

The Telegraph

The Left are being sore losers and democracy is the poorer for it



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Pro-Brexit demonstrators wave flags and banners outside Parliament in London, CREDIT: AP

If 2016 has taught us anything it is that people define democracy as getting what they want. If they win an election, it was fair. If they lose, it was rigged. Democracy is in crisis, says the Left, because, from America to Britain to Italy and beyond, the people keep making the wrong choices.

Take the United States. Donald Trump's victory was a surprise – we get that. It was narrow, for sure. And it was controversial – no doubt. But it happened. What ought to obsess the Democrats and the media is what he intends to do next. His cabinet choices suggest Trump will govern the way he ran, from the Right, and that he isn't afraid of confronting the consensus on everything from climate change to relations with Russia. There's so much to scrutinise.

Unfortunately, the Democrats and the media would prefer to engage in a ceaseless critique of his victory in the hope that it'll go away. The latest claim is that Moscow swung the election. The CIA has apparently concluded that Russia hacked into Democratic email accounts with the specific intention of embarrassing Clinton and helping Trump win. Many liberals are convincing themselves that the election was fixed. The debate was distorted by “fake news”.

The Republicans stole votes in the rust belt. And Clinton actually won the national popular vote – so can we re-run the election?! The answer is no, of course; but that won't prevent millions from refusing to regard Trump as the genuine democratic choice.

The Republicans have every right to be angry about this. Perhaps Russia did try to affect the election, and that ought to be investigated and exposed. But there's no evidence that they succeeded. WikiLeaks did not play a big role in 2016 – its revelations were small fry.



An estimated crowd of up to 10-thousand people march through downtown Los Angeles CREDIT: UPI / BARCROFT IMAGES

The FBI, which resurrected claims that Hillary did something wrong with her email account, had far greater impact. And all that WikiLeaks and the FBI did was reinforce decades-old suspicions that Clinton is a liar. Her approval rating in October 2015 was about -19 per cent. By election day it was about -13 per cent. The scandals had very little impact.

Also, didn't the Democrats employ a few dark arts themselves? Did they not stack the primary process to Hillary's advantage? It's surprising, too, that the Democrats suddenly care so much about the transparency of the voting process, having rejected Republican warnings about potential fraud for years.

But the Left isn't big on self-awareness. Consider the campaign of Jill Stein, the Green presidential candidate, to recount votes in the states that swung it for Trump on the rather rude assumption that because he won he must have cheated.

Trump won Wisconsin by a margin of about 27,000 votes; Stein got 30,000 votes there. Trump took Michigan by 11,000; Stein got 50,000. So there are at least two states that arguably were lost not because of a conspiracy by the Right but because of divisions on the Left. It was an old-fashioned political cock-up.

The militant [Remainers are playing a similar game in the UK](#). They question not only the referendum result but the referendum itself. It doesn't count, they say, because the Leave campaign lied. Leave would dispute that – but so what if they did? Have you ever known an election in which a politician didn't fib? It's up to the voters to play detective, and most of them are smart enough to sort the fact from the fiction. I have yet to meet the sucker who voted Leave to save the NHS.



Thousands marched in central London to Parliament Square in a pro-Europe rally
CREDIT: AFP/GETTY IMAGES

"The referendum was only advisory!" cry the Remainers. The legal arguments against this are mountainous and they boil down to "no it wasn't." But even if it was, there's still a moral imperative to accept the result.

If the referendum had come out for Remain and Parliament had a Eurosceptic majority that decided to plan for Brexit anyway, what would the Europhiles be saying then? That the referendum result was holy writ. But because they lost, they bring their lawyers and their peers and they invoke – of all things! – the importance of Parliament, because there they hope they have a majority for Remain.

Enter Tim Farron's Liberal Democrats, a party whose very name is an oxymoron. Liberal? Maybe. But Democratic? The two no longer mix. The Lib Dems have been banging on for decades about the importance of electoral reform only in so far as they thought it would get them more seats. Now that the exercise of democracy has produced a result they don't like, they suddenly despise the exercise of democracy. Their shameless hypocrisy is shown in their fluctuating support for an EU referendum. First, they demanded an in/out referendum. Then, when it looked like a plebiscite might actually be held, they opposed it. Having lost it, they now want another one. "Let the people decide," said Farron, knowing full well that they already have.

The chutzpah doesn't end there. Having labelled a democratic outcome as somehow anti-democratic, they also insist that the Leavers – like Trump in the US – are dangerous authoritarians. Theresa May, Nigel Farage, and the populist Right want a Putin-style police state, apparently – and democratic support for them is a sad turning away from democracy.

If you're struggling to follow that logic then it's because the word "democracy" is losing its meaning. Many liberals are quite happy for the state to be powerful so long as they are in control of it, and elections go their way. A democracy ceases to be a democracy when it moves to the Right. Then we need Jill Stein or Tim Farron to clean up our mess and restore order.

Let's not be naïve: conservatives play these word games, too. Trump had said that the presidential election was rigged before he'd even won it. Farage said he'd continue to fight for Brexit when he assumed that he'd lost the referendum. Perhaps our politics would be more honest if both sides admitted that they want power and don't care as much about process as they pretend to. But this means that the process is sadly diminished.

Some people are at risk of forgetting that democratic elections are wonderful, splendid human achievements – even if you don't win them. And critical engagement with the victors is far, far more valuable than being a loud, sore loser.

