

Democracy in Our Time

Part 2: Is it worth defending?

Presentation by Vince Giuca

Overview

**1. Introduction &
recap**

**2. Democracy today:
A survey**

3. Populism

4. Digital technology

**5. Ramifications for
Australia
(questions for you)**

Representative democracy is a recent phenomenon

- **Athenian democracy**
 - Lasted 175 years, ending in 322 BCE
- **17th century England**
 - Levellers engaged in an historical struggle for popular sovereignty, expanding voting franchise & equality before the law
 - Their political enemies accused them of being 'democrats' - a term of ridicule
- **Late 18th century**
 - In the midst of revolutionary fervour in France & America, 'democracy' became more mainstream, but still held in suspicion
- **End of 19th century**
 - The concept was reborn as 'liberal democracy' as a way of:
 - keeping the powerful in check
 - protecting the people from the people themselves

Is democracy a useful idea or not?

- Winston Churchill (1947): “**democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time**”
- **Dual concern** regarding ‘democracy’:
 - keeping a check on the powers of government
 - protecting the people from mob rule
- **A warning against complacency**
- Democracy is a **useful & important concept** with political & social consequences
 - ‘democracy’ is more than the sum of its institutions
 - it is also dependent on a society’s political culture, including a set of *reinforcing unwritten democratic norms*
 - it is an *evolving* system of government

The idea of democracy

... is a useful ideal, but we need a mutual understanding of what it means for a modern state to be called a democracy

- **Not just a system for electing legislators & government**
 - free & fair elections are the bedrock of democracy
 - the ability of the citizenry to remove governments & representatives is critical
- **It's a package**
 - the rule of law (not arbitrary)
 - respect for, & protection of, civil liberties & human rights
 - freedom of association (where interests can be represented)
 - institutional & structural checks & balances with the reinforcement of unwritten democratic norms - political leaders to act with mutual toleration & forbearance
 - overall interests of the people are taken into account (not just the majority)
 - governments rule with the consent of citizens

In defence of democracy?

1. Liberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laws must be of our own collective making• We sacrifice a little to enjoy freedom together
2. Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each human life has equal moral worth• We should have equal chance to influence political outcomes
3. Human nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking part in politics is part of human nature & is a way of self-improvement
4. Best outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Counters - the wisdom of crowds
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talkers - the deliberative element
5. Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Democracy is likely to be perceived as legitimate &, therefore, less likely to self-destruct
6. Prevention of tyranny & corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As long as the people retain control of the levers of power, tyrants will have less opportunity to succeed

Source: Susskind (2018)

Democracy today

Covering almost the entire world population, the **Democracy Index** provides a snapshot of the state of democracy worldwide in 165 independent states & territories.

Democracy Index 2019, by regime type

	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	22	13.2	5.7
Flawed democracies	54	32.3	42.7
Hybrid regimes	37	22.2	16.0
Authoritarian regimes	54	32.3	35.6

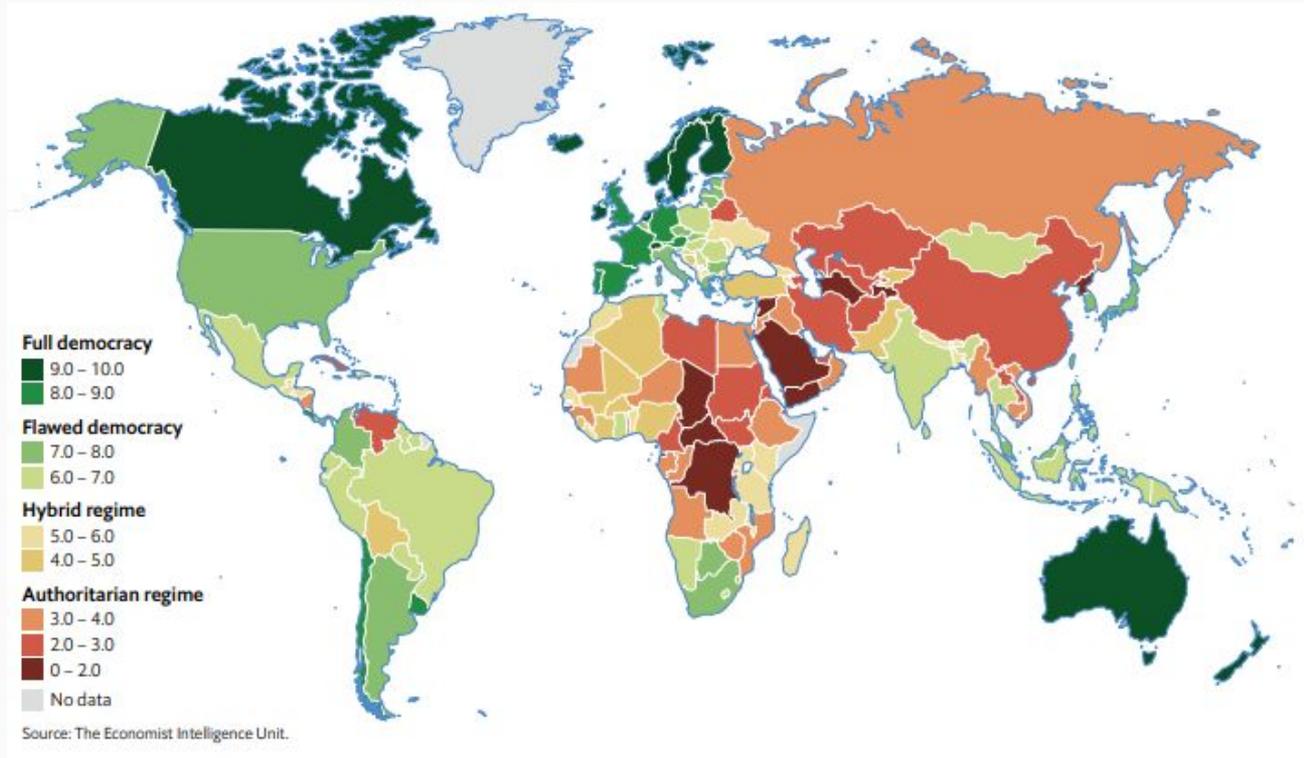
The Democracy Index is based on five categories:

- *electoral process and pluralism;*
- *the functioning of government;*
- *political participation;*
- *political culture; &*
- *civil liberties.*

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020)

Democracy today (cont...)

Democracy Index 2019, global map by regime type



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020)

Regressive trends

The EIU points to democracy's regressive trends in the mature democracies

- developed from the 1990s
- accelerated in the 2000s
- reached its pinnacle in the decade ending in 2019

“In the *mature democracies* the result was **an unsustainable political status quo**: the **increasing vacuity of national politics** and **the retreat of political elites and parties from engagement with their electorates** resulted in **falling levels of popular trust** in political institutions and parties, **declining political engagement**, and a **growing resentment** among electorates at the lack of political representation.” (p 6)

“Eventually **the alienation of people** from the 21st-century body politic gave rise to **populist movements**, which **repudiated the mainstream political parties** and demanded a new political contract between the people and their elected representatives.” (p 6)

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020)

Regressive trends

According to the EIU, the reasons for regression &/or stagnation of global democracy (mainly in the US & Europe) are:

- **an increasing emphasis on elite/expert governance** rather than popular participatory democracy;
- **a growing influence of unelected, unaccountable institutions & expert bodies;**
- **the removal of substantive issues of national importance from the political arena** to be decided by politicians, experts or supranational bodies behind closed doors;
- **a widening gap between political elites & parties**, on the one hand, & **national electorates**, on the other; &
- **a decline in civil liberties**, including media freedom & freedom of speech.

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020)

The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020

The Center for the Future of Democracy: Key findings

Across the globe, **democracy is in a state of malaise**

- This is the highest level of global dissatisfaction since the start of the series in 1995
- The rise in democratic dissatisfaction has been especially sharp since 2005

Many of the world's **most populous democracies** – including the United States, Brazil, Nigeria & Mexico – **have led the downward trend**

- As a result, many large democracies are at their highest-ever recorded level for democratic dissatisfaction

Citizens of developed democracies have also experienced **a large increase in democratic dissatisfaction**

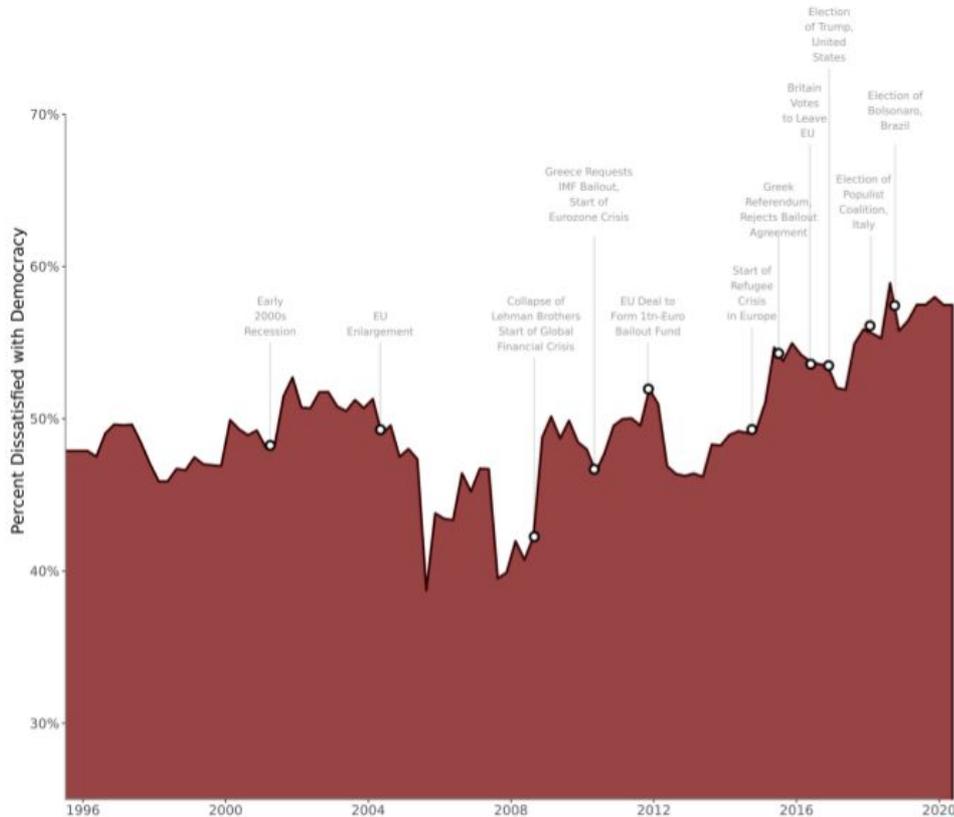
Citizens' levels of dissatisfaction with democracy are **largely responsive to objective circumstances & events**

The picture is not entirely negative

- Many small, high-income democracies have moved in the direction of greater civic confidence in their institutions
- Comparison by region shows a number of other bright spots, above all in Asia

Source: Foa *et al* (2020)

Dissatisfaction with democracy: The global picture over time



- Rising dissatisfaction with democracy across the world, in democracies representing 2.43 billion individuals across Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, North America, East Asia, & Australasia
- Based on 3,218 separate individual country surveys

Source: Foa *et al* (2020)

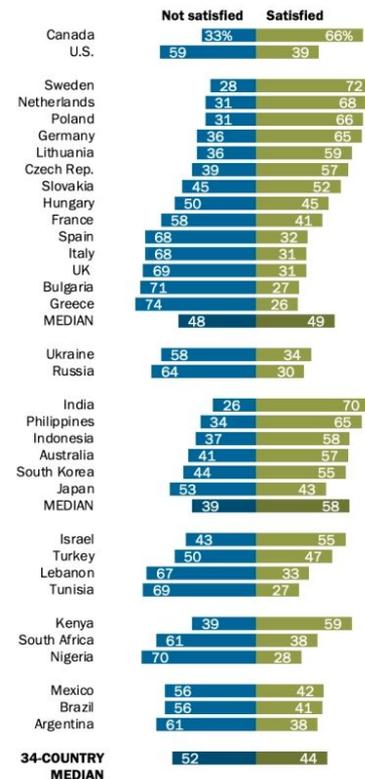
Discontent with democracy (Pew)

- According to Pew's 2019 global survey, **dissatisfaction with democracy is common**, but varied
- Across 34 countries, a median of: **52% are dissatisfied with 44% satisfied**
 - in Australia, the figures are respectively: 41% to 57%
- Dissatisfaction rates increased from the previous year in: Russia, UK, Nigeria, South Korea & France
- "Across the nations polled, supporters of the ruling party are consistently more content about the functioning of the political system."

Source: Pew Research Center (2020)

Many dissatisfied with democracy

% who are ___ with the way democracy is working in their country



Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey, Q5.
"Democratic Rights Popular Globally but Commitment to Them Not Always Strong"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Pew Research Center's survey (cont...)

- **Supporters of right-wing populist parties in Europe are likely to be dissatisfied with democracy**
 - “Specifically, in Sweden, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands and France, people with a favorable view of out-of-power right-wing populist parties are more likely than those who rate these parties unfavorably to say the democracy is not working well.”
 - This is not the case in Poland where the a right-wing populist party is in power
- **Lower income respondents are more likely to be dissatisfied with the way democracy is working**
- **Views about democracy are more likely to be consistent with views related to national economic assessment**

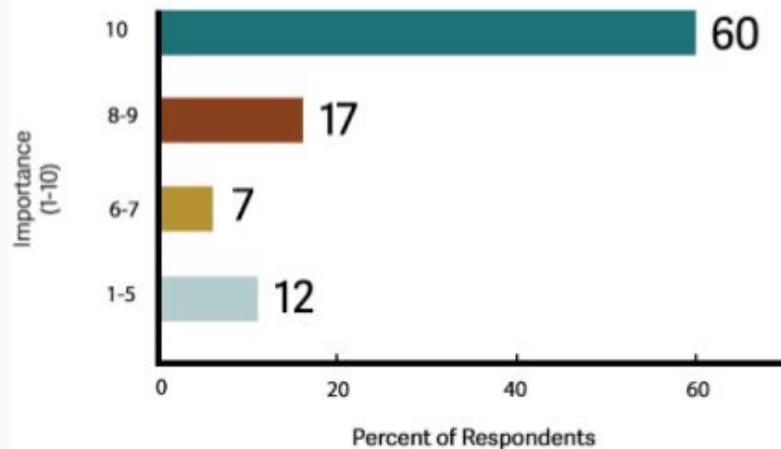
Source: Pew Research Center (2020)

How important is it to live in a democracy? Getting weaker?

The Democracy Project concluded in 2018: “A large majority of **Americans** consider it important to live in a democracy, but most also believe U.S. democracy is weak and getting weaker.”

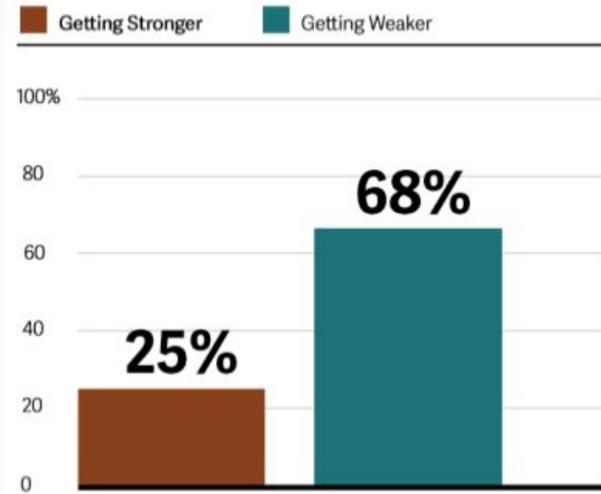
HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO LIVE IN A DEMOCRACY?

How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On a scale of 1-10, where 1 means it is “not at all important” and 10 means “absolutely important”, what position would you choose?



DEMOCRACY "GETTING WEAKER"

Generally speaking, would you mostly describe America's system of democracy these days as getting weaker or stronger?

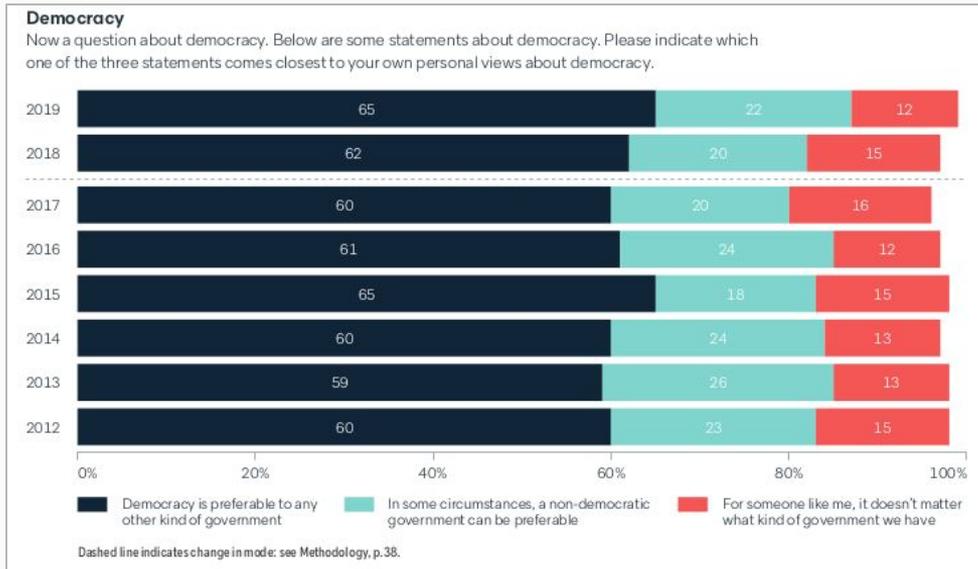


Source: Abramowitz, Blinken & Kuzmich (2018)

Attitudes towards democracy in Australia (Lowy Institute)

According to the Lowy Institute's 2019 survey, **support for democracy is stable**

- 65% of Australians think that '*democracy is preferred to any other kind of government*'
- 70% are *satisfied with the way democracy works* in Australia, despite having 5 prime ministers in 6 years



Very satisfied	13%
Fairly satisfied	57%
Total - very & fairly satisfied	70%
Not very satisfied	23%
Not at all satisfied	7%
Don't know	1%

"On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?"

Source: Lowy Institute (2019)

A focus of two threats to democracy

- **Populism**, where (authoritarian) leaders claim to represent the people & their interests &, yet, introduce anti-pluralistic & anti-liberal measures.
- **Digital technology**, which is becoming all too pervasive in our lives & has significant implications for political power & civil liberties, & consequently, for democracy itself.

What are the ramifications for Australian democracy?

What do we need to do to defend (or bolster) our evolving democracy?

The rise of populism

- The concept is not new
- **Born in the second half of the 19th century**
 - denouncing modernisation, social plutocracy & elected oligarchy
 - all in the name of the ordinary people
- **It took over from where fascism left off after World War Two**
- **It does not deny the legitimate role of elections**
- “... historically, fascism destroyed democracy after having successfully used its means, while populism undermines democracy without destroying it”

Source: Finchelstein & Urbinati (2018)

In the US, one of the foundational sites of the People’s Party in the late 19th century, there have been a range of populists figures: Huey Long, George Wallace, Pat Buchanan, Ross Perot & Sarah Palin, & now Donald Trump.

Source: Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo & Ostiguy (2017)

Populism: A simple definition?

Finchelstein and Urbinati (2018) argue that:

- A simple definition of populism is difficult to achieve because it is used in **ambiguous** & sometimes in **contradictory ways**
- It is **heavily context-based** within a polity's cultural & social character
- Populism is associated with **reconstructing state authority** & retains some **important elements of fascism** aimed at **mass appeal**
 - including **contestation of political tolerance & pluralism** (aimed at minorities)

While 'the people' emerge as a source of political authority and legitimise democratic politics, paradoxically, it also lays the foundations for populism; thus creating **an ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy**.

Source: Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo & Ostiguy (2017)

Populism: A contested notion

According to **Jan-Werner Müller (2017)**:

- Populism has “a set of distinct claims and has what one might call an **inner logic**”
 - it can be viewed as “**a particular *moralistic imagination of politics***”
 - morally pure
 - fully unified people against elites who are deemed to be corrupt or in some other way morally inferior
- Populists claim that **they, & only they, represent the people**
- Populism can linger in the background of representative democracy, **casting a shadow**
 - despite its appearance, it is not a friend of democracy



Müller's seven theses on populism

1. **Populism is not the authentic component of modern democracy, nor is it a type of pathology or irrationality;** it is “the permanent shadow of representative politics” because populists claim to be the only legitimate representatives of *the people*
2. **Political competitors are deemed to be essentially illegitimate** and anyone who does not support them is not part of *the people*; populists criticise elites and are opposed to pluralism
3. **Populists claim to represent the general will** or the common good as willed by *the people*; but there is no genuine process of will formation; policies are deduced from what populists believe to be the general will

Source: Müller (2017)

Müller's seven theses on populism (cont...)

4. **Populism is not necessarily a path to more participation in politics;** they simply want what they perceive to be the general will confirmed
5. **Populists can govern in accordance with their basic commitments** and will engage in taking over state institutions and in corrupting practices openly, supported by some moral justification
6. **They need to be criticised for what they are** (i.e. a threat to democracy); we should engage with them without accepting the way they frame societal problems and solutions
7. **Populism does not bring politics closer to *the people*;** it is not a corrective to liberal democracy; however, it can be useful in bringing attention to those parts of the population that are unrepresented or not being heard

Source: Müller (2017)

Populism in more recent times

“A wave of **left-wing populists** in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and to a lesser extent Argentina challenged neoliberal policies and promised the deepening of democracy.”

“**Right-wing nationalist** Jair Bolsonaro became Brazil’s president in 2019, while European right-wing populists are strengthening or consolidating in several countries.”

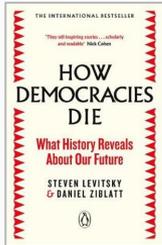
“**Donald Trump** brought populism from the margins to the center of US politics, winning the 2016 presidential election, whilst in the Philippines, India, Indonesia, South Africa, Turkey, and Israel populists are in power.”

Source: de la Torre & Mazzoleni (2019)

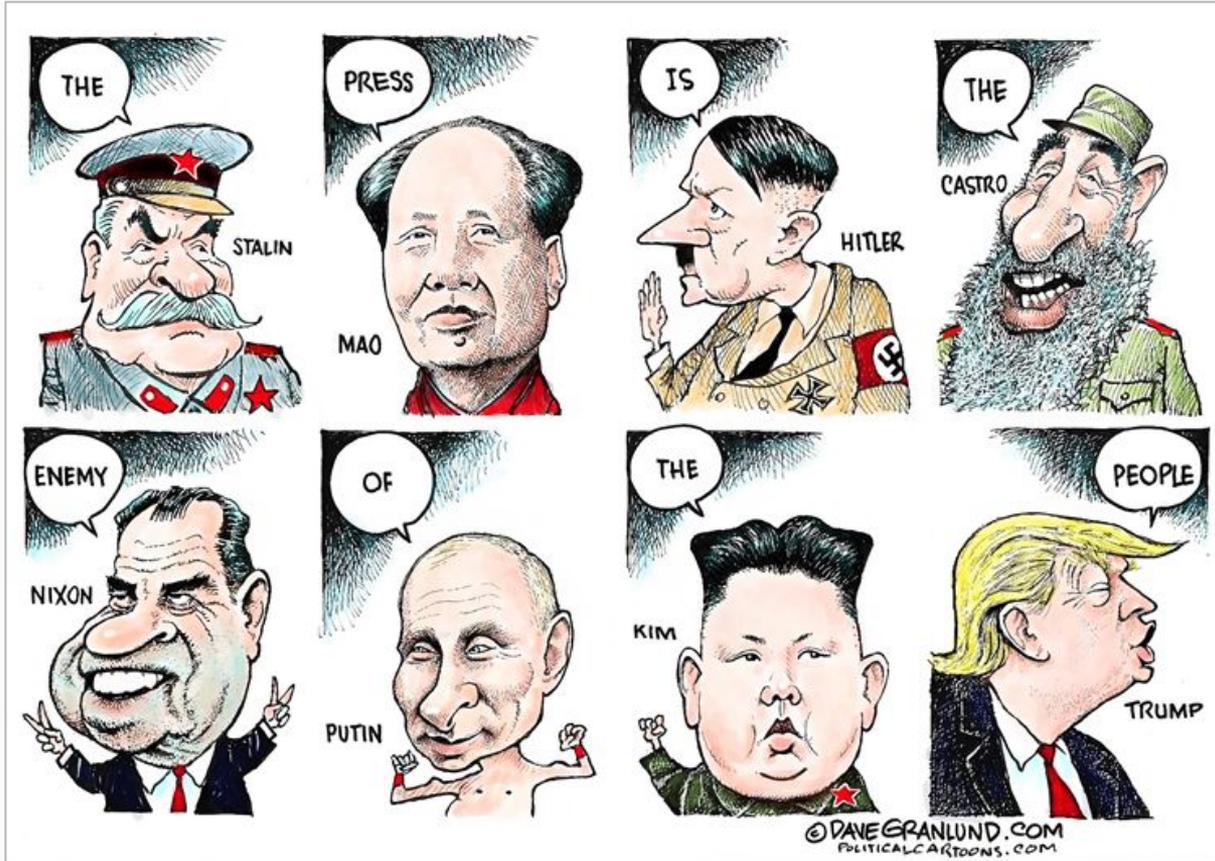
Three strategies used to consolidate power

- Elected authoritarian leaders use three strategies to bolster their power
- Trump has attempted to use all three

Strategy	Example
1. Capturing the referees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● FBI Director, James Comey - pressured to drop investigations of Michael Flynn, former National Security Director
2. Sidelining the key players	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Sections of the media are branded as “enemy of the American people” & dismissed as “fake news”
3. Rewriting the rules to tilt the playing field against opponents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The push for voter ID laws, based on a dubious claim of voter fraud being widespread; more recently, the attack on postal voting



The press versus 'the people'?



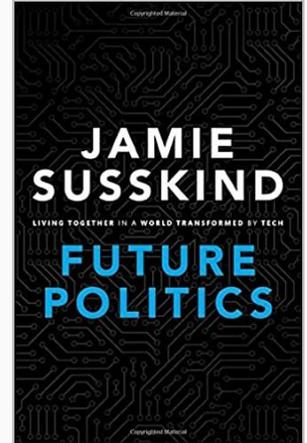
Populism in Australia

- **Relatively long history** starting with agrarian forms of populism in the mid-19th century
- Prime Minister **Menzies**' appeal to the 'forgotten people' in the 1940s had populist connotations
- **Bjelke-Petersen**, Queensland Premier from 1968 to 1987, can also be characterised as a populist who appealed to the 'ordinary people'
 - known for corruption, electoral gerrymander, attempts to silence the press & politicise the public service, including the police
- **Pauline Hanson**'s One Nation Party in the late 1990s and her political reemergence in 2016 falls within the purview of populism
- **Howard**, when he was Prime Minister, implemented arguably a pro-Hanson anti-immigration policy

Source: Moffitt (2017)

Digital technology is political

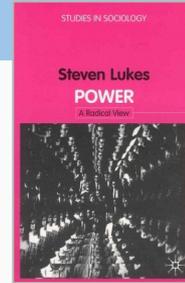
- Political order is built on cooperation, coordination & control
- In modern societies, the exchange & processing of information is essential, complex and voluminous
- The relationship between information & politics is fundamental, including:
 - Who owns & controls a given technology
 - How it is received & used by the public
 - Whether its possible uses are contemplated in advance
 - Whether it is directed toward a particular end
- The danger is that gradually (perhaps without us initially noticing) we become subjected to digital systems that we don't fully understand, let alone control



Source: Suskind (2018)

Power

Lukes' (2005) three dimensions of power:



- **One dimensional (behavioural)**
 - Focus on decision-making behaviour & overt conduct
- **Two dimensional (political)**
 - Ability to keep certain issues off the political agenda, including non-decision-making
- **Three dimensional (radical structural)**
 - Control of socialisation processes & political agendas by dominant groups
 - Exercising power over people by influencing, shaping &/or determining their very wants



Perception Control

“The final way to exert power over people, without subjecting them to force or scrutiny, is **to control what they know, what they think, and what they are prepared to say** about the world. A good way to get someone to refrain from doing something is **to prevent them from desiring it in the first place, or to convince them that their desire is wrong, illegitimate, shameful, or even insane.**”

Source: Susskind (2018: 142)

Filtering & perception control

Beyond our immediate experience, **we rely on others to filter what is important by:**

- Finding & gathering information
- Choosing what to report
- Deciding how much context & detail we need
- Presenting it in a digestible format

Filtering is incredibly powerful as a means of perception control

- It can influence our shared sense of what is:
 - right & wrong
 - fair & unfair
 - real & fake



WeChat, the 4th largest chat application in the world (900 million monthly users), is censored by key words. Emails with prohibited words are simply not sent to the intended receiver.

Source: Susskind (2018)

More 'deliberative' democracy? Or threats?

Does the internet provide a platform for a more 'deliberative' voice to 'the people'?
Is there more genuine public deliberation now?

Perception control

Those who own & operate digital systems have the power to shape our political preferences

Fragmented reality

Includes disintegration & polarisation of public discourse; confirmation bias; alternative facts; fake news

Anonymous participation

Encourages extreme behaviours that would not be accepted in face-to-face interactions

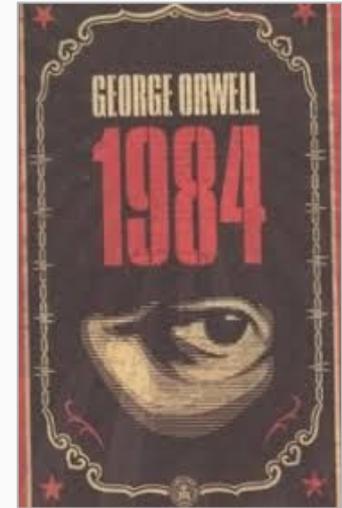
Use of bots (AI)

Could bots crowd out human voices?; power of digital intermediaries (foreign power interventions)

Source: Suskind (2018)

Censorship made easy

- Amazon had a dispute with a publisher in 2009
- As a consequences & without permission, Amazon deleted copies of the book in dispute on every Kindle device
 - possible because e-readers use cloud-based storage



Source: Susskind (2018)

China's social-credit system

- According to a slogan in planning documents, the China's national social-credit system aims to **“allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step”**.
- Once fully implemented, **it is more likely to look like an Orwellian exercise at public control to the detriment of civil liberties**.
- **A person can incur black marks for infractions** (such as public transport fare evasion, jaywalking & violating family planning rules).
- **A lower credit score has negative consequences** (such as inability to secure loans, diminished job prospects & limitations on school admissions)
- “In time, Beijing expects to draw on bigger, combined data pools, including a person's **internet activity**, according to interviews with some architects of the system and a review of government documents. **Algorithms would use a range of data to calculate a citizen's rating**, which would then be used to determine all manner of activities, such as who gets loans, or faster treatment at government offices or access to luxury hotels.”

Source: Chin & Wong (2016)

Ramifications for Australia

Our democracy is reasonably robust

- But, as with all political systems, it is evolving
- Can we afford to be complacent?
 - 12% respondents saying “it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have” &
 - 22% saying “in some circumstances, non-democratic government can be preferable” (Lowy Institute, 2019)
- Australia has not been immune from upheavals - for example:
 - 1975 constitutional crisis - dismissal of the Whitlam Government
 - Five prime ministers in six years - question of stability of our system of government
- And, we still have historical & systemic problems with different groups in our society
 - Minorities who feel disenfranchised (e.g. Australian aboriginals)

Ramifications for Australia: Questions for discussion

- **Populism**

- a. Is there a foreseeable threat from populist movements in Australia?
- b. Are these movements (e.g. One Nation) on the fringe?
- c. Do they have an influencing effect on mainstream politics?
- d. Do overseas populist developments affect us in Australia?

- **Digital technology**

- a. In what way does social media influence politics?
- b. Should we be concerned about external interference in our domestic politics?
- c. Should we be concerned with the ability of the large digital platforms (through perception control) to influence our practice of Australian democracy?

Philosophy Matters meeting

- There is a connection between developments in populism and digital technology.
- Questions about whether democracy is working as a system of government are separate (but interconnected) with questions about economic outcomes.

Further reading

- Abramowitz, M.J., Blinken, A. and Kuzmich, H. (2018) **The Democracy Project: Reversing a Crisis of Confidence**, George W. Bush Institute, Freedom House and Penn Biden Center, June, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2018/democracy-project>
- Chin, J. & Wong, G. (2016) China's New Tool for Social Control, **Wall Street Journal**, 29 November
- de la Torre, C. (2019) 'Do we need a minimum definition of populism? An appraisal of Mudde's conceptualisation', **Populism**, 2: 79-95
- Finchelstein, F. and Urbinati, N. (2018) 'On populism and democracy', **Populism**, 1: 15-37
- Foa, R.S., Klassen, A., Slade, M., Rand, A. and Williams, R. (2020) **The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020**, Centre for the Future of Democracy, Cambridge, UK
- Holden, B. (1974) **The Nature of Democracy**, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, Australia
- Kaltwasser, C.R., Taggart, P., Ochoa Espejo, P. and Ostiguy, P. (2017) 'Populism: An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art' in Kaltwasser, C.R., Taggart, P., Ochoa Espejo, P. and Ostiguy, P. (eds), **The Oxford Handbook of Populism**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
- Levitsky, S. and Ziblatt, D. (2018) **How Democracies Die**, Broadway Books, New York, USA

Further reading

- Lowy Institute (2019) **Poll 2019**, June, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/lowyinsitutepoll-2019.pdf>
- Lukes, S. (2005) **Power: A Radical View**, Second Edition, Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire, UK
- Moffitt, B. (2017) 'Populism in Australia and New Zealand' in Kaltwasser, C.R., Taggart, P., Ochoa Espejo, P. and Ostiguy, P. (eds), **The Oxford Handbook of Populism**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
- Müller, J. (2017) **What is Populism?**, Penguin Books, UK
- Pew Research Center (2020) **Democratic Rights Popular Globally but Commitment to Them Not Always Strong**, February, www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/27/satisfaction-with-democracy/
- Schumpeter, J.A. (1976) **Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy**, Fifth edition, George Allen & Unwin, London, UK
- Susskind, J. (2018) **Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
- The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020) **Democracy Index 2019: A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest**, <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>

Vince has been teaching post-graduate students at Monash University and other educational institutions since early 2015 as a sessional staff member. He has taught predominantly Human Resources Management (HRM), as well as, Principles of Negotiation, Managing Conflict, Organisational Behaviour and Change Management. Vince is well experienced with teaching and relating to international students from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Prior to his more recent teaching experience, Vince has had a long and diverse career in many managerial and advisory roles with a strong focus on HRM/employee relations and negotiations. These roles include Ministerial Adviser to two Industrial Relations Cabinet Ministers (during the Hawke Government), Senior Consultant with multinational consultancy firms (Price Waterhouse, SAP and Accenture), Human Resources Manager/Director (VicSuper and Tui Consulting), and Managing Director and Owner of an electronic security firm.

Vince has post-graduate business and management degrees (MA, University of Melbourne; MBA, University of Canberra; and a PhD, Monash University) encompassing HRM and related disciplines. He continues to have a strong interest in politics reflecting earlier studies in this area (BA, La Trobe University; and MLitt, University of New England).