

Ceccarini, Luigi. *The Digital Citizen(ship) – Politics and Democracy in the Networked Society*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2021. xi + 184 pages. Hardcover, \$118.85.

Luigi Ceccarini's book navigates the constantly evolving character of post-representative democracy marked by the role of media as well as changing categories of citizenship and political community in the Internet age. The digital age constantly reinvigorates multiple "public" spaces and plural identities, as the traditional notions of nation-state fade into the background and terms like "democracy," "citizen," and "political space" are becoming more fluid and losing clear definitions. The author argues that social media has been both indicative of and instrumental in democratic mechanisms redefined by increasing the populism that has reshaped the very scope of representation. In turn, social media is broadening the concept of the 'networked' community and democracy through Web 2.0, i.e., social media and mobile.

Regarding the redefinition of (digital) citizenship, the author predicts a diminishing significance of ritualistic voting in light of voter distrust in political systems and institutions of power, as observed in Western (particularly European) democracies. At the same time, the book hints at the internet inciting movement towards voter's political involvement in specific/individualistic issues and events, thereby pushing the "responsible" citizen into passivity.

While the Internet is considered potent enough to blur the boundaries between online and offline spaces where citizens interact, exercise monitoring, and show participation in the post-modern democratic setups, it also offers opportunities towards inclusive citizenship as new patterns of (web-based) collectivism emerge. However, the Internet, through its multifaceted character, can also breed counter-democratic sentiments—a political form comprising of ambiguous actors that threaten to challenge or reverse democracy.

Referring to the future of e-democracy, the book offers an optimistic possibility—(digital) citizens can shape the trajectory of democracy as a way of life. The author invokes the quintessential (good) citizens possessing creativity, awareness, and ethics to uphold representative democracy despite contradictory (and often ambiguous) impacts of the digital revolution of political and civic life.

The book answers questions through open-ended suggestions: for example, it cites the future of modern democracies, involving digital citizenship and mediated by new and legacy media. For the author, while internet has expanded the public space which defines, and gets defined by, developing democratic discourse, the manifold rise in multiplicity of opinions can cause distraction among citizens leading to a “decline of the function” of media as well as democracy (pp. 160). The reader is left wondering what avenues a democratic setup offers for policymakers or active digital citizens to jointly govern or manage the excessive information or disinformation.

Additionally, the author also argues that the democratic citizenship in the digital age is a construct but does not offer reconciliation to whether a “good citizen” could/should be able to identify these constructed aspects of the political ecosystem as they are exposed to more information and can engage in the surveillance of political parties. Would they continue to be monitored through the traditional surveillance state, further supported by information overload in the Web 2.0 age? The issue is even more pressing since the book concludes with the onus on (digital) citizens to practice and thrive in democracy, rather than interact with democratic institutions.

The strength of the book lies in the debates it brings to light surrounding the present dilemmas of e-democracy as it deals with continuously (virtually) “connected” constructs despite traditional, single identity-based communities gradually disappearing in political spaces. Identifying distrust among citizens as a potential strength of democratic process,

digitization as a possible avenue for increased political participation, and probability of value-based ‘humble democracy’ makes the book an informative work for researchers in the wider disciplines of political science and media studies investigating the development of citizenship—both as a concept and as practice.

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