

of hostility between the United States and the countries in which it chooses to intervene. This amounts, they argue, to Washington's increasing propensity to use "force-first diplomacy" in the face of ill-defined threats. These interventions frequently backfire and threaten long-term national interests. The authors' conclusions go beyond what their numbers prove, but the data they have amassed provide powerful insights into the trajectory of both recent and long-term American foreign policy that deserve close attention.

Merchants of the Right: Gun Sellers and the Crisis of American Democracy
 BY JENNIFER CARLSON. Princeton University Press, 2023, 288 pp.

In the United States, there are 100 million more guns than people, mass shootings occur nearly twice a day on average, and the country has by far the weakest gun laws of any peer country. In attempting to understand these facts, Carlson largely eschews the familiar focus on the National Rifle Association, the Republican Party, and the Supreme Court. Instead, she takes a bottom-up approach by delving into the political and cultural views of gun sellers and gun buyers. She finds that gun ownership has become an increasingly accepted way of dealing with feelings of insecurity in the United States' volatile democracy. Guns represent an "ethic of security (i.e., guns as a bulwark against victimization)" but also an "understanding of freedom (i.e., guns as a vehicle of individual rights)" and "a particular stance against the state (i.e., guns as a defense against government control and liberal indoctrination)." In

this subculture, steeped in conspiracy theories, guns are not simply a means of personal protection but a symbol of political identity and empowerment. If Carlson's conclusion is correct, it leads to the profoundly depressing notion that reducing gun violence in the United States will depend not merely on finding acceptable legislative formulas for gun control but on the vastly larger task of somehow mending the deadly partisanship and polarization that currently grip the country.

Western Europe

ANDREW MORAVCSIK

Homelands: A Personal History of Europe
 BY TIMOTHY GARTON ASH. Yale University Press, 2023, 384 pp.

For nearly a half century, Garton Ash has commented on central and eastern Europe using an approach that melds scholarship and journalism. This book's organization as a chronology from World War II to the present hints at the rigor of scholarship, yet its division into short vignettes tilts decisively toward journalism. The analysis is peppered with visceral images and juicy personal anecdotes, which convey the sense of being right where history was happening. Ash's narrative peaks with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989—a defining moment for him, when intellectual engagement, pragmatic politics, and moral legitimacy seemed to converge in a just cause. Yet the moment did not last. In

many countries, communist systems gave way to governments with questionable democratic credentials. The European Union is strong and stable, but it has forsaken its founding aspiration to become a United States of Europe. Migration makes European societies more diverse culturally and strong economically but now spawns populist protest and rancor. The borders within Europe are more open than ever before, yet proponents of liberal internationalism are on the back foot. Ash clearly remains convinced that defending, improving, and extending his youthful ideal of a Europe free, whole, and diverse is necessary. He admits, however, that a lifetime of intellectual striving toward that goal has not revealed how it can be achieved.

among elites themselves. Those elites with fewer private resources or less access to government largess rebelled, objecting to the spiraling cost of elections and forming complex coalitions to dampen the power of insiders. Today, Western democracies face similar challenges: special interests and wealthy elites use gerrymandering, enormous campaign spending, control of the press, manipulation of social media, and foreign disinformation to block change, leaving voters ever more dissatisfied. Yet it is far from clear how societies can ensure fairer elections. If this study is correct, reform in more institutionally inflexible, decentralized, and socially unequal polities, such as the United States, will prove especially challenging.

Protecting the Ballot: How First-Wave Democracies Ended Electoral Corruption

BY ISABELA MARES. Princeton University Press, 2022, 264 pp.

In the late nineteenth century, many liberal idealists believed that fair elections with universal suffrage could solve social problems, if only elites did not frustrate their outcomes through vote buying, ballot stuffing, intimidation, or selectively targeted public patronage. A few decades later, incumbent politicians in many countries banned such practices even though such a move threatened their own political survival. In this study of Belgium, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, Mares argues that limits on electoral corruption were not produced by a popular uprising from below but rather by splits

United Kingdom: A Global History of the End of Britain

BY STUART WARD. Cambridge University Press, 2023, 550 pp.

This book investigates a piece of unspoken conventional wisdom: since the loss of the empire, the British people have become unsure what their country represents, an uncertainty that may well trigger the dissolution of the United Kingdom itself. Oddly, given that the author fixes on this hypothetical future, the book itself is almost entirely about the past. Indeed, it barely touches on the current movement for devolution within the United Kingdom. Rather, the author, an imperial historian, details with telling anecdotes how “British” many imperial and formerly imperial subjects felt themselves to be over the past century, not least those who immigrated to the United

Kingdom over the past half century. Many of these individuals did not reject the United Kingdom but were rejected by the British, who refused to recognize them as equal co-nationals of the British Commonwealth. That rejection encouraged the process of decolonization that resulted in the independence of dozens of countries across the world in the twentieth century. Today we see the melancholy result of this complex process: a post-Brexit United Kingdom, unsure of its own identity, beset with challenges from within, and struggling unsuccessfully to retain the sovereign position in world politics it once held.

1923: The Crisis of German Democracy in the Year of Hitler's Putsch

BY MARK WILLIAM JONES. Basic Books, 2023, 432 pp.

This book revisits German history in 1923, the year of Hitler's failed Beer Hall Putsch, when his Nazi Party attempted to seize the city hall in Munich. The putsch took place in Bavaria, Germany's most conservative region, where even moderate conservatives were anti-republican opponents of the Weimar government in Berlin. Hitler was jailed, but he rightly expected that the support he had enjoyed on the moderate right, and the knowledge he had of their own plotting against the Weimar Republic, would assure a swift release. Hitler remained a marginal figure in German politics for almost a decade, until the Great Depression hit, in 1929, and fanned public discontent that he and his comrades exploited. The author, a professor of history in Ireland, claims

that this experience shows that moderates should have used the failed 1923 putsch to crush Hitler and the Nazi Party forever. Yet one might conclude instead that German elites should have done just as they did after World War II: tolerating peaceful extremists, while quietly working with social democrats to strengthen the German economy and build up economic links with the rest of the world to shield against future economic crisis.

Between Brussels and Beijing: The Transatlantic Response to the Chinese Presence in the Baltic Sea Region

EDITED BY OLEVS NIKERS AND OTTO TABUNS. Lynne Rienner, 2023, 225 pp.

This book, published by the Jamestown Foundation in cooperation with policy analysts in Latvia, contains case studies assembled to show why Scandinavian and Baltic countries, Germany, and Poland should be more vigilant with regard to economic and political relations with China. Beijing systematically uses investment and trade, research cooperation, and, in particular, ownership in foreign infrastructure to bolster its defense industry, grow its economy, and realize geopolitical ends. In recent years, Europe has also begun debating how to protect itself against such tactics but remains undecided and divided over exactly how to proceed. Accordingly, it is somewhat surprising that, beyond showing that China seeks to acquire dual-use firms and presses small countries to support its views on Taiwan, the authors present surprisingly little evidence of outright Chinese malfeasance.