifference of the US and the problems threatening to make the EU collapse, the world stage is set and the global leadership vacuum is being fulfilled by the remaining two global superpowers: China and Russia. While Putin's aim is chiefly that of reinforcing his power and weakening democracy, Xi Jinping strives for global domination, supplanting democratic values for authoritarian practices, freedom of speech for propaganda, opposition and minority protection with censorship and manipulation, freedom with control. And the field where the Chinese President will bet all his chips for winning global hegemony is digital authoritarianism. Obviously, the replacement of democracy entails, as first step, the mass adoption of its technological counterpart's practices; and China, with its Belt and Road Initiative,²⁴³ private

²⁴² Not being the objective of this thesis, I would not linger on how the scandal was discovered nor on who are its protagonists. For acquiring knowledge on the above-mentioned happenings, please see:

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>.

²⁴³ For a more detailed explanation, please visit: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>.

companies and AI technology, ²⁴⁴ is moving exactly in that direction: it “was once again the worst abuser of internet freedom in 2018, and over the past year, its government hosted media officials from dozens of countries for two- and three-week seminars on its sprawling system of censorship and surveillance. Moreover, its companies have supplied telecommunications hardware, advanced facial-recognition technology, and data-analytics tools to a variety of governments with poor human rights records, which could benefit Chinese intelligence services as well as repressive local authorities. Digital authoritarianism is being promoted as a way for governments to control their citizens through technology, inverting the concept of the internet as an engine of human liberation” (Shahbaz, p.1).

The empirical and theoretical framework thus far described, displayed to the reader how populism, distrust in democracy, criticism for the work of experts, journalists and NGOs, rise of illiberal democracies, voters’ preferences manipulation via internet and the birth of digital authoritarianism not only are global-reaching phenomena that are weakening democracy, they relentlessly aim to replace it. However, no matter how unpromising or desperate the global situation appears, hope should be far from being lost as there is plenty of room and possibility to fight back and defend democracy. Starting from understanding what originated these causes.

Chapter three. Origins and S

3.1 Origins of the current crisis of democracy

Prior to even attempting to answer such a hard question as “what originated these causes?” it is essential to pinpoint two facts: that complex problems do not have immediate or easy explanation, hence simplistic solutions and arguments must be refused and secondly that delineating, understanding and trying to explain these quandaries might be a big leap forward but it is by no means sufficient or a panacea thanks to which all global problems are solved. Concrete action is still, and much, needed. The various causes and explanations that are here portrayed do not merely subject themselves to causal relationship. That will be way too naïve and also false. Rather, they mix and merge, changing and developing each in particular ways,

²⁴⁴ For reading over China’s nightmarish Social Credit System, visit: <https://www.merics.org/en/blog/chinas-social-credit-systems-are-highly-popular-now> ; whereas for acquiring knowledge about the presence of ghastly evidences of Uighurs’ internment camps rendered possible by the use of AI technology, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/world/asia/china-muslim-camps-xinjiang-ughurs.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article®ion=Footer>.

giving rise to the two macro-spheres that I labelled, in general manner, causes for the modern crisis of democracy and origins of these trends.

The analysis on the origins of the causes of the current crisis of democracy can be reconducted to Sartori's clairvoyance and, in particular, to his prophetic book *Homo Videns* where the Italian professor conceptualizes his idea that the *tele-viewing* reduces humans' ability of critical thinking converging his attention on the change from homo sapiens' reasoning ability to homo videns' mere perception caused by the encompassing and passive use of TV or other "visual" media that precludes children and thus adults from forming an abstractive attitude, immensely endangering democracy and its processes.

The importance of Sartori's farsightedness should not be reduced to his ability of correctly predicting, more than twenty years ago, phenomena that nowadays compose our ordinary life's experiences; rather it should be recognized and cherished for having, already at the time, spearheaded such theoretical trail, proposing arguments and possible solutions that today's authors and experts recognize as fundamental explanatory factors for understanding and studying the (causes and) origins of the current crisis of democracy. Indeed, the Italian professor's arguments on the attack on rationality as well as his notion of againstism unequivocally resemble the idea behind the concept of the death of expertise: "the issue is not indifference to established knowledge; it's the emergence of a positive hostility to such knowledge (...) it represents the aggressive replacement of expert views or established knowledge with the insistence that every opinion on any matter is as good as every other" (Nichols, p.20). Moreover, the Italian professor's warning on the dangers of constructing a democracy without demos seems to have materialized as Algorithmic Trust – the increasing dependence on, and mindless acceptance of, technological developments – implicitly suggests the evolution from *Homo Videns* to *Homo Fidens*. Lastly, the explanation offered by Greenfield²⁴⁵ on how our society came to assume its

²⁴⁵ In his extraordinary book, *Radical Technologies*, Adam Greenfield portrays three peculiar circumstances which help explaining the rise of this new reality. As a matter of fact, first and foremost, in today's world, "the most basic task we undertake in life involve a new sector of actors, technical standard bodies, supranational and non, as well as hackers into the innermost precincts of our lives (...) secondly all the convention and arrangements that constitute our daily life move at a much higher speed, that of digital innovation" (Greenfield, p.13) and lastly the author is puzzled by the similarity of the objects people use to carry out the most diverse endeavors; after all we employ the same device for video-calling, organizing a fundraiser, checking bank accounts, summoning strangers to guide us to the airport or ordering food, all at distance of a touch on a screen we carry in our pockets. Hence, in the world we have constructed "those who enjoy access to networked services are more capable than those without" (Greenfield, p.24). As the new reality is completely constructed around technology's omni-comprehensiveness, technology itself becomes a necessity. Yet, under present conditions, it is impossible to use and maximize all the benefits that such

current form, indubitably mirrors Sartori's considerations on the various societal circumstances that, if left unresolved, would have translated into democracy-endangering practices.

It is hopefully easier by now to see how Sartori's insights helps explaining the origins of the current crisis of democracy. The tele-viewing then, algorithmic trust now, have reduced humans' ability of critical and independent thinking. This allowed the death of expertise to flourish, a tendency simultaneously supported and reinforced, also via internet, by a culture that sustains that somebody's opinion is just as worthy as a scientific fact as well as by people's passive willingness to accept the reality around them, increasingly molded around the desires of few tech companies. Surrounded by this numbing to-be technodystopian environment and lacking critical and independent thinking skills people/citizens/voters became more easily manipulated, even by charismatic strong men who find absurdly simplistic answer (i.e. blame the immigrant) to gigantic problems (recession, climate change, inequalities, migration, disappearance of privacy, unsustainable lifestyle etc. etc.). Just like a dog that bites its own tail, in an endless circle of this self-(r)enforcing atmosphere, the modern crisis of democracy is served.

3.2 Ways for fighting back

Despite the apparent gloominess of the situation, academics and laypeople alike continuously keep seeking alternative ways for fighting back. As the last chapter demonstrates, with appropriate attention and modifications, new technologies and awareness can be employed to reverse and cure the trends and phenomena that are deeply damaging democracy. Such proposals would be nowhere near to offering compelling and complete solutions for the modern maladies of democracy. Rather, their aim is to tentatively point out the topics upon which research should focus in the upcoming years, so to hopefully generate findings and propositions that will constitute the basis of the next trial-and-error process for the necessary transformation of democracy. These suggestions revolve around the importance of exploring new technological possibilities for guaranteeing the continual defense of democracy, in particular the adoption of the blockchain to help democracy becoming a selective polyarchy while also investigating the benefits and limits of 3D printing technology – along with a renewed, shared importance on

technologies bring, or at least as they intended to bring, without yielding something in return: our personal data. Even if the potential consequences of this are beyond dystopian, the great majority of people keeps on allowing and trusting these technologies in their daily lives, keeping on “*straightforwardly trading our privacy for convenience*” (Greenfield, p. 26).

education – in order to generate the conditions needed for pushing democracy’s transformation in a polyarchy of merit. Furthermore, future academic efforts should focus on ways to fight off the illiberal and digital authoritarian menaces and address possible solutions (such as cognitive empathy and the possibility of rethinking materialism) to be deployed for curing the crisis of ethics that Sartori deeply believed was plaguing modern democracies.

The empirical and theoretical analysis of the previous sections incontrovertibly suggests that we are all asked once more to consciously take part in the gargantuan trial-and-error process that constitutes democracy. This is so because, as its very same nature recommends and analysis showed, if democracy is to endure, it has to evolve once again. This truth enshrines the importance and the mission invested in the *TODRs* and in the general theory of democracy: analyze and crystallize the elements as well as the feasible circumstances needed for democracy to perform at its best, and to maintain, save and protect them while contemporarily allowing the necessary spaces for transforming the rest, so to give democracy the best possibilities not only to survive, but to thrive.