

# TIZIANA TORRESI | **The Cosmopolitan Future Of Democracy**

**Daniele Archibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008.**

In *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens* Daniele Archibugi argues for the extension of the principles and practice of democracy to the global arena, offering us a critical analysis of the prospects of global democratic reforms. This work is a much awaited book length exposition of the project of global democracy from one of its leading proponents and represents the culmination of two decades of reflection on this topic. This shows in the richness, thoughtfulness and depth of the arguments the author puts forward in his contribution to a debate that is fundamental for contemporary politics.

The book develops over two parts. In the first Archibugi engages with the theory of cosmopolitan democracy and global governance, in the second he grapples with the practical problems posed by such an ambitious project. A strength of the book is its determination in showing us what steps must be undertaken if we are to achieve the goal of global democracy. Archibugi does not simply argue for an ideal end state of global democracy, which would be no mean achievement in itself, but goes to the trouble of addressing the issue of the reforms necessary to the design of global democratic institutions. He traces a progressive, and feasible, path of reform and restructuring of international organizations aimed at their democratization, as well as arguing for changes in the behavior of existing democracies. In this, the book is a convincing reply to skeptics and critics of global democracy; this is indeed a book about an ideal, but not about a mere utopia.

Archibugi claims that democracy, at the dawn of the new millennium, is not only the victorious political system, but indeed the only available one. People all over the world have chosen democracy and indeed thought for it, giving rise to a powerful, transnational mass movement which has achieved great change with surprisingly little bloodshed. This is perhaps the best indication that democracy is indeed a universal system of values. However, his book is no naïve celebration of the virtues of actual democracies, even though the author does acknowledge the actual, material advantages that living in a democracy provides. To the contrary, it is the duality of the behavior of democracies that is the target of the author's critical stance: democracies apply two different standards of behavior within and outside their borders, they respect democratic principles on the inside but refuse to share power in the international arena. World politics is therefore dominated by an oligarchy of states, it is this "schizophrenia" that global democracy is meant to cure by extending democratic principles and practices beyond the states' borders.

The institution of global democracy is, however, also necessary to the effective exercise of democratic decision making on the part of political communities.

The increasing globalization of economies, cultures and political and social processes has eroded the democratic capacity of political communities whose decisions increasingly impact upon, and are influenced by, what happens outside their boundaries. Democratic decision-making must, therefore, be opened up to include all those affected by the decisions being made.

Archibugi's suggestion is a project of direct participation of individuals in global democracy through the creation of cosmopolitan institutions to parallel traditional state and international – that is to say intergovernmental – institutions. The aim is therefore, not the creation of a strongly centralized federation of states at the global level – a kind of world state – but rather a system of levels of democratic government. Cosmopolitan institutions would supplement, but also constrain, state level institutions in managing issues of global significance.

This goal is to be achieved by strengthening and reforming existing international institutions but also by creating new ones. The chief candidate for reform is the United Nations, for which Archibugi urges, first of all, that they actually carry out the tasks already assigned them, and secondly, that they move towards more democratic procedures and a more democratic ethos.

Amongst the new institutions Archibugi argues for, there is, most notably, a world parliament, which would initially have a mostly advisory and policy setting capacity, but with a view to extending its powers gradually. The world parliament would be the forum where the voice of the world citizens is heard. A forum which would allow for the possibility of representation also for such non-state actors as social movements, migrants, cultural communities and minorities whose interests and demands sit uncomfortably with representation through the channel of state politics.

Archibugi also calls for profound changes in the foreign policy of democratic states to bring it in line with the principles they apply within their borders, and suggests ways in which cosmopolitan institutions could be effective in managing difficult issues of international politics such as humanitarian intervention and claims of self-determination by providing a validating source of decision making and adjudication. He also discusses the thorny issue of the means to spread democracy arguing forcefully against the idea the democracy can be exported by force.

Archibugi concludes his discussion by addressing some concerns raised by the idea of global democracy, notably the problem of multilingualism in a world polity, and suggests plausible solutions to such concerns.

In his engaging with the issue of reform and institutional change, Archibugi completes the theoretical work undertaken in the first part of the book, and his addressing of possible doubts and objections in the second part works further to make this a concrete proposal for change. Archibugi succeeds in presenting us with a feasible and convincing picture of the future of democracy in its development from the political system of some nation-states to the political system of our global political institutions as well.

It is a shame, however, that the debate on global democracy and the one on global distributive justice often follow largely parallel trajectories without

meaningful interaction, as is the case in Archibugi's book. This is problematic for at least three reasons. First, Archibugi's work, which has a fairly light normative theoretical structure, shares its normative framework with some versions of global distributive justice theory. These theories have developed a body of research on these topics which could have provided an effective theoretical underpinning to Archibugi's argument. I am thinking specifically of practice-dependent theories of justice which, by theorizing the constraining nature of the international organizations framework, also provide a powerful motivation and justification for the need of democratizing the international system of governance. A justification and motivation that is echoed in Archibugi's discussion of the interconnectedness of political communities within the international arena as being at the basis of the need for global democracy.

Second, and most important, ignoring the main concern of theorists of global distributive justice, namely global poverty, represents a serious limitation in the discourse on global democracy as addressed in this work. If in fact the aim of proposals of global democracy such as Archibugi's is to give voice to *all* world citizens, failing to directly address the obstacle to democratic inclusion represented by the situation of deprivation of a great number of these citizens represents a worrying blind spot in such theorizing. A condition of extreme poverty would effectively prevent a large number of people suffering from it from participating in world politics, even if formally inclusive cosmopolitan democratic institutions did exist. It seems therefore, that a proposal for global democracy should also, at some level, address the issue of the socio-economic underpinnings of political rights by considering the problems of global distributive justice.

Conversely – and this is my third reason –, the creation of global democratic institutions could represent an important tool to tackle global poverty. Giving voice to the poor of the world, even if maybe initially through the mediated representation of NGOs or other non-state actors, could lead to challenging unfair rules of international interaction, and hopefully to institutional change in the direction of greater equality internationally. If, therefore, theorists of global democracy, such as Archibugi, could propose answers to the problem of representation of the destitute, they would help in addressing some of the pragmatic questions which arise from the analysis of global injustice that theorists of global justice have advanced in these years.

In view of this, it seems a loss for everybody that greater sharing and synergy cannot be achieved between these two fields of theorizing. If Archibugi is engaging, in his work, in *the* debate of our times, as reported by a commentator and if, as many believe, global poverty is *the* moral problem of our times it would have been interesting for the two debates to come together in such a major contribution to the scholarship on cosmopolitan democracy.

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