

As explained in the introductory note, the book is the seventh work out of a nine volume series published on the basis of annual conferences held by the University of Fribourg concentrating on topics relevant to the Eastern European region. As such, the book suffers somewhat from the difficulty of putting together a coherently edited work, considering, too, the fact that a considerable portion of materials were presumably gathered from the 'Interdisciplinary Studies on Central and Eastern Europe' project. Furthermore, the book suffers from a visible degree of heterogeneity in the choice of the arguments presented. This heterogeneity is manifested in two crucial moments: that of the delimitation of the area under scrutiny, namely Eastern Europe and the selection of the arguments as in the case of the contribution of Kalkandijeva in the chapter on the study of religion in Bulgaria or the one on Nationhood and Mentality which are "miss fitted" in the volume. The theoretical delimitation of the term Eastern Europe, that the editor proposes in the introduction, should have eliminated the chapter on Bulgaria. As the parts on Ukraine and Russia seem to fulfill the initial prepositions of the book, the central part of it on 'Aspect of Nationhood - or its Absence' is highly heterogeneous in terms of the cases presented.

Nevertheless, from a global perspective, the book represents a valuable tool for understanding and studying the area in question, with special value brought by the chapters on Belarus or Ukraine, which provide an adequate picture of the difficulties of transition not only in terms of the international position of the countries in question, but also in terms of their national identities and the passivity of the civil society.

David Altman, *Direct Democracy Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

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Democracy, both conceptually and practically, has remained a subject of debate for centuries. Though ancient Greece is regarded as the birth place of democracy, there is disagreement over the nature, meaning and practice of democracy worldwide. Etymologically, democracy referred to direct popular government by assembled citizens. This kind of democracy came to be known as "direct democracy". In practical terms, Greek democracy was simple. People would assemble, discuss and votes would pass on a simple majority. This was made possible owing to the small number of citizens in the polity as well as simplicity of issues at the time. Distinctively, Greek democracy emphasised community autonomy as opposed to individual autonomy. Yet, the issue of inclusiveness in this democracy was

problematic. Citizenship, which formed the sole criterion for participation, was inherently founded on exclusion. To be sure, citizens were mainly free male adults who owned property. Women and slaves were not regarded as citizens and hence excluded from political participation. This means that citizenship was restricted by sex, property and birth origin. It should be admitted that this was the first inborn omission of democracy which later democracies have yet to escape. One obvious explanation for such exclusion rests on the class stratification of Greek society. It was by and large a slave society dominated by a patriarchal culture. Arguably, democracy in a stratified society is an ideological weapon that serves the interests of the dominant class.

On the other hand, with larger populations as well as more complex issues, modern societies require a different way of doing democracy. This is called "indirect or representative democracy". Emphasizing individual autonomy, representative democracy (commonly used interchangeably with liberal democracy) was born in Western Europe. It is this fact which sometimes makes it known as Western democracy. Understandably, Western societies are ideologically founded on capitalism. Yet, capitalism does not always precede the practice of liberal democracy. It should be emphasised here that, in comparative terms, representative democracy has been under severe attack, unlike its predecessor Greek democracy. Some of the most frequently asked questions include, for example: how can the interests of the majority be represented? How accountable can the leaders be? Is this kind of democracy universal?

Direct Democracy Worldwide links both direct and indirect democracy. It focuses on revealing the relationships between the two forms of democracy. Rather than viewing direct and representative democracy as necessarily opposing each other, the author notes that the assumptions and practices of direct and representative democracy interact under different institutional settings. In discussion and analysis, the author unveils specific moments that allow the two forms of democracy to coexist in a mutually reinforcing manner. The book argues that while some mechanisms of direct democracy (MDD) are positive in so far as they attempt to democratise politics, others are backward looking as they tend to boost the power of politicians instead of that of the people. In grand terms, the book deals with the distribution and exercise of power in relation to making decisions that affect lives in their respective societies. Towards that end, it examines mechanisms of direct democracy such as referendums, plebiscites, recalls, and popular initiatives.

In studying direct democracy and its related mechanisms, the author provides a simple but an innovative typology. The typology focuses on three issues: (a) who initiates the MDD, either citizens (through signature gathering), the political establishment (executives, legislators, or both), or the legal or constitutional regulations in a country? (b) what is the purpose of the MDD - maintaining status

quo or altering it? and (c) whether the MDD is the final word on an issue or otherwise (binding law or nonbinding outcome). This typology is then applied throughout the volume. Overall, the volume contains an in-depth and rigorous analysis with clear cut arguments and concrete evidence. It therefore breaks new ground by providing thoughtful provoking insights with regard to direct and indirect democracy. The author accomplishes his objectives in eight chapters.

Yet, the book has a number of shortcomings. Firstly, the title of the book obscures its scope. As can be noted, the book presents significantly one region, that is, Latin America, with specific focus on Uruguay. Europe, Asia and Africa are virtually absent. Since the author appreciates the leading role of Switzerland in practicing MDD globally, it would have been an omission not to devote a section for this unique case (p.8). Instead, Uruguay has been taken as an exemplary case of direct democracy within democracies (p. 140-61). Secondly, the author posits that the book addresses the relationship between direct and representative democracy. Accordingly, such a relationship is based on mutual coexistence and reinforcement (p. 1). Contrary to this promise, my close reading of the volume indicates that the author dealt with how direct democracy complements representative democracy. His definition of MDD is self explanatory to this point. He states "MDDs are composed of those mechanisms through which, after the representatives and the government are elected, the citizenry continues to be – voluntarily or involuntarily, explicitly or implicitly – a veto actor or a proactive player in the political process (p. 7)." Throughout the volume there is nowhere representative democracy appears to feed direct democracy. Hence, the mutual coexistence and reinforcement of direct and representative democracy is fallacious. Thirdly, the volume includes deficiencies in terms of its methodology. It appears to me that the author made use of interviews to understand citizen-initiated mechanisms of direct democracy (CI-MDD) in Uruguay. He interviewed three former presidents of Uruguay. Questions and responses are in detail covered by the author (p. 180-6). Similarly, the author interviewed Uruguayan legislators. He did this without even mentioning how he sampled his respondents. Question and answers appear as appendix 2 (p. 209-12). What I find strange is that the author does not provide any discussion and analysis of the responses from interviews. Further, it is more problematic for a study on CI-MDD to omit citizens as key respondents. As it stands, the book presents opinion from the establishments through a top-down model. Fourthly, the book falls short when it assumes liberal positions unquestionably. For example, throughout the book, citizenship, individual and equality are taken as given based on the *Rousseauian* social contract (p. 7).

A critical examination of the social contract theory, which is an embodiment of liberal democracy shows that these concepts conceal exclusionary tendencies. It was John Locke who argued that the state of nature forced individuals to fear death and therefore entered into a social contract, a contract that is based on consent,

and the one that would protect all against all. Interestingly, Locke's state of nature argument shows that prior to this consent, men were already dominant in their families. He argued that a wife's subjection to her husband had a foundation in nature. This implies that women were excluded from the status of being "individual" which is basic to consent theory. Arguably, if a wife's subjection to her husband has a "natural" foundation, she cannot at the same time be "naturally" free and equal individual. This means that citizenship is a natural property of man. It is not surprising to see that, prior to 1918 and 1920, women were not allowed to vote in Britain and USA, respectively. Despite the aforementioned gaps and omissions, this book is instructive to understand the workings of democracy. It may be useful to political scientists, activists and policy makers.

Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

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Elections and authoritarianism have been subjects of debate since the third wave of democracy began. There are those who argue that elections are a curse to authoritarianism due to the fact that citizens can remove an authoritarian regime through elections. Arguments have also been advanced that elections legitimize authoritarianism. *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* is indeed a relevant piece on elections and authoritarianism. The book addresses an important aspect of competitive elections in an authoritarian context. This is a distributive function of elections, thereby joining those who see elections as a blessing in an authoritarian regime. The book sets itself to interrogate several issues about elections in Egypt: One, in what ways does an authoritarian regime benefit from holding elections? Two, why do candidates spend scarce resources to run for a seat in a parliament that does not make policy? Three, why do citizens engage in the costly act of voting in such a context? Four, do we observe patterns of economic change surrounding autocratic elections that resemble the trends observed in democracies?

The central argument of the book is that the authoritarian regime in Egypt has endured not despite competitive elections but to some degree because of these elections. The author holds that competitive elections help resolve conflict over distribution of rewards to regime's supporters particularly the rent seeking elites. Other important functions of elections in the Egyptian regime include institutionalization of dominance through formal channels as well as providing important information for the regime regarding the performance of party leaders. This is especially useful because elections reveal information about the competence