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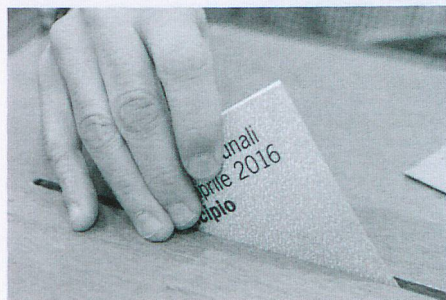
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Democracy's Decline

Switzerland now one of only 19 full democracies, says study



The latest Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit, entitled: *Revenge of the "deplorables"*, lists only 19 full democracies, down from 20 in 2015. 72 countries of the 167 surveyed, covering nearly the entire global population, experienced a decline in their total score compared with 2015. Now, only 4.5% of the world lives in a full democracy, down from 8.9% in 2015 after the US was demoted from a full democracy to a flawed democracy.

The report's title refers to the popular revolt against political elites who are perceived by many to be out of touch and failing to represent the interests of ordinary people.

The report says that until recently political elites have largely assumed that the values represented by the liberal democratic consensus are shared by the vast majority of the electorate. The events of 2016 proved that this is definitely not the case in the UK or the US, and probably not true for many other democracies in Europe.

The report argues that the revolt started in the 1970s, and that Brexit and the election of Donald Trump are consequences of a long term decline in the effectiveness of democratic political institutions, rather than its cause. In other words, Brexiters and Mr Trump are beneficiaries of this trend rather than its cause. In addition, they say the US would have been demoted regardless of the US presidential result.

While the political elite acknowledges that Brexit and Trump supporters had legitimate reasons to be unhappy with the status quo, instead of seeking to understand the causes, some have sought to disparage those who supported them, even questioning whether ordinary people should be trusted to make decisions about important matters such as the UK's membership of the EU.

In addition, the report says that given such low levels of trust in government in the US, Hillary Clinton, an establishment insider, was the worst candidate the Democratic Party could have chosen. The 19 full democracies among the 167 countries surveyed include:

1. Norway 9.93
2. Iceland 9.50
3. Sweden 9.39
4. New Zealand 9.26
5. Denmark 9.20
6. Canada and Ireland 9.15
8. Switzerland 9.09
9. Finland 9.03
10. Australia 9.01
11. Luxembourg 8.81
12. Netherlands 8.80
13. Germany 8.63
14. Austria 8.41
15. Malta 8.39
16. UK 8.36
17. Spain 8.30
18. Mauritius 8.28
19. Uruguay 8.17

The US was ranked 21st with a score of 7.98 out of 10, down from 8.05 in 2015. Switzerland's score of 9.09 has not changed since 2008. The scores are based on ratings for 60 indicators, grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. Full democracy requires a score of 8.00 or more. Notable flawed democracies in Western Europe include: France (7.92), Italy (7.98), Portugal (7.86), Belgium (7.77) and Greece (7.23).

Somewhat surprisingly, Switzerland gets its lowest score for political participation (7.78). While the nation seems to vote on almost everything, voter turnout is often low. For example, the last federal vote on 16 November 2016 on whether to accelerate the shutdown of the country's nuclear power stations, drew only 45% of voters. And the vote in 2014 to stop free movement of people from the EU saw turnout of 57%.

Despite the rift between UK voters and their democratically elected representatives that was demonstrated by the Brexit vote – 75% of parliamentary members were remainers, the UK's score rose from 8.31 to 8.36. This was partly due to a rise in voter participation, which rose to 72% during the referendum on EU membership.

So why has trust in politicians declined?

The report acknowledges the impact of two common explanations: the

economic impact of the 2008-09 financial crash and government responses to it, and the negative economic impact of globalisation on certain groups. However, it adds several more social reasons.

The first is the collapse of communities. Declines in manufacturing and deindustrialisation have had a huge negative social impact. Here they cite American sociologist Charles Murray and his book *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*.

Next the authors add the effect of women entering the workforce. Since the 1970s, millions of women have moved into paid employment. According to American social scientist, Robert Putnam, this has put pressures on the family, reduced civic participation by women and contributed to other trends, such as fewer marriages, more divorces, fewer children and lower real wages.

Other drivers include the breakdown of post-war relationships between the main political parties and their traditional support bases, and parties' failure to evolve. The old left-right political distinctions do not mean that much anymore.

Instead battle lines are being drawn over issues like globalisation versus national sovereignty, cosmopolitanism versus national identity, and open borders versus immigration controls, say the authors. Populist politicians are gaining ground because they have put these things on the discussion table. Political elites have tended to avoid discussing such issues, opening the way for new political parties.

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Calling young Swiss abroad:

Just a reminder that time is running out for those who have children aged 15 upwards to book for the many activities in Switzerland available for young Swiss living abroad : such as a summer in Leysin , language classes in Zurich or Fribourg, or attending Basel convention .

For more information refer to March 17 Swiss Revue.

If anyone has had children attend any of these young Swiss abroad programmes, and are willing to share the experience, I would be keen to hear from you.

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