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Intelligence Squared U.S.**Western Democracy Is Threatening Suicide**

For the Motion: Kori Schake, Clive Crook

Against the Motion: Yascha Mounk, Bernard-Henri Lévy

Moderator: John Donvan

AUDIENCE RESULTS**Before the debate:****41% FOR****31% AGAINST****28% UNDECIDED****After the debate:****57% FOR****37% AGAINST****06% UNDECIDED**

Start Time: (00:00:00)

[applause]

John Donvan:

We all know the saying that democracy is the worst form of government there's ever been except for all of the others. And, yes, it's true. Democracy can get messy. Voters can make mistakes and politicians can figure out ways to play those voters. But the theory goes that democracy always gets to correct itself. The bums get thrown out. The wisdom of the people gets reasserted. But what if the theory fails? Could the people make a choice that is not only bad but that so damages democracy in the process that it cannot make the necessary correction, and rule by the people gets lost? Well, we are in a time when that idea is being kicked around by a lot of smart people -- some of them very worried, some of them not so much because they do remain bullish on democracy. That all has quite the makings of a debate, so let's have it. Yes or no to this statement: Western democracy is threatening suicide.

00:01:04

I'm John Donvan. This is Intelligence Squared U.S., and I stand between two teams of two experts on the topic, who will argue for and against the motion. As always, our debate will go in three rounds, and then our live audience here at the Kaufman Music Center in New York City will choose the winner. And as always, if all goes well, civil discourse will also win. What I'd like to ask you to do now is to vote as you come off the street, to tell us where you stand on this motion: Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. We have two teams arguing for and against. Let's first meet the team arguing for the motion. Please welcome, ladies and gentlemen, Bernard-Henri Levy.

[applause]

Bernard, it is great to have you back for, I believe, your second IQ2US debate. You are a philosopher, you are author of the book "The Genius of Judaism," which was published only in January. And to launch the conversation, just very briefly -- from each of you -- we're going to put this question to all of you.

00:02:08

In one sentence, tell us what you consider to be democracy's defining virtue?

Bernard-Henri Levy:
One sentence?

John Donovan:
Yes.

Bernard-Henri Levy:
To believe in words, in values, in truth -- not emotions -- which is the opposite of what we will do tonight.

John Donovan:
What a perfect --

Bernard-Henri Levy:
We are going to be dealing with emotions.

John Donovan:
Ah, that's two sentences.

[laughter]

Thanks very much, Bernard-Henri Levy. And can you tell us who your partner is?

Bernard-Henri Levy:
I'm sorry?

John Donovan:
You -- and your partner. You can introduce your partner, or I will. Yascha Mounk.

Bernard-Henri Levy:
I'll introduce him, of course.

[laughter]

The floor is his.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

Ladies and gentlemen -- please welcome, your partner, Yascha Mounk.

[applause]

Yascha, welcome to Intelligence Squared U.S. You are a senior fellow at New America. You're a lecturer at Harvard University. You became an American citizen this year, congratulations on that --

Female Speaker:

Yay.

Yascha Mounk:

Thank you very much.

00:03:08

[applause]

John Donovan:

Your forthcoming book is titled, "The People Versus Democracy: Why our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It." You're also a host of the podcast "The Good Fight." Question to you is the same one I put to your partner. What do you see as democracy's defining value -- virtue?

Yascha Mounk:

Virtue? Well, you got -- I think it's the ability of people in democracy to see each other. You can have deep disagreements, even if they think the person on the other side is deeply wrong -- to see each other as adversaries rather than enemies, and to resolve their differences in a peaceful manner.

John Donovan:

Thank you very much. Great answer as well. The team arguing, ladies and gentlemen, one more time, for the motion, which is Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. And we have two great debaters arguing against the motion. First, I want to welcome, ladies and gentlemen, Clive Crook.

[applause]

Clive, also a return to Intelligence Squared for you. You are a columnist for Bloomberg View, where you write about economics, and finance, and politics. And on our question, democracy's defining virtue, you say?

00:04:10

Clive Crook:

I think I'd say one word, and that's "consent." I think you mentioned it in your opening remark.

John Donovan:

[affirmative]

Clive Crook:

Consent.

John Donovan:

Okay. You took one sentence and turned it into one word, well done.

[laughter]

That's the kind of pithiness we're looking for tonight. And can you tell us, please –

[laughter]

-- who your partner is? Kori?

Kori Schake:

[laughter]

John Donovan:

Next time, we will rehearse this over and over again. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Kori Schake.

[applause]

Kori, welcome back also to you, to Intelligence Squared U.S. You're a research fellow at the Hoover Institution. You are the editor, with Jim Mattis, of the book "Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military." Kori, what is democracy's defining virtue?

Kori Schake:

So, I am going to try and meet Clive's standard and use a single word. And for me, it is accountability.

00:05:05

John Donovan:

Excellent. The team arguing against the motion -- you've heard their two words.

[applause]

Let's move on to Round 1. Round 1 are opening statements by each debater in turn. They will be six minutes each. Debating for the motion, Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide, our opener is Yascha Mounk, a senior fellow at New America and lecturer at Harvard University. Ladies and gentlemen, Yascha Mounk.

[applause]

Yascha Mounk:

So, when I grew up, my parents and my aunts and uncles -- my grandparents -- would tell these jokes. They grew up in socialist Poland, and I just -- but I didn't always quite understand. But I've been thinking back to one of them a lot over the last year. It's pretty straightforward. It plays in a small town in the Soviet Union. And the guy is coming off work late at night. He's walking home. And here's some

other guy, completely drunk on the side of the road, throwing up into the gutter. And as soon as he sees the guy, he puts on a big smile.

00:06:10

He walks over. He puts a hand on his shoulder, and he says, "I completely agree with your political analysis, comrade."

[laughter]

I think you understand why I told that joke when I look at what's going on in our politics here in the United States, but also in Europe. It's easy to feel disgust, and I feel disgusted. I feel disgusted when our president denigrates the people who are in need of help at the moment in Puerto Rico. I feel disgust when our president calls neo-Nazis some "very fine people" implicitly, in response to Charlottesville. But today, I don't want to talk about disgust and I don't want to talk about emotion. I want to make a rational, careful, calibrated case for why, unfortunately, I do believe that democracy is threatening suicide at the moment. Now, what would it take for us to believe that?

00:07:09

If we put our disgust aside, why should we think that democracy is threatening suicide? Well, I think we have to show two sides -- two things to be true on this side of the debate. The first is that people really are quite fed up with democracy -- that they're falling out of love with democracy, that they've had enough of it, in many ways. Now, thankfully, that's something that my academic research speaks to directly. I've shown in the last years that the number of people who say it's important to live in a democracy has gone down a lot. When you ask Americans born in the 1930s and 1940s how important it is for them to live in a democracy, over two-thirds say it's essential to them. When you ask millennials -- like in 1980 -- how important it is for them to live in a democracy, less than one-third say the same thing. Even when you ask about straightforward or offer alternatives to democracy, the number of people who say that they are in favor of that has gone up.

00:08:08

20 years ago, 1 in 16 Americans said that they're in favor of Army rule. Now it's 1 in 6 Americans. 6 percent of young and affluent Americans used to think that Army rule was a good thing, now it's 35 percent, a nearly six-fold increase. And this is not just in the United States. In France, in the United Kingdom. About 1 in 4 people used to say that they want a strong-man leader who doesn't have to bother with Parliament, with elections. Now 1 in 2 do.

These are shocking numbers. And they're not just abstract questions that people are asked on surveys. You can see from the results an actual voting behavior. You see the election of Donald Trump in the United States, a man who promised even before the election to keep voters in suspense about whether he would accept the outcome of the election, who threatened to jail his main political -- not adversary, but opponent, in his mind. You see the rise of parties like Alternative for Germany, that is now the third-strongest as of elections 10 days ago.

00:09:09

A party many of whose adherence in leaders want, I quote, "A 180-degree turn in our understanding of World War II." So, this is not abstract. It's actually resulting in real action. So, that's the first thing we've got to believe -- that a scary] number of people is fed up with democracy, is becoming more open to alternatives, is threatening to immolate democracy. But there's a second part that we have to convince you as well -- which is that these movements are actually dangerous, that people like Donald Trump, that people like Marine Le Pen, that people like Frauke Petry in Germany, can do real damage to democracy. Now, there's some great examples of that happening in the world. And Bernard-Henri is going to tell you more about some of those cases. We're going to talk about Poland, and Hungary, and Venezuela, and Russia, and Turkey -- and all of those other places where populists, authoritarian populists have been able to undermine independent institutions, to take a lot of power and control.

00:10:10

But for the last minute-and-a-half that I have in my opening statement, I want to tell you about the logic of populism, why it is that these populists end up being dangerous to democracy and it's for a very simple reason. It's because they think politics is simple, because they think that all of our problems are befall off the elite that is corrupt, is self-serving or cares more about minorities and foreigners than they do about the real people. And it's this mindset that makes them promise voters everything, get into power and say I'm going to solve everything. And of course, once they get into power they start saying who knew that healthcare could be so complicated? Who knew that keeping the peace of North Korea is not so easy? And so, what do they do? They start to blame. They start to blame independent institutions. They start to attack judges. They start to attack the press. They start to attack minorities. And once somebody who's in power does that, democracy is in real danger.

00:11:13

So those are the two things we want to convince you of today. A lot of people are fed up with democracy. As a result, they're starting to vote [unintelligible] populists, and [unintelligible] populists are really dangerous. Now I'm not saying that democracy is doomed. I'm not saying that there's nothing we can do in response to that. It is threatening suicide. That doesn't mean that it's committed suicide yet. And we can stop it. It's our duty to try and stop it. But to do that, we have to recognize how serious this moment is and start to do whatever we can to save our political system. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Yascha Mounk. And that motion again: Western democracy is threatening suicide. First up to speak against the motion, Clive Crook, columnist for Bloomberg View. He'll be arguing against the motion Western Democracy is threatening suicide. Ladies and gentlemen, Clive Crook.

[applause]

00:12:07

Clive Crook:

Well, that's right, I'm going to argue that Western democracy isn't threatening to commit suicide. Attachment to the democratic principle of government by consent under rule of law is as strong as ever across America and elsewhere in the West. That's what I want to argue. I do want to stress one

thing at the outset. Much of what we've seen in Western politics lately, and much of what we'll be discussing tonight, is disturbing. We've seen a rising tide of populism, and this surge has led to some very bad choices of leaders and of policies. Democracy and the rule of law don't save us from bad choices. They don't always protect us from leaders that let us down, or from policies that will make us worse off. They don't prevent mistakes. But they do leave power in our hands so that we can correct those mistakes. That's the core of the case for democracy.

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And contrary to what we've heard so far, I see no sign in the West of support for this fundamental idea is wavering. Now my partner Kori is going to have more to say about populism more broadly, but Donald Trump and Brexit is seen as leading products of democracy's self-destructive instincts, so I want to start there. Trump is a loudmouth, a narcissist and a bully. He knows next to nothing about public policy, and he's fine with that. He may well have authoritarian instincts, and his appeal is in part the appeal of a demagogue. You could say he's testing the American constitutional system. But you'd also have to say that the American constitutional system is passing this test. Already he's been checked at every turn by Congress. Again, and again, he's been checked by the courts.

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After he fired James Comey as head of the FBI, Trump's own Justice Department appointed a special counsel of renowned drive and integrity to take the Russia investigation forward. Perhaps Trump will be foolish enough to try to remove Mueller from that post. If he does, more of his supporters will desert, and the odds on his impeachment will shorten dramatically. In other words, our constitutional protections are working.

Now, Trump, this leader with authoritarian appetites, let's call them, did get elected, and he still has a lot of support. So how can I argue that backing for democracy should remain strong? Because Trump -- support for Trump is mainly an act of protest -- not against the principles of democratic governance but against the performance of an entrenched and incompetent political class.

00:15:09

Trump supporters consider themselves loyal to the Constitution. They made a bad choice, but it's a serious misunderstanding to call a protest vote against the dysfunction of Washington, D.C. anti-democratic. I see Brexit in much the same way. Support for taking the U.K. out of the European Union was a protest vote against the leakage of political power to an emerging new order lacking clear lines of democratic accountability. This steady erosion of sovereignty has been exaggerated by Brexit's advocates. That's true. But it's real nonetheless. People feel a loss of control, and they want it back. Now, again, that decision was unwise, in my view. Brexit is going to cause the U.K. dearly. It was a reckless choice. But it was not a vote against democracy. It was a reckless vote in favor of democracy.

00:16:09

At this point, supporters of this motion might be inclined to pivot. There's no authoritarian tendency in Brexit. The vote to quit was passed by a majority in a legally sanctioned referendum. So, the charge can't be that Brexit is anti-democratic. Instead, it's deemed illiberal. And the evidence for that, Brexit

supporters are disproportionately in favor of tighter restrictions on immigration. And with this, of course, the link to Trump is reestablished. It turns out -- or so goes the argument -- the real problem is bigotry and backwardness. Populism isn't anti-democratic after all. It's just the wrong kind of democratic. But this, I think, is another misunderstanding. The foundations of Western liberalism aren't threatened by an argument over immigration policy any more than they're threatened by any of the other disputes that democracies exist to mediate.

00:17:09

I'm an immigrant myself with a vested interest in permissive immigration policies, but I recognize that the issue isn't open and shut. High immigration can put some host country workers at a disadvantage, and abrupt surges of immigration do put systems and communities under stress. Liberal democracy should be able to have this debate without collapsing into moral panic about our declining commitment to democratic values. In times of great stress -- and the past decade was that and then some -- voters can lose trust in their leaders and put the wrong people in charge. They might even tell pollsters that democracy is no longer working for them. But here's the key thing. Not for one second does that mean they want control taken out of their hands or the government to put itself above the law. Western democracy isn't dying. I ask you to vote against the motion.

00:18:10

John Donovan:
Thank you, Clive Crook.

[applause]

And that motion again is Western Democracy is threatening suicide. We are halfway through the opening round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. I'm John Donovan. We have four debaters, two teams of two fighting it out over this motion: Western democracy is threatening suicide. You've heard the first two opening statements, and now onto the third. Now to speak for the motion Western democracy is threatening suicide, let's welcome to the stage philosopher and author of "The Genius of Judaism," Bernard-Henri Lévy. Ladies and gentlemen, Bernard-Henri Lévy.

[applause]

Nice.

Bernard-Henri Lévy:
Okay. I feel to disagree strongly with Clive. I'm going to tell you why Brexit, populism in continental Europe and Trump are against democracy. Democracy is not only the fact of voting.

00:19:08

Democracy is not only the law of majority. To be a democracy means of course that there is a vote, but it means also a certain style of behavior, of consent, as you said, of values, a certain form of public debate, a certain way of believing in truth -- exactly the opposite of what do all of those you mentioned. During the Brexit campaign, you had this incredible image of some debaters -- Nigel Farage -- pretending. Making some points. And just after the vote, in a very famous TV program, saying,

"Okay. I lied. I did not mean it. I know that it is true that it will -- all the story with the health system and the European Commission."

00:20:06

You have, in French -- France, Marine Le Pen and all the populists, they don't give a shit about truth, about values, about creed. They don't even believe in fascist creeds. They don't believe in anything. They are pure cynicals, which is the opposite of democracy. And Donald Trump did even better. He decreed -- he decided that truth does not exist any longer, that truth is exactly what fits him and that there is a post-truth, and alternative truth, alternative facts -- which are what is convenient for him. So, this means that you cannot say that this rise of populist movements don't prove that there is a real threat on democracy. Now, there is other signs. For example, if we try to take a point of view a little broader -- what happened in Greece today -- Greece, as you know, and as my friend and partner Yascha knows better than me -- I was such a bad partner; I'm sorry.

00:21:12

[laughter]

Greece is the birthplace of democracy. And Greece -- and democracy in Greece is dying now, at this -- this since a few years. Number two, second side. In the last three, four years. I don't go decades into last years. Each time we saw people trying to embrace democracy, trying to join the club of democracy. So, democracy said, "No thank you. Remain where you are." This is what happened with the Syrian democrats -- when some people in Syria decided to oppose both the criminals from Bashar Al-Assad's regime and ISIS. The democrats, they were said by the United States of America, by France, by Europe, "No, thank you."

00:22:04

Remember the red line which was crossed and with no consequences. Second example, Ukraine. You had in Ukraine -- there recently a whole people with a big culture, saying "We are European. We want to join the club of democracy. We want -- we embrace your values." We said, "You belong to the geo-strategic space of Russia." And the last example -- I'm just coming from there a few hours ago -- Kurdistan. You have a valiant people who fight for the values of democracy, and we are abandoning these people in a shameful way. So, this is the sign of democracies who are -- who no longer believe enough in themselves to be able to hear this appeal and this call. When you look at the map of the world -- to last remark -- who is on the rise today? Who is in progress?

00:23:11

Some forces, some empires which we thought dead in the last years. There was a whole theory going from Toynbee and Spengler to Hobsbawmsaying that they were on decline, they were dying. They are on the rise again -- the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire, the Chinese empire. In a way, the dream of an Arab empire, embodied by Al-Qaeda yesterday and by Da'esh -- by ISIS today. And you have last, but not least, Iran, which is becoming, again -- which isrenoding, reconnecting itself with the dream of a Persian empire in all its area.

00:24:05

So, this rise, this revival of the old non-democratic empires, which we all believe to be in the grave, and who appear to be more vibrant than ever, this is another sign that democracy is not going well, that democracy is tired of itself, that the wind of history is alas no longer blowing in the sense of democracy, but in the sense of the enemies of democracy. And believe me -- when I say that, I'm not preaching for a motion. I'm saying what I feel, what I believe in the depth of my heart. That's why I would like you to vote for Yascha.

[applause]

Thank you.

John Donvan:

Thank you, Bernard-Henri Levy. And this motion is Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. And our final opening statement comes from the side arguing against.

00:25:09

Please welcome to the lectern Kori Schake, fellow -- research fellow at the Hoover Institution. Ladies and gentlemen, Kori Schake.

[applause]

Kori Schake:

So, I could tell the story of change in the international order very differently than Bernard-Henri did, because in the 1970s, people said, "Latin Americans don't care about democracy," right? "They're too poor, their basic needs are what they're focused on." And now, look at Latin America, right? It's a continent of vibrant democracies. The Brazilians are refusing to stand for corruption in their government, which had been common for the entirety of Brazilian history. In the 1980s, people said, "Africans don't care about democracy, right?"

00:26:05

And the African continent, while having suffered many setbacks -- because in fact, the transition to democracy, the building of a social fabric, of civil society, and free media, and civic tolerance, and institutions of government that buffer against bad choices in the near term, and the consensual relations of how you are going to pass laws, enforce laws -- these are difficult conversations for every society. And our society in the West is not excelling at them at the moment. I grant the other team that. But when we say we hold these truths to be self-evident, right, the people have rights and they loan them to governments in limited ways. We mean it when we're talking about ourselves. And yet, very often, we don't actually really believe in the universality of what we're saying, right?

00:27:06

That Latin Americans want to be able to control their government, that Africans want to be able to control their government. In the 19 -- let's see -- '70s, '80s -- in the 1990s, there was the Asian values debate, right, that the people -- the countries of Asia didn't care about democracy. They were worried about getting rich. Turns out that's not true either, right? People are agitating for the ability to control

their government. In the 2000s, there was the question -- oh, I left out Yugoslavia, right? That the -- people of the Balkans didn't care about representative government, they didn't care about the ability to control their government. And now the discussion is about the Middle East. And yet, what have we seen in the Middle East? Not only, as you suggest, the people of the Kurdish regions of Iran, Syria, Turkey, and Iraq yearning for a government that feels representative to them.

00:28:12

But the people of Iraq as well, the people of Iran -- the 2009 Iranian parliamentary elections, in which they believed the government had stolen from the people the outcome. And that had to be put down by force -- the peaceful protest marches. The peaceful protest marches you saw in Syria before the government began cracking down on them. People yearn for what we have the luxury of taking for granted. My response to the fact that, you know, these kids these days don't care about freedom and democracy, and they'd just -- be just as happy to live in an autocracy -- yeah. My nephews have the luxury of not knowing anything about World War II, and that's pretty wonderful that they have grown up in freedom so expansive that they can talk nonsense about what kind of government they would like to live under.

00:29:05

But nobody's choosing to live under authoritarian governments, right? People aren't -- Americans aren't emigrating to China, because, "By God, what we would like is an efficient government that would have high-speed trains that work on time." We don't do that because democracy is messy, and slow, and we're almost always dissatisfied with the process, and we're almost always dissatisfied with the outcomes. But that's the point. We get to change the outcomes. That's a universal yearning -- that every time people get the opportunity to choose it, they choose it. That is the expansive success of democracy in the West; that is, it is not just our democracy that is the measure of the success of democracy, but people in Argentina, people in Brazil, people in China who actually want a government that is responsive to clean air and safe baby milk demands.

00:30:10

That's what will bring the Chinese government down, right? Average people. All of us can identify ridiculous excesses in our politics. In fact, we have elected one president in our country. But the institutions are holding. Civic society is holding. The day President Trump issued his travel ban, the ACLU got 350,000 new members and raised \$24 million. There are natural antibodies in democratic societies that get activated when our rights or our practices begin to be undercut. And the reason I believe that you should vote for our side of the argument is that it's a vote in the ability of rejuvenation in democratic societies.

00:31:06

We're not good at having it right. We're good at getting it right -- right -- by bits and pieces, by fits and starts, by doing it badly and then doing it a little bit better. That's the success of democracy in our society.

John Donvan:
Thank you, Kori Schake.

[applause]

And that concludes round one of this Intelligence Squared U.S. Debate, where our motion is Western democracy is threatening suicide. One note I want to share with you as we're talking about voting. We asked you to vote when you came in off the streets on your opinion on this motion. At the end of the debate, after you've heard all of the arguments, right after round three we'll have you vote a second time, and we give victory to the team whose numbers have changed the most upward in percentage point terms between the first and the second vote. So, it's the difference between the first vote and the second vote.

Now we move on to round two, and round two is where the debaters address one another directly, and they take questions from me and from you, members of our live audience here in New York City.

00:32:09

The motion is this: Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. The team arguing in support of the motion, Bernard-Henri Lévy and Yascha Mounk have argued that Americans are falling out of love with democracy. They're saying they've seen the same thing in some parts of Western Europe, that this is not an abstraction, that it is happening now, it's happening particularly with the younger generation in this country answering surveys in which they indicate a willingness -- much greater willingness than their -- than their -- what's the word I'm looking for -- than their parents, I guess, for military rule, less support for democracy and belief in it is a good system of government. They're saying in fact that the people who are getting elected now actually can cause real harm, because democracy is not just about the vote. It's about a culture and a set of attitudes and the behavior and politicians are dishonoring the traditions of democracy, which has impact. We are hearing that now in this country with the president's attack on judges, on the press, that this harm is for real and that this is also happening around the world.

00:33:13

And also that the lack of support from the democracies for places where nascent democracies are struggling to stand up suggests that the democracies have lost faith in themselves. The team arguing against the motion -- Kori Schake and Clive Crook -- they say, yes, populism is real. They say it is rising. They say bad leaders are being chosen. But they argue fiercely that the mistakes that are made can be corrected and that support for the ability to correct mistakes is not being eroded, that all over the world people are fighting for what we have, which is the choice to choose our leaders, to throw the bums out, and that that has not changed. They also point out that in the case -- specific case of Donald Trump, that moves he's made which may seem authoritarian have been checked again and again and again by the courts and by the media, and they -- they're saying that basically the system is working.

00:34:06

Democracy is resilient, and that the fact that we get to change the outcomes suggests that the natural antibodies against authoritarianism are alive and well and working in this country. There's a lot to get into there. What I want to do is -- I'm very interested in this notion about the against side's confidence in the ability of the system to correct for the kinds of problems the for side is saying are taking place.

So, I want to take this to -- first to Yascha Mounk. Your opponents are saying a lot of what you're saying is true. They're not saying so what. They're not saying it's inconsequential. But they're saying the system is built to fix it and it's proving that it's working. What's your response to that?

Yascha Mounk:

I don't know if it's really -- you cut to the chase of a core of their argument -- right -- they both said, look, a protest vote doesn't necessarily mean, well, it's antidemocratic. You vote for Brexit, you're fed up with the European Union. It doesn't mean that you dislike democracy. They said -- Look, perhaps young people have the liberty to say I don't like democracy, I'm in favor of army rule. They wouldn't actually enjoy living under army rule.

00:35:08

I grant them this point. Both those points are true. But that's not reassuring, because democracy is a very brittle set of institutions, and once you have an authoritarian populace in power, who is actually trying to undermine independent institutions in every way they can, the fact that people say, oh, you know what, woops, we made a mistake isn't going to help. When you look at the current Polish government, they were elected mainly on a promise to abolish a \$10 charge when you go to a doctor, but they also were populists, and now they have stacked the supreme court of Poland with their own supporters. They have turned state TV into a complete propaganda machine. They have undermined the right of the opposition to protest their policies. Lots of Poles are now saying, you know what, perhaps we made a mistake. We shouldn't have said it's going to be fine. But once you have that kind of government in power, it's really difficult to fight back against it.

John Donovan:

Let's let Clive Crook respond to that.

00:36:05

Clive Crook:

Well, I think Kori wants to.

John Donovan:

Kori would like to. Kori Schake.

Kori Schake:

So, I agree with your assessment of the tragedy of contemporary politics in Poland, but I'm not sure that example proves the general case. I can think of two -- so two quick reactions. The first is that you guys haven't actually answered the question of why is this happening now? And Clive's answer is that we're in a time of tumult. The world's changing dramatically because of technology and globalization, and that's putting pressure on the system. But the system is functioning as it's designed to. We think it's a lot less brittle than you think it is. And I would just use from the American case, we have two presidential examples. There are similar times in the 1820s and the 1880s where you have rapid technological change that roils American politics and throws these populist political leaders up.

00:37:09

Andrew Jackson, for example -- much greater threat to the institutions and practices of democracy in

America than Donald Trump ever was. But the great thing about democracy is, is that you turn the key in the lock, his adversaries found ways to create counterarguments. And the same thing happens in the 1880s. You get populists coming forward, and then you get the problems that were driving people to populism addressed by democratic means.

John Donovan:

Let me --

Kori Schake:

And we're in the midst of that process.

John Donovan:

Let me bring a little of your point to Bernard-Henri Lévy and put it in the context of Brexit. Your opponents have called Brexit a -- maybe even a rational protest vote. Given -- you know, the European Union bureaucracy is annoying, it is slow, and therefore it's a rational choice as opposed to something to be frightened of that the British public would make that choice as a protest vote -- which was not a vote in any way to say we want less democracy.

00:38:11

And I think in the minds of the voters, there might have been a sense of more control. So, take us through the Brexit vote and how that fits into your argument.

Bernard-Henri Lévy:

The Brexit vote, of course it is a protest vote, but all populist votes, all extreme right votes in history, and even -- I'm sorry -- all fascist votes in the past -- it is not comparable -- were votes of protest. They were always in Germany -- not comparable in Italy -- it was votes of protest. Protest is not an argument. You have a way to protest in a democratic sense, and you have a way to protest which takes you out of the democratic circle. You say that thank god America is a great country -- of course -- with strong institution -- of course -- with institutions which resist the coup de force.

00:39:12

That is true. But the real event, which was unconceivable a few years ago, was that a man could come to the highest supreme duty office by not believing in truth, by not believing in press, by not knowing how the world is going on, by threatening a whole country to be destroyed from the surface -- from the earth because -- for good reasons, but you don't confront a dictatorship, North Korea, by saying that you are going to erase the whole people. All that is witness, is a sign of the real decay and the absence of protest about that. It's proof that we are facing real fatigue of the democratic values in our country.

00:40:06

John Donovan:

Clive Crook, your response?

Clive Crook:

Can I respond to that? I do agree with you that it isn't enough to say it's a protest vote. And I didn't say it was just a protest vote. I said the Brexit vote was a protest against political reforms that have not

been put before Europe's people, that have not been consented to. The fabric of democracy in Europe is changing at a very top-down driven way, and many people -- not just in Britain, but in Britain especially -- many people find that very disconcerting. They feel that they've been cheated, and they're protesting against that. And my point is that that is, in fact, a legitimate protest. And that is a protest in support of democratic values. And although I -- you know, I object to Trump as strenuously as anybody in this room. But there is an element of legitimate protest in the support that carried him to the White House.

00:41:07

What is -- so, yes, Trump has the protest vote. What is the protest about? The protest is about a political system that is perceived to be letting people down. And that is not a false assessment. I mean, for -- year after year of opinion polls --

Bernard-Henri Levy:

But don't you think that Donald Trump is letting people down too?

Clive Crook:

-- year after year, people in the U.S. tell opinion polls just what -- how much confidence they have in Congress. Year after that year, that number is in single figures. What changes? People are right to feel that Washington is unresponsive, that Washington isn't listening, that these incumbents are corrupt. And you can't get them to listen.

John Donovan:

Let me bring in --

Clive Crook:

That's a legitimate protest --

John Donovan:

Let me bring in Yascha. Yascha --

John Donovan:

One moment. Yascha Mounk.

Yascha Mounk:

So, I'm a little confused here, right? Because you seem to think that as long as you prove that the reason why people voted for Donald Trump or the reason why people voted for Brexit had something to do with protest, had something to do with legitimate grievances, that it means that Western democracy isn't threatening suicide.

00:42:14

That seems to be --

John Donovan:

Does -- did he nail your -- the essence of your argument --

John Donovan:

-- just one sentence, if you can, before he proceeds.

Clive Crook:

Well, I'll give you one word. No, he does not nail --

[laughter]

-- the essence of my argument. I'm trying to shed some light on where the support is coming from. And I'm trying to say there are legitimate components --

John Donovan:

Okay.

Clive Crook:

Yeah.

John Donovan:

Go ahead, Yascha.

Yascha Mounk:

My point is that --

Clive Crook:

That's all, for the moment --

Yascha Mounk:

That's not the question. I grant that there's legitimate reasons to be pissed off --

Clive Crook:

But you denied it before, Yascha.

Yascha Mounk:

No, I didn't. They had very legitimate reasons to be pissed off over the way things are going. But that's not a reason to think that democracy is threatening suicide and that it's not so easy to solve it. Why are people voting for populists? Why did people vote for Donald Trump? Well, for one, because the living standard average Americans has stagnated. From 1945 to 1960, it doubled. From 1965 to 1985, it doubled again. Since 1985, it's been flat. People are pissed off about that.

00:43:07

For another -- because it's complicated, turning a country's with a strict racial hierarchy into an equal multi-ethnic democracy. We're still struggling with that. There's some people against it. Now, what I want to say is this -- these are deep problems and they are driving real anger. And unless we solve them, they're going to continue driving those protest votes. They're going to continue driving that anger.

Clive Crook:

But this is pre --

Yascha Mounk:
And so, and so -- let me finish --

Clive Crook:
This is precisely --

Yascha Mounk:
-- for a second. This is precisely our point.

Clive Crook:
Because --

Yascha Mounk:
No. Because it's difficult to solve those problems. And if you won't, the democracy is going to be [inaudible] --

[talking simultaneously]

Clive Crook:
The problem in Washington -- the -- look, for heaven's sake -- the problem in Washington is not the technical difficulties of these issues. It is political paralysis.

Yascha Mounk:
Sure. And you could -- I'm sure we could all write down a list of sensible economic reforms, tax reforms that would make sense --

Clive Crook:
So, how do we solve political paralysis?

Yascha Mounk:
In Washington -- no --

John Donovan:
Clive?

Clive Crook:
Well -- Shocking the system --

John Donovan:
We haven't heard from Kori in about two-and-a-half, three minutes, so I want to hear from her, and then I want to hear from Bernard.

00:44:11

Kori Schake:
I agree with Clive that our fellows on the other side of the argument are underestimating the capacity of democratic institutions and democratic people to grope their way to solutions of these problems. The question I would ask is to -- that I think may bring a sharp point between --

Male Speaker:

With grope being the operative for our commander-in-chief.

Kori Schake:

The question that I would ask -- that I think puts a sharp edge on it -- is why would it be that democratic societies, of long-standing -- like, France and the United States -- have always had the capacity to solve these enormously hard problems and suddenly fail now.

John Donovan:

Okay. Bernard, that's an interesting question. Why is it different now?

00:45:05

Bernard-Henri Levy:

I think you are underestimating the capacity in a regime -- including democracy -- to die. Regimes can die. This is what all the --

[applause]

-- ancient authors -- inventors of the age of democracy proved. The Greek Polybius said exactly -- he designed the mechanism according to which the regime could corrupt, decline, and die. So, it is not because it did not happen in 1880 or in 1920 that it cannot happen today. Democracy can die, number one.

John Donovan:

Do you believe in the antibodies she's talking about--

Bernard-Henri Levy:

Why it happens --

John Donovan:

Okay. Go ahead --

Kori Schake:

But why is it dying now? --

Bernard-Henri Levy:

-- today? Why it happens today? Because there is, beyond the political parties, beyond the case of Trump or whoever -- there is a climate, a sort of air which is not favorable to democracy. For example, the Internet. The social networks.

00:46:06

This way -- it started with a good -- with a democratic belief. Anyone has the right to express its opinion -- his opinion. This is democracy. But it ends up in an undemocratic belief -- each opinion equals the other ones. Every opinions expressed have the same value. This is a single example. Very simple -- when you see how real democratic anger, pretension, desire turns into itscontrary. Today, you are back

to the worst regime -- what -- which the Greeks called the "La Sophistique," where every opinion equals the other. And this leads to Donald Trump, in -- about Charlottesville, saying that there is "two sides." We are living in a world where we believe that in every single circumstance, there is two sides -- the racists and the anti-racists, the violent and the pacifist -- there are just two sides.

00:47:10

This is what is happening now and this is the very corruption of the democratic spirit.

John Donovan:

Okay. But just --

[applause]

-- I was actually going to say, I heard throughout some of the recent comments the beginnings of applause and you backed off. So, go for it.

[laughter]

We'd like to get it. I want to ask the other side -- the degree to which their argument is gaining traction, I want to know if it concerns you. In this month, in London, John le Carre, the well-known novelist, espionage novelist, "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy," "The Spy Who Came in from the Cold" said this: "I think, of all of the things that were happening across Europe in the 1930s, in Spain and obviously in Germany, to me these are absolutely comparable signs of the rise of fascism, and it's contagious, it's infectious. Fascism is up and running in Poland and Hungary."

00:48:08

He's a well-known voice with a big megaphone saying that this stuff is happening now across Europe -- that it's for real -- as your opponents said, it's not abstract. What's your reaction to the fact that this idea is gaining traction? Does it -- isn't that in itself a threat to confidence in democracy?

Kori Schake:

My reaction to that is that John le Carre's very moving interview is one of the antibodies that is being activated to help us see clearly the nature of challenges -- and consistent with our values and in our political institutions -- to address those problems. I agree with Bernard-Henri that we are in a tumultuous time. There's a lot that's changing very fast in all of our societies. And that's enervating. It's creating a sense of anxiety for people about their longevity of their jobs, about the stability of the social order that they have known, about the way things have worked.

00:49:13

And it's -- it is, however, possible to over-analyze the moment and think that it's going to be a permanent feature --

Male Speaker:

Yeah.

Kori Schake:

-- as opposed to being able to solve those problems.

John Donovan:

And I want to -- I want to bring back to Yascha that Kori kind of dismissed your concerns about the shift in millennial attitudes earlier -- as almost -- not quite -- saying, "Well, kids are kids," kind of thing. Not so much that they have a rational reason for thinking that, but that they -- they're taking for granted what they know. They don't know how bad it can be. So, she said that what she's not seeing is a sincere grasp for an anti-democratic future, but they kind of don't get it. I wanted -- since that's so much the crux of your argument and your work, I would like you to respond to that. And then after that, I'd like to start going to questions from the audience.

Yascha Mounk:

I think that's really important. Look, I don't think that the people who say I would be fine with army rule would enjoy waking up under the rule of a colonel tomorrow.

00:50:10

I certainly don't think they would. I don't think the people who say I want a strongman leader who doesn't have to bother parliament or elections would enjoy living under a strongman leader. I don't think that for a moment. But the fact that they're saying, ah, democracy, you know what, that's not really so important. Who cares about it? I don't care about politics. Let them do whatever they want. The fact that they're saying how bad could get things get? You know, if someone like Trump gets elected, we'll get through it. Let's not worry about it. That concerns me a lot, because you've seen it over and over in different parts of the world, from the Bolshevik Revolution to the current government of Poland, that it doesn't take great support of a majority of a population to change the system of politics you live in. It takes a determined and well-organized minority who thinks that their views are more important than anything else and they're just going to go for it.

00:51:05

At that point, if a majority of people stand up to them --

[applause]

At that point, if a majority of people stand up to them, we can keep them back. We can save our democracy. We're not doomed. I'm not saying we're doomed. But if we're saying we're going to be fine, we've always been fine, of course we're going to be fine once again, that we might actually wake up under the rule of a colonel tomorrow.

John Donovan:

Let's go to some audience question. Sir, right there. The mic's right there. So, if you could stand up, tell us your name. And you can -- first name's fine, by the way.

Male Speaker:

Great. I don't want to give away my identity.

John Donovan:

Yeah.

Male Speaker:
My name is Trevor.

John Donovan:
Do you think we believe that?

[laughter]

Male Speaker:
I'm a history educator, and so because of that I actually want to speak to a comment that you had made, or sort of we can't overanalyze --

John Donovan:
You who again for the --

Male Speaker:
Kori. I apologize.

John Donovan:
Okay.

Male Speaker:
To Kori's point, we can't overanalyze the present moment. And while I know that the Holocaust is obviously a tough issue, I think -- I'm sort of surprised by how much we've avoided the story of Germany in the example here, and so I actually want -- my question is, Adolf Hitler was democratically elected in 1932, an overwhelming majority, and in less than a decade he turned what was a democracy into very much the antithesis of that.

00:52:14

And so, to what extent do you think, I guess -- the side would be -- Kori, to you and your side -- how is that so fundamentally different than what we're seeing happen in the United States today? Because I would question -- I think that's where my skepticism for resilience is.

John Donovan:
That was -- that was a perfectly nailed question, except for the last sentence right. Where you said that's my question.

[applause]

That was really good. That was a really, really well-phrased question. I want to take it to this side.

Kori Schake:
It is a wonderful question, and I think a really important one. I think there are a couple of differences. The first is that we weren't in Germany in 1938 having the kinds of conversations we are having here right now, right? This is what democracy does well. It worries, it airs arguments, it thinks

about moderate corrections, it -- so presidential term limits are one great reason, right?

00:53:08

It's a canary in a coalmine if a president stays longer than four years without being reelected. One of the reasons I am not as worried as our colleagues on the other side of the line are is not because I think everything always turns out right. It's because you have canaries in the coalmine along the way that give you the ability to respond to them. And I think society's reasonably good at responding to it. And the more institutionalized a democracy is -- the president's got to get reelected, the courts get a view on everything President Trump does, and he is abiding by those limits. The time I was most worried was when president -- Candidate Trump said that he, you know, wasn't sure what he was going to think about the outcome of the election. That kind of corrosive undercutting of the norms and behaviors that make our practices meaningful is worrisome.

00:54:11

And I think our colleagues on the other side of the line ought to be hitting that one harder.

John Donvan:
Bernard, to respond?

Bernard-Henri Levy:

Of course, we cannot compare the situations, and the time of Hitler in Germany was absolutely incomparable to anything. And Donald Trump, is far from being comparable to that. But what I want to stress is that the real "dissentiment" we have, I don't believe that democracy is a natural state of the human being. Democracy is difficult. Democracy is fragile. People sometimes don't desire democracies. They prefer something else. They prefer nationalism. They prefer national pride. They prefer sometimes war. Democracy is not the most desirable good -- political good in the world.

00:55:09

And this is what history has proved very often in the past. Democracy -- because you reason as if there was a sort of natural regulation between democracy and its opposite, and that at the end of the day finishes well. Look at Eastern Europe, Hungary and Poland. They're interesting. Thirty years ago, we were all convinced that they were joining the circle of democracies with joy and enthusiasm -- which was true. But after a few years, after a few decades, it proved to be not so true. And there is a sort of illiberal democracy, a sort of "démocrature", like a "dictateure" in these countries which is a very special form of democracy. The smell of democracy, the allure of democracy, the intuitions of democracy, but it's no longer the spirit of democracy. And you cannot exclude that, that you can have the body of democracy without the soul and the spirit of democracy.

00:56:12

John Donvan:

So, Clive, quick here. So -- well, if you can take this part of the question, I mean, your opponent Bernard is saying really that democracy is not the natural equilibrium state, that it's not everybody's cup of tea, it's got to be built, it's fragile, but if you build it and walk away it's not going to keep going, it could fall apart. And I think your guys -- you're saying it sort of is the natural.

Clive Crook:

No, no, not for a minute.

John Donovan:

No? Okay.

Clive Crook:

I don't think it's the natural state. But I think you do put your finger on the thing that we disagree about. I think so many of the things we're discussing, the differences are rhetorical more than substantive -- except in this one crucial respect. I think you both do feel that democracy, Western democracy, democracy in the U.S., democracy in Western Europe is brittle, is fragile. And I don't think that. I think that democracy in the U.S. and in Western Europe is robust and can handle and is handling a great deal of stress.

00:57:10

And I just want to come back, if I may very quickly, and underline this point about the strains that our economies have been under. There is an interesting comparison with the 1930s. We've just been through a crash that was as bad as the Great Recession. This was -- that was as bad as the Great Depression. And this happened on the watch of supposedly sophisticated, technically adept governments that knew what they were doing, that understood finance, that all this stuff had been dealt with. But we had a crash like the Great Depression, right? And it is not surprising that people are thrown by that, that people have, as I was saying before, legitimate grievances about that. And I think that that protest deserves to be heard. It doesn't threaten the system.

00:58:07

John Donovan:

Okay. Let me take --

Clive Crook:

The system's fine.

[applause]

John Donovan:

I want to let Yascha respond, and then right after that I'd like to go to another question. Yascha.

Yascha Mounk:

I think we've put our finger on where the heart of our disagreement is. I agree with you that this is where the heart of our disagreement is. So how worried should we be? How much comfort should we take from a long democratic history in the United States? Unlike in Germany in the '30s, here we go back a very long time in our history. Well, I think that in order to conclude easily from the past to the future, we have to assume that the sort of scope conditions, all of the conditions around what is happening now are the same. But all through the history of democratic stability in the United States, we have had a rapid improvement in living standards from one generation to the next. So, people could say do I love politicians, do I trust them completely, no. But you know what? I'm doing a lot better than my

dad was. My kids are going to do better than me. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt.

00:59:05

And now all of a sudden, so you know what, I have worked hard all my life and I am not doing better than my parents were. My kids are probably going to do worse than me. Let's throw some shit against the wall and see what sticks.

John Donovan:

You know, NPR is going to have such a problem with this.

[laughter]

Yascha Mounk:

NPR, NPR. All the through -- over the history of democratic stability, a democracy has been the most powerful country in the world, first your great country, Great Britain, and now my great country the United States. And it is not clear that it's going to continue being the case over the next 20 or 40 or 60 years as authoritarian powers are rising. So, we can't simply assume that the past is guaranteed of future results, as an Upper West Side audience might recognized by my finds. Just one other point. You say, Kori, that you were very worried before the election in 2016, because Donald Trump said he might not accept the outcome of the election. I agree. That was the moment I was most worried. And we were spared having to find out what he would have done if he had lost, because sadly he won.

01:00:06

Well, I'll tell you what. We have another election coming up. So, what's going to happen in 2020 -- if, as I hope to God, we defeat him at the polls -- is he goes to say, "Oh, yes. I lost fair and square. Please, candidate who won, I'll hand it over into you" or does he go to rouse up his own people to rebel against the election?

[applause]

That's something I'm worried about.

Clive Crook:

The question is what happens if he does do that, right? What happens if he does say that thing?

Yascha Mounk:

I'd rather not find out.

Clive Crook:

And I am very confident --

John Donovan:

I'm actually looking for some women to join the conversation since they're outnumbered on the stage here. And I'm -- thank you.

Female Speaker:

My name is Bernadette. I'm hearing a lot about this antidote and this protection of democracy and institutions that sort of happens naturally. But I hear it in the context of history, and not in the context of the future.

01:01:01

When we have our government gerrymandering districts so that we cannot have a vote that is fair, when we have a government that is stacking the Supreme Court, makes corporations people -- and we can add, you know, 10 more examples to this -- it's hard to understand how we really have an antidote anymore --

John Donovan:
Okay.

Female Speaker:
-- to this.

John Donovan:
I'm going to turn that into a question and say, "How do we have an antidote to this anymore, given that list of apparent compromises of the fair and democratic process?"

Kori Schake:
Well, I'll give you an example --

John Donovan:
Kori Shacke.

Kori Schake:
-- of my native state of California. We have taken away from the state senate the ability to set our electoral districts. It's done by a bipartisan commission now, right?

[applause]

Democracy actually has the ability to do that.

[applause]

We have the capacity to make these changes and we just need to mobilize ourselves and do them.

John Donovan:
Right down in front.

Kori Schake:
You have those tools.

John Donovan:
Second row, I'm sorry. Yes. And if you could stand up, please.

01:02:06

Female Speaker:

Yes. My name is Helena and my question is to you --

John Donovan:

To the side against the argument?

Female Speaker:

Yes. We have this wonderful constitution here. We have the rule of law. We have this very strong institution, as you said -- definitely much stronger than, let's say, in Poland, and Hungary. And this is the reason that we still have a democracy. But then you said the problem is -- and you also --

John Donovan:

I -- can you zero in on your question for me?

Female Speaker:

Yes.

John Donovan:

Thanks.

Female Speaker:

Why we are not able to produce, with this fantastic system, good politicians to make sure that our democracy survives?

[laughter]

We should make sure our democracy survives!

[applause]

John Donovan:

I'm going to -- again, that's a whole another debate.

[laughter]

So, I'm going to move to another question. Sir, right in the middle there.

Male Speaker:

For the side against the motion, my name is Ben. It's an effective argument, I think. The institutions are responding.

01:03:03

My question is, if you have someone more effective and more focused, perhaps, on corrupting those institutions, who didn't go for a Neil Gorsuch, but went for a good friend -- how effective could those institutions be with a focused leader --

John Donovan:

Oh.

Male Speaker:

-- who intended to remain?

John Donovan:

Interesting question. Do you want to take that, Clive, or Kori--

Clive Crook:

Yeah.

John Donovan:

-- and then I'm going to let the other side respond on this one, because we haven't heard from them in a while. But you guys go first -- because the question is to you.

Clive Crook:

[inaudible] --

John Donovan:

You go ahead, Clive.

Clive Crook:

I think -- you know, you're right. It is something of a consolation that Trump is so clueless --

[laughter]

-- you know, that if he were more effective -- I mean, you think of the travel ban. If he were -- that failed in the first instance because it was so incompetently drafted. He would be more of a worry if he knew what he was doing. That's true. And I don't deny that bad politicians get elected. Actually, I would like to come back, to link it to what you were saying before -- why don't we get better politicians? The whole point of democracy is that it is robust in the face of bad politicians.

01:04:05

There is something about the political process that projects certain kinds of people forward. I mean, I think you have the -- a disproportionate share of seriously flawed individuals running for office. And the beauty of democracy is that it keeps them contained. This is -- I think this is really the larger point. And I do -- if I may, just one other point, I do hear this sentiment coming from the audience, and -- sorry, from the other side -- that our situation is fragile, our situation is brittle, we're very concerned. I have to confess, I wonder about the sincerity -- I have to worry about the sincerity of these statements. I mean, I work in journalism, and I'm surrounded by people who write about, you know, the imminent collapse of our democratic system, and the of threat that Trump poses, that he is a fascist dictator or one step removed from that -- why aren't these people more frightened of being thrown in jail? Why aren't we a little more worried than we actually are?

01:05:13

[applause]

And maybe afterwards, if there are people out there who really do think that this democracy is doomed within the foreseeable future -- let's say, within my lifetime -- you might be interested in having a little wager with me.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

I want to throw in something from the news, to this side, the -- what's happened in Catalonia. Catalonia is a province of Spain that is seeking -- where there's long been, for several decades, a powerful impulse for separation from Spain. And this past weekend, its regional government tried to stage a referendum to vote on succession, and the central government came in and crushed the vote, literally crushed the vote, sending in police with batons to take away ballot boxes and beat up people who were trying to line up to vote. Yascha, where does that fit in to this argument, that whole episode?

01:06:09

Yascha Mounk:

Let me answer the question. I just want to very quickly speak to Clive, because, you know, I come from a country -- Germany -- which isn't renowned for its sense of humor. And so, when they laugh once a year at the Cologne Carnival -- [laughter] -- the way it works is that somebody makes a joke, and after every joke, there's a band that goes, "TA-DA!"

[laughter]

Now, you seem to imagine that the threats to democracy will come in as unrefined and blatant a form as the Cologne Carnival, where when democracy is under threat, that sort of band striking up the threat, and we know exactly what's the nature of the threat. That's not how it works. That might have been how it worked in Berlin in 1933. But it's not how it worked in Poland, or Hungary, or Venezuela, or a whole number of other countries.

[applause]

Kori Schake:

Are you saying --

Yascha Mounk:

Now, I'm afraid I'm going to have to cut you off because I have to answer your question about Catalonia --

[laughter]

01:07:08

Look, if somebody had told me -- and I'd believe you -- a year ago, that we would have close to a thousand seriously injured people in the streets of Barcelona by the police of Spain, I would have

thought you were insane. I would have thought Barcelona is one of the richest, most affluent, and by the way, one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, in the whole world. It's part of a deeply democratic country. What are you talking about? And yet, this past Sunday, we've seen those clashes in the street. We've seen deep political irresponsibility on the part of the Catalan government, which pressed through a referendum with a minority of public support in a legally -- highly dubious way -- voting for the lawful referendum when the opposition was outside of the parliament hall. And then we've seen an even more irresponsible Spanish state saying, "We're going to quash them with everything we've got," instead of saying, "Let's let them have a vote and ignore it," they came in and beat the citizens up.

01:08:06

If that can happen in Barcelona today, I don't see a reason why we should be so complacent about our inability of things devolving in this deeply divided atmosphere here.

John Donovan:

Kori Schake, do you want to respond to that? --

Clive Crook:

I really want do want to --

John Donovan:

All right. Do you want to yield to Clive? Sure, go ahead --

Kori Schake:

So, I agree with Yascha that it will happen with a whimper; not a bang, right? Because journalists, and institutional restraints, and my angry mother will prevent the carnival scenario. But I also think you overestimate the extent to which the Spanish, Polish, and Hungarian cases -- worrisome as they are, are generalizable. What it looks to me, when I look at those cases, what I see are countries that have been under --in the case of Poland and Spain --under foreign occupation for two generations --Soviet occupation, Soviet occupation --and Soviet-influenced controlled determining their political system.

01:09:16

Yascha Mounk:

Spain?

Kori Schake:

Not Spain. I said Poland and Hungary.

Yascha Mounk:

Oh, okay, oh.

Kori Schake:

And in Spain, under a fascist government, also undemocratic until, what, the late 1970s, early 1980s? What you get when countries are in transition to democracy, it's really hard. A lot of them fail. The fact that Poland, Hungary and Spain are struggling to transition, and perhaps their EU membership made that harder because where, if they had gone from Soviet domination to independence, they would have perhaps had more space for airing of nationalism in ways that wasn't

anti-EU and anti-democratic. I think those cases are really important, really dangerous, but also important to understand with specificity, and might not be the best examples for the end of democracy in Britain or the United States.

01:10:13

[applause]

John Donvan:

Bernard, are they outlier cases, or are they --are they typical?

Bernard-Henri Levy:

Spain and --Spain and Catalonia is a good example of the way in which democracy is misunderstood. It -- they were wrong on both sides, Spanish side because you cannot repress a vote with sticks. That is clear, and this image of violence will be like a shame on the Spanish government for long. But Catalonia government was wrong also by reducing the desire of democracy to the only question of who governs, how do we share the power, and so on. They should better deal with the question of Islamism in -- attack Catalonia with the way in which they explained before, the terrorist attack in Barcelona, the way in which they dealt with this story of jihadist salafism and so on.

01:11:18

So, there is a lack of democratic spirit in Barcelona and in Spain which was compensated by this fight for control of power. I want to go back to the question which was raised by the lady here, this question of why so bad politicians is a crucial question, because for all democrats, since the beginning of democracy, democracy has been a fabric of good politics. One of the signs of a sane democracy, of the real --of a real democracy is the ability to produce some good politics. Since the Greeks when they produced Pericles, to the first --to the beginning of the democracy in Europe, Machiavelli who says that the proof of democracy is the capacity to invent a political art.

01:12:11

Machiavelli said that art --policy in the future democracy is an art. That is when he spoke about virtue, he meant virtuosity, like a pianist. For him, politics were like artists. They had to have the virtuosity, the scale, the talent of an artist. Frankly, who is the artist of politics today in Europe or in America? Where are they? We are reduced to qualify Mr. Putin as a sort of artist in strategy, a great chess player, you know that, which is an insult to chess playing.

[laughter]

So, this fact that the so-called democracies are unable to produce artists of policy is one of the signs that our motion is a good one, that democracy [unintelligible].

01:13:10

John Donvan:

I saw, Clive, you were really thinking that one through and digesting, so --

Clive Crook:

I mean, it is an interesting theory of democracy that the purpose of democracy is to discover, you know, the Mozarts of politics who are out there. It is not.

[laughter]

Bernard-Henri Levy:

At least it's a sign --

Clive Crook:

It is not.

Bernard-Henri Levy:

Maybe not the purpose, but a sign --

Clive Crook:

Politics is about ordinary flawed individuals, and the purpose of democracy is to put them in a situation of competition and rivalry where they're held accountable to the people. That's what politics is for.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Okay.

Bernard-Henri Levy:

But the people--of course, but the comptability works on two sides in democracy. You -- the people has to be accountable also for his choices. If the people is sovereign, democracy's a sovereignty of people, every sovereign should be accountable. The people is king. Okay. All kings have to be accountable.

01:14:06

And when the people makes a bad choice, a choice which is opposite to its interests, he's accountable also for his choices. This is a true democracy.

John Donovan:

I want to take this gentleman. You're wearing an orange shirt. I can't quite see the color. No, no. Yeah, there you go.

Male Speaker:

Hi, there. My name's Eric I guess my question to the proposition would be -- would be most accurate to call this murder than suicide, given that the threats to democracy seems to come overwhelmingly from the right.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

I'm considering -- I'm considering whether we want to go down that road right now.

[laughter]

Again, I think I'm going to pass because it's a -- it's a very, very fascinating rabbit hole, but I think it might be one -- it might take us away. So, thanks for the question. But there's a gentleman right behind you who is also waiting.

Male Speaker:

Thank you. My name is Patrick. So, Kori and Clive, you guys have argued that democracy has these antibodies and it's structurally designed to defend itself from kind of the present circumstances.

01:15:12

But I think if you look at the American Constitution in particular, it was designed when the federal government was miniscule. Currently, the federal government is 3 million employees. There's various government agencies. And if you look at what Donald Trump is doing, right, he's completely redesigning the EPA -- or by not doing anything. He's letting Scott Pruitt do that. He's using his regulatory --

John Donovan:

Rather than giving a lot of examples, can you zero -- can you take that one and --

Male Speaker:

So where are the checks and balance in the modern government, either in America or in the European Union, against the regulations that have -- and the regulation government that has evolved from democracy?

Kori Schake:

Yeah, so it's a fantastic question. And the example that you gave -- you only got to give one, I know -- but it was an example of the administrative state, right? Elections have consequences. Presidents have the ability to change regulation unless Congress prevents it, or unless the courts determine that it is unconstitutional.

01:16:10

So that you get changes to the policies and practices of the EPA is not surprising. That's what elections produce. And the ability to make those changes is actually proof that the system is working. What I thought you were going -- I thought you were going to go a slightly different direction, which is that the great genius of those few dozen guys who had the big debate about the nature and structure of the American government is that we have a government designed by people who are afraid of concentrations of power, right? You can't get anything big done in America without consensus. That's on purpose, and that is actually our greatest protection. I mean, I agree with Clive's point that President Trump's malevolence is being outpaced by his incompetence.

01:17:07

[laughter]

But there's also -- there's also the very serious point that our government's designed to have to negotiate everybody into an agreement, and governments on both political sides for the last several

administrations haven't done nearly a good enough job of building a broad basis of support. That's why you see so much seesawing.

John Donovan:

Yascha, do you want to respond to what you just heard?

Yascha Mounk:

Yeah, I'm trying to remember the exact -- so, look, I think that's basically right, but there's a real problem here, that checks and balances work as long as all parts of a government actually have a common purpose in mind. When you read the Founding Fathers, when you read the Federalist Papers, they talk a lot about overcoming factionalism by the common or the public good.

01:18:07

People working together for that. They were really worried about the country being split into two big factions. They didn't think of political parties, but they would recognize the Democrats and Republicans precisely as two big factions of a kind that they were scared of. And the problem with the checks and balances is, that when you have so many veto points that nothing can get done because there's this deep spirit of animosity, of partisanship between both sides of the aisle -- that anytime somebody has a little bit of power, they use it to the max, they start to abuse the institutional norms because now we've got the presidency and we've got to do everything we can. And it goes into the cycle of precisely the blockage of politics, which makes it impossible to deal with the real problems we have been talking about, like the stagnation of the living standards for ordinary people. Then it produces a counter-reaction, where people say, "When I'm in government, I'm going to do whatever we want," and that, political scientists show, is exactly what has happened historically in Latin America -- which had a very similar presidential system, many of those countries, to the United States.

01:19:09

And they ended up in these situations of political blockage, where nothing could happen. And eventually, a strongman leader came about and said, "You know what? I'm going to solve all of this. Just give all the power to me. I'm going to run roughshod over the institutions. I'm going to solve any -- everything." And you know what you call that person? You call them a dictator.

John Donovan:

And that concludes Round 2 of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate --

[applause]

-- where our motion is Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. And now, we move on to Round 3. Round 3 are closing statements by each debater in turn. They will, once again, stand up and go to the space on the side. These closing statements will be two minutes each. And immediately after that, we'll have you vote a second time, and very quickly we will be able to announce our winner. The motion is Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. Here making his closing statement in support of the motion, Yascha Mounk, senior fellow at New America and lecturer at Harvard University.

01:20:07

[applause]

Yascha Mounk:

Once upon a time, there was a chicken on a farm.

[laughter]

And it was very happy. And all of the other animals on the farm kept warning it and saying, "Be careful. The farmer is only nice to you now. But one day he'll come and kill you, and slaughter you." And the chicken said, "What are you talking about? Every day he comes and feeds me. Every day he says some nice things about me. Why would things suddenly be so different?" That's a story by Bertrand Russell, and he concludes that indeed, that farmer did come and wrung the neck of a chicken -- and more sophisticated views as to the nature of history, it would have been to the chicken's benefit.

[laughter]

I'm telling you this story because there some things that are driving the farmer's actions. There's scope conditions to how he acted. As long as the chicken was thin enough, he let it live. Once it was fattened up for market, he slaughtered it.

01:21:08

We cannot conclude from history to the future -- because some things are different now. We have some deep problems and our political societies are failing to address those. And so, we can't assume that just because democracy was stable in the past, it's going to be stable in the future. Ancient Athens lived for 200 years. The Roman Republic lived for 500 years. The Republic of Venice ruled serenely over the beautiful lagoon for over a thousand years. If people in the later stages of those polities had said, "Perhaps it's going to die in the next 50 years, perhaps the system will collapse" -- people would have said, "You're crazy; what are you talking about?" And yet, eventually, they did. My point is not that democracy is doomed. It is not. We can fight for our democracies. We can save our democracies. But the first step towards that is not to make the mistake the chicken made, not to make the mistake that the Athenians, and the Romans, and the Venetians did at some point in their history -- and recognize that our political system is now under threat, and that it'll take all of us fighting and working together in order to save it.

01:22:14

And that's why I think it's truly important for you to vote for our side of the debate. Thank you.

John Donvan:

Thank you, Yascha Mounk.

[applause]

The motion, again, Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. Here making his closing statement against the motion, Clive Crook, columnist for Bloomberg View.

Clive Crook:

When I told people I was speaking in this debate tonight, and opposing this motion, a common reaction was, "Oh, so you're taking the optimistic view? Good luck with that."

[laughter]

Actually, I'm not a great optimist. I don't see Trump as a fascist dictator, but I'm under no illusions about the damage he can do in areas where the law grants him authority. I am pretty gloomy about Brexit as well. Although I think Brexit on the merits, is a closer call, I'm worried about what's going to happen to the U.K. economy, and I think it's going to be very difficult.

01:23:11

It's pretty much a slow-motion train wreck. So, don't call me an optimist. But here's the thing. It's a point of pride for me to meet people who disagree with me about things I care about. So, I actually know a lot of Trump supporters. I count many among my friends. I know a lot of Brexit supporters too. Some of those are family. I don't deny these populist movements do attract and energize the fringe of outright anti-democrats and shameless bigots. But in my experience, they're a small minority. One thing I can say with certainty that all the people I've talked to about these subjects agree on -- and I think the vast majority of people on all sides of these issues also agree about this -- our politicians work for us, not the other way around.

01:24:09

When we judge them to have failed, we kick them out, and no one is above the law. So, fellow pessimists, let's not bring intelligence pessimism into disrepute. Western democracy will prevail. I ask you to vote against the motion.

[applause]

John Donvan:

Thank you, Clive Crook. And that motion again -- Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. And here making his closing statement in support of the motion, Bernard-Henri Levy, philosopher and author of "The Genius of Judaism." Bernard-Henri Levy.

[applause]

Bernard-Henri Levy:

I'm not a pessimist either, but I just observe that in Europe, we thought, for example, that Poland, Hungary, and so on were the beating heart of Europe, and we hoped in that.

01:25:06

They are turning to authoritarian regimes. Germany -- we did think, since recently, that Germany was vaccinated by its own past, by its guiltiness against the return of the ghost. A few weeks ago, we had the proof of the opposite. France, fatherland of human rights. We were at the edge a few months ago to have populists of the right and populists of the left waging the last competition. And in America, you have Donald Trump. And in England -- in U.K., I'm sorry -- you said at the beginning of our conversation that the Brexit vote was a protest against the lack of power of the institutions of Europe. It is not

true. It was mostly a protest against migrants being at home and so on. It was more than -- more this than protesting against the European Union and all the system which goes with it.

01:26:11

What I want to say is that the best theoretician of American democracy was a Frenchman -- Alexis de Tocqueville. I'm sorry for this, but it's a fact.

[laughter]

And he said that democracy was three things. Vote -- of course, number one. But number two, the rule of law. And number three, a certain form of civilization. Tocqueville said that it was a form of freedom of speech, a way of behaving with the other, a way of having a free debate -- and that this, a way also of being, if you want, out of the grasp of power. And this democratic civilization is what shows today some signs of corruption everywhere in the Western world. Thank you.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Bernard-Henri Levy.

[applause]

01:27:07

One more time, our motion, Western Democracy is Threatening Suicide. And here to make her closing statement against the motion, Kori Schake, distinguished research fellow at the Hoover Institution.

Kori Schake:

So, my favorite commentator -- thank you -- my favorite commentator on American culture is not Alexis de Tocqueville, magnificent as he is, but a British historian from the 1920s, Bertha Ann Router who described the United States as a country of people too extreme in religion and politics to live in peace anywhere else.

[laughter]

Right? We are not newly a society with lots of friction. We are not newly a society that has economic problems, that is uncivil in much of its discourse, that has a lot of serious social problems that we, at times, address inadequately or we fail to live up to our values.

01:28:05

Those aren't new things about our country. My favorite article ever written about America in the world is by the journalist James Fallows. And I can't remember the actual title, but his argument is that the reason the United States is successful in the world is because we always think we're failing, right? It's about the role of the Jeremiah. Do you remember Jeremiah from the New -- from the Bible? He always thinks he's failing. He always thinks humans are failing God, and he's right. The United States always thinks it's bad at stuff, right? In the 1970s, the Japanese economy was overtaking us, and now the rise of China is going to be the end of American dominance. We tend to give our opponents all of the advantages of what we struggled so mightily to get right, and there are many things we get right. One

of those things is building institutions and building civil society as a counterbalance to the power of government.

01:29:13

The distribution of power that we have in Western liberal societies is our great saving grace, and is much more robust than our adversaries this evening give it credit for. I hope you will vote with me on that.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Kori Schake. And that concludes our closing statements. I just want to say a couple things. One is that I said at the beginning of the evening our goal is to raise the level of public discourse and to be able to have debates and conversation and argumentation -- frankly, argumentation in a civil and respectful and entertaining and engaging and informative way -- which turns out to be really hard, because there's not a lot of it. But it did happen on this stage tonight, and for that I congratulate these four debaters in the way they did it.

[applause]

01:30:07

You were really terrific. And, Kori, I personally take inspiration from your telling us that if you're pretty sure that you're constantly failing, that that's a good thing. So, I'm feeling better about that now.

[laughter]

I also want to thank everybody who got up and asked a question, and that includes the people whose questions I didn't take. I know it takes a lot of guts to stand up and do that. I don't enjoy passing on questions, and some of them in fact are the ideas for really great debates that we can have down the future.

Yascha Mounk:

Could I add a personal note about the questions?

John Donovan:

Pardon me?

Yascha Mounk:

Could I add a personal note about the questions?

John Donovan:

Sure.

Yascha Mounk:

It's to the lady who asked about why we can't have good politicians, who happens to be my aunt. And I just want to tell her that.

[applause]

And I just want to tell her that she stole the show from all of us by asking the funniest question of the night.

[applause]

Kori Schake:
Hear, hear; hear, hear.

[applause]

01:31:06

John Donovan:

I also want to point this out, for those of you who are new to Intelligence Squared U.S. You've heard -- the regulars have heard me say this many times. We are a nonprofit organization. This is an act of philanthropy. I told -- I talked with you about our podcast. I talked with you about the fact that this debate will end up on many, many NPR stations across the nation. It's also being used in schools through our website. We really are serious about trying to get the word out, that this is a good -- that there's wisdom in argument, that wisdom emerges from argument, and that's a good thing. So, I also want to tell you that as a philanthropy, we depend on support from a lot of people, and that would include any of you who would be willing to go to your phones and send a little donation in by text. I personally would appreciate it because our goal here is to grow this thing, to make it get bigger and bigger. At this point, we're up to the point where we can do about 17 or so of these debates a year, but we need support for that. If you go to your phone, you can -- there are two ways.

01:32:07

Just go to our website, IQ2US.org, and that's doable right there. But you can do a text donation. If you text the word "debate" to the number 797979, you'll get a link to debate online. So, I now have -- the results I have come in. I want to remind you, you have voted twice, one before you heard the arguments and once again after you've heard the arguments. It's the team whose numbers have moved up the most in percentage point terms that determine who our winner is. Let's look at the first vote. In the first vote on the motion Western democracy is threatening suicide, 41 percent agreed, 31 percent were against, and 28 percent were undecided. Those are the first votes. Let's look at the second vote. In the second vote, the team arguing for the motion, their result was 57 percent. They pulled up 16 percentage points.

[applause]

Okay, that's the number to beat. Let's look at the against side. Their first vote was 31 percent. Their second vote was 37 percent.

01:33:05

They pulled up eight percentage points, which was not enough. It means the team arguing for the motion Western democracy is threatening suicide are our winners.

[applause]

So, our congratulations to them. Thank you from me, John Donovan, and Intelligence Squared U.S. We'll see you next time.

01:33:30

[end of transcript]