



# 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, Ivan Krastev, a Bulgarian political scientist, asks us to fall in love with the future. Ria Shibata examines the role of youth in the recent Japanese election, and Jordan Ryan discusses the UN's "moment of truth." This issue also includes the latest book from Ciro Murayama *The Future is Nearly Gone: Neoliberalism and Populism in 21st Century Mexico*, and concludes by looking forward to Toda's Middle East and North Africa series featured in next month's digest.

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[DEMOCRACY LIGHTHOUSE](#)

# Ivan Krastev: Falling in Love with the Future, Again

*John Keane sits down with Ivan Krastev, a Bulgarian political scientist whose work looks at the past, present, and future of democracy. In this short video, Krastev talks about the present state of democracy and what it means to fall in love with the future, again. An extract of this is featured below.*

In 1643, a Protestant priest told his audience that this is shaking times and that the shaking is universal. I believe that we can subscribe to this view. At present, there are two stories that we can tell about democracy.



*Ivan Krastev*

The pessimistic story is that we have never seen this film before. The crisis that democracy is currently facing is much worse than in previous periods. The other, more optimistic story, is that we have seen this movie before, but not in English.

I am saying this because it pushes us to ask to what extent the current liberal democratic moment, that started with World War Two and blossomed after the Cold War, is historically unique. To what extent is liberal democracy rooted in certain conditions that are no longer here?

There have been three major changes in the conditions of liberal democracy. One is the information environment. Democracy came about with the printed media and was reliant upon the reader and the citizen. Television also fit into the broader democratisation of society. Due to social media, the information environment has changed. Social media has created an information capsule where people no longer share the same judgment on events.

The second is economic developments. For the last 80 years the fate of democracy has been tied to permanent economic growth. We can no longer be sure of this. The last is demographic constellations. We have structured society to allow the intergenerational contract to work, however, now we are seeing a society where people are living longer and having less kids. This is going to have an effect on democracy.

All these worries about democracy are clear. What is less understood is to what extent is democracy conditioned on a certain idea of the future. The future is important for all of us, in any dimension of our life. The understanding that we can shape the future, that we can hold our leaders to account is what a good society is and what a society that we want to live in looks like.

This future is very important for democracy. On election day, the voter is a two-faced creature. One eye looks at the past and judges the performance of the government. The other eye dreams about the future and judges the promises of political parties.

I am saying this because, for me, the major risk for democracy is the rise of three kinds of apocalypticism that I can detect in our political discourse. All of them are related to things that are very real, but they are also related to the projection of the future.

On the left, there is a focus on the environment. People are afraid that if nothing is done to save earth, we will start living like the last man. On the right, there is an obsession with demography and a fear that if the declining population and increased immigration is not reversed now than their country will not be the same.

The third kind of apocalyptic discourse is connected to technology. The view that owing to A.I, there will be no place for humans. The environmental issue, the demographic issue, and the technological issue has led to a view that there is not much time, we have no future, and therefore we are living like the last man. This is the major change in democracy.

If there is one thing that I believe we should do it is to open our eyes to the idea that we should fall in love with the future again.

[WATCH THE FULL STATEMENT HERE](#)



*The Future is Nearly Gone (in Spanish) is published by Planeta Publishing Corporation and is available to purchase for 22USD.*

and the spread of violence and social anomie.

Avoiding the simplistic dichotomy between neoliberalism and populism, this book chooses to explore a different path: an economic policy responsible both macroeconomically and socially, within a political regime of freedoms and rights that can restore enthusiasm for a country where wellbeing and democracy coexist.

FROM THE SHELF

## **The Future is Nearly Gone: Neoliberalism and Populism in 21st Century Mexico**

BY CIRO MURAYAMA

Mexico began the millennium with favourable winds to become a successful nation: it had consolidated democracy, opened its economy to the world, and its young population offered a unique demographic opportunity. A quarter century later the picture is, at best, disappointing: democratic erosion, the economy remains in prolonged stagnation, and the population suffers from inequality, precariousness, and violence.

Mexican scholar Ciro Murayama offers a stocktaking of that recent past: a democracy that proved as intense and plural as it was vulnerable to populism and the dismantling of its vital institutions. Based on deep empirical analysis derived from countless social science investigations, the author dissects the poor economic performance that fed political dissatisfaction, the resurgence of authoritarianism,



## What Takaichi's Victory Says About Youth Politics in the Digital Age

BY RIA SHIBATA

In Japan's recent federal election youth turnout rose, suggesting that Japanese youth are not politically apathetic. On the contrary, they are paying attention—but the nature of that engagement has changed.

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## The UN's Moment of Truth

BY JORDAN RYAN

The United Nations is being defunded in the middle of a crisis it was built to prevent. That matters now because the institution that made many positive outcomes possible is under deliberate assault, and the consequences are already landing.

[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)

# Democracy Watch: Introducing the MENA Special

*Olivia Stokes Dreier, Senior Research Fellow at the Toda Peace Institute, introduces a new series – to be featured in next month's digest – An Eye on Arab De-democratisation.*

The Arab region, or MENA (Middle East and North Africa), has had a chequered history with democratisation. Today, the prevailing trend is less one of democratic transition than of autocratisation and democratic de-consolidation. Against this backdrop, the Toda Peace Institute presents *An Eye on Arab De-democratisation*, a series examining patterns of democratic erosion across nine countries, alongside a case study on the gender dimensions of democratisation.



*Olivia Stokes-Dreier*

Discussions of democracy in the Middle East are often conducted in the abstract, shaped by assumptions formed elsewhere rather than by sustained engagement with the region's own political histories and constraints. The result can be analyses that are either unduly pessimistic or insufficiently grounded in political reality. This series approaches democracy not as a fixed model to be applied, but as a contested practice shaped by local histories, social relations, and regional dynamics. Across diverse settings, the authors examine representation, accountability, participation, and civic space, recognising both structural constraints and political choices.

The series appears at a moment when democratic governance is under strain globally. In much of the Middle East, political space has narrowed, conflicts persist, and economic and social pressures have intensified. Yet demands for dignity, justice, and responsive governance endure. Understanding these tensions requires empirically grounded analysis rather than sweeping or deterministic claims.

The reports are written by leading scholars and edited and introduced by Professor Larbi Sadiki. The views expressed are those of the authors alone and their diversity reflects both the complexity of the subject matter and the importance of maintaining open intellectual inquiry on issues that are politically sensitive and morally charged.

Since this series was prepared, the war launched by the U.S. and Israel has added a new layer of uncertainty across the region. While the chapters do not address these recent developments, the deeper dynamics they analyse – state fragility, constrained political space, regional rivalries, and the erosion of accountable governance – remain important in understanding democracy in the region. In this sense, the background provided here is not superseded by current events; it is more essential than ever for understanding them.

We thank the editor and contributors for the seriousness and independence of their work and hope this series contributes to deeper reflection on democracy's possibilities and limits in the region.