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## THE AUTONOMY OF NON-ELECTED PUBLIC...

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paigns are a major challenge for democratic elections and compromise the level playing field amongst political contestants. Countering them, however, should not be at the expense of freedom of expression. Data-driven electoral campaigning on social media, based on segmentation and profiling of users, is a growing phenomenon which should be better regulated, in order to ensure transparency and data protection, lest public trust and a level playing field be compromised”.

According to a recent Report of the Electoral Integrity Project, “There is widespread concern in many countries about low or falling turnout, public disaffection, party polarization, and the failure of elections to ensure legitimate outcomes. Electoral malpractices continue to undermine contests around the world, from overt cases of violence and intimidation to disinformation campaigns, cybersecurity threats, barriers to voting, and the under-representation of women and minority candidates.” The 2018 Italian elections are taken as an example of how “Despite high quality elections overall, politicization of media regulation, lack of media diversity, and harsh libel laws may undermine the ability of Italian citizens’ to make informed political choices, particularly as the problems associated with fake news and misinformation grow more severe”.

However, these features are not typical of a single country. A striking contradiction emerges particularly where governments claiming to act in the people’s name put under threat the independence of electoral authorities, notwithstanding these are reputed to maintain the genuineness of the electors’ choices, and therefore of the people qua electorate. While opposing a vague and fictitious concept, ‘the people’, to the constitutionally organized people qua electorate, populism is clearly at odds with democracy. Why, then, it seems to meet so frequently with success among the public? A key factor of that success is due to the parallel growth of disinformation campaigns and distorted media messages, that poison most contemporary democracies. It is the connection between the populist wave and the increasing distortions of information that constitutes the greatest danger for the very maintenance of democracy. Awareness of such danger is the first step for gathering the efforts of those who believe that democracy’s maintenance goes hand in hand with respect for the rule of law, including the legal guarantees of transparent and credible election processes.