

Foreword

The feeling that democracy is under threat or even in crisis is true of all times, but the feeling has been very strong in many countries in recent years (though perhaps that sense of particularity is also of all times). Internationally, waves of democratisation have been extinguished, and authoritarian leaders have put themselves in the spotlight of the world stage. In many countries, there are concerns about the growth of a technocratically and technologically driven anti-political *Post-democracy*, the erosion of democratic culture through destructive *Polarisation* and encroaching anti-institutional *Populism*. In this special issue, we do not focus on deepening these P-diagnoses and their interrelationships but primarily aim to provide a better picture of the democratic nature of national political systems and their actors.

This special issue opens with a review article by Henk Dekker. He discusses international surveys of countries' democratic content and citizens' support for democratic governance. The findings are diverse but worrying across the board. Only a minority of countries are democratic, and a minority of the world's population lives in a democracy. Trends are negative and in established democracies are showing erosion. Popular support for democratic governance and democratic values is limited. Enthusiasm for democracy is mostly there only among a minority and support for democracy is not infrequently combined with sympathy for undemocratic authoritarianism and technocratic leadership. According to the author, there is little reason to optimistically trust in global growth and flourishing of democracy as an outcome of modernisation and economic prosperity. There is a need to better socialise citizens into resilient democrats to resist the temptations and threats of strong leaders and undemocratic movements.

Against this background, we zoom in on the United States of America (USA) and its current leader. The second article elaborates on the political breakthrough of Donald Trump. Using, among others, the theoretical notions of face-work (Goffman) and faciality (Deleuze and Guattari), Bob Hanke meticulously analyses Trump's first presidential campaign and reign from 2016 with great richness of concepts and inspiring comparisons. Through extreme media use, Trump developed into the macro face of national power. In 2020, that power lost its presidential guise, but not its importance. Or as Bob Hanke concludes his article, "The micro-fascist conjunction of power around the 45th president was a historical moment of danger that will have far-ranging, long-term political ramifications for US democracy."

In the third article, Dan German describes the state of democracy in America. Basing himself, like Henk Dekker, on research by Freedom House, The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), he agrees with EIU's characterisation of the USA as 'flawed democracy'. A deteriorating political culture manifests itself in the anti-democratic misconduct of the former and present president and his supporters (Trump's refusal to concede the 2020 election; the January 6, 2021, Capital riots).

This special issue is completed with a review of a book about violent ethnic conflicts in the not so (fully) democratic southern post-soviet nations.