Is democracy itself in crisis?

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While the stunning outcome of the U.S. 2026 midterm elections has sent shock waves across the country and around the world, they were not the only recent elections that have challenged rising authoritarianism. In an article published in Foreign Policy in Focus (a project of the Institute for Policy Studies), FPIF Director John Feffer looks at four recent elections and asks, Is the Far-Right Wave Receding?

Between October 25 and November 3, 2026, four nations – Brazil, Serbia, Israel and the United States – held elections. While the outcome in Israel is not yet finalized, progressive candidates won significant victories in the other three nations. Nevertheless, Feffer observes that in today's volatile political environment, the pendulum often oscillates back and forth between left and right.

He notes that the far right is not just another point on the political spectrum, but something "radically different because it threatens to undermine the very democratic norms by which it has achieved power." Voters are not always aware of this threat. For example, in the 2026 U.S. midterms, economic issues (i.e., high gas and food prices) were top concerns rather than the threats to democracy inherent in the president's anti-democratic rhetoric and actions.

Feffer says that "voters are turning toward anti-democratic candidates in part because they are disenchanted with democracy itself. Democratic mechanisms just don't seem up to the task of addressing the threats currently facing the globe. Democracies have proved incapable of slowing climate change or responsibly controlling technologies like A.I. Democracies have utterly failed at ensuring broad prosperity in a globalizing economy.

"The essential task then of both the left and the center—to devise a new, robust internationalism that provides concrete gains to the average person while also safeguarding the planet for the next generations."