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PARTICIPANTS:

Host:

TORREY TAUSSIG
Nonresident Fellow, Foreign Policy,
Center on the United States and Europe
The Brookings Institution

Guests:

DHRUVA JAISHANKAR
Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, Foreign Policy,
Brookings India
The Brookings Institution

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MS. TAUSSIG: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast. My name is Torrey Taussig and I am a Nonresident Fellow in the Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings. This episode on the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the fourth and final episode in a four part series titled Democracy and Disorder, a new project in the foreign policy program that looks at critical challenge to democratic states and institutions in a new era a great power competition, and offers ideas for what to do about them.

This episode focused on democracy in India and India's evolving role in the liberal international order. At a time when global democracy is challenged the large majority of those living under democratic governance live outside the West. Several democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific and Asia have proven less affected by the populous tide than their Western counterparts. And India, as the largest democracy in the world, and one with a growing economy appears to

be on such sign of resilience.

To discuss a new perspective on the strength of democracy and international order, as well as India's evolving role in this order I am joined by Dhruva Jaishanka, a contributor to the Democracy and Disorder Project, and a Fellow in the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings India in New Delhi. He is also a Nonresident Fellow at the Lowy Institute in Australia. And Dhruva is joining us over the phone from New Delhi. Thank you for joining us today, Dhruva.

MR. JAISHANKAR: Thanks for having me, Torrey.

MS. TAUSSIG: So, Dhruva, you bring a new perspective to this democracy program, a non-Western perspective, and in your paper for the project you discuss your view on the global state of democracy. And in the West there is a relatively pessimistic policy debate featuring conversations on populism, declining trust in democratic institutions, economic grievances, culture wars. A number of issues that are

making it appear that democracy is challenged across the West. But what do you see from your perspective sitting in New Delhi? Do you think that we are on the verge of a global democratic recession?

MR. JAISHANKAR: You know, I wouldn't necessarily jump to that conclusion or I certainly wouldn't be as pessimistic. It's hard to say that there aren't problems, and I think you rightly identified a lot of the problems that we've been talking about. And many of them are shared not just in Western democracies, but around the world.

I think if you take a step back there's a long history, if you will, of democracies predicting the decline of democracy. And before World War II with the rise of fascism and communism. It goes back to the Cold War, and you see a lot of very pessimistic literature in the 50s through the 70s on democracy, and the belief that maybe it wasn't a superior system to others. And I think, you know, maybe we're at a different moment today. It's not as if there aren't

problems. There are some very deep problems.

But take a study done by Freedom House and this is, I think, a very well-respected study that measures a quantity and the scale of democracy around the world. The numbers of countries that Freedom House defines as free countries has remained relatively the same over the last 20 years, 44 to 47 percent roughly. The number of countries that Freedom House defined as not free has also been pretty consistent, 22 to 26 percent, and the numbers that are partly free, about 28 to 32 percent. So that doesn't necessarily indicate the precipitous decline in democracy.

And I think other indicators, both measures of the quality of democracy show that, again, with very notable exceptions you haven't seen a kind of precipitous decline. And then I would say the third factor to look at is public opinion surveys about the satisfaction of democracy which, again, indicates some contrasting trends certain Western or non-Western

countries.

MS. TAUSSIG: So how much would you say, Dhruva, that Western conceptions of democracy factor in to this perception of global democratic decline? And maybe you could outline for us what you see as difference conceptions between the West and the non-West views on what it means to be a democratic state.

MR. JAISHANKAR: I think some of that you have to step back, and I've tried to do that in my paper, step back a little bit into how countries became democratic in the first place. And I can mostly categorize countries into three broad baskets. One, starting with the United States, actually, where countries have really initially were inspired by the enlightenment, by enlightenment principles. You see this in the founding U.S. documents, the Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, the Constitution. And, basically, had a strong emphasis on individual. And that's mostly been sustained in countries like the United States that have been very immigrant heavy

where you have this kind of melting pot of people, and there's a strong emphasis on individual rights.

You have a second group of countries largely in Europe and in South Korea to the mix of democratic countries that also have a very strong national identity. And there, in some ways, these become nation states at around the same time or they actually democratized after becoming nation states in some ways. So you had relatively homogenous societies in all of these places which made it easier to focus on a democratic rule. And I think one key feature is that's kind of central, I think, to some of the immigration debates that these countries are having. They tend to be much more anti-immigration than even the United States and then say Canada and Australia.

But the third group of countries, in some ways, the most interesting, and these are countries that had to forge a democratic identity and democratic institutions in a much more pluralistic and multicultural setting. And this is really, in some

ways, a consequence of decolonization that took place mostly after World War II. And India was at the forefront of this, so in 1947 India becomes independent. It's this large multicultural, multi-religious country, and very unusually they decide to go with a democratic constitution. And it looks very different from, say the U.S. constitution. It actually has carve outs for various minority groups. It tries to protect collective identity, not just individual rights.

And, in some ways, the Indian experience is not that unusual if you look at most democratizing African countries or Asian countries. Their setups look quite similar. And it leads to things like Lebanon you can only be president, prime minister, or speaker of the legislature if you belong to a certain ethnic group. That's something that will be really foreign to European and --

MS. TAUSSIG: Right.

MR. JAISHANKAR: -- America. You see carve

outs on, you know, who can -- for whom a mandatory military service is required, who has certain kind of representation in the legislature or legal services. And you see that in countries like India and Bangladesh and Indonesia, in South Africa and Kenya, Nigeria. So this is the kind of phenomenon that I thought was useful to insert into debate because, again, these are democratic countries. In some ways, they're all becoming more democratic mostly. But it looks very different from a classic European nation state or a country like the United States.

MS. TAUSSIG: And I think this is an excellent perspective, you know, the one that a further shortcoming in this debate on democracy worldwide is the inability, at times, to distinguish between, as you write for the project, different democratic architectures, and to note that not all democracies are cut from the same cloth. So this is an important distinction as we look at the global state of democracy between Western, as you mentioned,

kind of enlightenment democracies and those coming more from a post-Colonial tradition.

And to come back to this current moment, this current contested moment in international order, and a time when democracy itself is contested. You mention a number of differences between Western and non-Western conceptions of democracy. Can you also walk us through what you see as some of the similar challenges that democratic states either emerging or advanced face at this moment in time?

MR. JAISHANKAR: So I do think there are some very key areas of convergence, or at least similar experiences that are being faced, and I like to describe them as the four Is which are identity, inequality, information, and interference. And let me unpack what I mean by each of these.

I think on the identity question there was this belief that came up that given the information environment, given greater democratization that we also see the bigger cosmopolitan, more cosmopolitan

societies emerge, not just globally and internationally, but also within countries. That we become more tolerant. That we become -- we be more exposed to people that weren't like us.

And I think one of the myths and one of the things that's been unexpected and we've seen this become more pronounced in the last few years in different countries and different places is that identity remains very crucial to peoples' societies, and we see this in the anti-immigration debates in Europe. We see this in the continued rise of identity politics in India. Recently Indonesia had a very crucial case where the Governor of Jakarta, the largest city, was a minority Christian was arrested and tried and jailed for blasphemy. And so even a country that is otherwise in many ways a real success case in democracy Indonesia. Identity remains very strong.

In inequality, I mean, well, what's actually key is not just simply actual inequality, but the

perception of relative inequality between people. And that, of course, leads to greater frustration and, again, we're seeing this play out in different ways. Particularly as economies change towards capital intensive and high productivity types of economies which lead to stagnant wage growth in the lower end of the income spectrum.

I think a third shared challenge is the new information environment, and I think adjusting to how, particularly the digital sphere is now affecting information flows which are critical to how a good democracy should function is a common concern. And I think the rise of political echo chambers, growing misinformation or fake news, the increase theatricality of politics is, again, a common feature on multiple places.

In India, for example, you now have this phenomenon of opposition parties walking out of parliament, and this only started in the last one to two decades when parliamentary debates starting

becoming television. So, in some ways, the irony is televising parliamentary debates has made India more democratic in some ways. People can actually see in real time what is being debated by their election leaders. At the same time, it's actually undermined the functioning of parliament because there's a tendency to fall back on theatrics.

The last concern I think is interference and that's part of the idea of open societies. All societies are, to various degrees, open. We expect both to outside and internal debate and whether it's financing, other mechanisms like that. And sometimes that's not necessarily reciprocated by non or less open societies. So I think one of the issues we're dealing with is, you know, we expect a certain kind of, maybe interference is too strong a word sometimes, but influence by external actors, but you're at a disadvantage in terms of influencing them back. And we see this again as the U.S. China competition I think is quite critical to that. So I think these are

some common concerns: identity, inequality, information, and interference that are shared to different degrees by all democracies.

MS. TAUSSIG: Dhruva, I want to pick up on one of the four Is that you put forward. This notion of inequality really affecting advanced democracies across the West, but in other regions as well, and this has been a significant phenomenon since the 2008 global financial crisis in which we saw inequality further increase even at a time of global economic recession. And at the same time, over the last decade we have seen a new successful authoritarian economic model put forward by China at a time where Chinese influence and presence around the world is rising.

Do you see China's authoritarian economic model, if we can call it that, present a clear and, perhaps, new alternative to democracy for emerging economies, emerging democracies around the world? Authoritarian leaders that might be presented with new political and economic options from China or is the

choice between a liberal democratic model and China's authoritarian economic model, perhaps, too simplistic? How do you see this new choice put forward by China's economic model?

MR. JAISHANKAR: Well, I think what's really interesting about China's rise is, well, initially it did not try and say that it was a model for other countries. That kind of self-perception in its rise until relatively recently. It was unique. And it has changed a little bit under Xi Jinping the Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party President. But now for the first time China is exerting itself in a way, positioning itself as a model, actively talking about how Western systems are inferior to what it has. So it's interesting to see how this will play out, and we do see a certainly collaboration by China with other authoritarian leaders around the world.

At the same time, I wouldn't read too much into it yet because very few other countries are actively trying to replicate China's model of

governance, at least at the macro level. Maybe, you know, local level development I think we are seeing some actors are trying emulate certain aspects. But certainly at the macro level there are very countries.

And just to put this in perspective I think that only five other countries in the world today, apart from China, that are constitutionally single party states, and they are Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, Cuba, and Eritrea. And barring, perhaps, Vietnam, the others aren't exactly models of good governance. So I think it is interesting that, you know, you don't see this single party state model being replicated actively by other places, and in most other authoritarian states they're actually within a nominally multiparty framework.

You see the rise of one party or one individual who's consolidating power, you know, whether it's Hungary or Turkey or anywhere else. So I do think China's rise is clearly having an effect and many are looking to China in much more positive ways

today because of what it has been able to accomplish economically. But at the same time, I'd caution against this idea that China is offering a successful alternative model to democracy quite yet.

MS. TAUSSIG: Dhruva, I want to turn to focus on democracy within India, in particular. We've discussed to this point that India is a very dynamic pluralistic system. It is the largest democracy in the world population wise. It, of course, is still beset by many challenges that democratic governments face, corruption. Many say that the current prime minister, Narendra Modi has consolidated control in ways that we haven't seen from other Indian governments in decades. What do you see as specific challenges that India currently faces to its democratic system?

MR. JAISHANKAR: You know, I think India faces a multitude of challenges, and in some ways it makes it very fascinating to work at a public policy institute in India because just about every problem

that you have anywhere in the world you have some variation of it almost in India. At the same time, you know, I think in some ways the roots of Indian democracy have never been deeper.

When you had the first few elections in the 1950s and 1960s there were real questions about whether it could work, whether it would last. A majority of people who were voting in those early elections were illiterate, couldn't read or write their own names. And, you know, I think there were real questions about whether it could function and last in a society like that. It was really quite impoverished. It was dependent on the rest of the world for food aid until the 1960s.

But, you know, I think if you look today, I mean, China's rise has been incredibly impressive. There's no question about that. But, again, India using in a democratic framework has been managing to grow at 7, at times in the recent part 8 percent a year for much of the last decade or two. So I think,

you know, for some people, again, India's rise has been overshadowed by China's and there's many good reasons for that. But I think not enough look at sort of how India has successfully managed to create a somewhat rising and growing economy amidst huge demographic challenges. We have a very large growing youth population. And, again, a democratic system.

Now, again there are some of the issues and the same issues that are being faced in the West, you know, inequality is an issue so we are seeing just as in some ways India's opening up both economy and a society you're also seeing a great state control over certain aspects of it in an effort to mitigate the inequality sometimes. And you are seeing a rise of identity politics, you know, not just on the right and the left and in different regions as well.

So not just Hindu nationalism which we have seen, but also a state-level identity. So many of the large states, and so the larger Indian states have populations of 40, 60, 80, in one case, 200 million

people. Sizeable countries. Many of them have state-level parties that cater largely to regional concerns. And, again, they've capitalized on a regional identity in many ways.

We have caste parties emerging as well whose basis, one -- and in many cases these are disadvantaged castes as well who politically organized. This happened to begin in the 90s. So we do have the rising identity politics, again, and with the deepening of democracy. You have concerns about inequality. You have a real problem with fake news, I think, and that's going to -- we're going to see this in the next few weeks in the election campaign. So these are just some of the things that India is facing on top of everything else as part of its development.

MS. TAUSSIG: And, Dhruva, one critical aspect of this Democracy and Disorder project that we've really tried to tease out from the policy briefs and the contributions in this project is to look at the intersection between challenges and opportunities

within democratic systems and the role that such democratic states might play in international order. And India is no exception to this intersection and to this focus. And so I'm curious what you see as the debate in New Delhi about India's role in upholding an international system in many ways that appears to be fraying?

MR. JAISHANKAR: That's a really interesting question, and in the past it's been a much more contentious question. That is Indians have traditionally if you talk to many Indian leaders or policymakers they'll say, you know, India's very proud of its own democracy, but it doesn't believe in imposing that value on other people. Now, I think that's a nice thing to say and it's politically correct, but the reality is a little bit different.

And, in fact, a colleague of mine, Constantino Xavier who's a Fellow, another Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings India is doing some fascinating work on ways in which India has, in

fact, contributed in the past and currently to democratic stake holding in a variety of countries. Most notably, in its near neighborhood, even though it has not embraced, necessarily the rhetoric of democratic promotion.

And just some of the ways, you know, that it come out are Indian capacity building efforts, particularly in the developing world. I mean, you have diplomats from all across Africa, administrators, electing commissioners, elections administrators, ombudsman, judges who come to India for training. And in some ways, the environment is maybe similar, but, you know, India's actually used its own resources to help build a soft capacity in these emerging democracies in Africa, in South Asia, in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

Another good example I think is, you know, India's building into its own foreign aid and foreign development projects. Efforts that, basically, (inaudible 0:18:32.2) to ensure better transparency,

better -- you know, less corruption and things like that. Again, a lot of this is a work in progress, but it offers a bit of a contrast to, for example, China's Belgium Road initiative. I takes into accounts things like local environmental concern. So I think these are some of the efforts on the way.

Afghanistan I think is a great example. I mean, Afghanistan's running through a lot of challenges and I think we will see the situation deteriorate maybe a little bit in the next year or two, but at the same time over the last 15, 20 years India has quietly built the parliament building in Cabo. It has provided training for civil servants and military officers, and election commissioner as well. It's, you know, students, so. And also provided other, sort of, hard infrastructure related to the state. So it's a case where it doesn't get a lot of press, but I think India is contributing in these various ways, and I'm not sure that's always recognized.

And India's certainly not alone. Prior to the economic slowdown Brazil was very active in Africa, including in Western Africa for doing similar things in terms of providing assistance and development. And then take efforts like in Indonesia there's something called the Bali Democracy Forum set up by the previous president which is the kind of thing that you think should be celebrated and supported by the West which is, you know, again, a forum for democratic cooperation.

These are some examples, I think, of non-Western democracies taking a more active role in supporting, bolstering, promoting democracy both at home and overseas that, I think, would benefit from support from more established and developed Western countries.

A similar point which was your issue on other things that can be done in collaboration. I think, again there's a lot that can be done in terms of lessons learned. And, in fact, just in the next

few days there are going to be some discussions here in Delhi about how India can harden its system, including its political system from the prospective of foreign interference, knowing that this has been a concern in the past and recent elections in Europe and the United States.

MS. TAUSSIG: Just to pick up on that last point, this notion of, kind of, foreign interference in India's upcoming elections. Where is India typically seen such kinds of interference emerge from when it comes to its national elections?

MR. JAISHANKAR: In the past there hasn't been large scale concerns about foreign interference. There have been concerns about foreign funding for political parties and that remains. It's a longstanding concern going back to the 60s and 70s, you know, various politicians were accused of being, at the height of the Cold War, you know, being funded by the Soviets or being funded by the United States. So I think that kind of foreign interference has

always been -- there've been concerns about.

To date, India have been relatively insulated from some of the foreign inference concerns that we've seen in countries like France and, of course, the U.S. And it may be for a few curious reasons. I think one is there are specific concerns about Russia and in many Western countries, and for political reasons and otherwise Russia doesn't have the same interest in interfering in India politics. But you would think there would be more concern about China and (inaudible 0:21:14.2) which are two adversarial relationship that India has had. But, again, for a few unusual reasons I think India has been somewhat immune.

And that's due to a few things. One is a sort of hardening of its electoral mechanisms. So, for example, India electronic voting machines are offline which helps in preventing tampering. Their system's in place to ensure that, now, electronic votes can be recounted and that the prospect of

interference is minimized. So the hardening of the mechanics of the elections I think has helped. A real credit due to the Election Commission of India for that.

But other things, you know, you don't really have -- it's really hard for foreign entities of any kind, any country to fund media organizations or educational organizations in India. And those have often been vessels of influence. So, again, for a variety of very unusual reasons I think India has been relatively immune today. That doesn't mean that they'll remain immune forever.

MS. TAUSSIG: And you bring up and interesting point, Dhruva, about the extent to which non-Western democracies have already begun contributing to global democracy institution building and norms in ways in which it's not always completely appreciated in the West. Moving forward, how do you think cooperation between democracies can be improved?

MR. JAISHANKAR: There's no easy answer to

that, particularly a time when there is concern about democratic decline, real or perceived. I think it's going to be difficult to actively promote that, although I'm sure that there will be efforts to that extent. I think India has a little less shyness about talking publicly about democracy as a virtue. Again, it's changing. It's still not as active as, say, the U.S. government is on that, but I think the needle has shifted a little bit.

A few years ago, for example, the U.S. and India supported a democracy fund at the United Nations, and, again, it was a small fund. I'm not sure it's been used as effectively as it could have been, but it marked a step in India's own ability to position itself as a leader of the democratic world.

But largely I think on two broad areas I think we can see more collaboration which is, one, tapping into existing initiatives by the developing world and seeing how they can buttress Western initiatives. Sometimes it may not be in the name of

democracy, but, you know, whether it is development initiatives, whether it's capacity building initiatives. That kind of work is already underway.

I think a second element will be just improving dialogue amongst democracies to try and address similar problems that all are facing. And there, I think, we haven't seen as much progress. There have been some kind of track two efforts or non-governmental efforts led out of Eastern Europe and Indonesia, other places, but it's not yet gone to a level that states are taking an active role. And there are some good reasons for that. I think nobody wants to be unnecessarily exclusive. Nobody wants to have to very strictly define what is a democracy and what isn't, particularly in areas where these are emerging democracies that may see some backsliding.

So I think all these reasons there's been a hesitance on the part of both Western democracy and non-Western democracies to talk about, say, a community of democracies which is an idea floated a

little while ago. But, you know, I think we may be moving very slowly in that direction.

MS. TAUSSIG: And, Dhruva, I would be remiss at the close of our conversation to not ask you about India's own upcoming national elections in just a few short months. What do you see as some of the competing visions for India that will be put on display by both current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parties and the opposition party going into this election?

MR. JAISHANKAR: And so, you know what, the election is always an exciting time in India. Every, at least in the recent past, every national election by India has been the largest organized activity in history just because the number of voters increase with each election. So, you know, you'll have, you know, tens of millions of first-time voters just in this election alone. So it will be very interesting to see how it goes, but already at this point in time in campaign mode, although the dates of the elections

have not been set quite yet, but it'll happen in the next few weeks.

In terms of competing visions, you know, I think there are some differences around the margins, but by and large India has been, at least in terms of its foreign policy and its position in the world has been relatively consistent over the last 25 years or so, from the time it embarked on economic realization 1991. And we've seen, more or less, each prime minister, regardless of party, build upon the progress made by his predecessor. So in some ways it hasn't been that much discontinuity between Modi and his predecessor Manmohan Singh belonged to Congress Party and foreign affairs.

There have been some changes around the margins and in terms of the rhetoric used and how things are presented and portrayed. But, largely, there's been, I think, more continuity than there has been discontinuity and I would expect that to continue no matter what happens in the forthcoming elections.

There will be some changes around the margins. I think, you know, we may see an India that is more, you know, slightly more or less inward looking depending on what happens in the election. But I don't think we'll see a dramatic change.

MS. TAUSSIG: Well, Dhruva, this has been an interesting conversation focusing not only on democracy in India, but India's evolving role in international order moving forward, and I want to thank you for taking the time to speak with us this morning.

MR. JAISHANKAR: Thanks so much, Torrey.

MS. TAUSSIG: You can find out more about the democracy and disorder project and [Brookings.edu/democracyanddisorder](https://www.brookings.edu/democracyanddisorder). The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network. You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter at [policypodcasts](https://twitter.com/policypodcasts) and email questions or comments to bcp@brookings.edu. Gaston Riverata [phonetic] is the audio engineer and Quinn

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A special thanks to Fred Dues [phonetic] host of the Brookings Cafeteria Podcast and Anna Newbie [phonetic] in foreign policy for their assistance with this special series. Thanks for listening. I'm Torrey Taussig.

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190