New Blackfriars

DOI:10.1111/nbfr.12390

Comment: *Illiberal Democracy*

For those of us who live in a 'liberal democracy', as we do in Britain, or so we think (the paradigm, we invented it, etc.), the rise of 'illiberal democracy' has become something of a challenge. Free and fair elections take place, landslide majorities return to power autocratic leaders ('strong men') — what are we to think when the classical civil liberties are curtailed or disregarded, as often seems to happen?

It was of course a pejorative expression, originally. While he may not have coined it, the term 'illiberal democracy' entered political discourse in 1997 in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, which he was then editing, in a comment by the journalist Fareed Zakaria. Born in 1964 in Mumbai, of Konkani Muslim heritage, educated at Yale and Harvard, a naturalized American citizen, self described as 'completely secular', resident in New York City with his wife, the jewellery designer Paula Throckmorton, Fareed Zakaria hosts his own talk show on Cable News Network (CNN), thus exercising a good deal of influence as a political commentator. Elections and civil liberties (of speech, religion, etc.) go hand in hand in democracies, he supposes. Around the world, however, the two are coming apart. Electoral democracy without regard for liberal values (pluralism, toleration, etc.) produces centralized, incipiently authoritarian regimes: 'illiberal democracies'.

Fareed Zakaria's pejorative term has been rejigged, in particular by the prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, removing the negativity and even making it a commendation. Born in 1963, famous as a student for his brave speech in 1989 demanding that the Russian army go home, he has been at the centre of politics in Hungary ever since. In July 2014, after years as prime minister, in what has come to be known as his 'illiberal democracy'speech, delivered before an ethnic Hungarian audience in Romania, Orbán urged them to stop invoking the 1989 triumph over communism, measuring progress from dictatorship and foreign domination to elections, civil liberties, and sovereignty, etc., and consider instead the weakness of 'the West', since the financial crisis in 2008, the internal contradictions in the European Union, and much else, including the fact that liberal values today 'embody corruption, sex, and violence'. In future, he suggested, it would be systems that were 'not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies, and perhaps not even democracies' that would create successful and competitive societies. As he asserted, 'the stars of the international analysts today are Singapore, China, India, Russia, and Turkey'.

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https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12390 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In a passage devoted to the obstacles facing his own political party, Fidesz, as it seeks to build an alternative to liberalism, Orbán denounced 'paid political activists who are attempting to enforce foreign interests here in Hungary'. On another occasion, in early 2016, he referred to 'hordes of implacable human rights warriors' that 'feel an unquenchable desire to lecture and accuse us'. For many people in 'the West'the defining feature of illiberalism would be intolerance toward minority groups: the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community, refugees and migrants of all sorts, and so on. But in Hungary illiberal government implies much more than assertions by the prime minister might suggest — that'every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk'and that refugees bring 'gangs hunting down our women and daughters'— and similar undiplomatic, exaggerated and rather paranoid declarations.

No longer regarding the events of 1989 as the relevant reference point in Hungarian history is noteworthy, given Viktor Orbán's biography. Now, however, after his own thirty years in politics, and the experience of Hungary's membership of NATO and the European Union — of 'the West'— he looks back at 1989—the dawn of liberal values, individual freedom, democratic solidarity, and so on — as a distraction, intellectually, in his bid to ensure the future direction of the nation. Identifying himself as a member of the (Calvinist) Reformed Church (his wife the jurist Anikó Lévai and their five children are Roman Catholic), the prime minister surely sees himself as one of the very few statesmen currently defending Europe's Christian inheritance. His illiberalism involves promoting traditional family values (so no same sex marriage), the integrity of the nation (no Muslim immigrants), and preserving our cultural heritage.

When he listed Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey, as examples of 'successful' nations, adding that 'none of [them] is liberal and some ... aren't even democracies', he is surely allowing himself a provocative touch of irony (no 'Western' nations are successful?), his point is that these nations are 'successful', precisely because they are *nations.*

Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Zakaria reportedly said on CNN, has become a textbook case of illiberal democracy. According to the civil liberties measure employed by another American analyst, Honduras, Bangladesh and Pakistan are the next three most illiberal democracies. According to the same analyst, despite Hungary's self-declared 'illiberalism', the country is ranked no worse than Bulgaria and ahead of Serbia. But of course it is not all that clear how to measure the integrity of a nation, or even what it would mean.

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