



internment of Muslim Uighurs in “re-education” camps. Indonesia has seen protests in the cities against what is seen as Government corruption and indifference to hardship. The unprecedented scale and destructiveness of the Australian bush-fires seems likely to precipitate political protests and an invigorated Green movement, calling into question the scale of Australia’s economic reliance on coal.

In Africa and Latin America too there are protests across those two continents. Protests against economic mismanagement and corruption in Zimbabwe and South Africa; demands for greater autonomy in parts of Ethiopia – despite its impressive economic growth; wars of religion in and around the Sahel Regions; and tribal/ethnic conflicts in Central Africa and elsewhere. In Latin America, a left-wing Government has been ousted in Bolivia, while Venezuela’s holds power largely by main force alone; at the same time, Chile – the poster-child for centre-right liberal capitalism in the region – is under siege by its own disaffected citizens.

The causes I identified in the 2017 blog have not changed much: the continued fall-out of the financial crash, and the shift from “labour” to “capital”; the rise across the globe of populism, political polarisation and identity politics; a desire in democratic states for more local autonomy, and in undemocratic ones, for the right to freedom of expression and disgust with corruption, and governments that disregard the feelings and wishes of their people.

Some actual revolutions have happened, and will continue to happen. But it is perhaps more significant that a state of protest now seems to be “normal” in so many parts of the world. So this blog asks, whether this is a new status quo, or a transition to a different political settlement.

Precariousness of people’s lives certainly shows no sign of diminishing, and might well become more marked with the impact of the 4th industrial revolution on work, and the shifting tectonic plates of the balance of global economic power. In developing regions, urbanisation affords opportunities for association and protest that would have been largely denied to people in rural areas. In the developed world, cities are already the focus of most protest movements, and the pattern seems to be repeating in the developing cities of the 21st century. So the causes of protest seem to be here for the medium-term, and may even become more compelling. The megacities of the future – which are projected to be bigger by far even than today’s largest conurbations – may be even more volatile.

The nature and techniques of protest, and of Government responses to it, are evolving. The Arab Spring was heavily dependent on mobile technology and social media. You Tube and Twitter have brought protests to the attention of the world, through shared video clips. In Hong Kong, a population much of which is highly



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tech-savvy, has been innovative in its protests, for example the use of laser pens to “dazzle” the Government’s facial recognition equipment.

At the same time Governments, especially autocratic ones, are seeking to up their game on surveillance and identification techniques. China has been at the forefront of this, and is reported to have provided equipment to autocratic regimes overseas, for example Zimbabwe. Governments who are minded to do so can build up data over time on individuals, and mark them out for closer surveillance, and denial of opportunities, if not arrest and imprisonment. But they will not be able to do so in secret.

This “arms race” between Governments and protesters is not confined to the streets, of course, although that remains an important arena, and we can expect protest movements to resort to cyber sabotage and other measures to interrupt the normal workings of governments. The ubiquity of social media, and the growth of “unofficial” news media, means that protesters can present their case to the world.

The sheer size of the 21st century’s megacities would daunt the most oppressive governments. Lagos is projected to have a population of 88 million; Kinshasa 83 million; Dar-Es-Salaam 74 million; Mumbai 67 million; Delhi 57 million. It is not clear that governments would be able to control and contain such massive concentrations of humanity.

This “new normal” may create the conditions for more extreme and polarised politics. Rather than a political and economic establishment seeking consensus, as at the World Economic Forum, political careers may more easily be made by stepping outside the consensus and using the tools and techniques of protest to lead demands for radical change, appealing to the “teeming masses” in the megacities and – more worryingly – exploiting the divisions. Populism and demagoguery may become an established approach to politics.

Certainly the decline of the “soft” left and right in Western democratic politics suggests that it is becoming harder for the politics of consensus to get a hearing in a noisy and tumultuous world.

One thing may work as a force for relative stability: the aging population. By 2050 the average age of the population of Europe will be 45; in Japan and South Korea, it will be over 50, and even in China, it will be in the 40s. Perhaps protest is a young person’s thing. In which case street politics will play out most dramatically in Africa and India, while the rest of us will decide we all need to calm down. Watch this space....

Written by David Lye, SAMI Fellow. Published 8 January 2020





Global Satisfaction with Democracy 2020

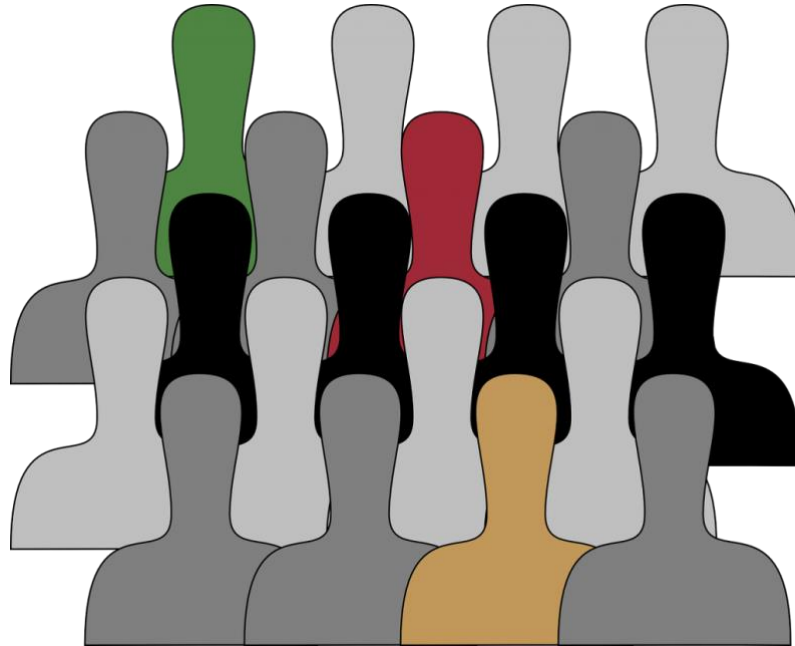


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The Centre for the Future of Democracy was launched in January 2020 to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by democratic politics over the coming century. Based at the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge, the goal of the Centre is to understand the prospects for democracy in broad historical and international perspectives in order to identify different possible trajectories for democracy around the world.

The Centre will look at how democratic decisions get made and how can they be made differently. How can the consent of losers and outsiders be achieved? How can new social divisions be bridged? How can the use of technology be brought under democratic control?

In its [first report](#), the Centre studied how people's satisfaction with their democracies has changed between 1973 and 2020. Using a pooled dataset of some 3,500 surveys, it found that dissatisfaction with democracy has risen over time, and is reaching an all-time global high, in particular in developed democracies. The share of the population across the globe "dissatisfied" with democracy has grown by around 10% points, from 47.9% in the mid-1990's to 57.5% in 2019. The rise in democratic dissatisfaction has been especially sharp since 2005 when just 38.7% of citizens were dissatisfied.

Large democracies – including United States, Brazil, Mexico, the United Kingdom,



South Africa, Colombia, and Australia – are at their highest-ever recorded level for democratic dissatisfaction. Developed countries show the largest growth in dissatisfaction.

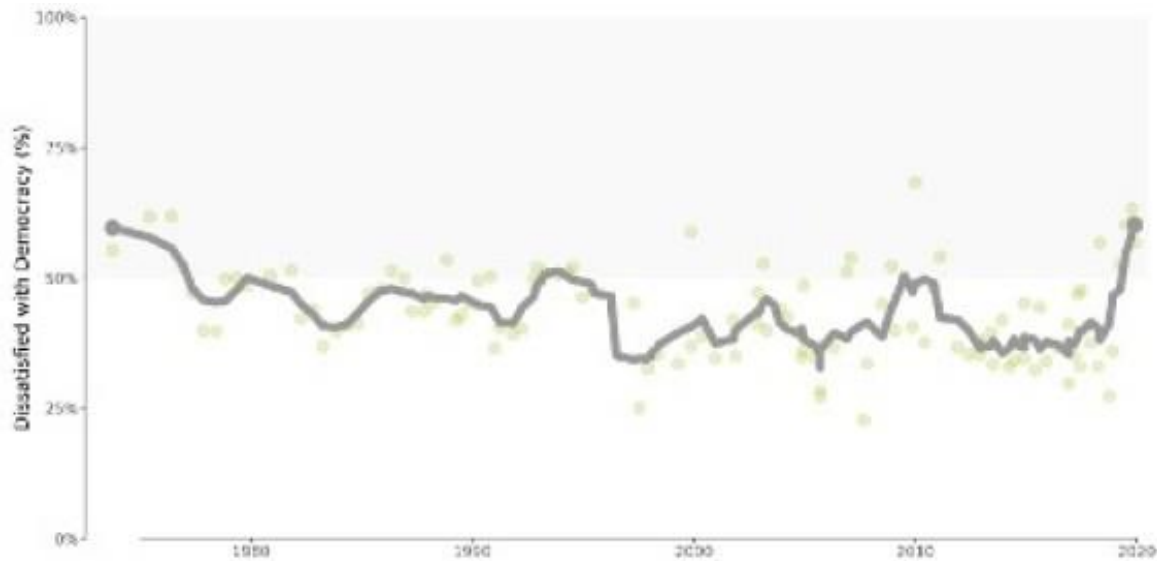
Several small, high-income democracies – Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – have moved in the direction of greater civic confidence in their institutions, with satisfaction in some reaching all-time highs. In democracies in South Asia, Northeast Asia, and above all in Southeast Asia, levels of civic contentment are significantly higher than in other regions – it's not clear why. In Southeast Asia, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe satisfaction with democracy has been rising in recent years.

Dissatisfaction is variously ascribed to:

- growing political polarisation, economic frustration, and the rise of populist parties in the West;
- endemic challenges of corruption, intergroup conflict, and urban violence in developing countries;
- specific economic and political events – the financial crisis of 2008, the eurozone crisis beginning in 2009, the European refugee crisis of 2015. Following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in October 2008 global dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy jumped by around 6.5 percentage points
- country-specific events: eg the series of scandals exposed by the “Lava Jato” corruption probe has seen public dissatisfaction in Brazil reach record highs;
- Latin America generally had increasing satisfaction from 2003 to 2013, but has since slipped back dramatically to 75% dissatisfied.

In the UK, the data show three distinct phases:

- The 1970s: strikes, power cuts, periods of minority government, an embarrassing IMF bailout, and the start of “the troubles” in Northern Ireland.
- 1990s to 2008: Good Friday agreement, devolved power to Scotland and Wales, and “cool Britannia”
- 2008 onwards: financial crash, parliamentary expenses scandal, Brexit impasse



The authors do note that answers to the survey questions could bear a number of interpretations. They primarily tell how well citizens perceive their political system to be *performing*. They offer a weaker basis for inferring support for liberal or democratic values: individuals may be strong believers in liberal democracy and yet dissatisfied with the performance of such institutions in practice – or on the flipside, be satisfied with the institutions under which they are governed, even though such institutions fall well short of accepted democratic standards.

The report's conclusion is that:

“If confidence in democracy has been slipping, then the most likely explanation is that democratically elected governments have not been seen to succeed in addressing some of the major challenges of our era, including economic coordination in the Eurozone, the management of refugee flows, and providing a credible response to the threat of global climate change. The best means of restoring democratic legitimacy would be for this to change.”

Overall, there seem to be a few issues with the report:

- There are major methodological issues associated with aggregating different attitude surveys in different countries and continents (though to be fair, this issue is discussed in some detail in an Annex).
- There are very many fewer datasets covering Sub-Saharan African countries
- The statistical significance of the trends is not explored.



- The report doesn't define what constitutes a democracy – Russia, Venezuela and Turkey are described as “no longer democratic”, which their leaders would obviously dispute.
- It's not clear whether what is measured is dissatisfaction with *democracy* per se, with the *democratic system* (eg is first past the post democratic, or Trump losing the popular vote?) or, perhaps more likely, just dissatisfaction with the *prevailing regime*. The authors note: “citizens evaluate the performance of their polity not only by its adherence to liberal-democratic norms, but also for its ability to offer valued outputs such as political and social stability, economic growth, and a sense of collective purpose and pride”.
- The link with political events is not the result of analysis, but of the authors' judgement; despite admitting that the surveys don't tell us why people are dissatisfied, some personal views are presented to give explanations.
- The exceptionalism of Asia is not really explored.

Nonetheless, it's a worthwhile effort to understand changes in underlying societal opinion, an area too often overlooked by forecasters. There are many intriguing charts, particularly for the different regions (despite the above reservations). It will be interesting to see what the Centre focusses on next.

Written by Huw Williams, SAMI Principal

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