

## Audio file

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## Transcript

00:00:07 Speaker 1

Hello and welcome to the Kog podcast, a podcast brought to you by the quality of Government institute at the University of Gothenburg.

00:00:16 Speaker 1

In this podcast, we have conversations with well known experts to try to make sense of politics and governments all over the world.

00:00:24 Speaker 1

Hosting this show is Professor Victor La Puente joining Victor in this episode is professor and influential public intellectual Sheri Berman, with whom he will be talking about the challenges of democracy nowadays in comparison, and in contrast with the fall of liberal regimes and the ascent of totalitarian systems in the 1930s.

00:00:45 Speaker 1

Which are the similarities and what are the differences?

00:00:48 Speaker 1

Berman will provide us with many interesting insights to grasp the true nature of the problems our liberal democracies currently.

00:00:56 Speaker 1

This interview was recorded before the start of the war in Ukraine, but Berman's response was acquired now, if any even more relevant, we hope you enjoy the episode.

00:01:16 Speaker 2

It's a great pleasure to have in our podcast, Sherry Berman, professor of Barnard College, Columbia University, a great expert in the politics of Interwar Europe, the mirror to which many turned their eyes today to understand the current discontent in many democracies.

00:01:32 Speaker 2

Share is an expert on the origin of democracy.

00:01:34 Speaker 2

When many say we are witnessing.

00:01:36 Speaker 2

Its demise, she is an expert on the history of social democracy.

00:01:40 Speaker 2

When many say it has no.

00:01:42 Speaker 2

Future her intellectual trajectory, analyzing the historical roots on the one side of democracy like in her 2019 book in Oxford University Press, *Democracy and Dictatorship*, Europe from the ancient regime to the present day and on the other side on Social Democratic parties, corroborates the old idea that understanding the past.

00:02:03 Speaker 2

Is the best way to predict.

00:02:04 Speaker 2

Future and approve of that is how in her very provocative opinion pieces in the New York Times, Foreign affairs foreign policy, for example, she has been taking positions relatively unpopular, like warning the American officials about the dangers of overlooking State Building in Afghanistan or her very early.

00:02:25 Speaker 2

A skepticism about identity politics, cultural wars, and weakness, which has revealed also quite prophetic.

00:02:34 Speaker 2

We are going to talk about the past to discern the future that awaits us.

00:02:38 Speaker 2

No pressure, Sherry, and welcome.

00:02:40 Speaker 2

In a recent article, Pablo Veramendi team best lay a morgue. Levy stated that if the whole human history was in one day, democracy would start just 0.09 seconds before midnight. So.

00:02:54 Speaker 2

Democracy doesn't seem to be in our genes.

00:02:57 Speaker 2

Maybe we prefer a guy with a stick like Putin who provides order in a society.

00:03:02 Speaker 2

Or a big.

00:03:03 Speaker 2

Brother that watches us overnight with cameras like in China and give us points for every good.

00:03:10 Speaker 2

Maybe humans are not morally equipped for democracy and we give priority to the immediate well-being of ourselves and our relatives instead of value. For example, freedom and civil rights.

00:03:22 Speaker 3

So I think that that is a great way to start a conversation with that rather pessimistic outlook on democracy.

00:03:30 Speaker 3

See, I don't believe that's true, but, and let me answer that question by talking about the present period.

00:03:36 Speaker 3

Although I will say that your listeners should be aware that statement that they made is not entirely accurate in the sense that modern democracy, representative democracy in large societies.

00:03:48 Speaker 3

Yes, that is something that is a recent.

00:03:51 Speaker 3

But the idea that people want to govern themselves, that they should have some role in choosing their leaders and in making the decisions that govern their societies.

00:04:00 Speaker 3

That is not.

00:04:01 Speaker 3

An entirely modern phenomenon.

00:04:03 Speaker 3

You can find that in pre modern societies and tribal groups.

00:04:06 Speaker 3

And things like that but.

00:04:07 Speaker 3

Sticking to the sort of modern version of democracy, sure, that is something that is relatively recent, dating by most analysts, views from about, you know, the time of the American and French revolutions.

00:04:21 Speaker 3

I think that we should differentiate between what people want, what people desire.

00:04:28 Speaker 3

And how difficult it is to achieve those things.

00:04:31 Speaker 3

I mean we think about that in our own personal lives, right?

00:04:33 Speaker 3

We often want things, but we don't know exactly how to make them happen.

00:04:38 Speaker 3

So if you look at survey data from around the globe, whether that's in advanced industrial democracies like we have in Western Europe and North America or places where democracy has been unsuccessful, largely absent Middle East, places like that, people generally believe that.

00:04:59 Speaker 3

Governing themselves is a good idea in the sense that people believe they should have a right to.

00:05:04 Speaker 3

Have a say in choosing their leaders and governments in deciding what kinds of policies should govern their societies in having rights, civil basic, civil liberties and political freedoms.

00:05:14 Speaker 3

That is to say, to organize to say what they want to have access to information.

00:05:20 Speaker 3

So there really is no place on the globe where people say, look, I prefer a strong man.

00:05:25 Speaker 3

I don't value civil rights and political liberties where I think government should make decisions for me and my fellow citizens without any input.

00:05:34 Speaker 3

The problem is that democracy is difficult.

00:05:37 Speaker 3

Build and that in many societies people have come to believe that they have they face a trade off between desiring those kinds of political rights and freedoms on the one hand, and other things.

00:05:48 Speaker 3

Whether it be.

00:05:49 Speaker 3

Economic performance or security or protection from internal enemies or whatever.

00:05:55 Speaker 3

And so when people feel that they have to choose.

00:05:58 Speaker 3

You then you begin to see problems for democracy and also again something we probably want to talk about given our contemporary period that even when people say they want democracy or they believe in their right to choose their leaders and governments, it is very difficult to make democracy work it requires.

00:06:18 Speaker 3

A lot of not just political, but social and economic.

00:06:22 Speaker 3

Prerequisites as well.

00:06:24 Speaker 2

So wouldn't you agree with the people that talk about the democratic backlash nowadays that we are living a wave of autocratic?

00:06:34 Speaker 2

And that there is a failure of democracy, or, to be more precise, of liberal democracy, as you always underline, because in your book you also side this idea that in 1989, no.

00:06:44 Speaker 2

The mood was truly optimistic all over the world, liberal democracy will reign forever and ever.

00:06:50 Speaker 2

Now, even in the heart of the European Union with Hungary.

00:06:53 Speaker 2

In Poland, we see examples of clear autocratic isation.

00:06:57 Speaker 2

Which is the diagnosis of the situation?

00:06:59 Speaker 2

Are are we seeing a democratic post, a momentary stop, or we risk really a reverse or even a collapse of of democracy?

00:07:07 Speaker 3

So that's obviously the question of the day.

00:07:11 Speaker 3

And let me begin that by looking back at the past, as you indicated in your.

00:07:16 Speaker 3

In common, if you look back at history from the, let's say starting date of modern democracy, as I mentioned before, you know, around the time of the French and American revolutions, we've seen several periods over the course of the 19th, 20th and now beginning of the 21st century when we've had these kinds of what social scientists refer to as waves of democratization.

00:07:38 Speaker 3

And that is to say, periods when large numbers of countries move from dictatorship to democracy.

00:07:45 Speaker 3

So we had that again with the French American revolutions.

00:07:48 Speaker 3

We had it in 1848, after the First World War, after the Second World War. Now if you look back at those period.

00:07:55 Speaker 3

Those waves were always followed by undertows, hence the term wave.

00:07:59 Speaker 3

Anybody who's been to a beach knows that you can't.

00:08:01 Speaker 3

Have a wave without.

00:08:01 Speaker 3

An undertow and so if you look back at previous periods of democratization, there's always been these under toes.

00:08:07 Speaker 3

These periods of now referred to very often as backsliding or autocratic nation, and there is no doubt.

00:08:15 Speaker 3

Empirically that we are in such a period, the high point for the number of democracies in the world, the.

00:08:21 Speaker 3

Are of people living under democracy as the in your home institution, varieties of democracy as as carefully tracked, peaked probably around 2010 and since then we've had more countries moving away from democracy or moving towards autocracy or dictatorship than we have moving away from autocracy and dictatorship.

00:08:43 Speaker 3

Now again, given the past, we would expect that because waves are always followed by undertones.

00:08:49 Speaker 3

Now simply saying that something has happened before is not a good way of explaining why it's happening now, that's just.

00:08:55 Speaker 3

Noticing a pattern?

00:08:56 Speaker 3

It's not explaining the pattern.

00:08:58 Speaker 3

Why is that the case?

00:09:00 Speaker 3

Why are these waves always followed by undertones?

00:09:03 Speaker 3

Well, again, for the reason that I mentioned before, which is that most people favor democracy over dictatorship when given the choice in the abstract, right, dictatorships are repressive.

00:09:15 Speaker 3

Dictatorships don't allow freedom.

00:09:17 Speaker 3

Dictatorships don't allow people to have a say in the lives of their community.

00:09:22 Speaker 3

And so while we think that toppling dictatorships, getting rid of them is the difficult part, indeed it is difficult.

00:09:28 Speaker 3

It's not as difficult as building a democracy, and so the reason why there is under toes, following waves to be a little overly simplistic is because once you get rid of the dictatorship, there is no easy path.

00:09:43 Speaker 3

From the end of the dictatorship to the building of a stable democracy, right, the end of the dictatorship is the very beginning of that path.

00:09:51 Speaker 3

It is not the end.

00:09:52 Speaker 3

It takes a.

00:09:53 Speaker 3

A lot to make democracy work, it takes a lot.

00:09:57 Speaker 3

It takes a lot socially.

00:09:58 Speaker 3

It takes a lot economically, so undertones follow waves, because even when dictatorships crumble, building successful, stable, well functioning democracies is very difficult.

00:10:11 Speaker 3

And most societies don't succeed.

00:10:13 Speaker 3

Especially on the first time.

00:10:15 Speaker 3

So we are absolutely currently in a period of backsliding and autocratic nation historically for those reasons that is to be expected if.

00:10:25 Speaker 3

We should be sorry about it.

00:10:26 Speaker 3

We should not be surprised by it.

00:10:29 Speaker 3

And if you want to end on this particular thought, on an optimistic note, while we have definitely been exhibiting living through a period of backsliding and autocratic nation, this undertow has been less powerful than previous ones.

00:10:42 Speaker 3

That is to say, the wave has left.

00:10:45 Speaker 3

In its wake, more democracies than previous ones have.

00:10:49 Speaker 3

So while history definitely does not move in a linear fashion.

00:10:54 Speaker 3

We still see over the course of the modern period, progress in the sense that there still are more democracies today than there were before this wave began.

00:11:05 Speaker 3

And also, as your neighboring institute has pointed out, the dictatorships that are left behind, while nasty and repressive, are not as nasty and repressive as their predecessors.

00:11:17 Speaker 3

You'd rather live in Hungary today than in Hungary under communism, and there's a reason for that also that I think has to do with.

00:11:26 Speaker 3

Some overall legitimacy that democracy has leaders today are not as willing and perhaps not as able to be quite as repressive as their predecessors, and it is possible we don't know that these less repressive dictatorships.

00:11:42 Speaker 3

May turn out to be somewhat easier to transition from than their predecessors.

00:11:48 Speaker 3



This we don't know, but at the very least they are generally somewhat less repressive than their predecessors and and it may perhaps be the case that with the benefit of hindsight, we may see that as some sort of progress, even if not the progress that we had.

00:12:04 Speaker 2

One of the most interesting contributions of your book, actually, is that we tend to have this conventional view that the French Revolution was the culmination of a process of grievances accumulated through centuries that exploded.

00:12:16 Speaker 2

But then you say that it was not the end, it was the beginning of a process.

00:12:19 Speaker 2

And actually during the 19th century we saw.

00:12:24 Speaker 2

The equivalent of what we are seeing nowadays, maybe in in many places, a succession of failed Arab Springs, let's say, and different parts of.

00:12:32 Speaker 2

Europe an an idea of of your book and what you are saying now, is that changing institutions is relatively easy.

00:12:41 Speaker 2

We see a.

00:12:42 Speaker 2

Change of of regime changes constantly and and for example, in the decade after the French Revolution but changing, let's say, the fundamental, the socioeconomic environment that.

00:12:53 Speaker 2

Is friendly to democracy, is much more difficult.

00:12:57 Speaker 2

Question is what needs to be done.

00:12:58 Speaker 2

It's really something that can be changed from from above.

00:13:02 Speaker 2

In the case of France, there should be varying reform and so other policies or redistributive policies.

00:13:09 Speaker 2

Or is something cultural that is out of the hands of government and this is important historically with the I think it's also important for for nowadays.

00:13:19 Speaker 3

So that's a.

00:13:20 Speaker 3

A sort of helpful way I think, to think about how the past can inform our thinking about the present.

00:13:26 Speaker 3

So if we were to go back to.

00:13:27 Speaker 3

The sort of starting point again of the modern democratic period, the French Revolution, it was an explosive and incredibly powerful and an incredibly impactful.

00:13:40 Speaker 3

Really, transition right?

00:13:42 Speaker 3

We got rid of the most powerful dictatorship on the planet, an ocean regime that had been in place, you know, seemingly forever.

00:13:50 Speaker 3

And you know, we have this just explosion, socially, politically, et cetera.

00:13:55 Speaker 3

And so the French Revolution is recognized as, you know, the first modern revolution with this incredible.

00:14:01 Speaker 3

Impact, but with the benefit of hindsight, we know that that was not the end point of Francis's transition to democracy, right?

00:14:07 Speaker 3

The French Revolution collapses very quickly, you know, after a brief transition to democracy, it collapses into what is essentially a terroristic dictator.

00:14:18 Speaker 3

Chip and of course, after 10 years we get a new kind of dictatorship.

00:14:23 Speaker 3

Back in France, you know, a Napoleonic dictatorship, which we would today call a sort of populist, authoritarian regime.

00:14:30 Speaker 3

And then over the course of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, French politics remains incredibly tumultuous when I teach.

00:14:38 Speaker 3

My students about it.

00:14:39 Speaker 3

The image of barricades is the one that you know they see most often.

00:14:43 Speaker 3

The French constantly uprising constant transitions back and forth.

00:14:48 Speaker 3

What we're living in now, or what the French are living in now, of course, is the Fifth Republic.

00:14:52 Speaker 3

Why is it the Fifth Republic?

00:14:54 Speaker 3

Because it's.

00:14:55 Speaker 3

5th at the very least, the fifth try at democracy, and if you know anything about French history, you know that even that number hides a lot of political transitions that happen in between.

00:15:06 Speaker 3

So even after the greatest democratic or anti dictatorial uprising, if you want to.

00:15:12 Speaker 3

Think about it.

00:15:12 Speaker 3

That way in modern history it still takes France.

00:15:16 Speaker 3

Over 150 years to find something that resembles stable democracy, right? So if they took the French the the sort of birthplace of modern democracy that long, it gives us some sense of how difficult that process actually is.

00:15:32 Speaker 3

Now the question of that difficulty, right?

00:15:34 Speaker 3

Social scientists have analyzed a large number, as you said, of social and economic conditions that help make democracy work relatively high levels of wealth, relatively low levels of inequality, limited numbers of social cleavages.

00:15:52 Speaker 3

In particular, our ethnic cleavages make democracy more difficult.

00:15:56 Speaker 3

Not impossible, but more difficult.

00:15:58 Speaker 3

But on top of that, in addition to, as you said, changing political institutions, which is easy, right in a comparative.

00:16:04 Speaker 3

Sense people's attitudes and behavior also have to change. They have to learn that politics is not 0 sum, as you said at the very beginning that you know, balanced off against their own self-interest in democracy. They must have some concern for public welfare and the public good. They must accept that.

00:16:25 Speaker 3

Conflicts can only be settled within the rules.

00:16:27 Speaker 3

Of the game.

00:16:29 Speaker 3

That, you know, protest and organizing are legitimate.

00:16:33 Speaker 3

But getting out on the streets and trying to violently change the nature of government is not.

00:16:40 Speaker 3

These are all habits, norms, social and economic conditions, that are very difficult to change over the short term.

00:16:49 Speaker 3

And without some confluence of these things, democracy has a lot more difficulty.

00:16:54 Speaker 3

So what I think we're seeing today in a lot of places and to some degree now even in places where democracy had been relatively strong, is that a lot of these supporting conditions or facilitating.

00:17:05 Speaker 3

Questions have begun to either disappear or have not yet been built, and that is surely a large part of the explanation for democracy's contemporary troubles.

00:17:16 Speaker 2

Yeah, you're right.

00:17:17 Speaker 2

We see yellow vest in in France that they are used to barricades, but we also see protest in in Canada and in many other places.

00:17:25 Speaker 2

So the question is, do you think that similarities should be drawn between not between nowadays and interwar Europe 1930s, but maybe between nowadays and the 60s?

00:17:39 Speaker 2

Maybe the right comparison would be that we have young, angry people and satisfied with democracy.

00:17:45 Speaker 2

But then in the 60s from the left and now.

00:17:47 Speaker 2

From the right.

00:17:50 Speaker 3

I think that's an excellent alternative comparison that we don't often hear.

00:17:54 Speaker 3

I mean, everyone looks back to the end of our period because it's so dramatic and so scary, right?

00:17:58 Speaker 3

Was a time when.

00:17:59 Speaker 3

And after a wave of democratization following the First World War, we had transitions to democracy in many places, Europe, most notably, and of course, by the 1930s, many of those transitions have failed and countries were under dictatorship, and not just dictatorships, but some really, really nasty and dictatorships. So when people look.

00:18:20 Speaker 3

At what's going on today?

00:18:21 Speaker 3

That is the frightening, as you said at the beginning mirror that they look up to and and while that is definitely something we should keep in the back of our mind.

00:18:28 Speaker 3

If only because.

00:18:29 Speaker 3

We never, ever want that to happen again.

00:18:32 Speaker 3

I think the 60s and the 70s are probably.

00:18:36 Speaker 3

Or I hope.

00:18:37 Speaker 3

The better analogy.

00:18:39 Speaker 3

Because that was obviously a period of immense dissatisfaction with democracy.

00:18:45 Speaker 3

First, we had, of course, uprisings in the 60s, largely driven by young people dissatisfied with the state of democracy, feeling it was incomplete.

00:18:52 Speaker 3

If we want to think in today's terms that while there were these formal democratic institutions and practices.

00:18:58 Speaker 3

A whole variety of social and economic issues will remaining unaddressed, and we saw dramatic turmoil, protests and, of course, in many parts of Europe, actually even domestic violence and terrorism.

00:19:11 Speaker 3

And then in the 70s, of course, we had terrible economic problems in the West.

00:19:15 Speaker 3

And so if you look back at questions about are you satisfied with democracy, how do you think your leaders and governments are performing very high levels of dissatisfaction at that time as well?

00:19:28 Speaker 3

And yet after that period?

00:19:30 Speaker 3

Democracy recalibrated it.

00:19:33 Speaker 3

Didn't solve all of those problems by far.

00:19:36 Speaker 3

But it solved enough of them to sort of bring down those levels of dissatisfaction, to tamp down on the number of people who felt they needed to go again outside of the normal political channels to express their views and their dissatisfaction.

00:19:54 Speaker 3

And you know, we had a recalibration.

00:19:56 Speaker 3

Now that is the hopeful analogy for the contemporary period.

00:20:00 Speaker 3

Our societies face a whole variety of real problems, social and economic.

00:20:06 Speaker 3

And to be fair, in most countries, governments and leaders have not done a great job dealing with them for a variety of reasons.

00:20:14 Speaker 3

Those protests have been primarily on the right or seem to have been channeled through right wing movements rather than left wing movements, but the underlying issue is the same, right?

00:20:25 Speaker 3

A lot of people feel like their leaders and governments are not responding to their needs and demands.

00:20:30 Speaker 3

This leads to rising dissatisfaction and support for movements that.

00:20:34 Speaker 3

Are anti establishment critical of democracy?

00:20:38 Speaker 3

Yadda yadda yadda, but democracy much more than dictatorships has an incredible ability to recalibrate.

00:20:44 Speaker 3

Dictatorships don't have that.

00:20:46 Speaker 3

We can change our leaders and governments we.

00:20:48 Speaker 3

Can form new.

00:20:49 Speaker 3

Movements, and so the hope is that 10 or 15 years from now, we look back at this period the way we do the 60s and the 70s.

00:20:56 Speaker 3

Is a time of real turmoil and dissatisfaction, but also eventually is a time when democracy manages to deal with enough of these problems to keep building and moving forward.

00:21:10 Speaker 2

Borstein always says that Italy is a lap for politics, so political inventions emerge from there that look like some kind of crazy from the outside point of view, like fascism at the beginning, mafia in politics to Berlusconi or left, or reason in the 1960s.

00:21:28 Speaker 2

And in some way.

00:21:29 Speaker 2

You consider that France is also kind of a lap or many things emerge in France, but now let's look at France and Italy nowadays.

00:21:38 Speaker 2

What we see is that in government they have a kind of a technocratic figure.

00:21:42 Speaker 2

Macron or Draghi, elected by different circumstances.

00:21:45 Speaker 2

But both of them reincarnations of a technocrat and a post ideological.

00:21:49 Speaker 2

Ruler and then the leading the opposition in both countries you have the far right, extreme anti immigrant far right.

00:21:58 Speaker 2

So is this.

00:21:59 Speaker 2

Our future government, by experts or by Barbarians?

00:22:04 Speaker 3

And that's a great observation.

00:22:06 Speaker 3

And the other thing I would add that characterize both of those countries that I also think is.

00:22:10 Speaker 3

Very critical for understanding our period is that the traditional party system essentially collapsed.

00:22:16 Speaker 3

That is to say, post war decades politics in Europe were sort of dominated by large parties of the center left and center, right.

00:22:24 Speaker 3

The entire Italian party system essentially exploded in corruption and other scandals a couple of decades ago.

00:22:31 Speaker 3

Thus, we have now a whole variety.



00:22:33 Speaker 3

Of new weak.

00:22:34 Speaker 3

Parties, populist parties, that.

00:22:36 Speaker 3

As you said on the right, the league now as well as a movement that was also characterized as populist but some vaguely left center in the five star movement and in France also Macron came to power because the center right and center left Party socialist Republicans disappeared.

00:22:54 Speaker 3

This is also, I think, a reflection of.

00:22:56 Speaker 3

Of new problems that democracy space, I don't think a technocratic solution is viable over the long term.

00:23:05 Speaker 3

What a technocrat.

00:23:06 Speaker 3

Say they have a kinder, gentler appeal of what dictatorships today say, which is, look, we're going to be in power, we're going to solve these problems and in return for that, what you're getting is.

00:23:17 Speaker 3

In the technocratic sense, less democratic representation, it's not a dictatorship, but it's sort of severed from a direct democratic mandate.

00:23:26 Speaker 3

Those things I think as long as those problems are solved, people are willing to tolerate that.

00:23:32 Speaker 3

But the problem with these kinds of things is that they are performance based and performance based only.

00:23:38 Speaker 3

And so when they stop performing well, people are not going to be willing to tolerate that anymore.

00:23:43 Speaker 3

So these kind of technocratic leaders over time.

00:23:47 Speaker 3

Have to build some kind of democratic support, otherwise people will not tolerate them.

00:23:53 Speaker 3

I think that that is much more obvious in a place like.

00:23:58 Speaker 3

Italy than it even is in France, because, of course, Macron was directly elected, even if in somewhat as I said, unusual circumstances.

00:24:05 Speaker 3

So I think what we're trying, what we're seeing now in a lot of European societies is a recalibration of party systems and recalibration of what people think about as far as their political.

00:24:18 Speaker 3

Identities and that also creates uncertainty and flux and makes coming up with stable governing coalitions and programs more difficult.

00:24:29 Speaker 2

I really like your idea of recalibration of political parties because I agree with you that I think that the old mainstream political parties are part of the solution and not part of the problem, because there is no alternative to these political parties and the two main, let's say, options that we have nowadays, technocracy or populism, are definitely.

00:24:49 Speaker 2

Much worse for the citizens.

00:24:52 Speaker 2

Let's talk a little bit about the recalibration of these political parties.

00:24:55 Speaker 2

And let's start with the center left, then we talk afterwards about the social democracy.

00:24:59 Speaker 2

Center right parties face basically two big dilemmas when facing the new right.

00:25:06 Speaker 2

The extreme right, the far right, the right.

00:25:08 Speaker 2

Whatever you want to call it.

00:25:09 Speaker 2

But the new national public is right.

00:25:12 Speaker 2

One dilemma is strategic and the other is programmatic.

00:25:15 Speaker 2

Strategically, they can do like in Sweden traditionally has been done.

00:25:20 Speaker 2

I try to isolate them.

00:25:22 Speaker 2

Try to do a cordon sanita like in France.

00:25:24 Speaker 2

Avoid them to join coalition governments or On the contrary, they might.

00:25:29 Speaker 2

They can normalize those parties.

00:25:31 Speaker 2

They can invite those parties to form coalition governments, like in other Scandinavian countries or in Austria.

00:25:38 Speaker 2

And it's not very clear empirical evidence is pointing out in different directions.

00:25:43 Speaker 2

It seems maybe.

00:25:44 Speaker 2

That normalizing them and try to include them in coalition governments might reduce their ability to portray themselves as a kind of anti establishment political parties.

00:25:55 Speaker 2

They lose some sort of purity and therefore they are less appealing.

00:26:00 Speaker 2

They are less attractive for the anti system voters, but it's not very clear and that is the first question is statistically should them isolate them or not or should they invite them and treat them as regular political parties?

00:26:14 Speaker 2

And then the second is programmatic dilemma.

00:26:17 Speaker 2

So should they take their positions in immigration copy?

00:26:20 Speaker 2

Their policy is there or, On the contrary, they should ignore those policies, and they should try to avoid the policies discussed and the framework that the far right is proposing.

00:26:33 Speaker 3

So this is a dilemma that exists or a problem that exists in many European countries, right?

00:26:38 Speaker 3

But each country has its own specific manifestation of this.

00:26:42 Speaker 3

If we were to look at the Swedish case, in particular, something very revealing about the Swedish case is the following, which is you now have a very.

00:26:53 Speaker 3

Powerful in the sense of large electoral support, what is considered to be a right wing populist party?

00:27:00 Speaker 3

The Sweden Democrats.

00:27:02 Speaker 3

And yet, if you look at survey data over and over and over again, the levels of xenophobia and racism in Sweden are really from a comparative perspective, very low.

00:27:14 Speaker 3

Now, how do we square that circle?

00:27:16 Speaker 3

Right.

00:27:16 Speaker 3

How do we how do?

00:27:16 Speaker 3

We make sense of.

00:27:17 Speaker 3

That well part of the answer to that is that during a period of immense demographic and social.

00:27:24 Speaker 3

Change all of the mainstream parties essentially adopted a version of the what we call the United States.

00:27:32 Speaker 3

Don't ask, don't tell.

00:27:33 Speaker 3

We're not going to talk about some of the problems and challenges associated with a men's demographic and social change.

00:27:42 Speaker 3

We're just going to shunt those issues.

00:27:44 Speaker 3

Decide we're gonna treat them as you know, any discussion of them is politically toxic. And we're just gonna pretend that they're gonna go away, that people's concerns and people's fears are going to disappear.

00:27:56 Speaker 3

And So what this meant was that anyone who had concerns about social and demographic change really only had one place to go, and that was the Sweden Democrats.

00:28:07 Speaker 3

Now the question you began with, do we talk to these parties or do we treat them as an anathema?

00:28:12 Speaker 3

Do we adopt A cordon sanitaire?

00:28:14 Speaker 3

You can only do the latter.

00:28:17 Speaker 3

Adopt according sanitaire, say, look, this party is an anathema is beyond the pale.

00:28:21 Speaker 3

It is a non liberal, non Democratic Party.

00:28:24 Speaker 3

If you deal with the underlying issues and problems that that party thrives on, right?

00:28:30 Speaker 3

So you can say the Sweden Democrats have roots in the neo-Nazi movement.

00:28:35 Speaker 3

There are lots of very nasty racist, xenophobic.

00:28:38 Speaker 3

People in that party, we will not deal with that.

00:28:42 Speaker 3

But if you then choose not to address the fears and concerns that that party is thriving off all you are doing is pushing voters with any fears or concerns into their arms.

00:28:53 Speaker 3

I think that was the strategic dilemma or the challenge that the mainstream parties in Sweden fell down on.

00:29:01 Speaker 3

Which is that it's, you know, you can decide to just treat this party as outside the pail, but to not address those issues until after the party had already started attracting a significant vote.

00:29:13 Speaker 3

Share was a strategic mistake.

00:29:16 Speaker 3

And so that's really the question, which is how do you deal with these underlying challenges, social and demographic change and absolutely for mainstream parties of the center, right, and even more of the center left xenophobia and racism are obviously both morally and practically law.

00:29:33 Speaker 3

But when you have the kinds of social and demographic changes that places like Sweden have undergone in the last generation, you must understand that those are difficult challenges to be overcome.

00:29:45 Speaker 3

Not in the sense that we've never faced as a society.

00:29:48 Speaker 3

Equally difficult challenges, but recognize that this is a challenge and that parties have to face it head on and that people who are living in a world where again their societies have changed in the course of their lifetime need to be made to understand that their governments are dealing with this challenge, that they recognize that things.

00:30:07 Speaker 3

Need to be done and are capable of doing that and so I think what again what we see.

00:30:12 Speaker 3

In Sweden is a version of a larger challenge, which is that it is diversity is a reality.

00:30:19 Speaker 3

It is a positive thing.

00:30:20 Speaker 3

But just like previous challenges, it needs to be dealt with.

00:30:24 Speaker 3

New programs need to be put in place.

00:30:25 Speaker 3

New understandings of what society are need to be probated by elites, and so parties need to face up to these challenges.

00:30:34 Speaker 3

And take away the fears and concerns that feed into parties like the Sweden Democrats.

00:30:39 Speaker 3

You want all of those people who are not truly racist and xenophobic not voting for the Sweden Democrats.

00:30:46 Speaker 3

That should be a small minority party of a bunch of lunatics.

00:30:50 Speaker 3

Lunatics exist in every society whatever, but parties like the Sweden Democrats, when they are getting high.

00:30:57 Speaker 3

20% of the vote that is a sign. I think that the mainstream parties have not recognized the challenges and dealt with them successfully because you do not have.

00:31:06 Speaker 3

25% of Swedes who by any account are, you know, truly racist and xenophobic. They are, they are worried. They are concerned.

00:31:14 Speaker 3

And you don't want that worry and concern to be captured by or championed by a party with very questionable commitments to, if not democracy.

00:31:23 Speaker 3

Certainly liberalism as we understand it.

00:31:27 Speaker 2

There is a.

00:31:28 Speaker 2

Very intense debate in political science, but also economics and other social sciences, on what is feeding these movements, these right wing populism?

00:31:37 Speaker 2

Is it economic issues?

00:31:39 Speaker 2

Is the workers go?

00:31:40 Speaker 2

Thing for those parties, because their factories were closed after being exposed to trade competition mainly from China?

00:31:48 Speaker 2

Or is it the cultural issues people fear for for their job or people are fearing for their identity?

00:31:54 Speaker 2

So it's it's loss of job or loss of identity, economic or culture, where would you position yourself in this debate?

00:32:01 Speaker 2

Although it's a very simplistic way of of saying it.

00:32:05 Speaker 3

Yes, this is a huge debate in both European and American politics.

00:32:09 Speaker 3

To my mind, I think that this the best way to think about this is that both of these things are obviously happening.

00:32:15 Speaker 3

You know, the last decades have been a period of immense economic change and also a period of immense social and demographic change, right?

00:32:22 Speaker 3

Anybody who is awake understands that both of these things are happening also, obviously immense.

00:32:27 Speaker 3

Technological change?

00:32:28 Speaker 3

That's another kind of issue.

00:32:30 Speaker 3

If you look at.

00:32:32 Speaker 3

The research, and it's not as clear cut as we'd like it to be.

00:32:36 Speaker 3

It's clearly the case that a lot of people who not so much are poor or unemployed, but are concerned about economic change, have been are in industries where, again you've had trade shocks from China or in areas where you've seen some economic decline.

00:32:52 Speaker 3

These people are obviously worried about the future.

00:32:55 Speaker 3

They're concerned about their own.

00:32:57 Speaker 3



Economic situation, even if they have not yet themselves, directly suffered.

00:33:02 Speaker 3

No, but what's important to think about is in that kind of situation, it's much easier to stoke in or trigger in and out group sentiment.

00:33:12 Speaker 3

It's much easier for parties to come in and say, look, the reason why your communities are in decline.

00:33:18 Speaker 3

The reason why you're suffering economically.

00:33:21 Speaker 3

The reason why I don't know in a place like Sweden.

00:33:23 Speaker 3

The hospitals are overcrowded, your healthcare system isn't what it used.

00:33:25 Speaker 3

To be their.

00:33:26 Speaker 3

Schools are not as great as they used to be.

00:33:28 Speaker 3

It's all because.

00:33:29 Speaker 3

Of immigrants, it's all because of these new people who have come into our country and I think that the way to really understand what's going on is that the confluence of these economic and social changes at the same time really creates again a.

00:33:44 Speaker 3

Lot of unease.

00:33:46 Speaker 3

A lot of ability to stoke these kind of.

00:33:49 Speaker 3

In and out, group sentiments to fan the flames of resentment, to make people worried about whether or not their governments have the resources or the OR the ability to deal with their own needs, the needs of their families and communities.

00:34:02 Speaker 3

And in that kind of situation.

00:34:04 Speaker 3

Anti establishment, xenophobic, illiberal parties can thrive.

00:34:08 Speaker 3

So I think that the way to understand this is not by saying ohh it's just economics or ohh it's just that people are fearful of their identities, like they're worried that their societies are being replaced or some sort of nonsense like that.

00:34:21 Speaker 3

But rather than in times of change.

00:34:24 Speaker 3

People are fearful and concerned and that if mainstream parties and politicians do not recognize and respond to those.

00:34:32 Speaker 3

Concerns they are creating opportunities for extremists to come in and do so and and to my mind that is the better perspective for understanding the the challenges that many democracies face from populism today.

00:34:46 Speaker 2

The question is how can we reverse this trend for the sake of of the left and for the sake of the democracy in the West, that is, for Democrats with capital D and Democrats with the small D on the one hand, you have written quite extensively that we need to reconsider the amount of time focused on economic issues versus non economy.

00:35:05 Speaker 2

Issues and we're trying to talk more about the economic inequality and so on.

00:35:10 Speaker 2

But what can be done?

00:35:11 Speaker 2

Maybe central politicians are embracing workless and cultural identity issues because are easier.

00:35:18 Speaker 2

Very difficult to.

00:35:19 Speaker 2

Redesign fair economic policies when in a time of big tech companies.

00:35:26 Speaker 2

With structural forces pushing towards an unequal distribution of of resources, maybe it's much more difficult now with tax havens and capital flows moving.

00:35:37 Speaker 2

Freely around the globe than in the 70s or in the 80s in the past century.

00:35:41 Speaker 2

So what can be done?

00:35:43 Speaker 2

And in this sense, for me is quite shocking.

00:35:47 Speaker 2

That big tech incarnates the corporations interest against against the will of the people and so on.

00:35:53 Speaker 2

But on the other hand, you see Republicans from Ted Cruz.

00:35:57 Speaker 2

So Marco Rubio and many others considering that big tech are the evil, so it's both the left and the right that seem in some way or another, interested in dealing with that.

00:36:08 Speaker 2

But maybe it's that they are powerless.

00:36:10 Speaker 2

Maybe they don't have a program.

00:36:11 Speaker 2

There is no light there at the end of this tunnel.

00:36:17 Speaker 3

This is a complicated series of questions I would say in general in general, right for democracy to thrive.

00:36:25 Speaker 3

Governments are going to need to figure out how to deal with some of these economic challenges, growing inequality, even in a place like Sweden, like Sweden, remains more equal than other societies.

00:36:37 Speaker 3

Has experienced a dramatic increase in inequality over the last couple of decades.

00:36:43 Speaker 3

Of course, my own country, the United States, is even worse.

00:36:45 Speaker 3

It has now become perhaps the most unequal advanced industrial democracy in the world, and that creates a whole variety of down.

00:36:53 Speaker 3

Dream, social and political problems.

00:36:56 Speaker 3

Dealing with this, figuring out how to solve some of these economic challenges, how to solve the challenge of inequality, how to increase social mobility, how to ensure that the technological change that we've had does not create entire parts of the country rural areas.

00:37:12 Speaker 3

Let's say that are left behind, where people feel that their communities are crumbling.

00:37:18 Speaker 3

And their economic opportunities are closing.

00:37:21 Speaker 3

This is an incredibly important challenge for democracy and it is not a challenge simply for the center left, but it is a challenge for all Democratic Party.

00:37:30 Speaker 3

How to do that that is complicated, but it absolutely has to be done.

00:37:33 Speaker 3

Democracy cannot thrive in a world where people feel like economies are 0 sum and where they believe the future is going to be less secure than the past.

00:37:44 Speaker 3

From the perspective of the center left, the center left also faces a challenge right historically.

00:37:51 Speaker 3

Its voting base has been precisely in the Group of the economically disadvantaged.

00:37:56 Speaker 3

We used to think of that as the working class.

00:37:58 Speaker 3

Now, of course it's not a simple, straightforward working class.

00:38:02 Speaker 3

You know, a male factory worker.

00:38:03 Speaker 3

It is people in retail.

00:38:06 Speaker 3

It is people in other low paid jobs.

00:38:07 Speaker 3

It is people in insecure.

00:38:10 Speaker 3

Types of professions.

00:38:12 Speaker 3

It's hard for me to understand how the center left can thrive electorally.

00:38:17 Speaker 3

Without a base in that group, and what does that mean today?

00:38:22 Speaker 3

That means today that it has to figure out ways to incorporate many of the new citizens that these countries have, immigrants and others into the economy as fully productive, integrated citizens, just like they face this challenge.

00:38:38 Speaker 3

Many decades ago.

00:38:40 Speaker 3

This is where the challenge for the left lies.

00:38:43 Speaker 3

Just like social democracy was designed, so to speak, or whose mission, so to speak, back in the early part of the 20th century, was figuring how to make economies work so that there was an expanding pie that could then give ever larger shares of that pie to the underprivileged.

00:39:02 Speaker 3

You have to figure out ways today to take these new citizens with lower levels of education who come to countries with all kinds of disadvantages.

00:39:10 Speaker 3

They don't speak the language, they don't understand obviously, how things work.

00:39:15 Speaker 3

Figuring out how to integrate these people fully into labor markets to help them be.

00:39:21 Speaker 3

Come fully integrated into society.

00:39:25 Speaker 3

That is the contemporary challenge that these parties face.

00:39:28 Speaker 3

Not only because that will help make other citizens understand that their countries, their economic models, are not threatened, but also because it will help to create a sense, I think, of commitment.

00:39:42 Speaker 3

Two larger public and social goods that is the basis for not just the left, but for democracy to thrive more generally.

00:39:51 Speaker 2

That we could be talking for a long time about these issues with always your great insights.

00:39:57 Speaker 2

But we need to finish and and before that, I would like to ask about the future, which is the model that we should be aiming to follow basically are still the Nordic countries, the model just before the the last economic crisis, the economies brought the next supermodel.

00:40:13 Speaker 2

And accepted that the Nordics were the model to follow in many senses. But nowadays with the rise of population, as you have said in the polls, they can get 20% or more of the vote in many of these countries and we.

00:40:25 Speaker 2

Different problems.

00:40:26 Speaker 2

Are they still the model to follow or are there other experiences?

00:40:30 Speaker 2

And in that sense very particularly, what is very puzzling is the Danish model, which seems to be taking more into account the economic problems, but at the same time quite tough on immigration and to the point that many people are saying that basically they are implementing.

00:40:46 Speaker 2

A program of the far right.

00:40:48 Speaker 3

So the Nordic countries, whether it's.

00:40:51 Speaker 3

Sweden or Denmark.

00:40:52 Speaker 3

Norway is obviously exceptional because it's sitting on top of a gargantuan amount of natural resources.

00:40:57 Speaker 3

People constantly turn to these countries.

00:41:00 Speaker 3

Because they seem to combine.

00:41:02 Speaker 3

I think what everybody in the abstract really wants, right, which is successful economies, innovative economies.

00:41:09 Speaker 3

That's particularly true in the Swedish case.

00:41:11 Speaker 3

Sort of large numbers of entrepreneurs, high tech companies, that kind of thing.

00:41:15 Speaker 3

With some sense of sort of social solidarity, manifested most obviously in generous welfare states.

00:41:22 Speaker 3

I think that.

00:41:23 Speaker 3

Is still the sweet spot for successful societies.

00:41:26 Speaker 3

And for democracies?

00:41:27 Speaker 3

It's very difficult for democracies to work well, as we've already discussed with economies that, you know, produce very dramatic winners.

00:41:35 Speaker 3

And losers because the losers are obviously going to be dissatisfied and the winners are going to be fearful of those losers.

00:41:42 Speaker 3

Figuring out how to combine successful economies with solidaristic societies is in some ways the kind of modern challenge.

00:41:52 Speaker 3

And both Sweden and Denmark have managed to do that better than many other countries.

00:41:58 Speaker 3

So in the abstract, yes, that is the way we want to go.

00:42:02 Speaker 3

And despite the fact that.

00:42:03 Speaker 3

Both of these countries obviously have.

00:42:06 Speaker 3

Significant problems.

00:42:07 Speaker 3

They are still doing.

00:42:09 Speaker 3

Again, comparatively well.

00:42:11 Speaker 3

I think the real challenge both of these countries face at this point is figuring out how to combine what are now really very dramatically different looking societies than you would have had a generation or so ago with.

00:42:26 Speaker 3

This sense of social solidarity with an economy that is thriving with low levels of unemployment, high levels of growth and innovation, these societies, particularly Sweden, have done this in the past, and so they have a foundation.

00:42:44 Speaker 3

And a sort of set of frameworks to build upon. The question is, can they take this model? Can they take this winning combination and update it for the 21st century?

00:42:56 Speaker 3

I certainly hope they can not just for the sake of people living in places like Sweden and Denmark, but because it's important for us to know that it is possible.

00:43:06 Speaker 3

To do these things, you do not have to trade off diversity with social solidarity.

00:43:11 Speaker 3

Equality with a highly innovative growth oriented economy.

00:43:17 Speaker 2

Well, we are going to end with this optimistic note.

00:43:20 Speaker 2

Thank you very much, Sherry, for this fantastic conversation.

00:43:24 Speaker 3

My pleasure.

00:43:25 Speaker 3

Thanks for having me.

00:43:28 Speaker 2



Thank you very much for listening.

00:43:30 Speaker 2

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