



Democracy Lighthouse Digest

Edited by Leo Shanahan

INTRODUCING

The Democracy Lighthouse Digest

Launched in May 2024, the Democracy Lighthouse appeared during a period of mounting anxiety and widespread political unrest about democracy's future. Funded and supported by the Toda Peace Institute, the Democracy Lighthouse has since then aimed to be an independent beacon and distributor of information on the global subversion and renewal of democracy.

The threats confronting democracies are evidently becoming more dangerous and intractable. Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, rearmament in Europe, terrible wars in Sudan, Myanmar and Palestine, big power rivalries, the threats posed to democracy by the Trump administration in the United States, the repression of public protests against the abuse of power in countries such as Argentina and Serbia, and weakened judiciaries in Israel, Hungary, Mexico, and Türkiye are just some of the many challenges facing democracies everywhere. In this fast-changing and turbulent context, the Democracy Lighthouse has expanded its remit beyond its founding focus on platforming the hundreds of organisations and networks engaged in advocating for democracy. Our platform has added a range of new features, including interviews featuring the work of activists and scholars, latest book reviews, and publications by our Global Challenges to Democracy group. As part of this expansion, we have launched the Democracy Lighthouse Digest, a newsletter that provides monthly updates on our group's work.

In this edition of the Democracy Lighthouse Digest, Debasish Roy Chowdhury examines the emergence of authoritarian neoliberalism in India, and Jordan Ryan assesses the democratic degeneration in the United States a year into the second Trump administration. This issue also includes the latest book from Douglas Murray on "Democracy and Death Cults." It concludes with a commentary from Professor Wolfgang Merkel on the AfD's rise in Germany and the pertinent question: can party bans save democracy?

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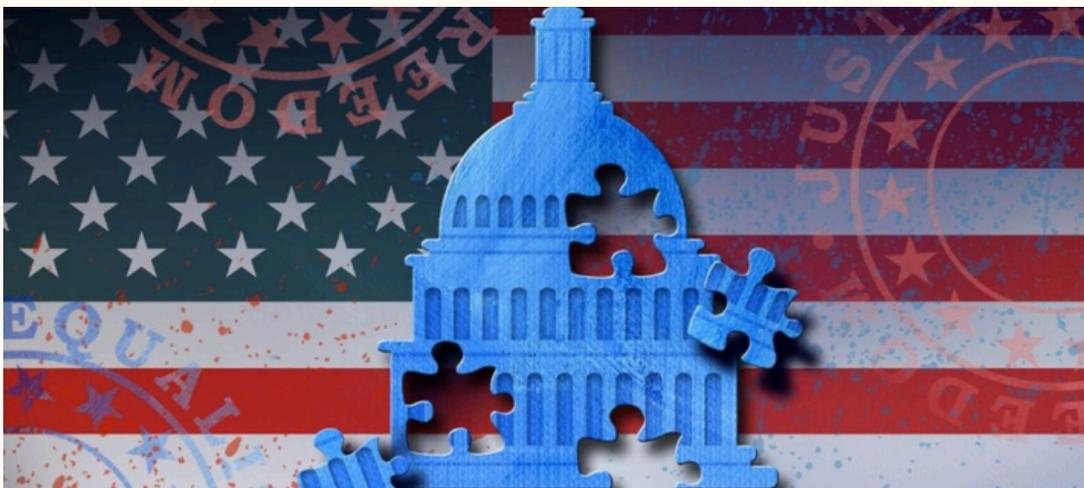


Modi's Monopolists: Labour and Capital in a Broken Democracy

BY DEBASISH ROY CHOWDHURY

This report examines the case of India, where the balance between labour and capital has moved decisively against labour, breaking the back of one of the most potent forces of democratisation.

[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)

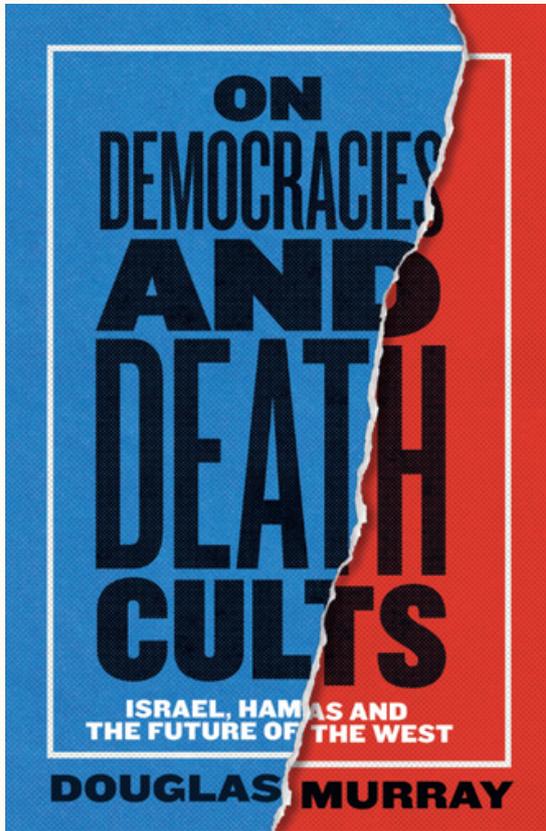


After Degradation: A Roadmap for U.S. Democratic Repair

BY JORDAN RYAN

This report assesses democratic degradation in the United States as President Trump's second term marks its first anniversary and proposes a framework for recovery grounded in the sequencing logic of post-conflict peacebuilding.

[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)



On Democracies and Death Cults is published by Harper Collins and is available to [purchase](#) for 18USD

FROM THE SHELF

On Democracies and Death Cults: Israel, Hamas and the Future of the West

BY DOUGLAS MURRAY

Douglas Murray, international bestselling author and staunch supporter of Israel confronts what he views as the most pressing issue of our time: why Western support of the Palestinian cause is ultimately playing into the hands of a much more dangerous force.

Drawing from intensive on-the-ground reporting in Israel, Gaza and Lebanon, Murray takes readers on a journey through the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 events, piecing together exclusive accounts provided by the victims, survivors and Hamas supporters to make sense of the complexities of the Israel-Palestine conflict and its implications for the global future of liberal democracy.

The central argument of *On Democracies and Death Cults* is that Israel's commitment to fundamental Western values – capitalism, individual rights, democracy and reason – has made it a beacon of progress in a region dominated by authoritarianism and extremist violence. Murray contrasts Israel's principles with the ideology of Hamas which, he says, openly proclaims the love of death over life. If left unchecked, Murray concludes, misplaced Western sympathy for Palestinian 'death cults' could embolden forces that seek to undermine democratic values and perpetuate cultures of violence.

Reviewers have pointed to the book's factual errors, its propaganda qualities, and silence about genocide. Literary editors of leading British newspapers have so far ignored the book while several Berlin bookshops have refused to stock it. But a *Times of Israel* reviewer hailed it as a 'book of monumental significance' and even 'one of the most important books ever written'. President Trump endorsed it as a 'powerful read from a Highly Respected author', and in 2024 Murray received an honorary award from Israeli President Isaac Herzog for his reporting and for being a 'friend to the Jewish people and fighting the resurgence of antisemitism'.

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Democracy Watch

Wolfgang Merkel, Emeritus Professor at Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), asks whether party bans can save democracy?

A spectre is haunting Europe: the spectre of right-wing populism. All the powers of liberal democracy seem to be joining forces against it. This is particularly true in Germany. According to the official discourse, a firewall must be erected. Right-wing populists must be kept away from government and executive power, regardless of how large their electorate and parliamentary representation may be. If this cannot be achieved through electoral success, a ban on the right-wing populist AfD (Alternative for Germany) must be considered. “No tolerance for the enemies of tolerance” is becoming a moral-political battle cry. Opponents of the AfD argue that they must be prevented from destroying Germany’s liberal democracy, if necessary, by banning the party. This raises the questions: Do party bans save democracy? Can they even be legitimised in terms of democratic theory?



Wolfgang Merkel

The AfD has xenophobic traits, its leaders cultivate racist attitudes, and its members and party elites provoke the liberal establishment with neo-Nazi slogans. But is that enough to ban the AfD “to save democracy”?

The phrase “militant democracy” was first formulated by the German constitutionalist Karl Löwenstein. His credo (1937) is as problematic as it is clear for a democratic constitutionalist: Fascism, he writes, can only be defeated on its own turf with its own weapons. Democracy must be prepared to abandon even fundamental principles to ultimately save those very principles.

Löwenstein's opponent was the liberal constitutionalist, Hans Kelsen. Kelsen, who also emigrated to the USA, argued that a democracy could only remain tolerant for as long as it did not suppress even “peaceful anti-democratic expressions. It is precisely this tolerance that distinguishes a democracy from an autocracy.” The red line, he said, was violence, not the existence, programs, and expressions of anti-democratic parties and their politicians.

In 1949, Löwenstein's spirit prevailed in three articles of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany: Article 9 (freedom of association), Article 18 (forfeiture of basic rights), and the much-discussed Article 21.2, which regulates the banning of political parties. The ban on anti-constitutional associations and organisations is the least problematic. It is imposed by the executive branch and can be reviewed by the administrative courts in accordance with the rule of law. It has already been imposed or lifted on numerous occasions. In contrast, only four applications for the forfeiture of the fundamental rights of individuals have been filed and none of them have been approved by the Federal Constitutional Court.

This leaves the banning of political parties as the last of the three pillars of militant democracy. It is the sharpest sword in democracy and must be wielded with the utmost caution. It has only been successfully wielded twice in the seventy-year history of the Federal Republic of Germany's democracy: in 1951, the Nazi “Socialist Reich Party” was banned, and in 1956, the Stalinist “Communist Party of Germany” (KPD) was banned. Two further attempts to ban the neo-Nazi NPD failed after the turn of the century.

Initiating a ban would be risky. The lengthy fact-finding process by the Federal Constitutional Court and the examination of the materials collected by the “Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution” could take three years. During this time, the right-wing populists could present themselves in their favourite role as the true opposition party, a party that is persecuted by all the “system parties” and can thus attract further protest votes.

If the party is not banned, this would be the ultimate legitimisation of the far-right party. If it is banned, it will be even riskier. This is because the executive branch would be forced to close the party offices and remove all AfD representatives from local parliaments, city councils, district councils, state legislatures, and the Bundestag. These representatives will not simply leave; they would have to be removed from office by state force. This, in turn, would lead to counter-violence. A spiral of violence that could provoke civil war-like conditions and lead to a push to delegitimise Germany’s democracy.



Tens of thousands protest in Berlin in against far-right AfD party. Credit: The Guardian UK

Is a ban on the AfD – a party that has 25% support at the federal level and more than 35% in some German states – legitimate in terms of democratic theory? Would this not lead to a quarter of the population being deprived of representation? Would democratic pluralism not be curtailed in an anti-pluralistic manner?

Finally, banning a party robs democracy of an important advantage over authoritarian rule. The feedback mechanism of elections, and especially election defeats, forces parties to reflect on why so many voters have chosen an alternative on the right wing. Establishment parties must recognise and correct their own mistakes, or else Germans will continue to look towards right-wing populist competitors. This would have no gains for democracy.

Democracies are fragile, including the German one. But after 75 years of successful existence, it is more resilient than the alarmism suggests. Democratic engagement, the civic awareness of competent citizens, freedoms, and good governance serve liberal democracy more than state surveillance, suspicion, and prohibition.