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The 2016 U.S. Election

Longtime readers will be aware that this is the first time the *Journal of Democracy* has ever devoted a set of articles to the situation of democracy in the United States. Our traditional focus has been on the problems and prospects of democracy in developing and postcommunist countries. In the introduction to the group of essays in our October 2016 issue entitled "The Specter Haunting Europe," we explained why we felt we had to redirect some of our attention to the growing vulnerability of democracy in the West, and promised that we would not refrain from examining the United States as well. This is an especially delicate task for us because our parent organization, the National Endowment for Democracy, is a resolutely bipartisan institution that seeks to steer clear of the controversies of U.S. domestic politics. We hope we have succeeded in avoiding the pitfalls of partisanship; but in an era when the trends that are weakening liberal democracy are increasingly global, an editorial version of "American isolationism" no longer seemed a defensible policy.

The 2016 election was one of the more remarkable events in the history of U.S. politics. It brought to the presidency, in Donald J. Trump, a true "outsider," a figure who had never before held public office and whose campaign was explicitly directed against the political establishment. As we go to press, there remains great uncertainty about how the eight-week-old Trump administration will evolve in the months and years to come. The articles that follow seek not to speculate about what that future might be, but rather to examine some of the developments that led to President Trump's election.

The opening essay, by William A. Galston, describes four phases that politics on both sides of the Atlantic have gone through since the Second World War, culminating today in "The Populist Moment." Next, John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck examine the voting patterns that gave Trump an Electoral College victory despite a loss in the popular vote. There follows an analysis by James W. Ceaser of the nomination process that enabled Trump's ascension, as well as an authoritative appraisal by Charles Stewart III of the widely expressed concerns about the integrity of the U.S. electoral process. The section concludes with an essay by Nathaniel Persily exploring the impact of online communications on the U.S. election and on democracy more broadly.

We believe these essays will help illuminate for non-American readers some of the peculiarities of the U.S. political system, as well as the many common features it shares with other democracies. And we think even American readers may find that they have learned something new from these analyses.

—The Editors

THE POPULIST MOMENT

William A. Galston

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"American exceptionalism" is a sturdy if contested trope of cultural analysis. But large shifts in U.S. politics since the end of World War II have been anything but exceptional. Rather, the United States has moved in tandem with other Western democracies. In the three decades after 1945, democracies on both sides of the Atlantic built systems of social provision and protection, which Europeans call social democracy and Americans the welfare state. A broad consensus across party lines supported this policy. In the United States, Republican president Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–61) ended his party's effort to roll back the New Deal, while later Republican president Richard M. Nixon (1969–74) expanded the federal government's activities in virtually every domain of social policy. As inflation surged, Nixon outraged devotees of the free market by imposing wage and price controls.

Starting in the mid-1970s, this political phase slowed in the face of rising concerns about the impact of an interventionist government on public finances and private-sector growth. *The Crisis of Democracy*, a much-discussed 1975 report by the nonpartisan expert conference known as the Trilateral Commission, voiced fears of democratic "overload"—public demands exceeding the capacity of government to finance and administer social programs.

The intellectual and political forces that coalesced around these doubts helped to bring about the second political convergence of the postwar era: conservative retrenchment, led by Republican president Ronald Reagan (1981–89) in the United States and Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher (1979–90) in the United Kingdom. Re-

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trenchment was not reversal. Reagan did not seriously challenge core social-insurance programs such as Social Security and Medicare, and Thatcher left her country's iconic National Health Service largely untouched. But these leaders did raise doubts about government's competence and sought to reinvigorate market mechanisms as models for the public as well as the private sector. The Conservatives won four consecutive national elections, and the reoriented Republican Party held the U.S. presidency for three terms.

Across the Channel, Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl became the chancellor of West Germany in 1982, ending thirteen years of dominance by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and proceeded to cut public expenditures, reduce regulations, and privatize public holdings. Even France's president François Mitterrand, a Socialist Party leader who came to power in 1981 on a bold program of expanding social protections and economic intervention by the state, was forced to execute a "U-turn" toward austerity after less than two years in office. During his presidency, moreover, he was forced twice to cohabit with conservative prime ministers whose parties prevailed in parliamentary elections.

Confronted with resurgent conservativism, reform-minded leaders worked to renovate left-leaning parties. The 1990s witnessed the next convergence of Western politics, the emergence of the Third Way movement. Bill Clinton led the charge, becoming U.S. president in 1993 as leader of the New Democrat movement within the Democratic Party. Inspired by Clinton's example, a New Labour team clustered around Tony Blair and Gordon Brown revived the British Labour Party, replacing its hard-edged socialism and pacifism with an agenda of internationalism and market-friendly economic and social policies. The remodeled Labour Party swept the Conservatives from power in 1997 and went on to win national elections in 2001 and again in 2005. In 1998, SPD leader Gerhard Schröder became Germany's chancellor and worked successfully to modernize social-welfare policies, reduce taxes, and reform his country's labor market, helping to lay the foundation for Germany's economic revival after years of slow growth that had started in the mid-1990s.

For some years, international Third Way forces had the wind in their sails. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the 1991 implosion of the Soviet Union signaled not only the end of the twentieth century's last remaining ideological challenge to liberal democracy but also the more rapid integration of nations into the global economy. At first, Western countries were well-positioned to take advantage of this emerging reality, and an economic program known as the "Washington consensus"—fiscal discipline, growth-favoring public investment, liberalization of trade and investment, and deregulation, among other measures—became canonical for developed as well as developing countries.

The Great Recession touched off by the 2008 financial crisis ended this era. Across the West, governments struggled to stave off financial

collapse, halt the downward slide of output and employment, and restart the engine of economic growth. Advocates of austerity battled with supporters of stimulus. Even when growth resumed—earlier in the United States than elsewhere, earlier in Northern than in Southern Europe—it was too slow and uneven to meet public expectations.

A Troubling Convergence

This brings us to the present, to what might be termed the fourth—and most troubling—convergence of postwar democratic politics. From Mitteleuropa to the Midlands of England to the Midwestern United States, a revolt against the arrangements that have shaped the democratic West since the collapse of the Soviet bloc is gathering strength. A populist surge threatens the assumptions and achievements of politicians and policy makers from mainstream parties, whether center-left or center-right. Economic policies based on free trade and flexible labor markets are under attack. Cultural norms celebrating diversity and promoting immigration are losing traction. International agreements and institutions are losing ground to nationalist forces.

Although the Great Recession helped to set the stage for these discontents, surges of migration across Europe since 2015 in response to civil war in Syria and drought in Africa exacerbated them. The failure of past reforms to stem the tide of illegal immigration over the country's southern border had similar consequences for the United States.

But larger forces are at work. Technological change has triggered new modes of production and a shift toward more knowledge-intensive economies, weakening industrial-era mass manufacturing throughout the West. These forces have also catalyzed the rise of an education-based meritocracy that dominates government, the bureaucracy, the media, and major metropolitan areas. The emergence of this new elite has left less-educated citizens in outlying towns and rural areas feeling denigrated and devalued, sowing the seeds of populist resentment.

These trends are deepening social divisions: between citizens with more and those with less schooling; between those who benefit from technological change and those who feel threatened by it; between the cities and the countryside; between long-established social groups and newer entrants into the civic community; between those who celebrate dynamism and diversity and those who prize stability and homogeneity. Elites' preference for open societies is running up against growing public demands for new forms of economic, cultural, and political closure.

The challenge goes even deeper. Some parties on both the left and right are calling into question the norms and institutions of liberal democracy itself, especially freedom of the press, the rule of law, and the rights of minorities. Throughout the West, there is rising impatience with governments that seem incapable of acting forcefully in the face of mounting

problems. Growing insecurity has triggered a demand for strong leaders, and forms of authoritarianism that many believed had been left behind for good a quarter-century ago are threatening to resurface.

These developments illuminate the historical case for liberal democracy, as well as the sources of its current weakness. A liberal-democratic bargain has defined the seven decades since the end of World War II. From the start, the terms of this bargain have been clear: Popularly elected governments would deliver economic growth; rising living standards; social protections for health, employment, and retirement; domestic tranquility; and the abatement of international threats. In return, the people would defer to political and policy elites on key decisions shaping economic policy, national-security strategies, and systems of governance. For more than half a century after 1945, the bargain held, and public support for Western leaders and for liberal democracy remained high. More recently, however, governments have failed to deliver on their end of the bargain, and public confidence has waned.

For some, liberal democracy may be an intrinsic good, an end in itself. For most, however, it is a means to prosperous, peaceful, and secure lives. It is a tree known by its fruit. If it ceases to produce the expected crop, all bets are off.

The Case of the United States

Donald Trump's remarkable rise to the presidency of the United States is broadly congruent with other surprises ranging from the electoral victory of Poland's populist Law and Justice party in 2015 to the 2016 Brexit vote in the United Kingdom. Still, each country is different. Americans' response to their country's economic, social, and political dysfunction has set the stage for the current moment of populism with distinctively American characteristics.

Economy: The poor performance of the economy, at least as average Americans have experienced it, has framed the politics of the past generation. After seven consecutive years of growth, median household income peaked in 1999. Since then there has been no growth whatsoever. In November 2016, more than seven years after the end of the Great Recession, median household income stood just shy of its record high, reached sixteen years earlier. There is no postwar parallel for the stagnation that average Americans have experienced during the past generation. While household income also declined from 1989 to 1993, it had regained all the lost ground by 1996 and continued to surge for years afterward. In the sixteen years from 1983 to 1999, median household income rose by nearly US$9,000 in 2015 dollars—a gain of more than 18 percent.

Making matters worse, the economic pain has been unevenly divided

during this period. By virtually every measure, metropolitan areas have done much better than small towns and rural areas. For example, aggregate employment in metropolitan America is more than 5 percent above its peak prior to the Great Recession, while outside major metropolitan areas employment remains substantially lower than it was at the end of 2007. The sharp decline in U.S. manufacturing employment since the beginning of the century has been concentrated in the country's heartland, while the postindustrial coastal economies have incurred much less damage.

To a greater extent than in other Western democracies, trade has entered into Americans' narrative of economic decline. They blame the North American Free Trade Agreement, crafted in the early 1990s, for the development of continental supply chains that have shifted manufacturing to Mexico. China's entrance into the World Trade Organization accelerated the growth of its exports to the United States; the U.S. regions most exposed to competition from Chinese imports have suffered the largest losses of manufacturing jobs and wages. In this context, candidate Donald Trump's denunciation of the entire postwar trade regime during the 2016 presidential contest found a receptive audience.

The economic performance of the past generation has underlined longer-term changes in opportunity and mobility in the United States. Children born into middle-income households in 1940 had a better than nine-in-ten chance of enjoying a higher real income by the time they reached the age of 30 than their parents had at the same age. By contrast, fewer than half the children born in the 1980s outpaced their parents in this manner.[1] Little changes if incomes are measured and compared at age 40 rather than 30.

This loss of economic ground across generations has profoundly affected public attitudes. At the heart of the "American Dream" is the idea of progress—parents desire and expect that their children will do better than they have. Yet a 2015 Pew Research Center survey found that only 32 percent of Americans expressed such optimism about the next generation, compared to 60 percent who thought that it would be worse off than the current generation.

In nearly every European country, the public outlook was even bleaker. In mid-2015, only 14 and 15 percent of French and Italian respondents, respectively, were confident that the next generation would enjoy a better future.[2] But optimism has never been as central to European societies as it has been to Americans, who have experienced a profound shock to their long-cherished expectations about how the world works.

Society: Ever since the countercultural eruption that began in the late 1960s, American society has been divided about issues such as abortion, illegal drugs, the role of religion in politics, and (more recently) the legal handling of questions tied to gender identity and sexual orientation. Frequently these divisions have figured centrally in national political contests.

Although these divisions have by no means disappeared, their impact on the political debate of the past two years has diminished, overlaid by rising concerns about the impact of immigration on the U.S. population. These concerns fall into three distinct categories, starting with the economic. Many Americans with lower levels of education and skills believe that poorly educated immigrants, especially from Mexico and Central America, are competing for increasingly scarce low-skilled jobs and are driving down working-class wages. Higher-than-average unemployment rates among lower-skilled workers and a decades-long fall in their incomes have helped this narrative to gain traction.

Next come demographic concerns, which a brief history can help to frame. The surge of immigration at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century raised the share of first-generation immigrants to 15 percent of the U.S. population, triggering a nativist reaction that culminated in the restrictive immigration legislation of 1924. Over the next four decades, the first-generation share declined by two-thirds, bottoming out at 4.7 percent in the early 1960s. During this period, the political salience of previously conflictual ethnic differences faded, and U.S. society—or at least its white majority—became notably more solidaristic.

In 1965, the landmark Immigration and Nationality Act (also known as the Hart-Celler bill) reopened the gates and allowed the entry of large numbers of immigrants from long-excluded areas such as East Asia and the Indian subcontinent, as well as from the Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas. The consequence over the past five decades has been a demographic revolution, as millions of nonwhite, non-European immigrants have entered U.S. society. Latinos and Asians are the fastest-growing groups, while the white share of the population is shrinking steadily. Three states (including California and Texas, the two largest) already have majority-minority populations, and many more will enter this status in coming decades. By 2044, if current trends continue, the United States as a whole will no longer have a white majority.

This ongoing shift has triggered vague but palpable anxiety among many native-born Americans, especially those outside the diverse metropolitan areas that have served throughout U.S. history as immigration gateways. These Americans have a sense that they are the rightful owners of the country and that new entrants threaten their control. Although they express their anxiety most often as anger against the roughly 11 million immigrants who are present in the United States illegally, they also believe that current levels of legal immigration are too high and should be reduced.

And finally, there are security concerns. During the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump asserted that immigrants from Mexico increase the U.S. crime rate and that immigrants from Muslim-majority countries constitute a terrorist threat. Although Trump campaign pro-

posals such as mass deportation and a total ban on Muslim immigration never received majority support, a substantial minority of Americans regarded them as justified in light of exigent circumstances. Fears of crime and terrorism created a pervasive sense of insecurity. In surveys taken in June 2016, 86 percent of Americans expressed concern about so-called lone-wolf terrorist attacks, acts of terror committed by a single individual not actively coordinating with a larger organization, and only 31 percent had confidence in the government's ability to prevent them. In this context, it is easy to understand why the desired balance between security and civil liberty is shifting. A 54 percent majority of Americans worried that the government would not go far enough in monitoring activities and communities of "potential terrorists," compared to 39 percent who feared that the government would go too far. Even more Americans—72 percent—favored increased surveillance of people suspected of possible links to terrorism, even if this would intrude on privacy rights.[3]

Politics: The dysfunction of the U.S. political system is too well known to require more than brief remarks. Suffice it to say that over the past quarter-century the two major political parties have become more polarized—that is, both more internally homogenous and more ideologically distant from each other. As this process has advanced, the adherents of the respective parties have tended to cluster geographically, a phenomenon that journalist Bill Bishop has dubbed the "Big Sort."[4] Combined with the decline of cross-partisan broadcasting and the rise of politically inflected media, this has produced the social equivalent of echo chambers in which partisans are increasingly likely to hear only opinions with which they already agree and to encounter only evidence consistent with these opinions.

Polarization is affective as well as cognitive. Today, for the first time in the history of modern survey research, majorities of partisans have not only an unfavorable but a deeply unfavorable view of the other party. In a 2016 survey, 49 percent of Republicans reported that the Democratic Party makes them afraid, and 46 percent said that it makes them angry. Sentiment among Democrats was even more intense: 55 percent said that the Republican Party makes them afraid, and 47 percent that it makes them angry. Among Republicans, 47 percent see Democrats as more "immoral" than other Americans; 70 percent of Democrats see Republicans as more "close-minded." The proportion of Republicans who view Democratic policies not only as misguided but as a "threat" is at 45 percent, up from 37 percent in 2014, while 41 percent of Democrats see Republican policies as threatening, up from 31 percent. Among the most engaged and active partisans, these figures are even higher, across the board.[5]

In a parliamentary system, these polarities, though troubling, would

at least be manageable. In the U.S. constitutional system, which allows for divided control of different national institutions, they are much more problematic. Partisan polarization makes compromise hard to achieve, so the typical consequence of divided government is gridlock. In contemporary circumstances, the national government can act effectively only when all its powers are in the hands of a single party. But then the dominant party is likely to go it alone and implement its preferred program, whatever the minority thinks. Single-party governments are tempted to overreach, and few resist this temptation. Winston Churchill's injunction—"In victory, magnanimity"—is ignored. So the cycle in which an increasingly dissatisfied public rotates between gridlock under divided governments and partisan overreach under unified governments can continue indefinitely.

Although unified government may produce unbalanced and unsustainable public policy, gridlock is a greater threat to the democratic order. In the name of effectiveness, presidents are tempted to extend their powers beyond constitutional bounds. Worse, an impatient populace becomes more willing to set aside the restraints inherent in the rule of law. A June 2016 survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute found 49 percent of voters agreeing that: "Because things have gotten so far off track in this country, we need a leader who is willing to break some rules if that's what it takes to set things right." This figure included 57 percent of Republicans, 60 percent of white working-class voters, 72 percent of Trump supporters, and—tellingly—59 percent of those who felt that the American way of life needs protection from foreign influences.[6]

The Populist Response

Many ordinary citizens hold American elites (often of both political parties) responsible for what they feel has gone wrong during the past generation, and there is some basis for their view. Highly educated Americans have benefited from the transition to a knowledge-based economy as well as from freer flows of goods, people, and capital. Meritocratic norms and practices have propelled this group to the highest reaches of the economy, media, and politics. Leaders have made at most halfhearted efforts to insulate average Americans from the negative consequences of these trends or to compensate them for their losses. Worse, many leaders have appeared oblivious to the travails of their fellow citizens, and this blindness is often tinged with a kind a meritocratic snobbery toward those with less education and status. The phrase "flyover country" perfectly captures the outlook of bicoastal elites, and in 2016 the citizens of the regions that these elites see from an altitude of 35,000 feet took their revenge.

These sentiments are nothing new, however. As historians are quick

to point out, anti-elitism is part of America's cultural DNA. Andrew Jackson (1829–37) was the first but hardly the last U.S. president to go to war against the establishment. In times of stress, blaming those with power—cultural as well as economic and political—for the difficulties of average Americans is a temptation that ambitious politicians have found hard to resist. Beyond anti-elitism, conspiracy-minded populists such as the 1930s radio personality Father Charles Coughlin have often raised the ante by attributing to disfavored groups—Jews and others—a hidden power to shape events.

Populism threatens not simple majoritarianism or even popular sovereignty, but rather the ensemble of principles and institutions that comprise the liberal dimension of contemporary democracy.

Experts enjoyed a rare period of deference between the end of World War II and the mid-1960s. Since then, policy failures at home and abroad have weakened their claims. "The best and the brightest" led the United States into the Vietnam War. Financial experts engineered new forms of investment that helped to bring on the Great Recession. The intelligence community's consensus that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction smoothed the path to war in Iraq in 2003.

The public sentiments underlying the recent populist explosion have been building for many years. With a few temporary interruptions during the economic boom of the late 1990s and again in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, public trust and confidence in national governmental institutions has hovered between 20 and 30 percent since the mid-1970s. At the same time, Americans' views of the motives of elected officials have darkened. Half a century ago, nearly two-thirds of Americans believed that the federal government was run for the benefit of all the people. By the end of 2015, only 19 percent of Americans shared this view. More recently, other major institutions such as banks, large corporations, and the news media have forfeited the public's trust. Today, surveys find that the public regards only a handful of institutions—the U.S. military, colleges and universities, churches and religious organizations, technology companies, and small businesses—as making a positive contribution to the country.

For decades, survey researchers have asked questions intended to monitor Americans' overall assessment of their country's trajectory. One version asks respondents to assess whether the nation is generally headed in the right direction, or is instead on the wrong track; another version asks whether respondents are satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that things are going in the United States. Despite differences of methodology, the results are remarkably consistent. In the final five years of the twentieth century, solid majorities of Americans felt posi-

tive about the direction of the country. Yet since 2004, despite multiple changes in party control of Congress and the White House, majorities have been consistently negative. As of this writing, Donald Trump's election has not disrupted these trends. Much will depend on his ability to make good on the major promises he made to the working-class voters whose support was crucial to his victory.

Implications for Liberal Democracy

The rise of populist movements in Europe has triggered fears that not only long-established policies, but democratic governance itself may be at risk. Populist champions retort that they cannot represent a threat to democracy because they come to power through democratic elections and will respect the judgment of the people in future electoral contests. However this may be, the appeal to elections in isolation obscures the broader issue at stake. Populism threatens not simple majoritarianism or even popular sovereignty, but rather the ensemble of principles and institutions that comprise the liberal dimension of contemporary democracy. The most urgent threat to liberal democracy is not autocracy; it is what has come to be known as "illiberal democracy," which could eventually give way to autocracy.

The phrase "liberal democracy" combines two distinct ideas. The noun stands for a particular structure of governance in which decisions are made, directly or indirectly, by the people, as well as a conception of politics in which all legitimate power flows from the people. The adjective, by contrast, denotes a particular understanding of politics in which the domain of legitimate public power—even when this power expresses the will of democratic majorities—is inherently limited.

Few leaders and movements in the West dare to challenge the idea of democracy itself. Not so for liberalism, which has come under mounting attack during the past decade. Many have come to see liberal institutions such as a free press, constitutional courts, and individual rights not as protections against public power, but rather as obstacles to effective governance. To solve major problems, goes the argument, government must have the capacity to act effectively, unhindered by liberal restraints.

The critique extends beyond institutions to ideals. Liberalism represents a general claim that transcends national borders, canonically expressed in the antitotalitarian 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although "liberal nationalism" is not an oxymoron, it is a problem—in part because nations resist the limitations on their sovereignty that all universal principles entail, but also because most nations give pride of place to particular groups who share an ancestry, native tongue, religion, or ethnicity. Liberalism, however, tilts against all forms of particularism in the name of equality: Any form of ethnocentrism that de-

nies equality must be rejected. The revolt against liberalism, then, rests on these three complaints: Liberal institutions undermine effective governance, while liberal principles weaken national sovereignty and force citizens to give equal status to people who are unlike them.

The demand for decisive action typically generates impatience with formalities. In a 2014 speech endorsing "illiberal democracy," Hungary's Viktor Orbán, prime minister since 2010, mocked the country's previous liberal-democratic government for its inability to promote the national interest. Instead, he cited places such as Russia, Singapore, and Turkey as examples of effective governance. This, he said, is why his government was abandoning "the dogmas and ideologies that have been adopted by the West" in favor of a new form of political organization "capable of making our community competitive in the great global race."

This approach is gaining ground. As early as 2011, Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of Poland's then-minority Law and Justice party, said that he would "bring Budapest to Warsaw." Today, a majority government led by his party is doing what he promised, starting with an attack on Poland's constitutional court.

There are signs of impatience with liberal-democratic restraints even in the United States, where constitutionalism and the rule of law are more deeply entrenched than in the newer European democracies. In two pathbreaking essays in these pages, Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk have presented survey research suggesting that Americans' support for liberal democracy is falling (especially among the younger generation) while openness toward alternatives to liberal democracy is rising.[7]

The connection between public attitudes and policy outcomes is loose, however. In times of intense concern about national or personal security, Americans often have expressed doubts about the scope of individual liberty. In the aftermath of 9/11, for example, a 49 percent plurality of Americans agreed that the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment went "too far." Yet these reservations have never been translated into permanent reductions in personal liberty. American institutions have served as bulwarks against inconstant public attitudes, and when institutions fail—as the Supreme Court did when it ratified the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II—elites and eventually the public have usually come to recognize the mistake. By 2006, the share of Americans who believed that First Amendment liberties were too expansive had fallen by almost two-thirds to only 18 percent.[8]

If modern survey research had been conducted during the 1930s, with the U.S. economy ravaged by the Great Depression, it would probably have shown support for liberal democracy at a low ebb and substantial levels of sympathy for both communism and fascism. In his First Inaugural Address, delivered in March 1933 as the Depression raged, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933–45) made it clear that the national economic emergency might require a "temporary departure from [the]

normal balance of . . . executive and legislative authority" and that, if halfway measures proved insufficient, he would not hesitate to ask Congress for "broad executive power" to wage war against the emergency "as if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe." He did not say what he would do if Congress refused to go along. Fortunately, new policies and institutions crafted within the framework of liberal democracy, after surmounting constitutional objections, proved equal to the task. No doubt FDR's assessment of the American people's underlying devotion to the constitutional order, whatever their temporary doubts, strengthened his own commitment.

The question is whether U.S. institutions and norms will prove strong enough to outlast, and if necessary resist, today's doubts about liberal democracy. A moment of testing will come when, as always happens, the judiciary hands down a ruling that prevents the president from doing what he wants, or orders him to do something he does not want. When the Supreme Court told President Harry S. Truman (1945–53) that he could not seize the steel mills during a 1952 labor dispute, he backed down. When the Court in 1974 told President Nixon to hand over audiotapes from the Oval Office in connection with the Watergate scandal, he complied.

Tensions between the executive and judicial branches often escalate when steps taken to enhance national security restrict individual liberty. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the administration of President George W. Bush (2001–2009) dealt with detained terrorist suspects in ways that the Supreme Court determined to be violations of constitutional rights. The administration accepted these judgments. Democracy in the United States would enter new and dangerous territory if a president refused do so.

Another moment of testing for liberal democracy would come if an administration infringed on freedom of the press. Since the Supreme Court in 1971 permitted the publication of the Pentagon Papers, a U.S. Defense Department study that contained damaging information about U.S. conduct of the Vietnam War, it has been taken for granted that the executive branch cannot invoke claims of national security in order to prevent the media from publishing classified information. Still, an administration could threaten other means—such as tax audits and regulatory crackdowns—to pursue the same end. Relations between presidents and the press almost always turn adversarial, and an attack on the press led by the president could do real and perhaps lasting damage to U.S. democracy.

Most Americans would likely have a hard time believing that their democracy is at risk of what Foa and Mounk call "deconsolidation," and they have centuries of history on their side. The constitutional order has survived the bitter battle in its early decades between the Federalists and the Jeffersonians, the Civil War, the Great Depression, the assassinations and cultural upheavals of the 1960s, and the security panic that

swept the country after the 9/11 attacks. During the two world wars of the twentieth century, both of which led to national mobilizations in the United States, liberal restraints on government were weakened, but only temporarily. Freedom of the press survived the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, the Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917–18, and the clashes of the Nixon era. The ethos of individual liberty has always been, and will continue to be, a powerful countervailing force. What is more, the greatest challenges to constitutional democracy have always come during major wars or national emergencies, and current circumstances, however worrisome, do not rise to this level.

Events at home and abroad have delivered a salutary warning against progressivist complacency. History does not have an end, nor does it necessarily arc toward justice. Liberal democracy is not self-sustaining. It is a human achievement, not a historical inevitability. Like every human creation, it can be weakened from within, when those who support it fail to rally to its cause.

That an event has never happened is no guarantee that it will not happen. Eternal vigilance is indeed the price of liberty, and liberal democracy will endure as long as citizens believe that it is worth fighting for. Despite some troubling signs, most Americans still think that it is.

NOTES

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