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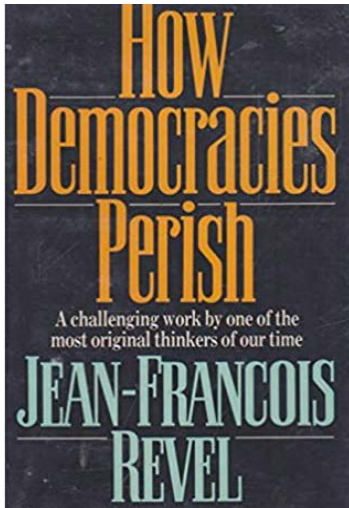
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This book by Jean-Francois Revel (1983), is a study that compares communist countries to democratic countries. One can easily see that this book was written at a time that the so-called soviet threat was at its peak as the author constantly reminds the reader of the danger of the Soviet Union. He blames the Western countries to be so naïve thus susceptible to the threats posed by the U.S.S.R. One may choose to dismiss this book rightfully so as Revel appears to make assumptions that none of them are true today. For instance, he argues that, and that attack which is being waged with an unexampled vigour... is catching the democracies in a state of intellectual incompetence ... makes a Communist victory probable, if not inevitable (p.10). This is as we clearly see today could not be farther from the truth as the Soviet Union collapsed only 7 years after this book was published. Such approach, however, will prevent us from learning some of the lessons in this book. First and perhaps the most important lesson of this book is that democracy is not a perfect system. It is a desirable system but by its very nature, it allows sometimes very dangerous political fractions

to be present therefore paving the way towards its own destruction. 32 year later from Revel, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) made a similar argument and said that rules do not enact themselves. Moreover, he points out the issues of international institutions and their unwillingness to intervene when a country slides into authoritarianism. On page 301, for example, he contends that, 'I submit that the mechanisms of international relations and world opinion is so rigged that in almost every situation it imposes an almost insurmountable initial handicap on the West' (Revel 1983). Beyond its value of accurately stating some structural problems in international organisations or in the West, the author, as mentioned above, plays the game of predicting the future in which he fails. In his defence, perhaps, it would be one thing to say that at the time, the Soviet Union was at its peak and people were afraid of its ability to extend its power. This might be true but if this teaches political scientists anything, it would be to avoid predicting the future or attempting to write scholarly pieces on events that are still unfolding. There is, of course, nothing wrong with unpacking events that are unfolding before our eyes. It is, however, dangerous to offer solutions or predictions about them. Though the book offers rich empirical evidence from many countries, the value of each evidence is questionable as the author seems to frame every instance along the lines of the struggle between the Soviet Union vs. the West. For that, the book barely moves further from a propagandist discourse. Overall, though many arguments put forth by Revel seem irrelevant today, there are lessons that we can obtain from this book. First as stated below, democracy is not armed well enough to defend itself against internal and external threats. Second, democracy appears to beat the odds and remain the most common style of government despite many challenges against its existence. For that, it is wise to stay optimistic about the trajectory of democracy while remain educated and alert about any possible threats to it.

References

- Levitsky, S. and D. Ziblatt. 2018. How democracies die. Broadway Books.
- Revel, J.-F. 1983. How Democracies Perish. New York: Doubleday and Company.

¹ Ibrahim Genc is a PhD candidate in the school of government and international relations at Griffith University. He is also a research editor at Democratic Decay and Renewal (Dem-Dec).