



Library podcast

Yascha Mounk discusses 'The People Vs. Democracy'

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[00:00:38] Hi everybody. Good evening. Thanks so much for being here tonight.

[00:00:42] I'm such a brand and I'm the literature and humanities program manager here at the Seattle Public Library. Welcome to this evening's program with Yasha Monck and Robert Pekkanen and we're presenting this tonight in partnership with our friends at Third Place Books and we are grateful to our authors series sponsor Gary Kunis to The Seattle Times for their generous promotional support for library programs and we're particularly grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors helped the library provide free programs and services that touched the lives of everyone in our community. So those of you that are library foundation donors here with us tonight thank you very much for your support. Before we get started I just have a couple announcements. We are recording tonight's program for the library podcast. So if you haven't done so already please take a minute to silence your phones and then if you'd like to listen again you can look for tonight's Tadcaster on our website. In just a few weeks most of the research received a survey when you came in and this is an opportunity for you to make your voice heard and to tell me a little bit about what you're interested in seeing here at the library. I really do read every single survey. So write legibly for me and the last announcement is that the library is going to close while we are enjoying tonight's event. But don't panic. The garage will be open until 9:00 p.m. And when you exit you can take these elevators that are just to the right outside of the room.

[00:02:11] You can take those elevators straight down to the parking garage or to the first floor and exit through the Fourth Avenue entrance. Now I'm delighted to introduce Yasha Monk and Robert Pekkanen Yasha is a writer academic and public speaker known for his work on the rise of populism and the crisis of liberal democracy. Born in Germany to Polish parents Yahshua received his B.A. in History from Trinity College Cambridge and his Ph.D. in Government from Harvard University. He's now a lecturer on Government at Harvard a senior fellow in the political reform program at New America and executive director at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. Yasha has written three books Stranger In My Own Country a Jewish family in modern Germany the age of responsibility luck choice and the welfare state and the people versus democracy. Why are our freedom is in danger

and how to save it. He'll appear in conversation with Robert Pekkanen. Robert is a professor at the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies agitprop Adjunct Professor of Political Science and adjunct professor of sociology at the University of Washington. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Harvard in 2002 and his first book Japan's dual civil society members without advocates won the Masayoshi Ohira prize in 2008 and also an award from the Japanese nonprofit research association in 2007. It was also featured as one of Japan Time's best Asia Books of 2006.

[00:03:41] So without further ado please help me welcome Yasha Monk and Robert Pekkanen.

[00:03:53] Thank you very much Sasha. It's great to have an opportunity to talk with you about populism and I really enjoy reading your book and I thought you had a really useful way of advancing several concepts and helped me sharpen my understanding of populism but if I may talk to the audience a little bit and say that intellectually as special mention I trained as a political scientist and my early researchers on nonprofits and I began to work on political parties and elections. I never imagined that I would have a intellectual interest in populism and tell a little over a year ago. And I think that this is a important point because in one of the arguments you make about political science is that it's the structure of incentives and discipline is to produce in professional journals. But it doesn't always have the engagement with the public or even I would say with empirical events and populism is a messy concept. This is my take on it and it's something that what's happened in the world has made me as a political scientist become interested in trying to get a handle on that.

[00:05:01] So I think that your call resonates in that way with me personally. So that's that's my background to how I've come to begin to engage with populism and this is a project I think that will take a take a while but it's also something that within political science there is an increasing amount of scholarship and attention to populism I think. And you're certainly at the forefront of that. So I wonder if we could talk a little bit about your book and I want to start off with a quote from page 254 if you're following along at home and it's quite terrifying. So I warn you history is full of people who could not imagine that the peace and stability to which they had grown accustomed over the course of their brief lives might somehow end. And it gets worse. The crowd gets worse. It is full of pagan priest and French aristocrats of Russian peasants and German Jews. If we do not want to end like them we need to be more vigilant and start to fight for our emersed fervently held values.

[00:06:06] That's terrifying is that is it is it really that bad.

[00:06:15] Well we'll find out. You know I think the when I started writing this book and such a thing about this book my prevailing attempt was to push us out of a certain complacency. I started warning that there were democracies at real risk in Western Europe and to some degree North America. Before we invented cattiness and populism which is to say befuddled Trump was elected and it was a bit of a tough time actually because people would basically look at me with a friendly face a little bit like I was a crank and some people you know who are more forthright than others called me a Cassandra and I always wanted to respond. But Cassandra was right.

[00:06:59] So you know look I do think that we cannot take for granted the stability of our democracies.

[00:07:07] So you know the view some times for a long time has been and the charms of one famous paper that you know sure poor democracies sometimes collapse if you're studying Kenya if you're studying you know Bangladesh you might not be amazed if there's real threats to those democracies ensure a relatively affluent autocratic systems might remain stable over time. It's not guaranteed that as we develop there will transition to democracy but a world of affluent traditional democracies is safe conservative changed government for free and fair elections a couple of times but have a GDP per capita of more than about 14000 dollars in today's terms. Those are safe. And the reason why those were supposed to be safe was what democracy was supposedly the only game in town. That most people endorsed the ideas of democracy the deep way that would open to other Tantallon democracy and that there weren't any political movements and parties but had real power but they actually reject the most basic rules and norms of a political system. Now what has become obvious for a while now is that there is no longer the case that the number of people who don't give great importance to democracy has been rising. They have a number of people who reject authoritarian alternatives to democracy has been decreasing. And most importantly that movements like populists and pops will talk about what that means exactly. They do reject the most basic norms of our present of government vast increase in power. So in Europe for example populist parties have an average voter of 8 percent in May 2000 menow 25 percent.

[00:08:52] Ok so that opens up the discussion of some of these important terms that you when you mentioned that this calls to mind some of the lectures that I gave on consolidating democracy and liberal democracy which I think I'll have to consider revising. So let's talk about those terms liberal democracy first a move to consolidate democracy and then we can talk about that populism is why it poses such a threat. But one of the arguments you make in the book is that liberal democracy is splitting its two into its component parts. You talk about a democracy without rights and liberal democracy. I wonder if you could sketch those ideas out for us a little bit.

[00:09:27] So you know I think in order to understand our political system reading to understand but it tries to accomplish two big things at the same time there are liberal democracies which is nothing. I mean I know that in Seattle I don't get into much trouble for using the word liberal perhaps in some of them. You know I'm going Salt Lake City next so I might have to be more circumspect but a bit when I say liberal democracy I don't mean liberal conservative right in the sense that I say liberal.

[00:09:51] George W. Bush is as much of a liberal as is Barack Obama because of what it means is a commitment to the basic rules of the rule of law of separation of power to a protection of individual minority rights. And the reason for that is that when you take those things together it allows us a modicum of individual self-determination. It allows us to say what we want to not say without fear of reprisal to worship in the way we want to worship or not worship without fear of having our place of worship closed down or being punished in some kind of way of having relationships not have relationships we want. That is one core value of our political system. Now once you've taken it out once you've sort of thought of that as one of two key components you can have a definition of what

we mean by democracy. That's much more straightforward even how we usually think about it. And it's just pure original meaning the rule of Saddam was the rule of the people which is to say some degree to which popular views are actually translated into public policy. Now my fear is that these two things do go together in one sense which is to say they reinforce each other.

[00:11:00] But the political system is much more stable when both things are present. But one of them can start to slide. And I think for a long time we've had a system that I might call rights without that much democracy of undemocratic liberalism in which because of a growing role of money in politics because of a revolving door between lobbyists and legislators. And because a lot of decisions have been taken out of democratic contestation and given over to technocrats to independent agencies to central banks to trade treaties to international organizations the system hasn't actually been all that responsive to the views of ordinary people. So that's one side of this falling apart of liberal democracy. Well that part is a response on the other side you get what I would call democracy avowed right to a liberal democracy populists who come onto the political scene and say the only reason why we have any problems is that the political elite is corrupt and self-serving and they care more about minorities over there and they care about people like you and me in quotation marks and so you just have to give me all.

[00:12:09] Trust me that I alone can fix it. All right.

[00:12:13] And when we get elected they find out that it's not quite so easy to fulfill the promises as vague as we set. Who knew that things could be so complicated. Some people say who knew that healthcare could be so complicated that negotiating with Kim Jung Un might turn out to be complicated. But of course they don't want to admit that all of the promises were based on a misunderstanding on a lie. So they start to cast blame.

[00:12:40] They start to say well why is it a cantilever for you. Because the press keeps lying about me and creating a distraction so they have to be regulated. Why can't I deliver for you. Well because the Opposition is playing in unfair ways and they're really traitors to the nation. Why you. Because the deep state and independent courts and so on are really an American on the enemies of the American people. And you see that playing out in a whole bunch of places where you often get attacks on the rights of minorities. And you think that attacks on the separation of powers more power concentrated in the hands of the prime minister of the president. And so you get a system of democracy right.

[00:13:28] Yeah I thought that was a particularly keen way of separating this debate out and your discussion of the increase in democracy without rights from the Eurocrats the judiciary international treaties central banks reflecting the rise of expertise and specialization in a bureaucracy. There were a couple of things there that I found to be particularly important. One is that I think it's not as appreciated in American politics as it should be that when the Supreme Court makes particular decisions about whether we support those decisions or not that can remove decisions from political contestation. So regardless of how you feel about reproductive rights the Supreme Court making a decision or about marriage equality and census's the other audience I can probably guess but the Supreme Court making decisions brings that out of political contestation and perhaps provides more

fertile ground for the claims of the populace later on. So I also want to mention so they you brought up in your discussion which is about this November 29 2009 Swiss referendum. And I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about that as well because I think that's important for people to hear.

[00:14:46] On the other side of tyranny of the majority Yeah so I mean this idea of democracy rights can be a little abstract but I think that's a great example of that sort of brings out what I mean by that.

[00:14:57] So you know Switzerland has a system where citizens can initiate referenda of a national level which are binding. And you know a lot of people who are upset of the idea that the biggest religious minority in the country Muslims were starting to build the number of minarets mosques with which you know with towers for quote a prayer. And so they initiate a referendum that was meant to outlaw that. And over 60 percent of people voted for this referendum. So you wound up with a Swiss Constitution that now reads there's freedom of religion in Switzerland. Full stop the building of minarets it's forbidden. It doesn't make a terrible amount of sense.

[00:15:42] And in a lot of the international commentary about this I was really struck and in Swiss commentary as well by the way by this line of business really undemocratic and that doesn't make much sense to me. Right. Because surely what could be more democratic than a majority of people going out to vote hype voter participation that wasn't sort of three hour lines of people being disenfranchised sometimes happens in this country. So surely it was democratic. Well what it was was a liberal right. What it was was violating in a way that I personally find intolerable the rights of minorities. Right. There's a way to understand it is as a liberal democracy. Now there's a bit of a sort of intramural science debate about whether that under place or term underplays the danger that comes from populists.

[00:16:29] So let me be very clear about that and the form that populism takes is this kind of a liberal democracy. But the important thing to understand about it is that it's not a very stable political system. And we're seeing it play out right now and hungry. We've had an aforesaid populace in power there for about eight years now. And the first thing he did was precisely to start colonizing the state media turned them into pure propaganda outlets to force the sale of private media institutions into the hands of his political friends and allies to reform the judiciary in such a way as to give the government much more power on who becomes a judge and how they decide cases. And to put all of his loyalists into the electoral commission so that over the past months this commission has investigated all of the opposition parties and found them to be guilty of a sort of spurious infractions fining them basically the entire funding that they had to run the campaign.

[00:17:31] But miraculously declining to investigate the election of the ruling Prime Minister Viktor Orban as a result we now have elections coming up in Hungary in a few weeks at the beginning of April which are neither free nor fair.

[00:17:44] So we're now at a point where a democratically elected and quite popular prime minister can no longer be pushed out of office by democratic means. So you can have a liberal democracy degenerating over time into dictatorship and that's the stage that Hungary has now reached and I

think that's also possibly answered your question earlier about how worried we have to be about the United States Hungary of United States but Hungary is a country that political scientists and specialists in Central Europe considered to be safe five or ten years ago.

[00:18:18] So I wonder if we can now turn to talk about that consolidate democracy and the particular threats that you believe consolidated democracies are under.

[00:18:28] Yes I think you know the Hungarian case is one of the answers to that. Right. I think the fundamental thing to understand is that you know when we think about threats to democracy it's very tempting to go to the most famous historical cases which are also in some ways the most extreme cases when you think about you know people taking on democracy what you think of what was a good chance that you're thinking of the far right the finger of Berlin in 1953 people doing the Hitler salute.

[00:18:56] People in black shiny boots running around of tortures and so on. Right. There are cases when democracy dies in that kind of extreme way but most of it's not how it goes. Mostly it goes for somebody saying Well I truly represent the people. Right. I am I am your voice. I am the person who actually speaks for the people and I don't want to abolish democracy.

[00:19:20] I'm a real Democrat. And I want to get rid of some of the deep state. I want to get rid of this country's political elite right. I'm going to make the system more democratic. So just trust me. Give me more power. Let me do my thing and we've seen that in Hungary playing out for past years we've seen that in countries like Venezuela where left wing populists distorted democracy was not just a right wing phenomenon. That to me is sort of what it looks like when the danger happens. Now why should we be worried for a number of reasons. If you'll indulge me for a minute tell you a story about a chicken the British philosopher Bertrand Russell has its nice story about a chicken which by the way is a kind of chicken we'd all like to eat right. I mean I'm so you know in Seattle you can only buy and serve you know organic chickens that you know are local and have been running around happily on the farm and all of us. So it's that kind of chicken we're talking about. And that and you have a happy life. But the other chickens some of whom say be careful. One day the farmer is going to come to kill you. What are you talking about. The farmers would be nice to me.

[00:20:29] He always feeds me why would he suddenly act differently. Well Russell writes in his British red one day the farmer does come to the chicken snack showing that more sophisticated views as to the uniformity of causation would have been to the chickens benefit. What does he mean by that. Well what he means is that the scope conditions to how things work in the world but as long as the chicken was too thin to be taken for market the farmer had an incentive to keep feeding it once it was fat enough to fetch a good price. He was always going to kill it. So you know we we're talking about. Why is it that these democracies that used to be consolidated where everybody used to agree with the importance of democracy where people weren't open to or four alternative democracy was a changing. Why 20 years ago that one in 16 Americans say that Army rules are a good system of government. And now it's one in six. How can we explain that. Well part of the reason I think is that a whole set of things was true during the period of demokratik stability in the United States and Western

Europe and Japan and other countries that may not be true right and the first of those is about the economy.

[00:21:42] So from 1945 to 1960 living standard of an average American doubled from 1960 1985 it doubled to get format and 85. You might know the answer no one in five today doubled again. No it didn't. It was flat remained stagnant and that really changes how people think about politics. Right. They used to say hey you know what I'm trying which is my LBS where my kids are going to be twice which is me.

[00:22:14] I don't love politicians I don't completely trust them I don't know what to do other than Washington D.C.. But you know what they seem to be delivering. So let's give them the benefit of the doubt and now people say you know what. I've worked really hard in my life. I don't have much to show for it. My kids are probably going to do was for me. Am I allowed to swear here. Where's the love. Yes. All right. Great. This is going to be very disappointing. Now. You know I don't you know I don't have much to show for this. My kids are going to was for me so let's throw some shit against who won't see what sticks. You know how bad could things get. Let's try something new. So that's I think one big reason for this of deconsolidation of of democracy. A second one has to do with more cultural reasons and there's been a big debate over the past year too about. Is it one or the other. I think anything interesting in the world is more than one course and these two actually happened to reinforce each other.

[00:23:11] So look I grew up in Germany democracy in Germany took hold.

[00:23:16] Not coincidentally after World War II when the Holocaust and ethnic cleansing had made the country more genius and there was a very strong conception that Germans but also Italians and Swedes and the Swiss and so on had of who makes a true member of a nation and it was somebody who was descended ethnically from the same people from the same folk and so you know somebody certainly who was brown or black somebody who was Muslim or Hindu didn't block the reality had always been a little different but it has been tremendous migration on the European continent. But those very few people who visibly didn't fit that bill. And it was very widely spread notion of who belongs. Now thankfully over the past 50 or so years that's started to change.

[00:24:02] You've started not just to have a lot of immigration but a more liberal understanding of citizenship both legally and in the minds of many people people who embrace that. Yes of course the immigrant immigrants children can be real members of our society but there's tremendous pushback against that at a social scientist. I think that shouldn't surprise us because people have something to lose from this. If you are not the richest guy in this society you're not the most educated.

[00:24:28] You don't perhaps have the highest amount of social respect you know at least you're looking at an immigrant or look at a person in another country and say well I'm better than them because I'm Italian I'm Swedish I'm Finnish right.

[00:24:44] When we like Norwegians Yes that's right.

[00:24:49] We now suddenly you know your boss might be an immigrant. The person representing in Parliament might be an immigrant and that does take something away from you because you no longer have an easy way of saying we're better than that. No that might be other states but similar different and respect it's different but we've always been obviously a multi-ethnic society but it's similar in that we've always been in a multi-ethnic society with very strict ethnic and racial hierarchy. Again we should then that we've actually come a tremendously long way in overcoming that. We sometimes forget that nowadays it's easy to be depressed about all of the ongoing injustices and all of the ongoing discrimination and some renewed attacks from frankly parts of the Trump White House. But I think there's little doubt that it's better being an ethnic minority religious minority a sexual minority in this country today that that's not been two years ago that that in 20 or 40 or 60 years ago. But again it shouldn't surprise us that there are some people who are rebelling against them because they have something to lose from that because they have a privileged status and a privileged economic sort of arrangements to lose.

[00:25:55] And then if you add the third thing which is the rise of social media and the internet which makes it much easier for extreme voices to bypass social gatekeepers and you add that to the deep economic frustration to the cultural fears about the future. That makes a pretty dangerous cocktail.

[00:26:15] Thanks very much. And I think that your point that we don't we're not aware of the conditions until the change in many cases is quite a powerful one and we'll see a lot of this is TBD. But on that second point and third point I want to tease out a little bit more on the second point that as I mentioned to you before Seattle and the cities that I looked at in the U.S. was had the third lowest percent of people voted for Trump and Washington D.C. and Detroit had lower percentages but Seattle was third at 8 percent. So there's often a kind of many people in Seattle I think don't understand the appeal of Trump but tied into what you said about there's this backlash. What are the areas in the U.S. that this geography of resentment is most keenly felt.

[00:27:07] Yeah so you know the reason why people sometimes think it's not about the economy is that they do these really simplistic studies and I'm amazed those that are. Because we spoke with scientists doing but by and large and at some of the smartest pinyon outlets in the country that sort of so uncritically keep running with this right. So the argument goes well look it's not actually true that the people who voted for Trump were poorer than people voted for Hillary Clinton. So kind of anything to do with the economy.

[00:27:37] That's true. But when you look at the geographic distribution of the vote for populists it clearly has something to do with the economy. Right. So Donald Trump won the two thirds of American counties but less than one third of Americans or about one third of America's GDP.

[00:27:57] He wasn't really big in parts of a country with fewer highly educated people in parts of a country with less recent investment in parts of the country even with a higher share of jobs that might be automated in the coming decades according to various economic studies. And you see very similar patterns of support for populists in Western Europe and Eastern Europe even in Asia and so

on. By the way we don't make the same mistake when we talk about immigration. If you apply the same logic that some of the people say it's nothing to the economy apply to the cultural side. We would say Well where would we expect the biggest backlash against immigration in cities like Seattle and L.A. and New York that are very diverse. Well we sort of. No that's not the case. So what do you see there is that you have a really strong backlash in places that don't have a deep history of diversity and migration but they have actually become a lot more diverse in the past decades. One who it always sticks with me is that over two thirds of American counties where over 90 percent white 20 25 years ago and an now less than 90 percent white.

[00:29:12] And that's a really interesting threshold. This is about where you go from very rarely having to do of somebody who's quote unquote not like you. To actually on a daily basis how to deal with people who are immigrants. But attendance and so on and that I think is an important part of the hope here. And I don't know how hopeful to be about that. The hope is that you might come out on the other side. But when you look at the politics of a state like California it actually had a deep anti immigrant backlash in the late 80s and the early 90s. But as the state became more and more diverse not just that you know the fact that it's not majority minorities so those you know people have different voting patterns. But the white Californian population has actually become a lot more tolerant immigrant as well because it became part of what the culture of the places. So that's one piece of hope about how has my pay to play out.

[00:30:10] It's yeah and I think that that is the hopeful scenario and that seems to be borne out by many of the areas that have experienced the greatest diversity and so the way that I kind of understood your argument there is that there is that went from being diverse to being even more diverse didn't have this kind of backlash as areas that went from being very very undiverse to being very undiverse the areas that dominance gets challenged. And then once this idea of the dominant group is is forced in some kind of power sharing then this animus may recede. So speaking of animus let me go to the third point that you made which is this this taking the tools of mass communication out of the hands of the elite which has the potential for democratization as in the Arab Spring but also has the potential for more significant disruption. I wonder if you could also talk about that in the context of and Yosh has got a very good Ted x Berlind talk which may encourage you to look at online. I looked at it today and I noticed besides the compelling content. I looked into the comments section which is perhaps inadvisable for anybody who wants to believe in the piece. All right Ed so the comment section I was I was shocked. There were there were.

[00:31:41] There were many quite hideous comments so this is something that you can also relate to the way that your ideas have been received in populism. But I wonder if you could talk about this disruptive effect of social media and consolidated democracies to speak to those hideous commons.

[00:32:00] For a moment. I actually haven't looked at them so I get them I really somehow get email updates. I don't know how I opted in but to this by mistake when somebody comments on my YouTube channel. So if you want to ruin my Sunday morning you can no comment on my YouTube channel on Sunday morning and I get hideous insults in my inbox.

[00:32:18] So feel free. But I am so this book was written English weirdly was published first in German and I was unbooked when Germany and Fabbri and I went to a country's biggest TV news program.

[00:32:32] And somehow vsf was making much a point I made earlier about sort of the need to transition to an equal multi-ethnic society and someone challenges around that and some of this was picked up by thousands of semi respectable outright block in Germany and went from there. But all of the Facebook groups of the far right populist party will out for Germany and then it somehow made the jump to the far right and right wing extremist publications. United States. So I had a not too flattering profile of me written up on the daily stoma. So as a result some of the recent comments on my YouTube channel as well as some of the emails I receive in my email account. Colorful.

[00:33:14] So we say but I think it is an interesting window into how to think about some of social media right. So the way I think about it is that you know this sounds like a slightly silly claim in some ways structurally the world of communication we had no say in 1992 when I believe CNN was invented. I was not too different from a world of communication we had 300 years earlier.

[00:33:39] Now obviously CNN was broadcasting the news live pictures sound all around the world but obviously wasn't possible and you know seventeen hundred and eight hundred.

[00:33:51] But the similarity is that the only people who could actually reach a mass audience were people who owned backend newspapers or publishing houses. Now you know radio station television station all the people whom they decided to give a platform to and that limited distribution of ideas and limited to partake in that. Now in some ways that change is a positive thing. It's a positive thing dictatorships where it makes it much easier. For people to have a voice is what we now are able to make a website which is basically free and but practically anybody can access it right. So it's no longer if you have huge capital but hymn book of sorts of people it's just what anybody and now one step further. You have Twitter and Facebook so that you know if you're sitting on a United Airlines flight and somebody decides to accommodate you and somebody takes a video of that even if you only have 100 followers of 10 percent of them retreated and 10 percent of them retreated very quickly can reach an audience of millions. So look in dictatorships that makes it easy to make a viral clip about the corruption of a dictator or the repression of the opposition and it can actually help the opposition forces to push some of the regime.

[00:35:18] At the same time in a democracy it also makes it easier for hateful voices for voices that spread fake news and so on to have more voice. So I don't think that you know five years ago what with social media was an obvious form a source of good. And it was going to democratize the whole world and empower marginalized voices within the United States. Now I think that social media is sort of the devil and it's going to drive the whole world.

[00:35:43] I think structurally fingered as a social scientist it is favoring outsiders and the forces of instability of the insiders and the forces of continuity. And depending on the context and depending on the nature of the outsiders there can be a good or bad thing. I think what makes it so destructive at

the moment United States is the conjunction with the fact that people are really pissed off because of its deep structural drivers of discontent that have little to do social media. Sanaa.

[00:36:19] That's a good way for us to maybe move into the final hour of discussion for you to vote for kunai but me say that I think that in political science we haven't yet got a handle on how communications technology will transform politics particularly because the nature of communication as you said it's not just that that people are changing their heartaches on whether Facebook is good or bad for democracy but the the tools themselves are evolving at a very rapid pace so we tend have a lag effect and social science is studying the effects and takes a while to figure it out. But when we're behind the arc on that I think now is the time that political scientists will be figuring out how e-mail works. It'll be a while before they move to social media more effectively. So looking ahead to the future one of them was on the telephone.

[00:37:11] But I'm happy to see.

[00:37:14] I do as a I told one of my students that when I got my first e-mail account as a graduate student at Harvard we told a friend who is an engineer he said Why do you have email. What do you need email. Which I think is still a good question. So speaking of the students that you dub one of the one of your most controversial claims is about the young generation. So as a professor you deal with wonderful young people and it often inspires me with confidence and optimism for the future. But you would say not so fast. The young generation the age cohorts are changing in their values about democracy and this is something we should be concerned about. I wonder if you could speak that a little bit.

[00:38:03] Yes so this is part of the sort of research that got me concerned that democracy no longer be the only game in town the way it once was. Right. And I sort of alluded to it briefly earlier but let me go on a little bit more detail. So for example when you ask people how important is it to to live in a democracy. Over two thirds of all the oldest American cohorts born 30s and 40s say you know 10 out of 10 really important and less than one third of millennials point since 1982. And you also see at least in the world that so this data is of greater openness to some of the Proton alternatives to democracy. Now has a number of reasons for that.

[00:38:46] One of them is Lowa ability of democracy to actually deliver for young people. So in places like a lot of European countries politicians are really mindful of older people who come out to vote in greater numbers and also in many countries now are just bigger age cohort and so they ring fence pension spending and things like that which is good and desirable.

[00:39:15] But they don't spend nearly the same amount of money on young people. They keep labor market very rigid which helps labor market insiders who already have good jobs that make it really hard for young people to actually find a job. And so as a result you have you know huge youth unemployment in parts of southern Europe for example. And when you see developments like the housing market which I know is a little bit of a topic in Seattle. Again you know if you bought your house 15 20 years ago or if you live in a rent controlled apartment that's probably fine but if you're

somebody in your 20s in Seattle even if you actually make decent money even if you have decent qualification it might be quite difficult to ever actually have a confidence that you're going to have a quality of life that will match that of your parents. And so that's sort of his objective reason I think of just the moxie deliverance for young people. A second reason I think is just less worry about what would happen if democracy changes will Mutato even comes to an end. For older Americans they have some basic understanding what fascism meant they came of age politically at a time when 17 was still a real political threat. And so they have a live imagination of what it would look like to lose a political freedom loving young people that's not the case.

[00:40:45] So when they look at the political system they see the things in it and walking and they aren't seeing things that are working right. And by the way we're doing a very bad job in high schools and middle schools and so on of teaching civics the amount of lessons and time we spent in teaching civics has plummeted in the last decades.

[00:41:08] And I don't speak for you but I feel like in a lot of universities we also do a pretty bad job of actually teaching people about what's valuable in our political system. We often tell people what screwed up in our political system. And that's important. Right. But we don't at the same time say and this is what the values of liberal democracy are and why it actually Madison by the way. Here's what's going on in Russia and in China in Venezuela. And you know what. Perhaps that United States is preferable to that.

[00:41:38] Thanks well all that. The students who are here are commenting on that specifically or other interesting myself but let me just make two observations on that and bring us to a final question perhaps. First is that it occurs to me that the elements of this intergenerational conflict that you outline in terms of demographic shifts and also in shifting the terms of job security as housing prices are of the advanced industrialized democracies actually most apparent in Japan. Where particularly after the bursting of the bubble in the early 1990s the response was not reduction in employment but no new hiring. So the obvious differential impact of generations and Toppins has Japan's population began to decline a few years ago. So it's demographic profile similar Germany with but with no immigration but we haven't yet seen young Japanese turn away from democracy. The second point that I bring out in terms of this change over time and in support of different situations that has often occurred to me in looking at surveys of trust in American institutions that there's been a substantial decline in trust in politicians of all stripes political parties the presidency Congress the courts the media even non-political that civic institutions all of those are scoring lower in terms of Americans perception of trust than the one that has been super immune has been the military and there is so that connects I think to your point about shifting values rather ominously let me ask you at the time that you finished writing the book you sketched out an optimistic scenario for American democracy and a pessimistic scenario and to provide a little context for that.

[00:43:44] When Trump was elected I think that the the way I understood most political scientists be looking at this was this would be a big test of American democracy and most political scientists seem to be of the opinion that American democratic institutions would be sufficiently robust that norms could be eroded by the federal system the courts the opposition parties the media would be

sufficiently robust to resist a populist. But others were worried that this anti institutionalist and this populist groundswell of anger in the hands of unscrupulous politicians could be more dangerous because if there was some kind of triggering event Reichstag fire some kind of food security crisis or a real security crisis. So you you talk about those scenarios since then even in this month there's been a couple of elections that provide mixed evidence for this. There was the Italian national elections in which populist did very well.

[00:44:43] And we also see this utter chaos in the Italian political system which was once seen as this entrenched party critique that the Christian Democrats were one of the most successful political parties in terms of their time in government for decades. But now all of that's been overturned and Berlusconi appears to be a moderate. And the question is and leading up to that I also see that time perhaps you can reflect on this that many of the arguments made about Berlusconi as a populist politician is that once a populist politician takes power and begins to erode the norms he becomes a kind of an outbidding game. Now positions these norms are devalued and this can be this this can lead to medium term erosion of democratic norms that support this consolidated democracy that you are also worried about. On the other hand in the United States there was a special election in Pennsylvania that people in Seattle were generally cheered by that result. So that's two differing results. Recent elections in the time since you wrote the book which these scenarios do you think is accumulating more evidence the optimistic scenario that the robust American democracy will survive individual populist politicians or the more pessimistic scenario that American democracy could be seriously compromised.

[00:46:10] So when you have free scenarios right in the book are you optimistic or pessimistic and one but of the Roman scenario is that the Romans had ancient Roman mind. But I think it actually tracks quite well to the recent Italian election as well. So so so so since it's uncanny I think I'm going to say Romans in.

[00:46:28] Let me talk you through those so I think the the pessimistic scenario.

[00:46:35] Was that Donald Trump would manage to do what Viktor Orbán has done in Hungary what brought about what he has done in Turkey what in some ways Vladimir Putin has done in Russia. That's not a perfect analogy which is actually quite popular and to concentrate power into his own hands in a very substantial way.

[00:46:54] Now I don't know what's happening because I think there is very good opposition to Donald Trump.

[00:47:01] I think people have recognized that there is a danger to democratic institutions and thanks to that and thanks to the activities of some great civil society groups around the country that actually are fighting tooth and nail to do something about this. I think institutions have held up reasonably well. So you know I don't think we're about to lose our democracy tomorrow. But I also want to say to us of course the third world we're of course around that is but when you look at what talks were saying 1 2 1/2 years into rule of lots of we look at what Hungarians were looking we're saying what to have years

and rule of Viktor Orban or indeed when you look at what newspapers like The New York Times The Wall Street Journal were writing about was countries. They all said this is great. Recip our one is bringing. You know Muslim form of moderate Christian Democrats democracy to a country and that's going to improve institutions in Turkey. So a year to have in it's not very long.

[00:48:01] The second thing I would say is that Trump has managed to do some very real damage.

[00:48:07] He now has complete control of the Republican Party including having managed to turn bodies that once were relatively bipartisan into just tools of capricious willful propaganda like the House Intelligence Committee.

[00:48:29] That's no mean achievement. And he's done that while being just sort of on pure technical terms. You know if you want to know it's free. It's a populist Olympiad and you are scoring people on their performance you know. Trump is nowhere close to the medal ranks and he is really really bad because he's not doing some of things that populists like Audubon and Adeline and Kuczynski Poland are systematically doing. He's not casting rhetorically. His fight is a fight of a nation that is really under threat from outside forces that are sinister and dangerous is always obvious it's about him. He's not attacking the independence of institutions. As to teach sick way right. I was chilled MyState to be union when he said you know what all of blockquote he's an efficient cabinet minister should be allowed to fire people at will when they're not serving the country the interest of the country right. If he had done that from the beginning and actually followed through on that he might have succeeded in doing quite a lot of damage there. But eventually he doesn't. The only thing he does is that when when Robert Mueller does something which obviously frightens his interest he tries to buy bread.

[00:49:40] So it's too tactical and then has both a response and Ferdie's been really bad at arguing for his base. Right. And like a lot of the other populist governments he hasn't given people real material benefits the Polish government has given each family of two children 500 Swati a month that turn up efficiently in your bank account you know courtesy of a government.

[00:50:04] You're reminded of the inefficiency every single month incompetence something like that will be a lot more popular you will be able to claim the good economy that he's inherited as to his credit much more strongly. So so that's the really pessimistic scenario.

[00:50:23] I don't think it's that bad but it could have been that if he had actually learned of a drop the opposite is very optimistic scenario is to say look Democrats just won a special election in a district that is plus 20 on average. But that means we're going to sweep the house. Perhaps we'll even take the Senate in 2020. Trump is going to you know carry Mississippi and West Virginia. That's it. Right. And we'll have a real moment of national coming together understanding that politicians that break these basic constitutional norms and rules are terrible and is going to be better. I at this point think it's pretty likely that Trump will lose in 2020. He was a decent chance of Democrats taking back the House in the midterms. It's hard. But that I think was special elections make me optimistic about that.

[00:51:14] But I do think it was going to be a moment of coming together I think was going to be quite clearly a large portion of Americans that stayed loyal to Trump. And I think as the Italian case shows even people who say OK you know what. Trump wasn't the right guy. He was sort of incompetent didn't really deliver. That doesn't mean we're going to go back to sort of nice moderate you know John McCain type Republicans don't vote for somebody who's even more extreme or vets of a same sort of ilk. But just as well I am a champion of that guy over there. He was an asshole but I'm great right. So I had that my fears the sort of Roman scenario Roman scenario in Italy in modern day Italy is that you know a man by the name of Silvio Berlusconi who has no similarity at all to American politics.

[00:52:07] Real estate billionaire with a lot of sex scandals who didn't like his country's judiciary and so on. I don't know who he reminds me of.

[00:52:16] Was finally rebuked in 2011. He had become very unpopular on the day in which it became clear that he was about to resign. And amateur orchestra and choir spontaneously assembled outside the presidential palace where he was about to Tender's resignation to play Handel's Hallelujah. You know there's a real moment of celebration and seven years later. You know what. Berlusconi is back. He's the king maker in Italian politics once again. As you alluded to as these two other populist parties that are actually more extreme in many ways but have even more of a vote. And between them they have two thirds of the vote.

[00:52:54] And by the way young people voted much more for these parties and older people read the original room and scenario of one but I actually write about in the book is Tiberius Cracow's who takes power in Rome and belayed second century before Christ. He gives voice to a lot of deep frustrations that people have. There's a huge constitutional crisis. He leaves politics muddled as some of his supporters. Things go back to seemingly normal for a little while. Then his brother gets elected. Same thing again please go back to resume the normal for a while. The next wave of populism comes back and over the course of the Roman case the century you get that disintegration of a political system.

[00:53:50] Now I think that's the thing that haunts me right that we get rid of Trump in 2020 but we don't manage to deal with some of the underlying reasons for his success and by the way in the book I give some amount of for what we can actually do to tackle those underlying causes of populism.

[00:54:10] But if we don't manage to do that then we can get keep having this kind of energy coming back and if the next die is a little bit better in the populist Olympiad and is a bit smarter and a bit more shrewd and a bit more strategic and perhaps tweets a little less then we might be in real trouble.

[00:54:32] Please join me. Thank. Great. And now I think we have time to bring up for some questions. Audience and people will just click two or three and then you can respond to those and we'll get more people they ask questions please ahead.

[00:54:57] So there you.

[00:55:09] Rise of populism liberal democracy but one very comforting thing. I teach political science and I could always for years up until the last decade say Oh but let's look at the Freedom Index and let's look at all the countries that have become democracies. Well I can't do that anymore and we just came back from Vietnam which was very exciting. What was the most interesting thing politically.

[00:55:42] You have a communist day that has come from no opposition parties and yet.

[00:55:53] Oh children are making double what their parents did. Oh right. It's right the generation where being gay was just like oh it's not mentionable and now it's part of the millennial generation. I mean I could go on and on. But it's sort of you know it just felt so good. In Vietnam and yet the political system is completely unjust.

[00:56:28] And I forgot to mention corruption but so could that be the wave of the future. What does that mean.

[00:56:41] So the question was about you know a couple of things. I think so the first is the above the fact that for a long time you had on the whole balance more countries moving towards democracy than moving away from democracy.

[00:56:56] What Larry Diamond calls. Yeah. And now for the last 10 or 11 years we've seen the inverse what Larry Diamond calls a Democratic recession. So velocity 11 years the number of countries each year it has moved away from democracy was roughly double the number of countries that has moved towards democracy.

[00:57:17] And one of the reasons for that perhaps part of the question is that some of his Havertown countries are doing reasonably well that countries like Vietnam with one party rule and a strong dictatorship are actually performing well economically and even to some degree allowing people individual freedom.

[00:57:35] So look I agree that there's a real danger. Right.

[00:57:37] I think we might underestimate the degree to which you know the ideological appeal of our political system around the world rested not just on some abstract preference for liberal democracy for the rights to self-determination for the fact that the same time we had a tremendous amount of soft power a tremendous amount of military power and that to anybody who wants to be rich it had to be United States.

[00:58:05] So I'm actually writing a piece right now. I just sort of added today for Foreign Affairs called the end of a Democratic Century Question Mark and one of the things it shows is that for the first time in over 100 years 040 town countries around the world now have the same share of GDP as liberal democracies for a part of the Western system broadly understood but includes countries like Japan.

[00:58:36] But and for the first time many of photon countries that can rival the standard of living of countries like the United States.

[00:58:49] So it's not just aggregate economic power. It's where you have a good life and that changes things right.

[00:58:55] In 1960 1970 the Soviet Union had something like half of the GDP per capita of Western Europe. So if you want to be really affluent you knew you had to go it was a democratic system but something of a case so yes I feel that we have to compete with authoritarian systems and smart but I still think that bad places to live and all kinds of ways in ways that a lot of people perhaps care less about than the pocketbooks and one of the answers to that.

[00:59:28] So we need to do more to actually deliver people who will deliver for people economically how we can make sure that globalization and capitalism all those things which I think are good actually make sure that money goes into the pockets of ordinary people. That's a lot of suggestions about that.

[00:59:45] And book of all experiences of your times in France.

[00:59:57] I grew up here and right now there is a strong sense of catharsis in the resistance. All of them are. Like we're safer together and on stage and is strong here. But they give you a little deeper. The city hasn't been as radical finding your way. Why thank you. I mean there were Rosty and people being shot over the beach. Not so long ago and the liberal Gorham's that you were talking about are Nazi so it is. This is just so tired. His voice is. More vague.

[01:01:07] Yeah. So and by the way what is essentially an excerpt from the book. So so innocent that I suppose a lot more on that in the book.

[01:01:14] I mean the question to repeat it from a podcast I'm getting a thumbs up here from the back of a room as it is that you know at the moment Seattle seems like on the one hand sort of united in essence of Trump it's available city but very obviously also deep tensions here. And particularly on Europe's campuses the tensions between different identity groups. And whether you know how you know whether there's something but we haven't common beyond those things as Americans and answer the question about my in the Times and and and and and the book about how we can emphasize those things. So look I mean you know I alluded to the fact that I grew up in Germany I'm Jewish and is by descent of not entirely by you know it was very tempting to me to say let's give up on collective identity. Let's give up on nationalism trishaw let's leave it behind the 20th century which is so crudely shaped and in a way I'm even more tempted now to think that Ben before because when you look at the horrible things but I think nationalism is doing in many countries in Europe. And when you look at frankly the White nationalism of parts of the Trump administration it's very tempting to run away from anything but has with nation in it. There's also another set of responses to it which is slightly different but those are quite prevalent on the left which is to say well you know if Steve Bannon and Steve Miller and Steve go on about things like you know like like like anation and attack

groups that according to them don't really belong in America. Well you know what. We should celebrate every ethnic and religious and sexual group.

[01:03:08] All these forms of subnational collective identity those we need to defend those who do celebrate but let's not go anywhere close to a nation. But I think it's one important kernel of truth to that which is that we obviously need to defend unreservedly and courageously. Any group that comes under attack but is discriminated against and so on and so forth and back and you know half measures about that. At the same time I think that ultimately running away from nationalism is a mistake that we need to think of nationalism as a have domesticated animal. But if we leave it to its own devices the worst kinds of people perhaps some people called Steve might come in and baited and provoke it until it runs wild and instead I think we need to try and work with it and try and make it useful for us not knowing but it can be dangerous. But is part of the nature of it unfortunately politics is dangerous as scary things are going on right. Trying to reclaim what nationalism means to actually say hey we do need collective identity because it can be incredibly motivating it can mean we don't just care about my family. I just don't I don't just care about my immediate neighborhood or people who share my religion. People share my ethnicity. It makes me able to say if something horrible happens in Houston like a big hurricane I want to help those people.

[01:04:34] And if something happens in Puerto Rico I want to help those people too. Right. It's something that can make me say well perhaps you can. Your answers come from a different part of the world. You have a different religion we're both Americans. We have something in common right. And that to me seems important to fight for that. BARACK OBAMA I think was very good at putting that in words acknowledging some of the deep feelings of America like in his speech in Selma but also emphasizing the ability of a common future across those lines a call from a good number of political disagreements. The president fans expressed today well I think in a complex campaign speech in the city of say in the south of France where he said look we're not looking to his audience. I see people from the Ivory Coast from Somalia and from Algeria and from Italy and France. But what I see. I see the people of say what we're seeing see the people of France. Look here ladies and gentlemen of us tonight of a far right party headed by Marine Le Pen. This is what it means to be proud to be French. That to me seems like the right kind of response to the exclusive nationalism to fight foreign nationals are lies.

[01:05:53] My apologies which that where it has the most responsibility.

[01:06:27] So so the question from the excellent Steve in the audience is about which sort of what institutions are most important in standing up to 240 incursions and populists. I mean I think all of them are right. I mean I think certainly one that has failed the test so far is Congress and it is frankly shameful.

[01:06:57] How cowardly congressional Republicans have been in doing their job in a way that really made me understand certain parts of history. I mean the amazing thing about congressional Republicans is just how little they have to lose unlike parliamentarians in some other periods of of world history.

[01:07:22] They don't have to be afraid that they might be thrown into prison or that they might be killed if they disagree with the president and lose the election which is probably the prize that would have to pay thanks to the wonderful role of money in politics. Bacon don't make a ton of money as lobbyists.

[01:07:43] What we have to lose and yet they are not willing to stand up for principles. And that's very scary to me thinking about what would be going on in this country right now the president was 10 15 points more popular and more competent. That's scary. Now thankfully the institutions have done a much better job. The judiciary doesn't show any signs of playing favorites.

[01:08:07] The media I think has really been outstanding so I think that you know on the whole the institutions are still working reasonably well. But we need to make sure that that continues to be the case.

[01:08:25] We have time for one more question to what we took but take about that and how Rosie.

[01:08:50] And my question is do you think that the role democracy is compatible with a capitalist society. So let me take the second question first.

[01:09:16] Yes I think it is in fact you know there are no historical examples of democracies that haven't been capitalist and I think we have to take that seriously.

[01:09:29] You have to thing I would say is that you know if you're really on the political right I can see I don't think that according to your principles you should be against globalization and free trade and so on but I can see where you're coming from because when you look at the last 25 years of American history you know steel workers in Michigan really haven't profited because of a bunch of political choices. The kinds of critical choices that the great champion of the people Donald Trump is actually making worse over last year too.

[01:09:58] But you can see what he might say well look we're not getting so much out of it. So why why get rid of it if you're on the left and you care about the well-being of people around the world. I think it's very hard to look at the last 20 25 years and not celebrate parts of globalization and free trade.

[01:10:16] It was a question about Vietnam while in countries like that now like China like India we've had about 2 billion people who are in dire poverty. A few decades ago no electricity very limited education not no will to have food. That night joined the global middle class. The really decent lives. But I think there is an achievement of capitalism now when democracy and capitalism work well together. They need to check each other a little bit. What happens with capitalism does is that it makes you less dependent on the state which makes it easier to have political freedom which means that you can criticize the government for losing your job. But one of the things about having capitalism in a democratic system is that you shouldn't have deep corruption.

[01:11:04] You shouldn't have. The law is just doing the bidding of corporations and so on. And I think that we've somewhat fallen short. So we need both. But democracy has to do a better job of keeping capitalism in check and ensuring that all people actually get something out of capital's on on voter suppression.

[01:11:27] Yeah I mean you know first of all it has long been a problem. And you know it's perfectly possible that that would have worked out slightly differently in places like Pennsylvania if you know overwhelmingly Democratic voting black voters in places like inner city Philadelphia didn't have to line up for twice three times four times as long in order to cast a vote. And people in overwhelmingly white Republican suburbs. So this is one of a deep injustices that do exist in the market but we need to remedy and very easy to remedy by the way is a political will was there. But obviously there's a reason why this but I'll go one step beyond right and we've talked about the sort of slightly mysterious rules and norms a little bit earlier in our conversation or what are the rules and norms is that you really want to win but you accept that you want free and fair elections.

[01:12:27] But you are happy to be ruled by your political adversary if he wins. Well voter suppression is one of the ways in which Republicans and I think by and large I'm Catholic not to exaggerate for continuity between traditional Republicans Donald Trump right.

[01:12:42] I mean I have disagreements with both. But but it's important to recognize who is a legitimate adversary and who's an enemy of a broken system. John McCain was a legitimate adversary and he had the courtesy of casting Democrats as legitimate adversaries versus moment 2008.

[01:12:59] But I keep going back to in which a few days before the election he does a town hall and a woman stands up and says You know I'm Barack Obama he's an Arab.

[01:13:13] He's dangerous he hates our country. If he becomes president you know I'm fearful for what's going to happen. And John McCain says look I have deep disagreements with Barack Obama. I think it's really important that I win and he lose. But you know what he's. He's a decent man. And if he does win you don't have to be faithful to that's treating somebody as an adversary rather than as an enemy. Well I think there are as parts of a Republican Party that have for a while stopped to do that. One of the great examples of that is the gubernatorial elections in 2016 in North Carolina which were narrowly won by a Democratic candidate and then the outgoing Republican legislature that basically just lost its majority.

[01:13:59] Decided to rewrite the rules in order to basically make the office of governor as unimportant as possible. That's the definition of not being willing to have a free election and being ruled by a diversity. And that's a very deep problem it's a sign of how how poisonous the partisan divide in our country has become.

[01:14:20] Now if I may I just want to say something at the end which is that you know sometimes I get these conversations and give these talks and people at Vienne tell me that it's all been terribly depressing. So if I have to press I'm sorry I apologize. But I actually I'm not oppressed by this political moment.

[01:14:38] I'm energized by it and I'm heartened by it. Because when I came of age politically it was clear that mistakes were real. You know it was important policy issues to be discussed and all those kinds of things but it didn't seem like there were existential. It didn't seem like you know it's more or less we know what the words can look like in 20 or 30 years. Well that's no longer the case. But thankfully we live in a country where despite voter suppression and so we still actually have the ability to mobilize. We have the ability to speak our mind. We have the ability to go and protest.

[01:15:17] If and when Robert Mueller is fired we have the ability to do that Thompson pain for people and all of those kinds of things and that's inspiring what we do now really matters.

[01:15:32] I went to a talk by I was a few months ago and he had this beautiful image that there's a huge fire burning in the world and it can feel a little helpless because all we have is you know a little bottle of water in our hand. And that's not going to be enough to extinguish the fire. Well but if each of us takes our own little bottle of water and we each attack some corner of the fire one of its closest to you on that but you must get by. Then together we might just be able to extinguish the fire. So I can't as I say the book I can't promise you a happy end. But I know that whenever we can to get a happy end or not depends on what we do. So let's get to it.

[01:16:26] This podcast was presented by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.