

Surviving the Democratic Deficit: the Contribution of Young Citizens in the 21st century

Philip Caruana

philip.caruana@um.edu.mt

Abstract

Democracy has always been a debated concept but even more so in the 21st century when we are faced with a crisis in democracy and citizens have overlooked the democratic values and responsibilities in society. Citizens have lost faith in democratic values as they see their countries facing economic problems and high unemployment, and are influenced by what they read on the media. Citizens are turning to populist and far right movements in order to seek resolution to the problem of immigration. This paper commences with a theoretical analysis of the changes that have occurred in the definition of democracy, their effect on society in recent decades and how democracy is now in crisis. Reference is then made to a longitudinal study administered by the author in January 2019 focusing on the students' understanding of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' in the 21st century using the same research instrument employed in 2004 to compare and contrast the progress or shortcomings related to the understanding of the concept of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' of young Maltese students attending the Junior College of the University of Malta. Keeping the findings in mind, the study proposes a number of recommendations to better prepare young Maltese citizens to face the challenges they will definitely meet throughout their life and also in defence of the value of democracy.

Keywords: *democracy, crisis, citizens, populists, education, Europe*

Introduction

The definition of democracy has always been an ongoing debate since the birth of the concept in ancient Greece. The challenge throughout the years was not only to survive the 'competition' with other forms of government but also in its development. When it started in ancient Greece, with all its good intentions, it was never very popular especially with philosophers like Plato who was more interested in promoting his ideal state or utopia where everybody fulfilled their role and kept one's place for the sake of harmony. Others argued that one of the reasons for the fall of Athens was the result of democracy, the political system in place at that time, thus sending the system into hibernation for hundreds of years.

Democracy has gone through a lot of challenges, and still is today, while continuing to develop into its current definition. Many countries in the world, especially after the two world wars, were aspiring to adopt democratic ways of government to rid the world of far right or far left ideologies. In the 21st century, citizens seem to have overlooked or taken for granted the importance of democratic values in society.

Democracy is in crisis both as a concept and in the way it is defined, as a system of government and perhaps of most concern, in the preparation of citizens, young and old, to become active democratic citizens who are ready, willing and able to nurture and safeguard democracy in these difficult times to improve their life and country. It has been said for years that even if the safeguards or 'guardrails' are in place, according to Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) it is the citizens themselves or their representatives who should safeguard democracy for future generations.

The populist movement, especially in the first part of the 21st century, has hijacked countries in Europe and even in America and is promoting intolerance and racism. Unfortunately, citizens in democratic elections all over the world have elected populist leaders with undemocratic views and agendas. These actions lead one to rethink the role of education and schools that should promote and nurture a democratic citizenry. Rapid developments have occurred in different societies, and curricula should aim at preparing citizens to face the challenges of this century.

This study will first refer to some of the changes that have taken place in the last decade with respect to the concept of democracy. Then it will delve into the present situation where political theorists are arguing that democracy is in crisis and it will also seek to explore what they mean by this. Reference will be made to the findings of a study among a number of young Maltese citizens attending the Junior College of the University of Malta carried out in January 2019 as a longitudinal study compared to part of another similar study administered by the same author in 2004 in order to see if there were changes in the students' understanding of the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship'. Furthermore, with reference to international literature, the study aims at suggesting ways to argue in favour of democracy considering how politics is evolving and keeping in mind the challenging global situation, especially the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the international crises in economy and immigration. This is discussed within the context of the author's preoccupation that one of the most important causes of this state of affairs is the fact that citizens are not adequately prepared to live and contribute as democratic citizens. This is said while keeping in mind the participation of sixteen-year old Maltese citizens in local and MEP elections in May 2019 and the implications of whether these young citizens were prepared or not to participate in these elections.

Changing definitions and perceptions of ‘democracy’ in the 21st century

Up to the beginning of the 20th century, changes that occurred in the world and in the definitions of concepts largely survived and remained in force for a number of years. A characteristic of modern life in every aspect including political science is the fact that nowadays, everything is in a state of flux and can change instantly from one day to the other. Mounk (2018) argues that there are long decades in which history seems to slow to a crawl:

Then there are those short years in which everything changes all at once. Political newcomers storm the stage. Voters clamour for policies that were unthinkable until yesterday. Social tensions that had simmered under the surface erupt into terrifying explosions. A system of government that had seemed immutable looks as though it might come apart. This is the moment in which we now find ourselves (p. 1).

Who would have thought that in Italy, the old parties would slowly make way for new populist parties with a technocrat as a prime minister? In the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, on one day the Prime Minister lost a vote in favour of the Brexit deal offered by the EU with a big majority (15.01.19) and then the day after the same Prime Minister won a vote against a no confidence motion proposed by the opposition (16.01.19). While criticizing Trump’s government, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 2) argue that ‘American politicians now treat their rivals as enemies, intimidate the free press, and threaten to reject the results of elections’. One can apply directly this statement to the events that happened in America in January 2021 and the storming of the Capitol.

Unprecedented developments have taken their toll on democracy. Papadopoulos (2013, pp. 2-3) affirms that ‘governability was preserved and restored but this happened at the price of declining democratic accountability. The classic – standard or ‘textbook’ – model of democracy based on the model of political parties and representative institutions no longer adequately describes our political systems’. Populist parties are dismantling this idea and far right parties who are in power in certain countries in the West are introducing policies and ideologies, amongst others, that promote anti-immigration sentiments and xenophobia, and encouraging the building of walls to keep ‘others’ out. Critiques point to democracy’s inadequacy such as the fact that it fails to capture the changing circumstances of contemporary democratic struggles and it wrongly assumes that all western societies are democratic or at least pluralist.

Grugel and Bishop (2014, p. 96) propose an alternative definition that includes the state, civil society and the global political economy. They adopt a broad approach that combines elements of different theories including amongst others, structural explanations, the significance of social structures, state institutions and forms of economic production. The nurturing of democracy has to be seen as an ongoing process and one that requires adequate preparation of up and coming generations who should be encouraged to contribute more actively to strengthen and positively develop the democratic process.

Democracy in Crisis?

Although democracy has spread throughout the world in successive waves and the number of democracies has tripled in the last 30 years, we are seeing the resurgence of right and left elements in new parties. When Dalton (2008, p. 251) concluded his book *Citizen Politics*, he asserted that 'by some measures, the present may be considered the golden age of democracy'. Crozier et al. (1975) in *The Crisis of Democracy* use the word 'crisis' as too much democracy or an excess of it. Papadopoulos (2013, p. 2) gives a diametrically opposed criticism when analysing world politics and states that we are experiencing a weakening of democratic politics on political decisions and a declining democratic accountability. Papadopoulos argues that this is not the result of a 'democratic deficit' or of a supranational integration as it takes place in the EU. It is not the result of the malevolent role of economic globalization and financial capitalism.

Democracy continues to be defined and judged according to the old definitions, the most important being the legitimacy of democratic regimes on the delegation of power from the citizens to their representatives. But are citizens fully prepared to choose the best representatives and do representatives really and truly work in the interest of the citizens and the state? This is what many asked after the results of the May 2019 EP elections were published.

One can also question the extent of the outcomes of participation by citizens and NGOs and what decisive effects they have on collectively binding decisions. Papadopoulos (2013, p. 7) argues that the 'growth of cynicism, distrust in politicians, and anti-establishment feelings, ...partisan straight-jackets, or even the reorganisation of political parties themselves in response to media pressure' are a few of the reasons that contribute to the present crisis that we are experiencing. The changes to the level of education, where it is happening, as a solution to the present crisis make citizens better informed and more critical.

Citizens are more ready to challenge authoritarian alternatives and as Mounk (2018, p. 124) affirms, 'populists who have little or no attachment to basic democratic norms are gaining immense power' and are ready to use it for their own ends. Until recently, politics and life in general in the West and in other democratic countries were relatively positive. They were mainly hit negatively by the financial crisis of 2008. Now it seems that things are getting rough again. It seems that in many countries across the globe, there is political unrest and citizens are protesting for one thing or the other, but mainly for personal gain rather than for the common good.

Crouch (2004, p. 5) asks 'are the voices of ordinary people being squeezed out again, as the economically powerful continue to use their instruments of the influence while those of the *demos* become weakened?' In post-democracy, 'virtually all the components of democracy survive' (p. 22) 'yet many citizens have been reduced to the role of manipulated, passive, rare participants' (p. 21) and

‘politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times’ (p. 6). There should be more experiments where citizens are involved after being trained and prepared to do so from an early age through education. These should not be symbolic exercises. Reforms along these lines would empower ordinary citizens and politicians and would affect positively the policy process.

Another important point is the fact that the opposition, especially where there is a vast majority vote in favour of the government, may be seen as toothless especially when taking an important or controversial vote in parliament. One cannot dismiss the importance of an active opposition that one day may be elected as the government and the important work performed through sub committees of the house of representatives.

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) refer to everyday life situations that have weakened democracy and pushed it into a crisis. Some democracies in the world are not functioning as such even though they are still called a democracy. They question: ‘Are we living through the decline and fall of one of the world’s oldest and most successful democracies?’ (p. 2). Referring to Juan Linz’s *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (1978), Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, pp. 24-26) list four behavioural warning signs that can help us identify an authoritarian politician when we see one. We should worry when a politician rejects in words or action the democratic rules of the game; denies legitimacy of opponents; tolerates or encourages violence or indicates a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents including the media.

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018, p. 92-93) affirm that

one of the great ironies of how democracies die is that the very defence of democracy is often used as a pretext for its subversion. Would-be autocrats often use economic crises, natural disasters, and especially security threats – wars, armed insurgencies or terrorist attacks – to justify antidemocratic measures.

Now we can also add the effects of the pandemic. Citizens are ready (e.g. after 9/11) to accept authoritarian measures in security crises, and some rulers create crises themselves.

The above developments are some of the reasons why Western democracies have continued to decline. Other reasons are weak economies, growing scepticism of the EU, with Brexit instigating other anti-EU parties to militate in favour of leaving the Union, and the failure to solve the rise of anti-immigration political crisis. Racial and religious intolerance are also reasons for the difficulties being encountered in European politics. Democracy was never seen as multi-ethnic. In Europe, we have witnessed anti-immigration protests but also demonstrations against slow economic growth that decreased job security (Yellow Vests in France), longer working hours, fewer prospects of upward mobility and more social resentment. Protesters want more social policies. Other claims are for comprehensive health insurance, paid leave for working parents, prekindergarten education for everyone and child care centres for mothers who wish to go back to their work. According to Levitsky and Ziblatt

(2018, p. 231), the most important and challenging change is to ‘restore democratic norms and extend them to increasingly diverse societies... Our generation, which grew up taking democracy for granted, now faces a difficult task. We must prevent it from dying from within’.

The crisis of democracy has been the main reason and preoccupation of the author, and one of the reasons for carrying out a study among a group of Maltese students attending the Junior College of the University of Malta. The study seeks to explore the changes experienced by young Maltese citizens, if any, in the understanding of the concepts of ‘democracy’ and ‘citizenship’ that may have occurred in the last fifteen years, when compared to another similar study administered in 2004 at the same College. One must keep in mind the rapid changes that have taken place in the Maltese society including that of becoming an EU member state and the introduction of the 16+ legislation where sixteen-year old voters participated in the MEP elections for the first time in May 25, 2019 and for the second time in local council elections. The most challenging argument is not about giving the vote to sixteen-year old citizens through legislation but to ensure that these young voters are prepared to take on this responsibility and to use this opportunity in the best possible way to deliver the right message in a truly democratic spirit and to be ready to contribute actively as a citizen.

Maltese young citizens as active democratic citizens: findings, discussion and recommendations

Reimers (2018) points out that ‘free and fair elections, rights of minorities, freedom of the press and the rule of law - are under attack around the world’. These are some of the main reasons that stimulated the need for the research administered in January 2019 in order to compare and contrast findings with the survey administered by Caruana (2008) in 2004, in order to detect if there were significant changes in the way students attending a post-secondary institution understand the concept of ‘democracy’ and their role as active citizens. Indirectly, the research aimed at analysing whether the students have been equipped with the necessary knowledge, attitudes, skills and understanding to fulfil this role, and also whether the content and pedagogy used in schools and at tertiary level are appropriate to fulfil this aim.

The questionnaire used in this study was the same as the one used in the first research, apart from question 18 (***How do you feel now with the introduction of legislation of 16+?***) as this has now been introduced in Malta. Maltese citizens who are 16+ voted for the second time in the Local Council and for the first time in the MEP elections on May 25, 2019. As has been stated in the *Research Design* in Caruana (2008, p. 87), this study should not be taken *a priori* as a generic analysis of the students’ understanding of their role as active Maltese, European and global citizens in all post-secondary schools in Malta. At the same time, the researcher

does not exclude that the findings might refer to a same or similar situation with other students at the same level, and can be used on a national level for further research.

Two hundred and forty-five students (245) out of a population of around one thousand seven hundred students (1700) at post-secondary level at the Junior College, mainly 16 to 18-year olds, participated in the study. With respect to the aim and scope, this study seeks to explore what the researcher and colleagues had been feeling for a number of years through the observation of different groups of students when answering questions in assignments, tests and end of year examinations regarding the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship'. This study further aimed at investigating whether after fifteen years and with the introduction of so many different ways of acquiring information and participation, students have a different way of looking at the concepts themselves and their role as active democratic citizens, not only during elections but throughout their lives. The questions focus on the first module of the Systems of Knowledge syllabus. After fifteen years from the administration of the first study and the continuous improvements of lecturing methods by colleagues (Gatt 2018), and the introduction of a new Systems of Knowledge syllabus, the study therefore aims at studying the students' understanding of the concepts and also their level of participation to improve the state of democracy in Malta.

The overarching aim and the most important one is to explore whether our students who represent a sample of the Maltese young population are ready, willing and able to act as democratic citizens on the local, national, European and global level, keeping in mind what has been discussed in this paper about the state of democracy globally, with its definition changing according to the whims of different politicians, the situation in the US, Brexit and Venezuela, protests in France and the rise of populism within the EU in Italy, Poland and Hungary. One may rightly argue that today it is very important to expose young Maltese citizens to democratic values, and for young citizens to be able to take important decisions that might change the course of events of their country and of countries in the world. We are living in difficult times when populist governments are pointing at democracy as the reason for so many negative elements such as the economic crisis of the 21st century. The following is a concise analysis of the main questions and responses of the questionnaire, followed by reactions of the author to these findings. The responses will be divided into three main themes: defining 'democracy', democracy in practice and finally active citizenship.

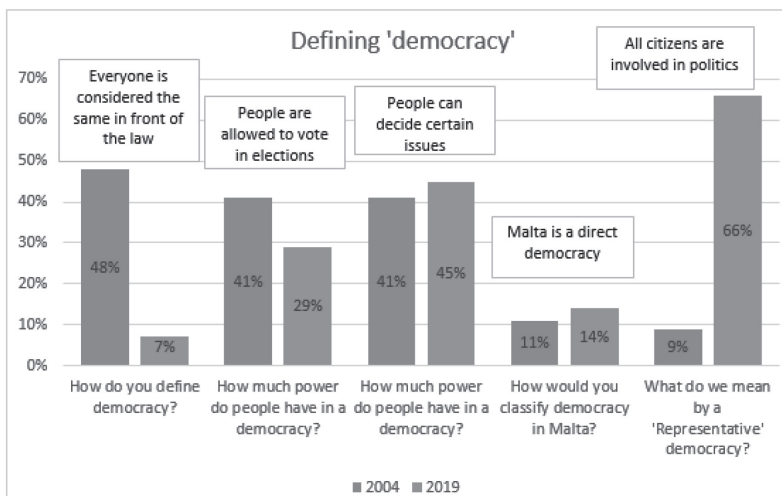
Defining 'democracy'

When asked to define 'democracy', the respondents chose responses that emphasize the participation of citizens in elections rather than participating actively, or the

rule of the people through the participation of the representatives. Only a few (7%) chose the response that in a democracy, as illustrated in Figure 1, everyone is considered the same in front of the law. When asked how much power do citizens have in a democracy, 29% of the respondents argued that the citizens are allowed to vote in elections and 45% said that citizens can decide certain issues. These responses show that students participating in this longitudinal study, after fifteen years and following all the changes that happened in Maltese politics, still believe that the most important thing in a democracy is the ability to participate in elections. Furthermore, 14% of the respondents believe that Malta is a 'direct democracy', and not a Representative democracy.

For 66% of the respondents, defining 'representative democracy' means that all citizens are involved in politics. This is another significant negative development as in 2004, only 9% gave this response. This shows that students do not understand that democracy is managed by representatives who are given the power to govern by the people for a number of years and that they have to put into practice the programme that was proposed by the party. Students should remember that during those five years or more, representatives have to take decisions that were not listed in the programme and that the people have no say in these decisions. This raises concern as respondents would have explored these issues during lectures at Junior College. One wonders even further what other Maltese students who do not have the same experiences think of this issue. But then there are instances especially the present situation with Covid-19, when one understands that these are special times and that all over the world radical measures had to be taken to safeguard as much as possible the lives of citizens first and foremost, then the economy.

Figure 1: Comparison in findings between 2004 and 2019 related to defining 'democracy'



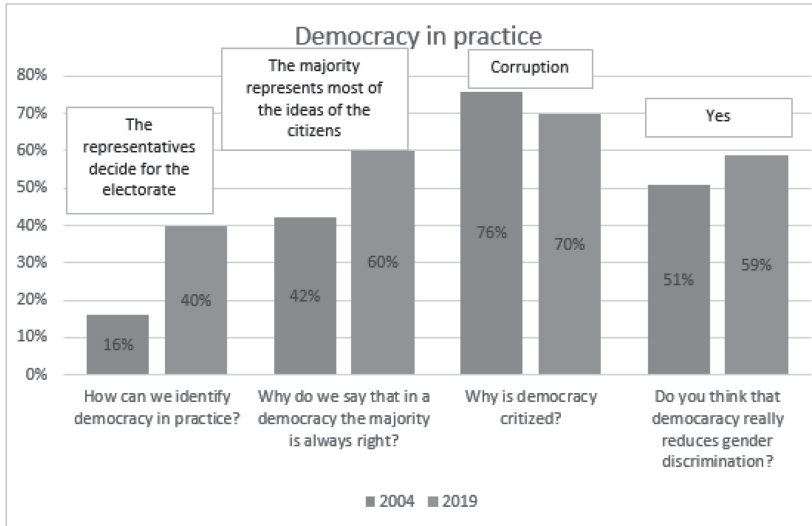
Democracy in Practice

When analysing responses about the theme of democracy in practice, as illustrated in Figure 2, another significant finding is that 40% of the respondents believe that democracy in practice refers to representatives deciding for the electorate and do not refer to active citizenship; the rest (60%) believe that the majority is always right when this might not be the case especially when the majority opts for something that is not intended to the common good. There are citizens who argue that democracy is the best system available but the majority of the respondents (70%) affirm that one can criticize democracy especially where there is corruption. This is a positive development since it seems that corruption is conditioning every aspect of life.

In the study administered in 2019, 59% of the respondents believe that women have equal rights as men. Respondents might not be informed that there are still instances where there is a difference between what is written in laws and what exists in reality. As an example one can mention the current discussion in Malta and other EU countries regarding inequality in pay between genders and also the protests in Switzerland in June 2019 for the same reasons. When asked why this is so, respondents referred to cultural restrictions that do not let the democratic process function properly.

When asked about numbers in a democracy, respondents argued that age as a number (18+ or 16+) makes it easier to decide between a majority and a minority, and that it is a form of control. Even when one refers to the majority as 51%, this gives the impression that if the majority agrees, then it is a fair decision. But who is the majority, Plato would ask? Questioned about the importance of pluralism in a democracy that is seen as a symbol of liberty, respondents think that pluralism enhances liberty and that it gives people the opportunity to promote different opinions. A significant improvement in this regard is that respondents are appreciating more the use of the media, the different ways of informing citizens and the possibility of views of more than one ideology or party or religion. The same improvement was also seen in the responses in two questions about freedom of expression and expressing one's opinion freely in a democracy. The media, whether mass or social, was seen as the most appropriate medium that would best function for the purpose, compared to trade unions, NGOs and religion.

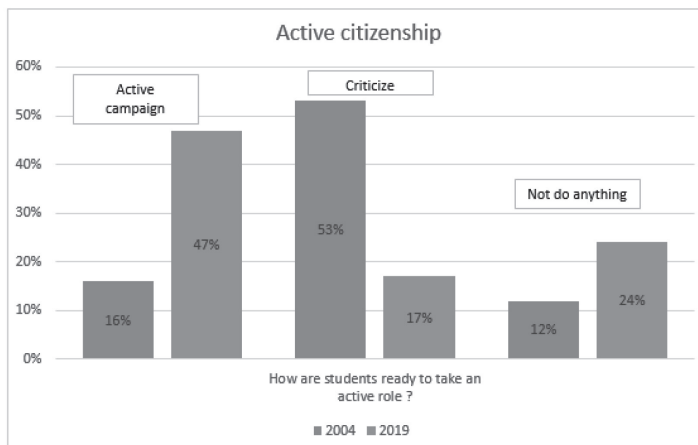
Figure 2: Comparison in findings between 2004 and 2019 related to democracy in practice



Active Citizenship

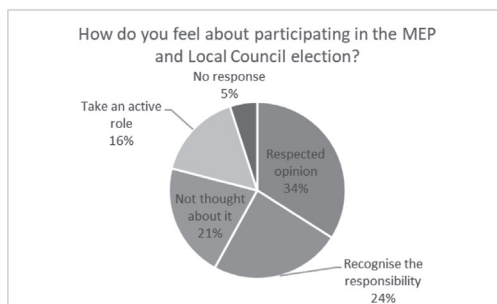
When analysing the responses about whether students are ready to take an active role if there is an issue against plans proposed by the government, as illustrated in Figure 3, 47% (2019) as against 16% (2004) of the respondents are ready to participate in active campaign, 17% are prepared to criticize while 24% responded that they would not do anything. Participation in the electoral process is what Patrick (2000, p. 4) defined as ‘minimal democracy’ and Crick (1999, p. 338) argues that ‘where a state does not have a tradition of active citizenship deep in its culture or cannot create in its educational system a proclivity to active citizenship, that state is running great risks’. Miller (2000, p. 26) points out that citizenship is not something that people learn spontaneously. Hess and McAvoy (2014) argue that being able to talk about politics is a skill that needs to be learnt. It just does not come by itself: you are either taught or self-taught, or you simply parrot away what the masses are saying. Miller (2000, p. 69) argued that it is good to be active citizens but emphasizes the importance of being informed, critically responsible and reflective.

Figure 3: Comparison in findings between 2004 and 2019 related to active citizenship



When respondents were asked how they feel about participating in the MEP election for the first time and in the Local Council election for the second time on May 25, 2019, following the right to vote given to citizens who are 16+, 34% answered that they feel their opinion is respected but 24% feel it is a lot of responsibility; 21% have not thought about it and only 16% would take an active role. These findings are illustrated in Figure 4. It would be interesting to keep these findings in mind and to compare them to statistics that were published by the Electoral Commission in Malta after the vote of May 25, 2019, where there were 38,737 (10.4%) uncollected votes for the MEP elections and 92,398 (21.9%) uncollected votes for the Local Council elections (*Times of Malta*, Saturday, May 25, 2019, p. 3). Furthermore, 72.6% (*Times of Malta*, Monday, May 27, 2019, p. 1) of those voters who collected their voting document decided to vote for the MEP election and 60.4% for the Local Council election.

Figure 4: Illustration of the answer selected by the respondents on how they feel about participating in the MEP and Local council election



This data is more striking when local research has shown (Vella 2018, p. 407) that there is still a high turnout of Maltese citizens in elections when compared to the EU turnout of 51% in the MEP elections in May 2019 (described as the highest in the last twenty years!) and argues that unless we want to assume that Maltese citizens are civic-minded, there must be other underlying features contributing to such high turnouts, such as pervasive partisanship and concentration of competitive elections, amongst others. Young Maltese citizens who participated in the study may have a narrow definition of democracy and not see it as a way of life, or see it as a conflict between a political system and living in a democracy.

At this point one asks whether education is an appropriate medium for preparing young citizens. Education is not the only medium that can be used. The process of socialization and rapid change at times catch everyone by surprise and one may find that it becomes increasingly challenging to at least minimize the positive or negative effects of that situation. New methods are usually used by different individual lecturers as suggested by Gatt (2018) to support the education process. It was also a good initiative taken by the Systems of Knowledge department to organise lectures with Agenzija Żgħażaġh about the 16+ legislation and the importance of the MEP elections for Junior College students. The president of the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Żgħażaġh (KNZ) (The National Youth Commission) Sean Ellul in *The Malta Independent* (February 24, 2019) argues that nobody is prepared to vote, irrelevant of their age. Young Maltese students questioned by *The Sunday Times of Malta* (March 17, 2019) in preparation for the 2019 European Parliament elections emphasize that voting is an integral part of the democratic process and they affirm the importance of tolerance to diversity, equal pay and the environment. Kristina Chetcuti in her article 'Politics should be taught in school' in *The Sunday Times of Malta* (May 5, 2019), refers to the need for Civic Education classes or workshops on Citizenship Education. Caruana (2008) had already made this clear in the first study and now would still like to further promote the idea of a National Strategy for Citizenship Education.

Giroux (2018a) suggests a critical pedagogy that can change how people view the world by creating critically engaged students and intellectuals who are ready to hold power accountable. Furthermore, Giroux suggests inclusion and social responsibility, a deep respect for others, a keen sense of the common good as well as an informed notion of community engagement. Critical pedagogy is not a method but a moral and political practice that does not mould but inspires, while it produces young people capable and willing to expand and deepen their sense of themselves, to think the world critically and imagine something other than their own well-being. Creasey (2018) disagrees with the idea that educating people for the workforce should be the only purpose of education. Unfortunately, another negative aspect is that the things that children are taught in schools typically bear no relation to the world in which they live – a world that is heavily influenced by social media, popular culture and mainstream media. In this way, even schools may seem irrelevant to young people.

Conclusion: The Need to Defend Democracy

While trying to understand what were the key changes that impacted negatively on the concept of democracy even recently, one might conclude that we did not nurture those values that make democracy a preferred system. Citizens were moving away from what is needed by exploiting the nation and they were more engrossed in satisfying their personal needs rather than working for the common good and the safeguarding of democracy. In certain cases, this attitude was brought about by the elected representatives themselves in order to increase their popularity and remain in power.

In his *The People vs. Democracy*, Mounk (2018, p.135) argues that ‘if we want to venture an educated guess about the future of democracy, we thus have to figure out what political scientists call its ‘scope conditions’. There are three major scope conditions, as set by Mounk. First, the importance and to a certain extent, the dominance of the mass media that in the past slowed the spread of fake news. The rise of the Internet and social media has since weakened the systems of control and automatically, and maybe without knowing or wanting, empowered far-right movements and politicians. Secondly, when living in a democracy during the second half of the 20th century, most citizens experienced a rapid increase in their living standards and always worked with the aim of a better future. This changed for the worse after 2008 and even more so now with the pandemic. One feels that there is little, if any, economic stability on a national or global level. It is unfortunate that in many countries economic growth has slowed down drastically in first decade of the 21st century when compared to the second half of the 20th century. The third condition is that in the past, most democracies were founded on monoethnic nations or where one ethnic group was a majority. Today it is difficult to find one group that dominates the rest: we are living in multicultural societies where talking otherwise would be verging on the racist and limiting one of the major values of democracy.

Mounk (2018, pp. 16-17) suggests ‘to preserve democracy without giving up the emancipatory potential of globalization, we need to figure out how the nation state can once again take control of its own fate’... to ‘rethink what membership and belonging might mean in a modern nation state... in which members of any creed and colour are regarded as true equals’... to ‘start to emphasize what unites rather than what divides them’... ‘to learn to withstand the transformative impact of the internet and of social media’.

Mounk (2018 p. 189) proposes a ‘forward-looking strategy’ that would help reduce power from the populist group. Firstly, citizens should be united around the definition of the nation without going into extreme nationalism. Secondly, the opposition should speak the language of ordinary citizens and attend to their concerns, mainly by giving hope for a better economic future while slowly emerging out of the pandemic. Thirdly, to put forward new positive ideas and solutions

without restricting free speech because this goes against the main aims and values of liberal democracy. Finally, all promises put forward in this fight have to be feasible and realistic.

Those who have lived in a democratic country for many years or from birth in relative peace and prosperity cannot imagine another system. But change can happen and we need to be more vigilant and start to safeguard what we have and try to improve what can be improved. Especially after the terrorist attack of 9/11 and after that in other countries, such as England and France, and the increasing violence by the IS, citizens all over the world should realise that democracy is not something that will remain forever. Never before have citizens in democratic countries been so critical of their political system but unfortunately without knowing the other options or realising the meaning of its loss.

In Malta, young citizens still give a lot of importance to the electoral process. They participate in elections but then allow others, such as representatives in parliament, to decide for them. Once the elections are over, young citizens become indifferent to everything around them without thinking that individual rights might be violated. They are spectators not participants in the whole democratic process. We have a duty to uphold and promote democratic institutions by persuading those around us and those who will come after us to do the same. These options can be realised if there are young democratic citizens who are willing and able to take the leap!

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