

Democracy and Foreign Policy: A Retrospective

Maxwell A. Cameron

Department of Political Science & School of Public Policy and Global Affairs

University of British Columbia | Vancouver Campus | Musqueam Traditional Lands

C425 – 1866 Main Mall | Vancouver BC | V6T 1Z1 Canada

Cell (604) 786-0992

Max.Cameron@ubc.ca

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Introduction

Democracy and Foreign Policy, the 1995 edition of the Canada Among Nations series, was written at a time of shifting policy frames. With the end of the Cold War, scholars and policymakers began to rethink the role of democracy both *in* foreign policy and as an objective of foreign policy. In the realist conception of global politics that dominated international relations theory in the Cold War era, domestic institutions were regarded as secondary to the structure of anarchy—understood as the absence of government—in international affairs. Although the Cold War had been framed as a contest between capitalist democracies and totalitarianism, realists argued that in crucial respects all states behaved similarly: they sought at a minimum their own defense and, at a maximum, to dominate other states (Waltz 1979). This viewpoint lost credence with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the prospect of another “wave” of democratization in the post-Soviet successor states.

Already in the 1980s, scholars like Michael Doyle (1983) were noticing that democracies do not engage in warfare with other democracies. Hobbes fell out of fashion and Kant was back in; the conflict between friends and enemies was replaced by competition among rivals. Scholars like Bruce Russett et al. (1995) suggested that democracies are governed by norms, including publicity, that promote peace. Since democratic governments need to secure the support of domestic public opinion before they launch an attack on another country, and since mobilization for war in a democracy tends to be very public, it is hard to surprise other states with unilateral aggression. The data also showed that democracies *do* fight non-democracies—and with considerable regularity. An obvious implication of this finding was that democratic states have a security interest in preservation of democracy in the inter-state system.

Influenced by such findings, we began the 1995 edition of *Canada Among Nations* with the question of democracy as a foreign policy aim or objective. If democracies do not fight one another, can they work together to strengthen democracy globally? Moreover, might such a logic foster an interest in promoting democracy at home as well as abroad? Indeed, might foreign policymaking itself be more democratic? We postulated that the imperative to strengthen democracy globally might encourage nations to reinforce their democratic institutions at home, building public support for democracy through the recognition of its critical importance to international peace, and thus using foreign policy not just as an instrument for advancing national interests but also as an expression of democratic values. This gave rise to a discussion of a values-based foreign policy. It also generated a debate over whether expert consultations in foreign policymaking was a meaningful form of public engagement or mere window-dressing. An optimistic view of the role of democracy in foreign policy was outlined in the Liberal Party's Red Book (see discussion in Cameron and Molot 1995: 9-10); it called for strengthening the role of parliament in foreign policymaking and public consultation on the direction of foreign policy—in short, the “democratization of foreign policy-making” (Liberal Party of Canada, 1993).

The optimism about a democratic peace and the suggestion that foreign policy could be made more democratically seem out of step with the present moment in global politics. As the world reels at Russian aggression against the Ukraine, it is worth returning to these issues. Russia has engaged in the kind of aggression that is possible in a secretive, tightly-knit authoritarian regime where power is concentrated in the hands of a single autocratic individual or small group. It is inconceivable that the invasion of the Ukraine would have occurred had Russia achieved a successful transition to democracy. That almost certainly did not happen because of the failure to

create a politically regulated market economy. In her thoughtful essay on “Democracy and the Problem of Government in Russia” in *Democracy and Foreign Policy*, Andrea Chandler cautioned foreign policy makers that Russia was having serious difficulties establishing democratic institutions and the transition to markets via shock therapy was creating violence, instability, and hardship that boded ill for the future.

China represents a different problem. By achieving economic transformation under an authoritarian regime that systematically violates human rights, China demonstrated not only that rapid economic growth can be achieved without the kind of free market policies advocated under the “Washington Consensus,” but also that authoritarian regimes can be durable as incomes rise. Perhaps even more troubling from the perspective of neoliberal globalization is the erosion of democracy in the United States. Trump’s complaints about the “carnage” caused by bad trade deals and job-stealing migrants tapped into grievances arising from an increasingly unequal and polarized political system (Edsall 2022). As the US political system has become more oligarchic (Bartels 2008; Foweraker 2021), the commitment of its leaders to promoting democracy abroad has waned. The election of Joe Biden in 2020 temporarily reversed this trend, but Republican extremism destroyed a bipartisan consensus on democracy in foreign policy that took root under the Reagan presidency.

These trends invite renewed reflection. That democracy is vital for countries like Canada to defend is a proposition I accept, but seek to nuance. The trends I have just noted point to a deeper intellectual crisis of liberal democracy. The end of the Cold War not only failed to produce a more harmonious world based on a comity of liberal democracies: it failed to do so precisely because of an over-confidence in the inexorable advance of liberal democracy despite the highly uneven effects of market-led globalization. In addition, emerging global issues like

climate change, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and the management of pandemics have intersected with globalization in ways that challenge liberal democracies to address human needs beyond the immediate interests of voters and politicians within the confines of the nation state.

Consider some of the key challenges facing the world in the third decade of the 21st century. Liberal democracies need to find ways to include the needs of future generations in policy decisions. In 1987 the Brundtland Report harshly criticized the “spendthrift ways” in which current generations “overdraw” environmental resources that cannot be repaid: “We act as we do because we can get away with it: future generations do not vote; they have not political or financial power; they cannot challenge our decisions.” Decades later, the message from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is essentially the same: the window is closing on a liveable future for humanity.

Liberal democracies also need to supplement abstract and individualistic notions of citizenship with recognition of diverse cultures, histories, and systems of knowledge (Lightfoot and MacDonald 2017: 35). In coming to terms with the harms caused by ongoing colonialism—a process facilitated by a Royal Commission, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, and the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples—Canadians are beginning to realize that repairing the relations with First Nations cannot be achieved without decolonizing institutions and practices. Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us that demagoguery and nationalism can be an impediment to achieving global common goods. Liberal democracy may be the best system of government we have, but it is still insufficient. At the conclusion of this chapter, I suggest ways it can and must be supplemented.

Policy Frames: Conflict, Competition, Crisis

Setting aside bogus talk of “alternative facts” by demagogues, public policy controversies rarely revolve around disagreements over factual truths. Instead, they involve contrasting frames, which can be understood as mental maps that help us to see patterns and regularities in an often-chaotic world (Schwartz and Sharpe 2010; Rein and Schön 1996). Like all maps, policy frames provide pictures that highlight what we consider most worthy of attention. They engage our capacity for making decisions based on the discernment of relevant facts and relationships (Schwartz and Sharpe 2010: 61-62). Often frames involve narratives—stories we tell ourselves that imbue actions with meaning and purpose.

Linguist George Lakoff (2004) notes the crucial role of language in framing. The use of certain evocative words can conjure particular frames and thereby influence our understanding of the world and our attitudes toward it. A parent walking with a child might describe a forest as enchanted and magical, or dark and dangerous. The choice of words in that context are likely to influence the experience of the child. The words we use to describe global politics are likewise evocative of alternative frames.

Framing matters from a democratic perspective because the activity of self-government demands that we work through deliberative processes to achieve decisions to act collectively in the public sphere. Framing aids decision makers as they make the leap from analysis to action; it assists them in breaching the gap between what there is and what we ought to do about it. Since policy frames often work by providing the implicit or unstated narrative arc that gives meaning and coherence to action, competing frames can lead to different decisions and actions even as decision makers agree about the relevant facts on the ground. The source of disagreement needs to be excavated through analysis of implicit frames.

I suggest three competing frames for thinking about democracy in foreign policy. The first emphasizes conflict and calls itself realistic. In a world of states, where there is no overarching authority to punish aggression, all states must look out for their own interests. This frame evokes a Hobbesian world of war of all against all. A contrasting liberal frame emphasizes competition and suggests that states and non-state actors are motivated by the desire to maximize their interests, and this can be harnessed by institutions that foster competition. A third frame is critical in the sense that it emphasizes crises, the unviability of the status quo, and the need for change. It highlights the accumulation of wicked problems derived from over-population, unrestrained growth, the limits of environmental carrying capacity of the planet, the collapse of ecosystems and species diversity, climate change, pandemics, mass movements of peoples, violence and polarization.

Each of these policy frames has distinct implications for democracy, which will be explored below. Whereas realists question the relevance of democracy to foreign policy, liberals embrace democracy as a foreign policy goal, and critical theorists warn us about the capacity of democracy to respond to the multiple, overlapping crises of our times. I begin with the much-noted crisis of liberal democracy.

The Freeland Doctrine: A Neoliberal Frame?

For the purposes of this analysis, a good place to begin a discussion of the way in which Canadian foreign policy framing intersects with the current crisis of liberal democracy is with Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland's October 2022 speech to the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C. I argue that the "Freeland Doctrine" represents a continuation of neoliberal

foreign policy thinking—complete with the same flawed assumptions—but under new circumstances.¹

Freeland stated that “The past 33 years were guided by an idealism that was both high-minded and—for the countries of the transatlantic alliance—supremely comfortable. We were fat and happy, assured in our belief that we could do good by doing well.” Freeland insists that the intentions of the West were benevolent: “With hindsight, it is easy to mock the hubris and the naiveté which animated that era. But as we set about building its successor, it is important to start by remembering how generous and humane our intentions were.” But she acknowledges that the announcement of an End of History was not accompanied by effective and consistent efforts to put the West’s the universal rights and values into practice. She does not, however, question that these values are universal. “The End of History was founded on the profoundly liberal and egalitarian conviction that everyone in the world had the right and the ability to live as well as we do. That is why it was such a powerful and promising idea.”

Later I will return to the implications of the claim “everyone in the world had the right and the ability to live as well as we do.” Here, I merely note the irony that Gerald Butts, former Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Trudeau (2015-2019), when he was President and CEO of the World Wildlife Foundation, argued that four planets like earths would be required if everyone consumed resources the way Canadians do (World Wildlife Foundation [WWF] 2010).

¹ The speech assumes considerable import since last major comprehensive review of Canadian foreign policy was undertaken by the government of Pierre Trudeau in the late 1960s. The most recent review was interrupted by 9/11, completed several years later, and was largely ignored by the Harper government (Mulroney 2020; Levin Bonder 2019).

Freeland argued that the “End of History had an economic corollary.” That corollary was that, as countries became prosperous through trade, democracy would become inevitable and war would become an anachronism. The democratic peace was, in this view, reinforced by the “Golden Arches Theory”: no two countries in which McDonald’s operates would wage war on each other. In short, democracy and prosperity are mutually reinforcing and contribute to international harmony. Freeland acknowledges that this view is mistaken. Authoritarian regimes will not inevitably decline, and “economic interdependence” does “not always prevent war.” In short, “We need to assume that in the decades to come we will be sharing the planet with rich and powerful countries who do not share our values – who, in fact, often see our values as both hostile and inferior to theirs.”

Another way to think about the corollary of the End of History is in terms of competition as a driver of institutional change. Francis Fukuyama (2011) argues that institutions change is the result of competition. Competition among societies produces processes of institutions change that lead to winners (good institutions) prevailing over losers (bad ones). The End of the Cold War was interpreted by Fukuyama as a victory of good institutions over bad ones. Freeland acknowledges that liberal democracies have not prevailed but does not depart from a competitive view of international politics.

Her critique of the End of History leads to three propositions. First, “the world’s democracies, must strengthen our connections with each other,” including “friendshoring” (by which “democracies must make a conscious effort to build our supply chains through each other’s economies”). Second, the “in-between countries” (that is, those neither in among the friendshoring alliance nor among its adversaries, primarily from the global South) must be welcomed if they are prepared to play by the rules and “share our values.” Ultimately, “our own

success” will be key to “victory” which will be achieved “by delivering widespread prosperity for our own people.” Finally, democracies must be firm with autocrats: “authoritarian regimes are fundamentally hostile to us...Our success is an existential threat to them.” Democracies must avoid vulnerabilities and ensure they cannot be blackmailed by autocrats.

The first proposition appears at a glance to be consistent with a Kantian vision of democratic peace. Democracies have every right to engage more closely with other democracies and to shun autocracies. Moreover, building preferential economic linkages is a good way of creating incentives for other regimes to seek inclusion in the club of democracies. Such a logic has informed diverse market-driven integration projects. Moreover, Freeland explicitly advocates the inclusion of democracies that are not among the wealthy nations of the “non-geographic West.” Yet her analysis side-steps rising inequality, exacerbated by market-driven globalization. She notes but does not articulate an alternative to what she calls the “turbocharged globalization of the past 30 years.”

And yet this turbocharged globalization has contributed to the existential crossroads that Freeland has described in several ways. First, the global economy is a victim of its own success. The rise and occasional alignment of the BRICs—Brazil, Russia, India, and especially China—has deadlocked international trade negotiations, undermining the hegemony of the United States as a rule-maker in the global economy (Hopewell 2021). Second, globalization has produced a backlash, consistent with what Karl Polanyi called the “double movement” in which the market-led globalization produces countervailing pressures for social protection (Evans 2008). The rise of the Latin American left since 2000 can be seen as a reaction against the neoliberal model of development enshrined in the institutions that promote globalization. Finally, globalization

contributed to the rise of nativist and nationalist leaders like Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán, Giorgia Meloni, and Jair Bolsonaro.

Freeland rightly seeks to avoid a return to Cold-War era conflict but proposes to do so by reinforcing the institutionalized competition of neoliberal globalization. Freeland notes it was a mistake to assume “that we could do good by doing well.” And yet, instead of interrogating this connection, she reaffirms it by arguing that “our own success” will be key to “victory.” The contemporary crisis of democracy will not be resolved through intensifying or reconstituting the competitive market forces that created the crisis in the first place. Global conflict is to be avoided but liberal thinkers, especially neoliberals, often miss the ways in which liberalism itself contributes to generating conflict. As classical realists are fond of noting, conflict is often the product of liberal idealism. The Wilsonian idea of “making the world safe for democracy” is an example, and Freeland’s “friendshoring” has similarly belligerent implications. By contrast, realism emphasizes the importance of prudence: a hard-headed appreciation of the role of power and violence in politics and the necessity of minimizing their evils effects. It is not my goal to offer a defense of classical realism, however, but rather to offer a critical perspective on the assumption that we might “do good by doing well” competitively.

A Critical Perspective on the New Policy Frame

Liberalism is an insufficient bulwark against today’s polarization and extremism, as indeed it was in the 1930s. We tend to forget that one of the great lessons of the 1930s was precisely that in a context of globalization liberal democracy was vulnerable to extremism and therefore government had a role in balancing the inequalities created by market forces. As David Harvey (2005: 9) has written, “The restructuring of state forms and of international relations after the Second World War was designed to prevent a return to the catastrophic conditions that had so

threatened the capitalist order in the great slump of the 1930s.” This created conditions conducive to the class compromises that historically underpinned the social welfare state.

The Bretton Woods institutions were designed to allow states to provide for the welfare because Keynes and others of his generation understood that without a flexible system of regulation of markets the backlash against an open global economy would be inevitable. This was aptly described by John Ruggie (1982) as the “compromise of embedded liberalism.” The breakdown of this compromise happened for reasons that are too complex to address here. Suffice it to say that, beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the global marketplace became increasingly dis-embedded from social or political regulation. Neoliberal thinkers rose to prominence precisely at the historic moment that the USSR collapsed, there by contributing to the triumphalism and hubris mentioned by Freeland.

A return to the embedded liberalism of the past is unlikely. The power of globally mobile financial capital and the erosion of democratic regulation places social democracy at risk or out of reach in most countries, especially the most powerful driver of global capitalism, the United States. There are, however, powerful forces at work in the current crisis that offer a glimpse of what the future might hold in terms of disrupting existing policy frames. Two are mentioned by Freeland, and one is neglected; confronting them seriously calls into question the viability of her three propositions.

The first is the climate crisis. Freeland notes that “even as we are more cautious and more limited in our economic ties with authoritarian regimes, we need to work with them to preserve the global commons. That means, first and foremost, continuing to work together on tackling the

preeminent threat of climate change.” Freeland recognizes that the climate crisis cannot be addressed without China. “We cannot save the planet today without working with Beijing.”

It is unclear how a strategy of isolation or containment of authoritarianism offers hope for global cooperation on climate change. Freeland argues that “A more overtly suspicious attitude towards the world’s dictators need not preclude, or even imperil, cooperating on common goals.” Yet it seems likely that with regard to China “common goals” will involve contributing to rather than fighting climate change. Although the Trudeau government promised action on climate change, and a nation-wide price on emissions was created, emissions have not gone down, except temporarily due to Covid-19, and Canada is far from achieving its targets. The fight against climate change has not prevented Canadian contributions to emissions through its exports. Coal was Canada’s top export to China in 2022. Despite its commitment to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the Trudeau government will spend an estimated \$21 billion to expand the Trans Mountain Pipeline with the goal of exporting more crude oil to Asia. Already most of the Canadian crude that gets re-exported after being refined in the US Gulf Coast goes to China (Jaremko 2021). Freeland’s vision of friend-shoring would not reduce Canada’s efforts to ship fossil fuels to China. It is small wonder elements of the business community responded enthusiastically to the speech, pressing for more subsidies and regulatory changes to foster mining and energy projects (Corcoran 2022).

Cooperation with China would require an effort on the part of the Quad to understand that country’s legitimate developmental goals. But to do this implies recognizing that the economic model advanced by the rich countries cannot be imposed on the global South. A “win-win” relationship with China seems a remote possibility unless the “non-geographic West” can re-design the global economic order to allow wealth to be shared with the global South. The South

will need a global redistribution of wealth in order to adapt to climate harms that they have contributed little to creating, and rich countries will need that redistribution of wealth to secure their contributions. Yet we are far from a world in which the global redistribution of wealth is given serious consideration.

The second doubt expressed by Freeland concerns “my country’s original sin against Indigenous Peoples.” Yet Freeland seems primarily concerned to avoid self-doubt that would make the defense of liberal democracy vulnerable: “an awareness of unredeemed historical crimes, and of our serious fresh challenges, in no way contradicts my equally profound conviction that the liberal democracy we are so lucky to enjoy in Canada is the best way humans have found, so far, to organize a society. Self-criticism is a feature of democracies – not a bug. But it is a pitiless mirror that can rattle our self-confidence when we measure ourselves against tyrants and their armour of oblivion.”

There is much to unpack here, starting with the challenge of accommodating Indigenous self-determination within the framework of liberal democracy. This demands legal pluralism and recognition of Indigenous land and title. It also demands giving land back to Indigenous communities where treaties were not signed and negotiating nation-to-nation on the terms of a new relationship. It is hard to see how a genuine process of reconciliation is possible without a fundamental rethinking of liberal democracy and the market economy. In fact, the opportunity provided by reconciliation is precisely that we acknowledge the harms caused by colonization and embrace the possibility of repairing our relationship not only with Indigenous peoples but with ways of life that offer a better balance between human activity and nature. A democracy that found ways of decolonizing itself and allowed for Indigenous self-determination would look rather different from “the best way humans have found” to govern themselves. A renewed

nation-to-nation relationship with Canada's First Nations was promised, but most of the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission remain unfulfilled.

Finally, since the election of the Liberal government in 2015, there has been a gradual shift from a progressive domestic democratic reform agenda to a defensive preoccupation with external threats to democracy. In part, this reflects concern about evidence of meddling in Canadian and other elections by countries like China and Russia. These concerns came to a head in early 2023 when leaked intelligence reports suggested Beijing had sought to influence Canadian elections, resulting in a decision to appoint a special rapporteur to investigate and determine whether a public inquiry was necessary. Today, democracy intersects with foreign policy in ways that reflect the assertiveness of authoritarian regimes in a weakened global liberal order, but the shift toward a more defensive agenda was also the result of a loss of domestic democratic reform momentum.

As in the 1990s, the Liberal Party came into office promising sweeping democratic reforms, only to find their ardor cool after the election. Justin Trudeau's path to electoral victory in 2015 was paved with promises of democratic reform, including electoral reform, Senate reform, more free votes in parliament, improvements to Question Period, more power to parliamentary committees, and less in the Prime Minister's office. Although considerable progress was made on Senate reform (see the chapter by Peter Boehm in this volume), the single most important democratic reform that could have been undertaken by the Liberal government was to abandon the First-Past-the-Post electoral system. A more proportional system would have had a significant impact on Canadian politics. Insofar as it would have weakened the tendency to form false majority governments, it could have encouraged more cooperation in parliament and less hyper-partisanship. Yet the excellent work of the cross-partisan electoral reform committee was

peremptorily abandoned when its final report tilted toward electoral systems that did not appear to be favored by the Prime Minister (who later acknowledged his preference for the alternative vote system). In other words, the process was abandoned for partisan reasons.

In the 2019 election, many of the promises made in 2015 were reiterated: private members bills were to be given more time and committees were to be better resourced. A Canadian Centre for Peace, Order and Good Government would be created. The promise to govern more democratically rang hollow not only in light of the failure to pursue electoral reform but also after the SNC-Lavalin scandal and the dismissal of Minister of Justice and Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould. Moreover, the election of Donald Trump absorbed much of the attention of the government and contributed to a growing concern about electoral integrity at home and abroad. In addition, parliamentary reform was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which altered the functioning of the parliament, as much of its activity moved online. To some degree, parliament was sidelined by the pandemic; many members of parliament were overwhelmed by the specific, often-pandemic related demands by their constituents.

The 2021 election was widely seen as unnecessary and driven by a partisan calculation. The PM bet that relatively successful pandemic management would be rewarded at the polls, yet the writ was dropped in a transparent attempt to win a parliamentary majority despite the need for voters to weigh in on a major question of public policy. In the course of the campaign, the issue that emerged was the highly divisive matter of vaccine mandates, the politicization of which created a wedge in the Conservative Party and contributed to the rise of the Freedom Convoy. The occupation of Ottawa weakened the moderate leader of the official opposition, Erin O'Toole, and paved the way for one of the most partisan politicians in Canadian politics, Pierre Pollievre (a

former Harper Minister of Democratic Institutions responsible for the anti-democratic “Fair Elections Act”).

The 2021 Liberal election platform placed stress on democracy and human rights as foreign policy objectives: “With foreign threats and interference on the rise and the impact of authoritarian trends more widespread, now more than ever, it is time to place the promotion of democracy, human rights, and rule of law at the centre of our foreign policy.” The meant, *inter alia*, support for emerging democracies, the creation of an anti-corruption court, protection for persecuted minorities, and support for human rights, feminist, and LGBTQ2 activists. Again, the Liberals reiterated their promise to establish a Canadian Centre for Peace, Order and Good Government. Even in the most modest way in which the Liberal government might have democratized foreign policy, little action was taken. The Liberals did not initiate broad-based foreign policy consultations nor put in place a meaningful public engagement strategy. Civil society filled the gap: an innovative participatory process of examining Canada’s place in the world was conducted by the Canadian International Council (2021), a non-governmental organization. The lack of public engagement by government went hand-in-hand with a lackluster diplomatic record. Canada acquired a reputation for rhetorically espousing progressive values but doing little to take or support diplomatic initiatives. Even on the democracy file, despite the opportunities created by multiple democracy summits, Canada has shown little international leadership. This is largely because little happens in Ottawa without the PMO’s direct involvement.

To be fair, the Canadian government was forced to commit substantial resources to the NAFTA renegotiation process demanded by the Trump administration, and by most accounts was successful in protecting domestic economic interests. For that, of course, Freeland in particular

gets considerable credit. But this may also explain the why, despite ending her talk on an ostensibly inspiring note, Freeland's vision is ultimately a grim one. She concluded by exhorting her Washington audience to "build a world where we can save the planet and ensure that working people have good jobs and lead comfortable lives. A world where we look after our friends. A world where democracies depend on democracies, rather than despots." This is a foreign policy frame that divides the world into friendly democrats, authoritarian enemies, and in-between nations that have to be cajoled and corralled into supporting rich democracies. It does not appear to be a world in which the prospects for global climate action, reconciliation, and the deepening of democracy at home and abroad have a bright future.

Current Crises

In this final substantive section, I want to offer a third frame for thinking about current foreign policy challenges. Instead of emphasizing either conflict or competition, I want to suggest that the dramaturgical metaphor of crises is more appropriate (Habermas 1976). I use the plural to capture what some are calling the contemporary "polycrisis" (see the discussion in the chapter in this volume by Jeremy Kinsman) The idea is meant to capture the severity, the acceleration, and the overlapping of multiple crises facing humanity which may derive from climate change, collapse of ecosystems, loss of biodiversity and wilderness, pandemics and contagious diseases caused in part by human encroachments into wilderness and global mobility, inequality and its politically corrupting effects, polarization and extremism, misinformation, disinformation, war and conflicts caused by dispossession and migration, demands for decolonization, and the proliferation of identity politics as ways of life as the planet becomes increasingly connected but also uprooted. These forces spread and multiply, often exacerbating one another with astonishing

intensity and speed. In this context, not only democracy but governance generally may be overwhelmed and unable to cope.

The observation that democracy is in a world-wide recession or crisis has to be accompanied by a recognition that contemporary political regimes function under unprecedented circumstances. This is neither to deny the erosion of democracy, nor to suggest it must fail, but rather to insist that the biggest challenge to democracy may be endogenous: the limit of the capacity of democratic governments to meet the urgent challenges humanity faces. These challenges implicate all political systems, but they are also democratic crises in a specific sense: institutional features of contemporary democracies may be a hindrance to their resolution.

For example, democracies are good at aggregating the preferences of specific groups of individuals at particular moments in time. They are less capable of consideration of future generations, non-citizens, or non-human life. This makes democratic institutions, as currently configured, ill-equipped to respond to the climate crisis, the costs of which are borne most heavily by future generations, people living in vulnerable environments, and other species, none of which have legal standing or voting rights in contemporary liberal democracies. Even the challenge of reconciling liberal democracy with Indigenous self-government eludes most if not all contemporary democracies. Although the climate emergency is the most urgent and existential crisis we face, similar problems of exclusion and non-enfranchisement afflict democratic governance in the spheres of conservation, public health (including disease and substance use), migration, the protection of the public sphere, domestic violence and international conflict.

In many of these global issues, the dilemma entails what biologist Garrett Hardin (1968) called the tragedy of the commons—namely, the tendency of individuals to burden the commons as a result of individually rational strategies of maximizing welfare. Using the example of shepherds using common pasture for cattle, he argued that when the carrying capacity of the commons was reached, collapse would follow. Hardin specifically stressed “tragedy of *freedom* in the commons” (my italics). It was individual freedom to pursue and individually rational but collectively ruinous strategy that was at the heart of the dilemma. “Freedom in the commons brings ruin to all” (Hardin 1968: 1244). This helps explain the contested status of freedom in the contemporary political debates on global issues, as well as the challenges this poses to democracies that rely on a public philosophy that values individual freedom to maximize utility.

There can be little question that human freedom has, to paraphrase Hegel, continued its march through history. What is less clear is whether the march is progress. Certainly, the struggle for freedom constitutes a deep, often imperceptible social force for democratization. Citizens have more choices, more resources, more capabilities to choose how they want to live and what they want to be than ever before—even, to some degree, in non-democratic regimes. The world’s most authoritarian regimes—China, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela—struggle to contain pressure to allow greater freedom. But this powerful human insistence on freedom may well be the cause of our ultimate downfall. We seem to lack the capacity as citizens, as communities, and as a species to make sacrifices even for the sake of our own individual and collective survival. The pandemic has revealed our impatience with the slightest restrictions, imposed for our own good, and government is paralyzed when faced with emergency situations both natural and social. This bodes ill for our capacity to adapt and mitigate tragedies of the commons.

Can our systems of government demonstrate their relevance or even minimal capacity to deal with our most pressing collective needs? To answer this question, we need to more thoroughly probe what it means to recognize the difference between doing well and doing good. We need to reimagine the global common good.

Modest Proposals

I end with three modest proposals to address our current democratic crises. These suggestions are offered not as concrete action plans, but as an attempt to glance at the horizon and take our bearings for the path ahead. It is a call to end our blind rush into catastrophe, and it is informed by Hardin's (1968: 1243) view that our challenges are not technical but require "a fundamental extension in morality."

First, democracy today, as in the past, demands civic virtue—both from leaders and citizens. Only citizens capable of concern for all other citizens, non-citizens, human and non-human life are fit for self-rule in the Anthropocene. I echo Jeremy Kinsman's reflections in his excellent essay in this volume. Democracy demands more than institutions; it demands citizens capable of behaving (I would say functioning) democratically within those institutions. They put the common good ahead of narcissistic and materialistic self-interest that markets promote and ahead of the office-seeking and partisan interests that elections promote. Civic virtue is learned through practice; and through practice the habits of self-government in a political community are acquired. A community capable of placing collective survival and flourishing above individual egocentrism can avoid the tragedy of freedom in the commons.

Second, democracy today, as in the past, demands leadership with moral authority. Without moral authority, leaders are incapable of demanding (and modeling) sacrifices for the greater

good. Pandering and demagoguery have always afflicted democracies, and cannot be avoided, but the price of such irresponsibility is today higher than ever before. The specific nature of the problem, which in the past would have been called the mischief of faction, today takes the form of hyper-partisanship. The strength of democracy depends on the ability of citizens and rulers alike to embrace moderate partisanship, which leads to politics as a practice of collective self-government of equal citizens, not the practice of domination which involves the imposition of the will of one party over another. There are many ways to attenuate partisanship, including electoral reform, participatory innovations, the cultivation of reflection-in-action in politics, and public education.

A third crucial defense of democracy is the preservation of knowledge and trust in expertise. Shared knowledge—indeed language itself—is a fundamental common good and must be protected against misinformation, disinformation, deliberate falsehood, and plain nonsense (Gessen 2020). This involves careful balancing acts, since I have already noted that we face moral and political rather than technical challenges. We should not turn to experts to make public decisions for us but *with* us; and we need to find ways of agreeing on factual truths while acknowledging that the decision to act on what we know demands political skill and knowledge—what the Greeks called “practical wisdom” or *phronesis* (Schwartz and Sharpe 2018). The protection and strengthening of a professional public service is critical to the collective ability to deliberate and act on the basis of shared knowledge and evidence.

Each of these proposals points not only to ways of making democracy a more effective instrument of policy, but also of improving the functioning of democracy itself. The strength of democracy depends on its ability to address our greatest collective challenges, and democracy’s ability to meet those challenges is the best guarantee of its future prospects. Canadian foreign

policy in particular, although it merits some praise for its contribution to a more democratic world, may also be taken to task for doing too little to meaningfully engage citizens in the global struggle for a more democratic world.

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