



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, Chee Soon Juan, Singapore's opposition leader, discusses the importance of resilience. Kevin Clements and Ria Shibata examine the quiet erosion of New Zealand's democracy, and Robert Kaufman asks whether America can rebuild in the aftermath of Trump 2.0. This edition also features Katia Chornik's book, *Music and Political Imprisonment in Pinochet's Chile*, and concludes with reflections by Debasish Roy Chowdhury on the aftermath of the Cockroach Movement.

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[DEMOCRACY LIGHTHOUSE](#)

Chee Soon Juan on Resilience

Singapore's opposition leader Chee Soon Juan's latest book *Unbroken: The Power of Resilience*, is a powerful personal meditation on the democratic significance of resilience. When things fall apart and failure and burnout loom, he tells John Keane, resilience is the learned art of bouncing forwards, the courage to rise in the face of adversity, to do what is difficult without surrendering what is good. Included below is an extract from his interview with Democracy Lighthouse.



Chee Soon Juan

'I always wanted to write about resilience because of the political fight that I have been involved in for decades. As far as elections in Singapore are concerned it has been failure after failure. But I am not deterred. If you understand the power of resilience, then you know that failure is always an ally. You not only come back but you return stronger than ever. Failure steels you for the challenge ahead....Resilience is not a vague trait that you possess, or do not possess. It's a skill. A skill that we can acquire, that we can strengthen, that will put you in good stead. Not only in politics but in the modern age. As people talk more about burnout and the rise of AI, resilience is going to be a skill that is hugely important.'



[WATCH THE FULL VIDEO HERE](#)



The Quiet Erosion and Resilience of New Zealand's Democracy

BY KEVIN CLEMENTS & RIA SHIBATA

This report argues that New Zealand's reputation as one of the world's most stable social democracies increasingly obscures a quiet onset of democratic erosion. New Zealand is not approaching an acute constitutional crisis but occupies a more insidious position—one where warning signs are visible enough to be noticed, yet not urgent enough to compel sustained corrective action.

[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)



Democratic Resilience in the United States in the Second Trump Presidency

BY ROBERT KAUFMAN

Robert Kaufman focuses on the challenges of backsliding and recovery in the United States. What are the primary sources of resilience, he asks, and what are the chances that American democracy can rebuild in the aftermath of the Trump era?

[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)

Music and Political Imprisonment in Pinochet's Chile

BY KATIA CHORNIK

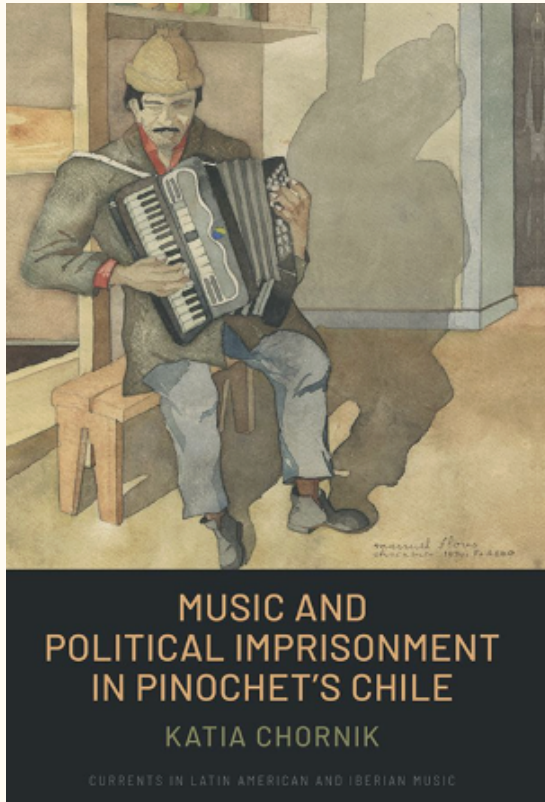
Two decades after Augusto Pinochet's death, Chile has elected a new far-right President, José Antonio Kast, who has praised the dictator's legacy. Now, a new book exposes the brutal and sometimes tender realities of political imprisonment during the dictatorship (1973–1990) through the power of music.

Over 1,000 political imprisonment and torture centres existed across Chile during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973–90), writes Chornik. Music was often present in those centres, both as a part of and reaction against human rights violations. Proposing the concept of 'memory cacophony' to describe the discordant kaleidoscope of voices, memories, repertoire and practices her research unveiled, Chornik explores the relationships between music, politics,

Music and Political Imprisonment is published by [Oxford University Press](#).

, memory, and human rights, discusses a broad range of music experiences, and analyses how these are remembered, preserved, and disseminated decades later.

While music has potentially democratic qualities, in that it is both a tool for democratic protest and a mirror to political life, in Pinochet's Chile music was co-opted by the regime to torture political prisoners. Songs by Julio Iglesias and George Harrison were played repeatedly at high volumes during torture sessions. However, Chornik shows that music was also an expression of democracy. Prisoners comforted themselves and each other with music, took courage and hope from songs, and mounted acts of resistance through the recording of anti-Pinochet music.



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Democracy Lighthouse

*a research and publications platform and global guide
to the organisations, networks, and scholars currently
rethinking and advocating democracy*



Democracy Watch

Debasish Roy Chowdhury, author (with John Keane) of To Kill a Democracy, discusses the Cockroach Movement's message for the world.



Debasish Roy Chowdhury

After Gen Z spotlighted the country's broken public examinations through an unprecedented popular movement, it is Gen Alpha's turn to lay bare even deeper layers of dysfunction in India's education system. There's a message for the world in all this, and it better listen, because India's education crisis is a global problem.

School students have picked up where the "cockroach movement" left off last month when nationwide youth protests that began with a satirical campaign triggered by question paper leaks and unemployment forced the Narendra Modi government to let go of its education minister whose resignation the cockroach activists had demanded. This month, frustrated school-goers in many states have decided it is their turn to push back.

They are not asking for much, just the basics that the Indian state still fails to provide nearly 80 years after independence. So, in Uttar Pradesh, India's biggest state, they are marching with national flags demanding the construction of a long-overdue road leading to their school. The principal of a government school for hearing and speech-impaired students in the northern state of Rajasthan was suspended after the students staged a protest against the lack of decent toilets and proper classrooms. In the central state of Madhya Pradesh, schoolgirls are protesting a bus fare hike they say has made their daily commute a burden on their families. In the western state of Maharashtra, students have been staging an indefinite sit-in demanding more teachers.

Most government schools, on which the country's poor depend, function with barely any teachers, proper ventilation, functioning toilets, desks, science laboratories, or libraries. This leaves students of these schools poorly equipped to compete with those who come from families that can pay for their education, pushing them into menial and lower-order jobs almost by design. India's chronically low state investment in education and the growing dependence on private financing in the field thus replicate the existing class hierarchies rather than widening the base for inclusive development.

The full version of Deb's article is freely available on the [Democracy Lighthouse website](#).

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