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## Abstract

Who should wield the powers of government? Where do these powers come from? And how can we avoid derailments and abuses of power? Democracy is one of several possible answers to these three questions.

If the powers are in the hands of an absolute monarch or an absolute ruler, we should not worry if he is benevolent and compassionate. But we have to fear that an absolute monarch or a dictator becomes over time corrupted by his powers. Psychological research has indeed shown that power increases confidence and reduces inhibition and empathy. Fear of derailments is particularly justified if the holder of power is surrounded by yes-men or by shady advisers who try to implement their own agenda. We therefore have to fear that an absolute ruler will not act for the well-being of his subjects but arbitrarily and exclusively for his own benefit or for the benefit of his noble class of people.

We now classify natural selfishness as abuse of power because the subjects of a ruler are no longer the ruler's personal property that he has the right to use and to exploit as he pleases. Subjects of a monarch are now individual citizens with rights that the ruler has to respect and that he manages on their behalf. To avoid abuses of power, parliaments that people elect, control the monarch and limit his powers. We call this a constitutional monarchy. Examples of constitutional monarchies are today the United Kingdom, Sweden and Japan where the monarchs have next to no power but ample funds for pomp.

Government power and authority in a democracy do not come from God or from the virtue and wisdom of wise men at the helm but they come from the people. This raises the question how we can ensure that a mass of people exercises these powers more wisely than a compassionate monarch. Can people power be compassionate?

The question how to avoid abuses and derailments actually arises for all forms of government. It is the ubiquitous conflict (Spannungsfeld) between freedom and authority. Any government needs authority to be efficient and people want freedom from authority. To solve this paradox is the main problem in all government systems. This is not easy. We can only judge by the results. *'When the people are afraid of the government, that's tyranny. But when the government is afraid of the people, that's liberty'*. This is the litmus test that Thomas Jefferson, the third American president, had proposed at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

People developed the call for democracy when enlightenment destroyed the claim of monarchs that God gave them enormous power and the right use these powers freely. People in past centuries were probably aware that monarchs had these powers and privileges but they took it as a natural or God-given phenomenon. Doubt about the godly source and justification of these powers led to the replacement of absolute monarchies with republics, in which the main and most important characteristic was the absence of a monarch. Once people had killed the monarch or had chased him away, all other features of republics were not clear. Democracies promoted different answers to the questions, who should exercise the people power and what the ultimate goals and values of a republic should be. Republics developed in different directions. Some republics emphasize human rights and civil liberties. Other republics, which call themselves Peoples' Republics, made the socialist struggle against bourgeoisie the raison d'être of state and government. Other countries like Nepal or former East Germany refer to their system as democratic republics or people's republic, which each sound like a tautology: two words with similar meanings. Yet other republics, which call themselves Islamic republics, see their main purpose in the service of Allah, of Muhammad and of the Quran.

Synodality is the name for a style of governance in the Catholic church and in other religious organizations, in which people listen to one another in a spirit of participation, collaboration and shared responsibility. Conservative thinkers in the Catholic church oppose 'synodality' arguing that the church is not answerable to its people but only to a higher power that God exercises through his representative on earth. If current trends prevail, I predict that people with equal rights will elect the Pope in free and fair elections within probably one century if the Catholic church then still exists.

At the beginning of the democratic evolution, only distinguished people like land owners and wealthy people were eligible to elect a government and there was at the beginning the opinion that the country was generally in good hands if privileged people who had with their wealth an important stake in society would govern the country. Government was management of assets – not management of people. Ordinary and common citizens were not eligible to participate in government because they had no significant assets. Women, black, poor people and Chinese had no rights anyway.

Human rights movements then added the principle of equality. As a result of their efforts, women, blacks and other under-privileged citizens became eligible to go to the polls. This created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – not even hundred years ago - the doctrine of universal suffrage, which made every citizen eligible to vote. Democracy with universal suffrage, combined with a guarantee of human rights became a political model that American democratic missionaries energetically propagate for implementation in the entire world. But the US try to promote democracy only to bring down or destabilize non-democratic governments in countries that compete with the US for dominance in the world. China is the prime target. Democracy has become the battle cry and a weapon of US foreign policy.

The system of universal suffrage gave the mass of people the right to determine their government no matter whether voters are educated, mentally healthy or if they are committed to democracy and its underlying values. Universal suffrage allows even enemies of democracy to go to the polls. This is a feature that risks to auto-destroy existing democracies. In historical terms, the concept of universal suffrage is very recent. It is still in a testing phase and there are clear indicators that the test will end in failure.

It is an overly brave assumption that a collective of people acts wisely in the interest of the common good. Such an assumption was possibly justified 100 years ago when people generally had a relatively healthy sense of responsibility and did not make selfish interests their highest priorities. People were 100 years ago probably as gullible as they are today but because the internet did not exist at that time, the masses did not easily become victims of mass messages with blatantly fake news and inflammatory content. Influencers and troll farms can now use mass psychology to direct the public opinion into any direction that they chose. Modern democracies have not yet built a defense against such dark maneuvers. Self-healing or self-organizing capacities in democracies are not strong enough to neutralize extremists on one side of the political spectrum with extremists on the other side. In addition, most democracies neglect civic education, which is essential for a democracy to function.

Modern democracies in larger countries have developed gigantic administrations with overly complex laws, rules and procedures. All this overwhelms the majority of citizens. People have practically no access to justice because it has become unaffordable and court proceedings take far too much time. Dissatisfaction prevails.

In addition, high taxes drain the purses of average citizens while the masses of millionaires avoid paying taxes.

As a result, the democratic system in the US and slowly also in other countries like Canada has become or is about to become dysfunctional. It seems that the experiment of democracy with universal suffrage has failed. People have lost trust in government institutions. They feel that institutions are corrupted by elites, corporations and foreign influencers. People have started to demand changes that will probably not be possible with democratic elections and with peaceful methods.

## **Preliminaries**

Democracy is a word that many people use as easily as they use glorious but vague words like morality, justice and freedom. All these words greatly shine like gold on the surface but their meaning is vague inside. People use these and similarly glowing words in different contexts and with meanings that are different from speaker to speaker and different in the minds of listeners of speeches. 'I am in favor of democracy' is a nice statement but it has completely different meanings when the speaker is Xi Jinping, the president of China, or Donald Trump or a freedom fighter in Hong Kong.

Mother Nature or God have not created phenomena like democracy, justice or morality. These phenomena are man-made. Nature has not created humans as equals and as moral persons. In the opposite: human beings are selfish predators by nature. The Latin language has the usual short saying for this truth: "Homo homini lupus est". Man is a wolf to man. It means that people – like wolves - have by nature the qualities of being predatory, cruel and inhuman.

Equality, morality and rights are human inventions. In addition, these concepts are not written in stone. They vary from culture to culture and are subject to dramatic changes during the course of history. I wonder what human rights will look like in 500 years and I would also like to know how history books in 1,000 years will describe liberal democracies if they bother mentioning them as an ephemeral historical phenomenon.

There seems to be only one clear understanding of the word democracy today. It is when Americans and other western politicians in official speeches use this catchword to refer to their own political system as prestigious. They put their own system in contrast with systems like in China and Russia, and claim that these regimes are not good because they are different. They call other systems undemocratic and authoritarian and want to make people in these countries free by imposing on them democracy in American style.

Some members of the republican party in the US associate democracy with the values of 'faith, family and freedom' (FFF). They call the democrats, the members of the other party in the US, "God-denying demons" and accuse them of pursuing communism. But their use of the word communism is totally free of any precise meaning except that the word refers to a dystopian world. Republicans want to create fear that a horrible situation will develop if the voters allow the democratic party to win any democratic election.

A republican candidate for the post as senator of Georgia showed total ignorance of government systems. He claimed during his campaign for the 2022 mid-term elections that he knew the horror of communism because as a soldier he had been stationed in West Berlin and had seen the Berlin Wall with his own eyes and therefore considers himself as an expert. He then compared the president Joe Biden, who is a democrat, with Erich Honecker, the last leader of the communist party in East Berlin. How silly some American politicians can be to make such comparisons! How silly the listeners of such speeches are who seem to be impressed by somebody who claims that he knows the horrors of communism because he has seen one side the Berlin Wall with his own eyes but does not mention that he has not seen the other side. You could as well say that you know everything about Catholicism because you have seen the Pope when he kissed a child on St Peter's Square.

Details and accuracy of the comparison between democracy and communism don't count in a belligerent political environment. The term democracy has become a rallying cry that sounds as if there existed only two forms of political systems in our world, namely democracy, which is the only respectable system on one hand and – on the other hand - authoritarian regimes or communism, which are evil systems.

American politicians are missionaries. They see it as their obligation towards their almighty God to convert these evil systems into democracies and to free the unfortunate people living in these countries from dictatorship. However, as we will see further below, there is not only black and white, good and evil. Democracy and communism actually share both good and evil – perhaps in different ratios. No system is perfect, particularly not the American democracy. It might have been a good concept hundred years ago, but it will fail if it is unable to adapt to circumstances that have dramatically changed since then.

Under-privileged and poor citizens who lived in absolute monarchies called for a fundamental change of the political system when they realized that noble rulers at the top of the country enriched themselves at their expense and disregarded the wishes and aspirations of the commoners. People actually were aware of this injustice; they noticed it clearly. But they accepted it as God-given. The triumphant advance of enlightenment, which started in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, had cast serious doubts about the claim by the rulers that God had given them the exclusive privilege to govern the country. People started challenging the claim of rulers that the creator of the universe had appointed them exclusively to translate God's will into government action. Disobeying the king was therefore the same as disobeying God. The regime in Iran, which is a theocratic country, maintains even today the view that demonstrating against the government is '*war against God*' or '*corruption on earth*' which gives them, as they claim, the right and the obligation to punish the offenders with death. But if elections are the main criterion, Iran and Russia are democracies.

Confucianism reflected on the justification of powers that Chinese emperors exercised over their subjects. Confucianism like all other Chinese religions or philosophies does not include the possible existence of a God. Therefore, the powers of emperors cannot be God-given. Confucius (孔子- kǒng zǐ) was born in 551 BC. He taught as philosopher and political theorist that a ruler can justify his powers only if he is virtuous. Virtue is the source of power and authority, he said. Confucius developed this idea, which sounds utopian, from his general worldview. He developed this view when he observed the downfall of the Shang dynasty. This dynasty started its glorious development around 1600 BC. By the year 1046 BC, when the dynasty violently ended, the morality of the government had dramatically declined. The rulers lacked virtues and had therefore lost legitimacy. The idea that virtue legitimizes a government is brilliant like many bright concepts. But the devil is in details. One huge problem is to decide who will be the judge to decide if a government is virtuous or not. The second problem is how people can get rid of a government that is not virtuous. Violence and revolutions are regular solutions; ballot boxes are not, because authoritarian rulers don't allow free elections.

Catholics are today still subject to the principle of God-given power of the Pope. The church argues that the ultimate leader receives his wisdom directly from the creator of the universe. He is infallible and is therefore always right. For this reason, democracy has no room in the Catholic church even though pressure from people forces the hands of the Pope more and more often. The Pope gives in because he has no longer the tools of bloody inquisitions to fight heresy and to silence critics. He also offers compromises to avoid that his sheep take the liberty to run away and no longer pay money into the church's coffers. However, the Catholic Church still considers the defection not merely a hostile act but condemn apostasy still as a mortal sin against God leading to eternal damnation. For some theologians in previous centuries apostasy was a sin as serious as adultery and murder.

An increasing number of enlightened Catholics today don't care and don't fear eternal damnation. In Germany alone, 522,821 people disaffiliated in 2022 after 359,338 Catholics had removed themselves from parish registers during the year before.

Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) follow the traditional theocratic view that government powers come from God and not from the people. The governing body of JW consists of three members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. They claim for themselves the status of prophets and are the church's spiritual leaders. JW maintain that its members have no say because the governing body – not its members – receives revelations directly from God. This governing body is God's only and exclusive organization on earth while they reject all other government bodies as Satan's organizations.

The Bible supports the view that we must respect government as God-sanctioned authority. The Bible says that *"every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."* (Romans 13:1). *"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation"* (Romans 13:2). These passages say that you must *"obey your leaders and submit to them"* (Hebrews 13:17) unless government action conflicts with their faith. In such a case, faith prevails and the church allows a Christian to disobey but does not allow to fight back.

Christians don't clarify the process by which God appoints the *'governing authorities'*. In a democracy, the political parties nominate the candidates for elections and the people elect the candidates who then decide the political agenda of a coalition government. I cannot see that God guides these processes unless I say that whatever happens is God's will.

When some 120 to 130 cardinals meet in the Vatican's conclave to elect a new Pope, they claim that the Holy spirit guides them. The more often the cardinals pray during the meeting, the more reliable the Holy Ghost's guidance will be, they say. They shily admit that the Holy Spirit does not entirely eliminate their free will. But it is actually no secret that the winds of current politics guide the cardinals more than the Holy Spirit. The Catholic monarchs of France and of Spain and the emperor of Austria had a right of veto in papal elections, which they called *jus exclusivae*. This right of secular authorities, which Pope Pius X abolished in 1904 also indicates that it is not God who anoints the Pope.

Jehovah's Witnesses also don't give a believable answer to the question by which procedure God has appointed their governing body and how God anointed its members. All rulers who claim to be appointed by God don't answer the question by which process God has given them powers. But independent from this question, the passages of the Bible that I have just quoted, clearly state that the power comes from God and does not come from the people. Nobody on this earth before the era of enlightenment has dared making the revolutionary claim that government power is with the people and not with God. When the Good Book mentions people power, it is not the power to govern society but only the *'power to become the sons of God'* (John 1:12) or the *'power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases'* (Luke 9:1).

People during the ages of evolving enlightenment started realizing that common individuals must have the right to limit the arbitrary powers of the traditional rulers. From there it was only a small further step to claim that the source of powers to rule the country was exclusively with the people. In countries like the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark, the monarchy survived after the people had stripped the monarch of virtually all powers. The French, in contrast, killed the 38 years old king Louis XVI under the Guillotine in 1793 to make sure that he really became powerless. It is one of the French particularities that the monarchy nevertheless re-appeared on and off after the French Revolution until 1848 when they finally abolished the monarchy and proclaimed the Second Republic with a president at its helm. However, the French president behaves like a king and lives and works in the same premises and with the same furniture that their monarchs had used. The only difference is that the *'Président de la Republique'* does not wear the last emperor's crown when he meets people. I also believe that the French, when they meet their president, no longer kiss his ring on one finger of his hands. It would today be anyway not a ring of a godly investiture but his wedding ring. But the current president Macron avoids this issue as he has decided not to wear a wedding ring.

In ancient times the kings and rulers did not only own the land and its resources but also their subjects, which we now say are sovereign citizens. According to this old and outdated concept, a person was not master of himself but a piece of property. This is enshrined in the Bible, in which God says that *"everyone*



*belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me” (Ezekiel 18:4).* And this goes along with the biblical perception that righteous human beings-are-God’s slaves.

Some preachers keep the Christian dogma of righteous slavery and the perception of human beings as God’s property occasionally still alive in writings and in sermons. But the mainstream perception is now that individual citizens are not slaves but are autonomous and free and that nature has given the people the right to exercise all political powers collectively. Leaders in democracies are no longer God’s representatives but representatives of the collective of all people.

We must consider two important issues when we give the power to govern to a collective of free individuals. Firstly, we are confronted with the general question if individual persons really act with a free will or to what extent external factors influence decisions of individuals more or less unconsciously. Internal chemistry and instincts also control involuntarily peoples’ opinions and decisions and makes them selfish. These factors also influence the decisions that monarchs and dictators make. But these rulers have a more distant view, which might be more objective. They might also verify their opinions and decisions by listening to advisors and courtiers. All this creates some sort of faint safeguard against errors and bias. Members of the general public don’t employ advisors and the blind often guides the blind. Many external factors like propaganda and internet have a strong influence on the will of individual people.

The second, more important, question is how the will of a crowd develops. A complicated mass psychology governs the behavior of masses. The process, in which masses make decisions, is different from the process that leads to the decision of an individual. Individuals might act rationally but crowds mostly do not. In his book ‘The Republic’, which he wrote in 380 BC, the Greek philosopher Plato called politics a dirty business by which unthinking masses are manipulated. Each individual might be a cunning fox, but when individuals are in a mass, they become a herd of rams. This truth still holds today. We know this as a fact but this does amazingly not tarnish our high appreciation for the collective holy power of masses.

In a simple and glorious sounding definition, a democracy reigns in a country, if the powers of legislation and government are in the hands of a collective of individuals who are each autonomous and free. I feel happy when I am in front of one free and reasonable individual, but I feel uncomfortable when I am squeezed into a mass of people over which I have next to no influence. I am not easily convinced that the will of the masses develops rationally and produces healthy results.

Article 1 of the Chinese constitution uses the term ‘democratic dictatorship’ (mínzhǔ zhuānzhèng -民主专政). Mao Zedong coined this term as communist ideology, which gives dictatorial political powers exclusively to the working class that became the dictator of the bourgeois class. In a speech at the occasion of the 28th anniversary of the communist party in 1940, Mao Zedong argued that *‘it is only the working class that is most far-sighted, most selfless and most thoroughly revolutionary’*. Only very few people nowadays share the view that the populace, including the working class, is far-sighted and selfless.

For an individual like me it does not really matter whether the restrictions and the nonsense, to which I am often exposed, come from an individual dictator or from the dictatorship of the working class or from a majority of my co-citizens. I prefer living under a benevolent dictator. My mother, for example, acted like a compassionate dictator when I was a child. I prefer living in such a situation instead of living in the dictatorship of a mass of many immature individuals who themselves live under the dictatorship of mass psychology.

Current critics claim that democracy violates the inherent rights of individuals. The rule of the majority, they argue, violates minority rights. They are right if the majority has a ‘winner-take-all’ attitude and does not respect legitimate interests of the minority.

Ron DeSantis, the governor of Florida declared his disrespect for minorities by saying *'I may have earned 51 percent of the vote, but that entitled me to wield 100 percent of the executive power, and I resolved to use it to advance conservative principles'*. This is another form of 'democratic dictatorship'. Thomas Jefferson, the third American president put it this way: *'Democracy is when two wolves and a sheep decide what will be on the menu'*.

The vox populi is likely to be less inclined to respect the interests of minorities than an autocratic ruler who might look at the situations from above like a (hopefully) compassionate judge if he is not guided by his own selfish interests.



Democratic Assembly in Glarus

Citizens in Switzerland exercise the power of government for certain issues not through legislative representatives but directly in citizens' meetings. It is aptly called direct democracy or pure democracy. The people in cantons like Appenzell or Glarus meet on a public square to elect their representatives in the Council of States by show of hands. But this form of direct democracy does obviously not prevent mass psychology from doing damage. Switzerland uses otherwise referendums as another form of pure democracy.

Some other countries also know and practice referendums in various different ways. They call this instrument 'Initiative and Referendum' (I&R), which exists since the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the US. I&R provides for the possibility that a referendum has to approve certain legislative projects. They later expanded it to allow citizens to initiate legislation. The German constitution provides for referendums on federal level only for the adaptation of a new constitution, which has never happened. As a side note I want to mention that it was actually the military government that promulgated the German constitution (Grundgesetz). They did not ask the German people if they wanted this constitution. Germans silently accepted it.

A referendum in Germany can also be held for the redesign of the boundaries of provinces (Länder), which happened twice since 1949. The law on provincial level allows referendums more widely but cleverly not for issues of taxes and state budgets. This ensures that people don't do what they probably would do, for example, to lower or abolish taxes. Initiatives to cut property taxes were successful in the 1970's in some states of the USA. As a result, some 15 states lowered Income tax rates. But governments afterwards slowly increased taxes again to much higher levels than before.

People in all democracies don't exercise their powers directly but delegate these powers to a few men and women who represent the people. Each member in the US house of representatives represents a congressional district with between 700,000 to 750,000 people. These numbers are between 112,000 to 115,000 in Germany and approximately 6,000 people in Vanuatu, which has a total population of only 320,000 people.

The representatives in parliament must be duly appointed in free and regular elections. The need to let the vox populi talk through representatives creates very much indirectness. The voice of an individual is like a drop in a huge bucket of water.

Some features of the democratic concept are so counterproductive that they have the potential to destroy democracy. In addition, some forces inherent in democracies damage society. They also damage the interests of individuals that democracy is supposed to protect. I will explain this with more details in the next sections. In summary, I think that people, who are the main actors in a democracy, are paradoxically the weakest elements for a democracy to flourish and to succeed.



Next to nobody in our world *'is most far-sighted, most selfless'*, as Mao Zedong stated for the members of the working class. Most people are selfish sinners. This is why we need laws and must enforce laws. It would be foolish to abolish laws with the delusional assumption that people will always do the right things. People have to be domesticated to behave responsibly. Democracy, in contrast, bases its concept on the delusional assumption that people will selflessly act according to the spirit of a well-functioning liberal democracy.

Too many people today abuse the democratic system. But western democracies establish only insufficient checks, controls and remedies to reign in abusive selfishness. They seem to be unable to neutralize their enemies. As I had mentioned above, there is a wide area of conflict (Spannungsfeld) between freedom and authority. It is often difficult or even impossible to mediate in situations of controversies. Stefan Zweig, the Austrian writer, described the dilemma by saying: *"Freedom is not possible without authority - otherwise it would turn into chaos and authority is not possible without freedom - otherwise it would turn into tyranny"*. This is a nice description of the problem. But Zweig, like many others who quote the problem, do not in any way indicate a solution.

We apply the concept of democracy in a wider sense in situations when all members of a group or organization participate with equal rights in decision-making processes. Education consultants discuss the implementation of democratic principles in family life under the term of 'democratic parenting'. It sounds silly if this means that all family members will vote – for example – about whether to spend holidays on the sea or in the mountains, where to live or which car to buy. Parents with three or more children will always be overruled. Parents with one child will regularly overrule their offspring unless a helicopter mother sides with the child and the father becomes the victim as a constant minority. Children cannot responsibly decide whether the parents can finance the purchase of a family mansion with a huge bank loan. But while we reject democracy in financial decisions in families, democracies put financing of fancy government projects into the hands of irresponsible voters.

However, democratic parenting is primarily not about casting votes. It is about familiarizing children with democratic principles. Casting a vote is only the final step. More important steps prior to this are the correct establishment of facts, engagement in orderly group discussions and learning how to cooperate, to compromise and to build consensus. When people cannot compromise on differences in fundamental issues, the task is to become tolerant and to live peacefully with different opinions and with unwelcome rules.

Equally important in democratic parenting is to familiarize the children with the importance of justice and with the need for rules and laws. If parents acquaint their children with this important ingredient of democracy, children learn in the micro-cosmos of the family how democracy should work in society. Democratic parenting is an excellent idea if parents have the time and the patience to practice this type of democracy within the family.

Another method of familiarizing youth with democratic processes is the participation in sessions of mock parliaments. Students will in such sessions – amongst other things -learn to understand the parliamentary procedure and will learn techniques of group discussion and how to arrive at a decision after group discussions.

I think that democracies should practice democratic parenting and mock parliament sessions in all educational establishments at all educational levels as models for democracy in the nation.

## Political Parties and political Freedom

Political Parties are associations of people who share the same or similar political and economic interests that they want to promote as a group in their country. Before political parties became in the 19<sup>th</sup> century rallying points for groups of people who share interests and values, different cliques formed around either nobles or business people to promote their respective interests in politics. We would today call them lobby groups. Before these groupings became political parties, people in the US called them 'factions' with the underlying fear and risk that these 'factions' could lead to a division of the nation. As we can observe today, their fear was justified and the risk has fully materialized. Democracy in the US is divided into hostile factions. The two-party system in the US polarizes the nation. People tend to think in terms of 'we are the right people' as opposed to the 'others' who are fundamentally wrong.

We find two-party, multiparty, and single-party systems. Each of these systems seem to reflect different levels of political pluralism, which allegedly is weak in a one-party system and is strong in a multi-party system. But this does not exclude pluralism within a political party as we observe in the republican party in the US, which is not monolithic. Their members are united by their shared lip service to a conservative democracy. But different factions disunite the party. Some members are moderate republicans, which hardliners call RINOs (Republicans in Name Only). We then have members of the so-called Tea Party, Freedom Caucus and other populist groups who promote nationalism and Trump's "America First" policies.

As a side note I want to mention that Donald Trump, who claims to have invented the MAGA catchphrase (Make America Great Again), has actually stolen it from Ronald Reagan, the 40<sup>th</sup> president of the US, who had used exactly the same slogan in his election campaign twenty years before Donald Trump.

Unlike in the German constitution, where Article 21 establishes the system of political parties, this system is not mentioned in the constitution of the US but parties exist and are very influential.

The main purpose of political parties is to participate in democratic elections and to win seats in legislative assemblies. The important initial goal is to get as many candidates as possible printed on the ballot paper. It is not easy for an independent individual to get his name printed on ballot papers. The next important goal of a party is to get their candidates elected as members of parliament. Parties need massive funding to promote their candidates during election campaigns. Individuals rarely have the strength to attract wealthy donors.

In many democracies the majority of parliament members elect the prime minister, chancellor or president or whatever they call the head of their governments. In these systems, parliamentarians can change their minds any time during a legislative period. They can topple the head of government with a vote of no-confidence. This has happened in post-war Germany only once in 1982 when parliament (Bundestag) toppled chancellor Helmut Schmidt and replaced him with Helmut Kohl.

This situation is different in the US. Not the parliament but an electorate college with 538 members elects the president every four years. Parliament cannot change this appointment. They cannot elect another president.

Another feature of the American democratic system is that not the parties determine their candidates. Instead, the parties ask their members to determine the candidate for presidential elections. They call this procedure 'the primaries'. The leader of the majority party becomes automatically the prime minister in the UK and in Canada. When the party elects a new leader, the country has a new prime minister.

The system in France is also different. People elect their president, whom they call 'Président de la République' directly every five years. They elect their parliamentarians in separate elections called 'les législatives'. This has often the same result as in the US, where the president can belong to another party

than the majority in the parliament. This majority calls the shots and can make the political life of the president difficult but the parliament has not the power to replace him. This awkward situation is in France even more pronounced since the parliament elects the prime minister, with whom the president has to govern the country. He cannot dismiss ministers but can only dissolve parliament. The French call this complicated situation 'cohabitation' – living together but not loving each other.

The numbers of political parties are different in every country. Countries like Vietnam, China, North Korea and Cuba know only one political party and don't allow other parties to exist. More than 200 parties, including the Libertarian Party, Green Party and Constitution Party operate on state level in the US but only two parties are active in federal elections. These are the republican party and the democratic party.

In Nepal, where I worked for some time at the Supreme Court, 122 political parties participated in the 2013 election, which is the year 2070 in the Nepali calendar. A total of 30 parties made it to the Constituent Assembly, as they call their parliament. The list of national parties now includes only seven parties, including two popular communist parties.

Multiple parties reflect politic pluralism and the diversities of opinions and ideologies in the general public. The more parties there are, the more difficult it becomes to form coalition governments and to keep these coalitions alive because parliamentarians jump ships and form frequently new coalitions to replace the government and its leader.

During the Third (1875–1940) and Fourth (1946–58) Republics of France a government lasted on average less than nine months. An infamous example of parliamentary instability was the Republic of Weimar in Germany, which lasted from 1919 until Hitler took over in 1933. Ballot papers showed often more than 30 parties that fielded each many candidates. The Reichstag in 1930 had members from 14 different parties. As a result of disagreements about main political issues, government became powerless and the head of government, called chancellor, changed 15 times between 1919 and 1933. Nine general elections were held during the same fourteen-years.

Western critics do not recognize countries as democracies if they feature a one-party system. Western politicians say that every citizen must have the freedom to create associations, including political parties. This is a fundamental right that, for example, article 9 of the German constitution (Grundgesetz) guarantees. The critics of one-party systems say that citizens in a fully-fledged democracy must have a choice between different political parties even if some of them have fundamentally different concepts and advocate ideas and values that are divisive and disintegrating.

The critics of the one-party system are right insofar as citizens in China and in Vietnam cannot choose between political parties with different ideologies. The critics of a one-party system say that critics in true democracies must enjoy the freedom to challenge the current system and to question the prevailing fundamental values.

In western countries a constitutional court can prohibit a political party only if it is a direct and imminent danger for democracy or if the association presents an acute danger for the existence of the nation. Longer-term dangers that slowly creep in and undermine the political order, do not seem to be of concern. People and parties have the unchallenged right to advocate anti-democratic concepts. These undemocratic ideas might evolve over time like a cancer, which we cannot cure once it is fully developed and becomes active like a metastasis. At one point in the future, it will become impossible to restore the health of the political system.

The 'Alternative für Deutschland' (AfD) in Germany is an example of a political party that represents extremely right-wing positions. Björn Höcke, AfD's de-facto leader, openly declared that his ultimate goal

is to dismantle the current political system and to abolish the German nation (Bundesrepublik Deutschland). The AfD is not actively working on the implementation of their ideas, which they just promote in speeches and in print. The authorities in a democracy cannot intervene because the constitutional freedom of speech covers such statements even when they have a negative long-term impact on the public opinion. They preach opposition against fundamental values but formally declare that they are dedicated democrats. They just want to offer, as they say, German citizens a real political alternative in all areas. The German constitution actually does not allow such fundamental changes. But authorities must let them advocate fundamental changes because the party declares that they want to adhere to democracy and to the rule of law and their members don't walk the streets with assault rifles.

The threshold for the courts to declare a party illegal is very high in democracies, because the respect of freedom of speech is even higher. This allows extremist parties to operate freely and to pursue goals that envisage dramatic changes of the fundamental values and features of the nation. And – as always – the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The louder and the more populist and the more violent a movement speaks, the more it will find the ears of the people – particularly the ears of those who are unhappy with their current situation for whatever reasons. Some people are never happy and always want changes. They eagerly follow the promoters of promising ideas as the rats followed the Rat-Catcher of Hamelin (Rattenfänger von Hameln). We can currently observe such rat-catchers in the US. Movements like the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and Q'Anon are such rat catchers. These organizations promote publicly the – even violent – abolition of government and the establishment of a utopian anarchy while authorities look on and unfortunately don't intervene.

Carlo Schmid, a constitutional lawyer, was one of the fathers of the 1949 German constitution (Grundgesetz). He voiced the opinion *'that it is not part of the concept of democracy that it itself creates the conditions for its elimination'* and he added that *'we must also have the courage to be intolerant towards those who want to use democracy to kill it'*.

Countries like China avoid the risk that subversive parties develop by allowing only one single political party, which they consider to be the custodian of the nation's founding ideology and its fundamental values. As a result, it looks difficult to change fundamental features even if expedient changes would be advantageous. The inability to adjust to reality was the reason why the communist party in the former Soviet Union failed.

The Chinese Communist Party, in contrast, has since 1949 shown the incredible flexibility to move the country decisively away from Mao's catastrophic policies that the first chairman of the communist party had based on Marxism-Leninism. Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, called *gǎi gé kāi fàng* (改革开放 – opening and reform), started in the early 1980's. The reform movement has fundamentally changed the country, which is now completely different from what it used to be under chairman Mao. These policy changes would have been possible in western countries only by a change of the constitution or by a revolution. In China the changes were the result of processes within the single communist party, which has inside its organization clear rules. I believe that these rules are within the definition of democracy.

The critics of a one-party system are right because citizens in China and in Vietnam have no choice of different ideologies. But – at the same time - they are wrong at least in the case of China. They are firstly wrong because people in China have the right to join the party and, therefore, can participate in the management of the country. This includes the right of party members to disapprove current policies and to make suggestions for changes.

The critics of the one-party system in China are secondly wrong because there is democracy inside the party. The party appoints officials on all levels in free elections. They make most decisions by the majority votes in the party committees. In China and in Vietnam - like in the former Soviet Union – the communists call these processes ‘democratic centralism’ (mínzhǔ zhuānzhèng - 民主专政). This system allows open discussion and criticism of policies. But these discussions are under central control to guarantee party unity and discipline. A condition for criticism is that party members respect and uphold agreed decisions until the party changes them with democratic processes inside their organization. The opposition in western democracies – even if they are members of parliament – takes the liberty to fight and even to boycott decisions that the government or majorities in parliament have made in a democratic process. The continuous hyper-partisan fights between democratic and republican parties in the US are examples of an unhealthy and divisive political environment, in which one party criticizes opinions and decisions not because they are wrong but because it was the opposite party that voiced the opinion or made a decision. This is conceptually different in other countries like Germany, where people's representatives in parliament take an oath of office by which they pledge to dedicate their strength to the good of the people – and not to the good of a party. This is a nice concept that remains theoretical as we see further below.

Republican parliamentarians in the US know that their voters are behind a principled attitude. A CNN survey in 2023 asked republican voters if their party should ‘*stand firm on beliefs without compromise, even if not much gets done in Washington*’. More than half of the respondents confirmed this question. The goal of an opposition party in the US is not to work towards the common interest by seeking compromises. The goal is not to create a society, in which people with fundamentally different positions can live peacefully together. No, they want the total victory of their ideological position and want to bring down the government before the next democratic elections.

In China and in Vietnam, which I both know well, members of parliament are free to voice their opinion, even if they are critical of government. But this freedom ends when the majority has made a decision. You don't oppose a duly made decision. Critics of the one-party system point at photos of sessions of the National Congress, in which all delegates without exception lift their right arm to approve a policy or a law. The critics tell you that the delegates are voting fodder in a rubber-stamp parliament. This is similar to democratic parliaments where a party whip ensures that all members devotedly share the party's agenda and vote in the same way.

But critics of the principle of unanimity in communist parliaments don't tell you that thorough consultations precede all decisions of the National Congress. Consultations go back and forth through all levels of party hierarchy and through provincial and national levels. Party members discuss all proposals freely within the system and these discussions often produce changes of policies and of rules. When I worked in the Chongqing Education Commission, I have observed how long the consultations took back and forth between central and provincial governments before the responsible committee in Beijing approved a solution. But I also observed that the leader of the local Education Commission took the liberty to interpret the rules coming from Beijing to his own liking. Deviations are allowed as long as they are not hostile to policies and principles of the communist party.

Unanimity is meant to evidence the unity of the party and of its members. Even the members who had disagreed with a decision lift their arm to show that they accept the opinion of the majority. Demonstrating the unity of the party is a cherished feature of the communist party. The leaders of the party will sanction a member for violation of party discipline if he expresses openly and publicly criticism instead of using the proper channels at the appropriate time to voice his opinion. You can call the demand for discipline an authoritarian feature but some discipline in western democracies would do them good.



The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has more than 95 million members, which is much more than the total population of Germany. But this number is only a small portion of the total population in China. There are probably two reasons for this relatively low participation rate. Firstly, and most importantly, many Chinese mind their own private business. They are not interested in participating in active politics and prefer pursuing their own professional careers or businesses. I heard more than once a Chinese explaining that he did not join the party because he was not interested in getting involved in government activities of which most require membership in the communist party.

You join the party only if you are interested in politics or if you want to make a career in politics or as a senior civil servant – if not you stay away. Staying out of politics seems to be the prevailing attitude of Chinese people. It is similar in many democracies. Only 60% of registered voters went to the polls– for example - during the 2016 elections in the US and many others did not even bother to become registered as voters. But the main difference with western democracies is that China allows only those people to go to the polls that have actively shown interest and commitment in political processes by participating in party activities. In Western democracies everybody can go to the polls even if he has never shown any interest in politics and has no knowledge of its workings.

A career in Chinese politics means that you start your political life in the youth league of the communist party. You will then be eligible for a government job at local and then provincial levels before – if you are lucky and clever or both - you might end up in Beijing where you benefit from your previous experience in political affairs. This is very different to western democracies, where people elect actors, business people or famous sportsmen or rappers to the top of the government even if the elected person was never before involved in politics and had not any experience in public affairs. The German word of it is “Quereinsteiger”, which means ‘coming from a different sector’. The Chinese system provides that only party members who have shown commitment to political issues and have followed party discipline can be elected. I cannot outright condemn such a concept.

Xi Jinping’s political career is a typical example for the path to the top of the Chinese government. He got his first significant job in 1982 when he became deputy party secretary of Zhengding County in Hebei province. He was then promoted in 1983 to party secretary, which is the top official of a county. Subsequently he continued his political career from 1985 to 2007 as official in Fujian and Zhejiang provinces and in Shanghai. After having served as president of the Party School in Fuzhou he made his way into the center of power in Beijing when he became an alternate member of the 15<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP. An intermezzo as party secretary of Shanghai, which is a very prominent position, followed in Xi’s career until he was appointed in 2007 to the nine-man Politburo Standing Committee of the party. Five years later, in 2012, he made it to the top after some internal struggles behind the scenes out of which he emerged as the winner. But discussions and struggles that the party hides from the public eye, are also common in western democracies, when party leaders often make deals behind closed doors or when splinter groups of like-minded parliamentarians privately meet to agree on strategies to influence politics or to arrange for a vote of non-confidence to topple the head of government.

Disinterest in politics is the first reason for a low participation rate in the CCP. The other reasons are the criteria that the party uses before they admit new members. The party admitted only 1.25 million new members in 2023 and 2 million new members in 2014. Some years ago, the depth of knowledge of Marxism-Leninism was important for admission. The party subsequently replaced their ideological emphasis with a focus on technical and educational qualifications. If admitted to the party, the new member will go through a probationary period during which he receives political instruction. This education is also no longer ideological but more technical.

It is remarkable that Marxism-Leninism is still prominently mentioned in the preamble of the constitution of China and in article 4.1 of Vietnam's constitution. Marxism-Leninism is also regularly features in solemn speeches and in policy papers. It is the colorless glue that keeps the party and politics together. It amazed me that the communist party praised Marxism-Leninism as driving force when they switched China from communism to capitalism starting in the early 1980's. Some official declarations today sound as if Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin had been the inventors and advocates of the current capitalist system in China, which is even more capitalistic than the capitalistic countries in the west. To create the illusion of continuity, officials still keep calling the new system a socialist achievement. But the desire to feel continuity is also very much alive in the US, where politicians still celebrate the founding fathers of the constitution in 1776 as the inventors of the American nation today. The founding fathers shaped the country not according what people think today but along the lines of classical liberalism and republican principles of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some people even say that the founding fathers wanted to create a fully fledged white Christian nation with no separation of church and state. I am sure that all founding fathers would not recognize their child if they were looking today at the political landscape in the US.

The 1995 education law in China, in its article 3 declares "*Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought*" as a primary guideline for the education system. Vietnam's education law of 2005 also echoes in article 3.1 the same principle with the only obvious difference that Ho Chi Minh's thoughts replace Mao's thoughts – obviously under the umbrella of socialism. It seems that chairman Xi has now replaced Mao Zedong's thoughts with his own ideas about China and its future. He apparently wants to become the new and modern Mao with his '*thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*'. He also mentions very often the dream of a rejuvenation of his socialist nation.

In an education project in Vietnam, our project conducted throughout the country many training workshops for school managers. We discussed the main principles that should guide managers of schools to improve school performance. I expected that Marxism-Leninism would be an important guideline as the education law prescribes. I thought that school directors would consult booklets of Marx and Lenin every day – like Christians the Bible - for daily guidance. I also thought that their goal would be to produce graduates with thorough knowledge of Marxism-Leninism. But no participant in any workshop came up with such ideas. At the end of the workshops, I often asked my audience, who were all school directors, to what extent Marxism-Leninism guided their daily work. Silence and helpless smiles were the regular answers. They looked at me as if I were a Martian or from another planet. Marxism-Leninism had not the slightest impact on their daily work and it has actually no practical impact at all in current politics except to embellish official speeches. Marxism-Leninism is like a beautiful figurehead at the bow of an old-fashioned sailing ship. Everyone on board is behind it but nobody can see it.

Western countries also have a figurehead. Official speakers often use the words democracy and freedom in solemn speeches without clear reference to what democracy actually means in the context of their speech. Movements like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers mention democracy as well. They use it as justification to abolish democracy and its government. They refer to the 240 years old original constitution as their beacon. But they selectively have mostly those parts of the constitution in mind that allow them to carry openly assault rifles and to criticize government with wildly free and subversive speeches and with protests by which they sabotage street and railway traffic and other functions of public life. If police try to restore public life that they disturb, they take this as infringement of freedom of speech and as violation of the constitution.

## Separation of Powers and Roles in Society

Classic Greek philosophers stated as one guiding principle of a republic that responsibilities in society should be distributed to different groups of people. According to Plato, society is divided into three types of people. The first group are producers like farmers and craftsmen. Plato then mentioned soldiers whose role and obligation is to defend against enemies inside and outside the country. There are thirdly philosophers and other wise men whose task is to govern the country.

Soviet monuments celebrated three main groups of people in society. They presented soldiers and workers or farmers. These were the first two groups in line with Plato. But instead of adding to the monument a philosopher or a wise man, they included a mother with child as symbols for the role of women in sustaining socialist society and of the glorious future of the younger generation that carries socialist values forward. The soviets did not see the need to include a symbol for governance in their monuments because it went without saying that government was in the good hands of the communist party. In addition, how can you present the communist party in a group photo?

In 2023, the local government in Sofia, Bulgaria, dismantled monuments that the soviet army had donated. The monuments showed soldiers, workers and mothers with their children. Bulgaria destroyed these monuments not out of disrespect for mothers and their children. They removed them out of disrespect for the soviets which they despise.

Society in India knows a social classification system called 'Varna', meaning 'color' in Sanskrit but is no longer related to skin color. Every varna has its own sacred duty and role in society and in the universe. Varna has four social classes. The first varna comprises priests and teachers of sacred knowledge (Brahmans). The next 'varna' comprises warriors and nobles responsible for protecting society (Kshatriyas). The other two varnas are commoners like farmers and merchants (Vaishyas) and servants for the other three varnas (Shudras). Priests and nobles form together the two government classes that specialize in religion and politics respectively.

Plato claimed that a harmonious relationship between producers, soldiers and farmers guarantees a well-functioning society. He demanded that everybody stick to their respective roles. 'Cobbler, stick to your last' (Schuster bleib' bei Deinen Leisten) is a recommendation that we should not categorically reject. In line with this recommendation, we often hear that the church should refrain from politics. On the other hand, journalists sometimes interview famous people like scientists or authors of bestselling books or famous actors or sportsmen about political issues with the wrong assumption that if someone is successful and famous for singing, acting or boxing, he must be an expert in politics and in other social fields as well.

As a side note I want to mention wrestling in Mongolia, which is more than a sport.



Mongolian Wrestling

Wrestling is with archery and horseback riding one of the national sports in Mongolia that they prominently practice during the most important and colorful festival, called Naadam (*Наадам*). I attended Naadam in 2013. I was impressed by the display of a strong culture that seemed to unite all classes of society. A wrestling champion has very good prospects as a politician. Khaltmaagiin Battulga is an example. His father coached him since his childhood and made him win the world cup championship in Ulaanbaatar in 1989.

He then served as President of Mongolia from 2017 to 2021. Wrestling is a ritual with hundreds of years of tradition. Wrestlers have a high status in Mongolia. They embody a set of important non-physical virtues like chivalry and nobility. Wrestlers are particularly not practicing wrestling for money as

sportspeople nowadays do and often become millionaires. Mongolian wrestlers practice this sport for the honor that a win brings and with the commitment to the almost sacred rules of traditions. This qualifies them for public offices.

The concept of allocating political functions to people according to skills, knowledge and experience looks reasonable to me but goes against today's dogma of equality. Everyone in modern democracies shares with everybody else the right to rule the country no matter their skills, experience, background and honesty.

Some advocates of universal suffrage warily admit the problem that unqualified people enter politics. But they argue that a separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers provides the necessary checks and balances. Montesquieu, the influential political philosopher, proposed this concept in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in his voluminous book 'Spirit of Law' (L'Esprit des lois). I wonder if this fundamental theoretical concept exists only because Montesquieu has invented it or if this idea would have come up anyway as a logical and important safety feature of democracy. The separation of political powers has remained an idea that democracies have not actually implemented as Montesquieu had envisaged. Since no other political philosopher has presented a more realistic concept, the principle of separation of powers became a standard item in textbooks and in solemn speeches.



Oscar Niemeyer, the famed Brazilian architect, designed in the 1950's the vast square called the Three Powers Square in Brasilia. At that time, Brazil developed its capital city.



The construction site was in the middle of nowhere and became a feast not only for the Brazilian architect but also for famous architects from all countries that built fancy embassies in Brasilia to celebrate their respective cultures. The star architect Hans Scharoun, for example, completed in 1971 the German embassy as one of the first embassies on Avenida das Nações. Italy, like other nations, did not want to look less prestigious and asked their star architect Pier Luigi to build their embassy, which they completed in 1977 on the same Avenue of Nations, which I visited in the mid 1970's when it looked still a little bit like a playground for architects with many buildings under construction.

The Three Powers Square in Brasilia was part of this playground for architects. They built, one next to the other, the massive Congress, the equally impressive Supreme Court and the presidential palace. Together, they are the symbol for the concept of separation of powers in a democracy.

Theoretically, the legislative makes the laws independent from government. The government executes the laws. The judiciary – upon request – verifies that everything is done correctly according to law. All this sounds like a simple concept. But it is too beautiful to be realistic.

Above the legislative and the executive branches of government thrones an independent judiciary that solves disputes that the citizens have with government and amongst themselves. This judicial power was previously in the hands of the noble rulers who solved disputes between their subjects. There was no court of justice for disputes that the noble rulers had between themselves. They solved these problems by going to war against each other when diplomats and mediators remained unsuccessful to defuse a conflict. The noble rulers used for these wars their subjects as soldiers and money from Jewish lenders who financed both sides of the conflicts.

The judiciary, to which everybody is subject today, is conceptually independent and above everybody – also above the executive and above the church.

Judicial independence is nicely implemented on the lower levels of the judiciary. Not the government, but the judiciary's own independent organs supervise the behavior of judges and the administrative procedures of the courts. Higher courts, not the government, review decisions of judges if parties of court cases complain that a decision is not in line with the law.

The situation is different for the country's highest courts. There is nothing above it. Only the Senate's Judiciary Committee has the power to impeach a justice. They can impeach a judge not for judicial mistakes that judges might have made but only for severe personal misconduct. During the long history of the US, the parliament impeached only 15 federal judges, including only few from the Supreme Court. Examples of charges are drunkenness on the bench, financial improprieties and accepting bribes. Between 1803 and 2010, the Senate convicted only eight judges while they acquitted four. Three judges resigned before the end of impeachment procedures. The first one to resign in the face of impeachment was justice judge Abe Fortas in 1969.

Obviously, a democratic government is not allowed to allege misconduct of a judge if they disagree with a court's decision. Donald Trump deviated from this constitutional principle after federal judge Boasberg temporarily blocked the president's executive order to deport illegal immigrants in 2025. He wrote on his Truth Social platform that *'this judge, like many of the Crooked Judges' I am forced to appear before, should be IMPEACHED!!!'* Trump's blatant disregard for the constitution prompted the Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts to publicly remind Trump *'that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement'* with a judicial decision and that *'the normal appellate review process exists for that purpose'*.

Constitutional principles related to the judiciary are different in China where the government can punish a justice of the Supreme People's Court not only for violation of disciplinary rules but also for *'law violations'*. The government can sanction a judge when it establishes that a judicial decision shows disloyalty to the communist party.

The governments in western countries usually refrain from interfering in the day-to-day work of the courts except for publicly criticizing decisions that they don't like. Donald Trump, in particular, was never shy of censuring decisions of the courts as *'ridiculous'* or with even more disparaging words. These criticisms of the judiciary by members of the executive not only violate the principle of separation of powers. They also show lack of respect for the judiciary which endangers the reputation and perception of the judiciary in the public eye. Respect for the courts is as important as respect for the law.

On the other hand, judges must make great efforts to deserve that respect. Justices of the US Supreme Court have for good reasons lost the public's appreciation. Justice Samuel Alito, for example, failed to disclose that he had enjoyed a luxurious fishing trip to Alaska, including private jet travel, that Paul Singer, a major Republican donor, has offered him. Paul Singer had been involved in 10 appeals to the Supreme Court. Justice Clarence Thomas also forgot to disclose similar freebees that another republican megadonor had offered him. Dubious transactions of other justices have also come to light.

After these revelations, the Supreme Court itself did nothing to disperse public doubts about its integrity. They firstly refused to adopt rules of ethical behavior. The court secondly showed that their justices are politically highly biased along the fault line of the cultural war in the US. People clearly identify justices politically as either liberal or conservative, which describes their bias towards the democratic or republican parties.



Justices are thirdly not shy to criticize each other in public and in dissenting opinions. They make the Supreme Court look like a hornet's nest full of partisanship and ideological infighting.

Politicians attack the highest courts in the country if they feel that a decision of the court restricts their freedom of political action. Strong and ambitious politicians in Poland and in Israel have recently advanced their plans to reduce the powers of their respective Supreme Courts. They call these plans 'judicial reforms'. China under the leadership of chairman Xi has also embarked on a '*comprehensive reform of the judicial system*' with the goal to '*constructing a clean and honest administration in the court system, and building a loyal and honest team of judges in the new era*'. The use of the word 'loyal' indicates that the government expects judges to follow party lines and claim the right to sanction judges if they don't follow.

When government or politicians disregard decisions of the Supreme Court they seriously attack judicial independence. An example is Aryeh Deri, leader of Shas, which is the Sephardic ultra-Orthodox party in Israel. In a criminal trial against him he avoided the punishment of time in prison with a plea bargain, in which he promised not to seek any public office any more. He subsequently resigned his position as parliamentarian but nevertheless joined afterwards the Netanyahu government as Interior Minister. The Supreme Court of Israel ordered Netanyahu to dismiss him but Netanyahu did initially not obey and Aryeh Deri publicly stated "*They will close the door for us, we will enter through the window. They will close the window for us, we will break through the ceiling.*" You cannot express disregard for the judiciary more clearly.

States in the US appoint their judges in different processes. In some states, people can go to the polls to elect certain judges. In other states it is the governor who is either totally free in his decision or has to make his selection from a list of candidates that an independent judicial nomination commission prepares.

Clear dangers for the judicial independence come from the process, in which justices of higher courts are appointed in federal and state courts. Governing political parties often are successful in appointing judges that share either conservative, liberal or other specific political views. If a democratic president fills a vacancy in the US Supreme Court, he will nominate a candidate who has shown liberal views, for example on abortion and gun control. A republican president will nominate a candidate who is against abortions and promotes the right to carry rifles in public. The parliamentarians who have to approve the president's choice, try to elucidate the candidate's views by reading judgements that the nominated judge had previously made or by outright questioning him during the nomination hearing. The parliament will then approve a conservative candidate if the majority is republican and they will approve a liberal candidate if there is a democratic majority in parliament. This confirmation process strictly follows party lines. At the end, political parties refer to certain justices as 'their' people in the Supreme Court alluding to their political bias.

Politicians also hope and expect that justices will make decisions in their favor as a thank you for the appointment. Donald Trump confirmed that he used the enormous power of the president over the Supreme Court appointments. He declared in 2024 that he was "*proudly the person responsible*" for overturning the 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*. He took credit for the abolition of abortion rights because he had nominated conservative justices, which now form a conservative majority in the Supreme Court.

Partisanship is also at work in states where people elect judges. When one seat of Wisconsin's Supreme Court became vacant in 2025, a conservative and a liberal candidate competed one against the other. Elon Musk, the richest man on earth at that time, supported the campaign of the conservative candidate Brad Schimel with about 20 million US dollars and paid \$100 to anyone who signed his petition in favor of Schimel. As if this had not been enough, he let every signatory of his petition participate in a lottery in

which he paid two prizes of 1 million USD each to the winners. This was the most expensive judicial contest in US history. But the liberal contender, Susan Crawford, eventually won the race.

People and political organizations use the courts to attack decisions that the executive branch of government has made. This is their right. But it happens in the US overly often. As a result, the judiciary becomes constantly involved in political disputes and becomes a political decision-maker. The court gets more and more dragged into partisan and hyper partisan crossfire. During the peak of the COVID-19 health crisis 2020 to 2022, the federal government in the US issued a regulation that employers with more than 100 employees had to ensure that staff was either vaccinated or that their employees were regularly tested. This measure was certainly not abusive. It was reasonable and – in my opinion – within the government's latitude. But stern vaccination opponents brought this issue to the Supreme Court. Instead of saying that the issue should be in the hands of government and of parliament, the Supreme Court felt compelled to decide this rather administrative issue. The judges have in many of such cases not the necessary technical and scientific knowledge to overrule decisions that, for example, experts in agencies of environmental protection and disease control have made. The US Supreme Court had for this reason in 1984 ruled that not the courts but government agencies in charge of health and environmental issues have the right to make final decisions if they employ expert staff with special training and with scientific competence. This court ruling has entered the legal world under the title 'Chevron Deference'. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court has overruled its own decision in 2024 and claimed back their own competency to judge if government agencies have made scientifically correct decisions.

Citizens who call the courts to verify government decisions behave like childish siblings who ask their parents to decide their disputes instead of coming to an agreement between themselves. This is why justice Brett Kavanaugh of the US Supreme Court asked in a case involving abortion rights in 2021: *"Why should this court be the arbiter rather than Congress, the state legislatures, State Supreme Courts, the people being able to resolve this?"*

Court battles, which are the continuation of political disputes, show that politicians have lost the art of producing consensus. The US give blatant evidence of a hostile stalemate in the question of abortion and of gun control. Society and politicians are hopelessly polarized and divided about the right of abortion and about the necessity to restrict the purchase and possession of guns. Whenever one of these two questions is brought before parliament, a deadlock develops with the result that parliament cannot pass necessary legislation. On the other hand, if one political party has a clear majority, legislation will follow party lines and will not compromise over concerns expressed by the opposition party or by the minority in the population. In such situations, it should not be the task of the Supreme Court to take over legislative functions and should not decide in lieu of parliaments.

The Supreme Court had in 1973 ruled that women have the right to abort a foetus before the 28<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. This ruling became famous as *Roe v Wade*. Anti-abortion activists brought the issue again to the Supreme Court in 2022. Instead of saying in Latin, which language legal people like, 'Roma locuta, causa finita' (Rome has spoken, the matter is settled), the now conservative Supreme Court took on the case and reversed its own precedent. The court argued correctly that the federal constitution did neither grant the right of abortion nor made abortions illegal. In such a situation of a legal vacuum the court should in *Roe v Wade* not have decided that the right exists. The court should in 1973 have left such a decision to the federal parliament or to state parliaments. *Roe v Wade* has infringed on the prerogative of parliaments.

I personally believe, however, that in a liberal democracy everything, including abortions, should be allowed if it is not prohibited by law. In this sense, *Roe v Wade* was correct and it was up to the federal

legislation to ban abortions if this had been the will of the people. But the will of the people is so much divided that parliament was unable to intervene.

Decisions by the executive and by parliament should in a healthy democracy get the benefit of the doubt and should be respected. It is not a good sign for the health of a democracy if people too often disrespect these decisions. People almost regularly ask the constitutional court to overturn decisions that they think are not in line with their own views. If the constitutional court in these cases is drawn into the political discussions of the day, it risks becoming part of the discussions instead of staying above grubby politics.

In this context, I don't find it appropriate when justices of the Supreme Court in the US develop a public life by regularly appearing in interviews with the media to discuss political issues. They should stay discreetly above it. I find it, for example, unfitting that associate justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote and published books, which reveal not only her personal world view in many issues but also shows that she has the time for writing books while there is a heavy backlog of court cases. She earned \$3.5 million USD from her bestselling autobiography and from her children's books.

In my opinion, justices should stay as much as possible out of public sight. I find it for this reason unacceptable that the late justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in a 2016 interview called Donald Trump 'a faker' who showed – in her opinion - too much of an ego. She was obviously right with her opinion but voicing such opinions as a Supreme Court Justice is an entirely different story. I find it equally questionable that justice Sonia Sotomayor, the court's senior liberal member, publicly revealed that she is 'frustrated' having to work with her colleagues who represent a conservative majority of the Supreme Court. Justices should not dish any dirt about internal issues.

Finally, when dissenting justices formulate their opinions by which they disagree with the opinion of the majority of their colleagues, they should refrain from emotions and should not violently criticize their colleagues at the bench. In their dissenting opinion they should also not passionately advocate their personal opinions and should not use politically strong terminology.

We have recently read fiery and emotional dissents of justices in the 2022 abortion case that I have just mentioned and in a case dealing with affirmative action in university admissions. Some justices – two black ones in the latter case - voiced their dissenting opinions like crusaders. They expressed opposite political views and verbally attacked each other. Judges should not express their personal opinions but should speak 'in the name of the people' (im Namen des Volkes) as they are held to do in the German judicial system and 'in the name of the French people' as they say in France. Judges should express the voice of the law without emotions. They should not voice their passionate own opinions. In my view, the custom that dissenting justices publish their contradicting opinions weakens unnecessarily the authority of a decision. All justices of the court should accept the decision of the majority and should not be allowed to publicly declare that the decision is wrong. The law is the law, as we often say. The court should not present law as a matter of personal opinions. Justice Clarence Thomas, to give an example, criticized in 2023 in his consenting opinion the view of his colleague Ketanji Brown Jackson, as '*unfathomable to me*'. Similarly, I found it irresponsible that justice Sotomayor in her dissent called a decision of her own court a "*sad day in American constitutional law*". After the Supreme Court had ruled that Donald Trump enjoys immunity for criminal acts, the same justice Sotomayor called publicly her court's ruling '*utterly indefensible*'. She ended the presentation of her dissenting opinion by writing: '*With fear for our democracy, I dissent*'. This is a political crusade – not a legal opinion.

Overall, however, I think that the principle of separation of powers works relatively well in favor of the judicial independence. But I cannot say the same for the respective powers of legislature and executive.

These two powers are separated only on paper. The culprits are political parties that I have mentioned above. Conceptually and theoretically, the members of parliament are bound only by their personal conscience and should conduct their work in parliament accordingly. But practically, they have become slaves of the political party, to which they belong. The so called 'whip' of the party enforces party discipline in the legislature and ensures that members of the party vote according to the decisions of the party and not according to their own individual opinions. The opinions of their constituents don't count anyway once a candidate is elected.

As a sideline I want to mention that the term 'whip' comes from fox-hunting, where one person called 'whipper-in' corrals foxhounds with a large bullwhip to ensure that the dogs don't stray. This is similar to shepherd dogs that keep the herd together.

The principle of forced unanimity in parliaments applies in Germany and in Austria where members of parliament are regularly coerced to align their personal opinions with that of the party or with the group of parties that form a coalition government. This group discipline is called *Fraktionszwang* in Germany and *Klubzwang* in Austria. The task of a member of parliament, therefore, is primarily not to follow his own firm beliefs or to pursue the wishes of his constituents but to follow the party line or the line of a party faction and to sell his party's decisions to his constituents with clever speeches.

Members of parliament elect prime ministers or presidents of a democratic country but they have to follow the instructions of their respective parties when they cast their votes. Similarly, laws are made along the party lines. Therefore, it is safe to state that political parties are the actual makers of laws and of kings. Political parties combine and exercise both legislative and executive functions. Montesquieu's idea of a separation of political powers, which we still hold high in theory has not become reality except for the lower levels of the judiciary, which have remained independent in most democracies.

### **Election Campaigns and Electoral Procedures**

The main privilege of citizens in a democracy is to elect their president or prime minister who then appoints his ministers not according to voters' wishes but following negotiations with his party or with coalition partners.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> amendment of the American constitution does not allow a president to serve more than two four-year terms. Similarly, the French constitution limits the presidency to two consecutive terms of five years. The limit wants to promote political renewal like Roosevelt's 'New Deal', in which he wanted to stabilize the economy after the Great Depression.

On the other hand, the citizens have after two presidential terms to elect another government even if they are happy with their leader and no better successor is available.

I guess that the limit exists because we assume that power corrupts over time even if people in power don't notice it. *'Politicians and diapers must be changed often, and for the same reason'* is the explanation that Mark Twain gave us.

Governments can use referendums to let people formally decide what they want. The government must in some jurisdictions respect the results of most referendums. Governments can also conduct surveys to find out what people want but they have no formal obligation to follow up on the results of surveys. But general elections remain in an electoral democracy the most important tool by which people can express their political will. However, the freedom of a voter to express his will in a ballot box is limited. The voter can either select a candidate or a political party. That's it. He then has to hold his breath that the party or the candidate who emerges from the elections as winner will pursue the interests that the voter had

in mind when he cast his ballot. This hope is more or less delusional to judge by what usually happens after elections. The most important freedom of the electorate is to vote a government out of office. This is probably the main merit of an electoral democracy.

When voters go to the polls, they can have many different expectations in their minds for which they might have priorities. Some might expect improvements of social benefits and of public safety. Others prioritize ideas about foreign policy, LGBT rights and limitation of immigrants. But all voters can cast their votes only for candidates or for political parties and not for specific political issues. A voter has to rely on candidates and political parties who promise the pursuit of specific goals and the voters hope - mostly in vain - that the candidate and the party that he elects, will give certain issues the same priority as he has in mind.

Before deciding how to cast the ballot, the voter might also consider which candidate is in his opinion capable to manage the country efficiently and honestly. A voter most likely does not know which skills and competencies a manager must have. But if he is convinced that he has given his vote to a capable and honest manager, he might not worry any longer about details under the motto 'He knows, let him decide'.

Overall, there is much indirectness in the process and there are too many variables in the decision-making process of the voter and in the development of events after the elections. Many voters suffer from the agony of choice. At the end they can never be sure if they have made the right decision. If they feel disappointed afterwards, they will in the subsequent election blindly vote for another party to punish the party that they had previously selected. In these frequent cases they will not vote someone into office but will vote incumbents blindly out of office. This is what I did in the rare occasions when I participated in general elections. I did not vote for a candidate but against him by making my cross on the ballot paper for his opponent without knowing if he was a good choice.

Some voters are committed to one political party no matter their candidates and no matter the fine print of the parties' agendas. They vote for the liberal party if they are liberal and they vote for the conservative party if they are conservative. These preferences are often handed down from generation to generation. I have, for example, inherited a generally conservative attitude from my parents. Most people then vote for their preferred party only to avoid that the opposing party wins the elections. Some people call this a firewall. These voters remain faithful to a party of their choice until either the party or the voter changes preferences.

The concept of democracy assumes that voters act responsibly and form their political opinions free from undue influences. These assumptions might have been relatively accurate 100 years ago but they are now for sure no longer realistic. Fake news and conspiracy theories in the internet inundate people who are not able to fend them off with critical thinking.

Another assumption behind the concept of an electoral democracy is equally brave. It is the belief that an election commission, even if it is formally independent from government, can organize the election processes technically in a way that translates the votes of all people precisely into the corresponding election result. Even if election commissions organize the elections honestly and with good intentions, how can you assume that this process correctly translates the will of individual voters into a common will of the total population? The assumption might be correct in a homogenous society but not in a country like the US, where people are irreconcilably divided in a cultural war and determined influencers become very active on all levels before and during the elections. Many fighters for special interests do their best to influence the outcomes of election processes with legal and with illegal methods as we will see below.



Right-wing politicians reject the result of democratic elections and claim that they were rigged if they lose. They rarely support their claim with evidence of criminal manipulations but they insinuate that the election process was technically not able to reflect people's will correctly. If people deny the reliability of the election process, they deny democracy because free and fair elections are the vital pillar of a democracy. There can be no democracy if the election process is technically not reliable or if the election process is subject to interference by anonymous influencers.

Some election candidates in the US announce that they will accept an election result only if they win. If they lose, they promise their followers that they will fight the election results with the argument that their loss is clear evidence of manipulations. It is logically dishonest if a candidate states that elections are fair and free if he wins but claims that elections are rigged if he loses. If elections are technically unable to catch the true will of people, no winning candidate should accept his election. But a winning candidate never questions the honesty of the election process even if he knows that his supporters have manipulated the election process.

There are indeed many interventions by which politicians and interest groups can influence election outcomes. In extreme cases, rulers of some countries organize elections in a way that shows that 99% of voters have confirmed their hold on power. For example, the people of Ruanda in 2024 re-elected their president of 24 years, for a fourth term with 99.15 % and the Central Election Commission in Russia confirmed in the same year that 87% of nearly 76 million voters had voted for Putin. Even the Christian God will not achieve such positive results in a general election if several other gods are candidates.

Elections in other countries never achieve clear results because influencers on both sides of the political spectrum work equally hard to strengthen opposing opinions and to split society. This leads in a two-party system like in the US to a stalemate, in which only a couple of thousand votes decide the outcome of elections in favor of one or the other party.

The techniques of organizing elections can produce unavoidably some distortions. Some techniques used in election processes are highly questionable. In my opinion, the features that I now describe, cast a dark shadow on the reliability of electoral processes:

The ruling party, for example, might practice a mild form of a manipulation by selecting the date of an election when the popular mood speaks temporarily in its favor. The government can call snap elections at a time when the economy has by coincidence come out of a slump and people are happy or the public opinion is – for whatever reason – in favor of the incumbent government. A child will use such a trick when it asks for a special favor from his father at the moment when he is happy after receiving news about a pay rise in his job.

Not the parliament and also not the people elect their president in the US. It is an Electoral College of 538 electors who determine the president. There is one member each from the 435 congressional districts plus two senators each from America's 50 states and three members from the District of Columbia (DC). California, the most populous state, has 55 electoral votes while small states like North Dakota and DC have only three votes each

Citizens vote in their congressional districts for a political party and its candidate. The winning party gains in every district one elector in the college. The votes for the losing party fall by the wayside. They don't count. This has frequently led to the result that the electoral college elected five presidents who received fewer numbers of popular votes than their opponents. The two latest of these presidents were Donald Trump in 2016, who received more than 3 million fewer popular votes than his opponent Hillary Clinton. Another recent example is G W Bush in 2000, when he received some 540,000 fewer popular votes than

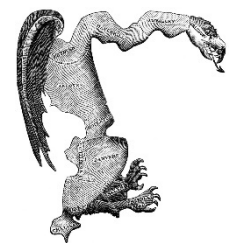
his opponent Al Gore. This is an incredibly narrow margin given that 137 million voters had cast their ballots, which is 60.1% of the eligible voting population. The most challenged election results in the US were in Florida where the two candidates obtained almost equal numbers of votes. This triggered several recounts and multiple legal battles. The majority of justices in the Supreme Court, who republican presidents had appointed, decided in favor of GW Bush who is a republican. It was therefore the Supreme Court that decided the final outcome of the elections. If the Supreme Court had ruled in favor of Al Gore, we might not have seen the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan, for which GW Bush strongly pushed once he occupied the White House. As a matter of fact, the Republicans have since 1992 won the popular vote only once - very narrowly - in 2004.

The electors in the Electoral College are bound by law to vote for their party's presidential candidate. The electors cannot cast their vote by a free and conscious will. They are – so to speak – voting fodder.

The organization and management of federal elections in the US is the responsibility of states, which have quite a bit of discretion how to organize the elections. There is no federal standard procedure. The organizers of elections in the states often politicize the process with the goal to manipulate the outcome of elections in favor of the party, which rules the state. One method that some states use, is that they require that a political party must not only win the majority of the popular votes but also a majority of voting districts, in which the party has won.

Another method of manipulating the election outcome is to design the boundaries of congressional districts with the intention to create advantages for the party that governs the state. For example, if mostly black or Hispanic voters, who both generally prefer the democratic party, are concentrated in one geographical area, where it can be expected that 75% of voters will vote for democrats, while only 51% are needed for a win, the state government designs the boundaries of the electoral district in a way that some residents of this area are assigned to a neighboring area that has no clear preferences for the democratic party. In this way, the neighboring district will, after the re-design of boundaries, have sufficient numbers of black or Hispanic voters to achieve a result of 51% for the democratic party.

We know these attempts to redefine electoral districts as gerrymandering. The expression is a concoction of the words 'Gerry' and 'Salamander'. Elbridge Gerry, the governor of Massachusetts, invented and signed this method into law in 1812 and the electoral districts that he designed in favor of his party looked on a map like a salamander. England and Scotland in 1993, and in the USA in 1994 also used the technique of gerrymandering. The South African government gerrymandered non-white citizens into 10 tribal homelands in 1981. Databases about voters, their background and their voting patterns are extremely detailed.



Gerry-Mander cartoon by  
Elkanah Tisdale, 1812

Campaign managers of political parties use such data to target specific voters with tailor-made messages and actions. I am sure that they seek help from artificial intelligence to extract detailed data from the databases and that they use the information for messages that target specific individuals.

If data shows that absentee voters typically vote for the republican party, the democratic administration of the state will make it more difficult for people to vote by mail or will even make mail-in votes impossible. Another example is the requirement to present certain documents for the registration as voter. If data from previous elections show that a certain population group voted for a specific political party, and if members of this group – like immigrants - usually don't possess certain ID documents, the law of the state might require that voters have to present such documents for their registration. The federal government

can attack such state election laws only in constitutional courts and has to prove that these laws violate either the state constitution or the federal constitution.

There are many tricks to influence elections before election day. In India, for example, the government has just weeks before the 2024 elections frozen the bank accounts of the Indian National Congress, which is the main opposition party. The government alleged irregularities in income tax returns during an audit that it concluded diligently just before the beginning of the election campaign.

Manipulations continue on election day. One of many tricks is the way, in which election officers in some states interpret a filled-in ballot paper in a way that is different from state to state. If, for example, the voter has to tick either a 'yes box' or a 'no' box', a biased election officer might only count crosses on the check box and not a checkmark and also not a circle around a checkbox.

There are many more tricks to manipulate election results such as providing transport to election offices and refreshments for carefully selected voters and even blocking access to ballot stations more or less subtly. Given that recent federal elections were extremely tight races, these manipulations ultimately tip the scales. The vox populi in these cases is actually the vox of the manipulators. People can also influence elections with criminal methods by making ballot boxes disappear or by manipulating voting machines.

Other criminal tricks that election officers use on local levels, are adding, removing or altering ballot papers, intentionally counting votes incorrectly or deliberately certifying an incorrect election result. Joseph Stalin who knew how to organize elections said correctly that *'political power does not rest with those who cast votes; political power rests with those who count votes'*.

After the general elections 2020 in the US, the losing candidate Donald Trump claimed that the elections were 'rigged' but he did not produce evidence that the election had been illegally manipulated with one of the criminal methods that I have just mentioned.

General elections are the regular tool that democracies use to determine the government that is supposed to execute the peoples' wishes in general but not specific wishes. But parties offer only their political agendas containing many items that change from time to time.

Political agendas of parties deviate one from the other only slightly in a country where the population is relatively united. The party with most votes will form the government. In a multi-party system, not one single party usually obtains sufficient numbers of representatives in parliament. A party that tries to form a government has to enter into negotiations for a coalition with other parties even if these other parties have competed with very different political agendas. These negotiations – and not the voter - then determine the leader of the government and the political agenda, which will be a compromise that the parties negotiate behind closed doors in a coalition agreement. It can happen that people voted for party 'X' because they did not like the finance minister of the incumbent party 'Y'. But both parties then come to a coalition agreement, in which they re-appoint the finance minister of the party 'X'.

There is quite a bit of indirectness in the process of translating the peoples' will into a government because people during elections do not vote for or against a specific political issue as is done in a referendum. On one hand, they vote for a political party that makes a wide range of different and sometimes contradicting promises, which they usually do not keep. On the other hand, people vote for a specific candidate in their district if he looks like a dynamic leader but is not member of the preferred political party. This leads frequently to the dilemma for a voter who prefers a local candidate but does not like too much the platform of the party, of which the candidate is a member. This is why the German and New Zealand systems give its citizens two votes: one for a party and one for a specific local candidate. The voter in these countries can give one vote for a candidate that he likes and can give a second vote for the opposing

party. If the parliament consists of 500 seats and 350 seats are filled by candidates that were directly elected, the remaining 150 seats are filled with candidates according to numbers of second votes that the voters have cast for a political party. Such a system alleviates the voters' dilemma, but it does not exist in the US.

The parties and their candidates use during election campaigns sophisticated marketing techniques to praise themselves and to make undecided and sleeping voters swing to their sides. They act like salespeople who praise the quality of their own services and bedevil the services of their competitors. The statements in electoral slogans are often crude lies. The republican party in the US – for example – made during the 2022 mid-term elections the fear-mongering statement that the democratic party *"advances Marxism, corruption, economic, social and moral decline and contributes to the undermining of our national sovereignty, our constitution and free enterprise"*. A year later, Donald Trump promised in an election campaign rally that *'we will root out the communists, Marxists, fascists and the radical left thugs that live like vermin'*. Such unsubstantiated obscene slogans should be banned in a civilized democracy but they remain without sanctions in most democracies.

Marketing techniques include manipulations of feelings and opinions, exaggerations, unrealistic promises and often outright lies. These marketing techniques and manipulations are not limited to the time during the election campaign. Some candidates use them consistently and repetitively over many years until the electorate believes the repeated distortions and lies and make them politically acceptable.



Imelda & Ferdinand  
Marcos ~1960

A prime example is Ferdinand Marcos Jr, the son of the infamous dictator Ferdinand Marcos who was after 20 years of abusive government toppled in 1986 by "People Power", which is a violent form of democracy. Both his father Ferdinand and his mother Imelda were together responsible for mass killings and human rights violations and stole allegedly between 5 billion USD and 10 billion USD from the Central Bank of the Philippines.



Imelda Marcos  
~2000

Ferdinand Jr. continuously over the last decades disseminated lies about his father's terror regime and falsified history by making people believe that times were much better when his father ruled the country for more than 20 years. Gullible Filipinos, who did not live during Marcos' dictatorship, ended up believing the lies and elected Ferdinand Marcos Jr president in 2022. Filipinos generally show a soft and forgiving culture. They call their new president lovingly 'Bongbong' and have even started again to admire Bongbong's mother Imelda Marcos, 93 years old at the time of writing. Imelda is a phenomenon in her own right. She won at the age of 20 a beauty contest in Tacloban and became later known as the 'Steel Butterfly' because she combined her passion for beauty, fashion and philanthropy with cold political resolve and selfishness. In 1991 I visited the presidential palace Malacañang, where I saw the gigantic collection of her shoes. I did not count the shoes but Imelda had apparently 3,000 pairs of them. Her equally gigantic collection of exquisite jewelry, which I have not seen, speaks to her passion for beauty and luxury and her skills to loot the money to pay for it.

People in the Philippines have, as most people, a short political memory. We can call this 'historical oblivion'. Today's young generation in the Philippines are not aware of all the horrible crimes that Imelda had co-authored with her husband before the 'people power' revolution of 1968.

They remember Imelda Marcos only as the beautiful, fashionable and flamboyant Jacqueline Kennedy of the Philippines.



Cultural Center of the Philippines,  
Manila

She had embellished Manila with many grandiose buildings in modern and exquisite architecture like the Cultural Center and the government guest house, called Coconut Palace.



Cultural Center Entrance

When I drove many times on the famous Roxas Boulevard where the Cultural Center is located, my local colleagues every time pointed at this building and did never fail to mention how much Imelda Marcos had contributed to Manila's glory with this and with other impressive buildings. This is her fabulous legacy. The Philippine people elected her to many high-level political posts after her return from exile in 1991.

One devilish tool in election campaigns is to use mass mailings in the internet with different messages to one demographic sector of society and another set of mailings to groups of other voters with different social profiles. This allows candidates in elections to target specific political topics differently to each segment of society. The method is called micro-segmentation. They don't promote a consistent message just with different styles of language that they adapt to different audiences. This would be acceptable. But they disseminate totally different and contradicting messages to different audiences.

In the next step towards perfecting their election messages, candidates can tailor their political advertisements not only to typical groups of voters but to individual voters. The candidate makes the recipient believe that he is his preferred target and friend. Marketing companies, which candidates and parties hire for good money, provide the necessary data and promotion techniques. Each mailing contains different sets of promises and values that they adjust to what each social group or what individuals want to hear. They approach voters – for example – that they have identified as sympathizing with LGBTQ+ issues by promising programs in support of LGBTQ+ while election clips or messages of the same politician to others segments of society will present the candidate as a conservative advocate against LGBTQ+. The objective of this marketing tool is not to get the candidate's message across. The only intention is to lure voters into casting their ballots in favor of the candidate who uses these tools.

When the candidates in election campaigns speak to an audience that people from different groups of society attend, they use skillfully a diplomatic language that appeals to all groups. Once elected, these politicians are finally free to do what they wanted to do anyway without having told their electorate. Advertising professionals call this 'bait and switch' tactics, in which sellers promise a valuable product and switch it to a less valuable product at the time of delivery.

It always amazes me that voters remain passive when elected politicians break election campaign promises. The elected [politicians simply explain afterwards why they could not keep their promises. They always blame nasty circumstances, which are out of their control, as they say. But in most cases, they knew that they made unrealistic promises. A politician like Donald Trump pledged, for example, that he will deport all illegal immigrants without exceptions. Right after his election, he slightly changed the wording of his pledge by saying that he will launch a broad effort to deport undocumented immigrants. This change of his promise leaves the possibility open that the effort might not succeed. In a third version of his pledge, he announced that his effort to deport all illegal immigrants will focus only on foreign nationals who have committed crimes. Donald Trump promised in his election campaign 2016 that he would build a wall at the southern border for which he would make Mexico pay the costs. But he built only some stretches of the wall and Mexico did not contribute one single cent for it.



Friedrich Merz promised solemnly in his 2025 German election campaign that he would not touch the balanced-budget law, or debt brake (Schuldenbremse), which created in 2009 the constitutional obligation for any government to stay within certain limits when borrowing money. He broke this promise only a few weeks after his party won the elections.

I would very much welcome legislation that gives citizens the right to sue a politician in courts of law for performance of election campaign promises.

One promise, which all politicians regularly break, is to work towards a balanced state budget. In that respect, not even the sky is the limit for promises of balanced budgets while government debts keep growing. It is a decisive weakness of democracies that citizens expect their governments to be generous with pay-outs and with benefits. Peoples' representatives give in to such demands if they want to be elected or re-elected. Pensioners on one hand expect increases of their pensions and believe – on the other hand - the promise that the state budget will become balanced. All other social groups also expect increases of the benefits they receive and unrealistically believe the lie that the government will not have to make new debts.

Adam Price, a member of the Welsh parliament, that they call Senedd, seriously introduced a bill that wants to '*ban lying in politics*'. This is an excellent initiative. But a law against lying in politics might be difficult to implement because there are just too many politicians telling myriads of fake facts. But it could be worth trying to prosecute politicians like Donald Trump, who deliberately shower the public with blatant and provable lies. He disseminated, for example, the lie that Kamala Harris, the American vice-president whom he called a '*bum*', had rejected federal judges for being Catholic and that Kamala Harris would appoint "*hardcore Marxists*" to the Supreme Court. He also accused Harris of wanting to force doctors to give '*chemical castration drugs*' to children. He finally accused her of wanting a federal law for abortion, '*to rip the baby out of the womb in the eighth, ninth month and even after birth -- execute the baby after birth*'.

I will never understand that liberal democracies allow their politicians do disseminate crude and obvious lies that contain verifiably incorrect facts.

In democratic elections, it is not the vox populi that expresses their wishes. Political contenders rather sell ideas, which they skillfully inculcate in the minds of the voters. They act like sellers of cosmetics who convince customers to buy a lotion that they don't need or that is even damaging for the skin.

Political contenders manipulate the voters into believing that they are the best or the only choice for good governance. Voters notice regularly after the elections that the elected officials seem to go their own way. Some of these disappointed voters become amenable to believe the claim that insiders and a secret political elite, which they call the Deep State, make the important decisions no matter for which candidate they had made the cross on the ballot paper. Individual voters realize that they do not really have a voice that any politician wants to hear. The vox populi is the product of the manipulation of the masses and not the voice of individuals.

Sudden events during the election campaign sometimes influence the outcomes of elections. If, for example, a candidate's wife is murdered two weeks before election date, voters, who had decided to vote for another candidate, might opt for this candidate out of compassion. Voters in such a situation might forget all important issues that they previously considered.

Events of the day like floodings or health crises can dramatically swing the public's opinion in a different direction if one candidate appears weak while the other candidate succeeds to present himself as efficient manager of a sudden crisis. Foreign countries might create events that influence voters' behavior. Price

hikes, for example, of gasoline might trigger negative opinions about the current government, which people blame for such hikes. OPEC or Russia can produce drastic hikes in gasoline prices at the pump by slashing oil production. OPEC, for example, reduced oil production by 2 million barrels per day just before the 2022 mid-term elections in the US. Finally, the incumbent government might lower taxes or might increase social benefits just before elections.

In such circumstances the public reacts with emotions and stops thinking about longer term issues. This is democracy. If I transpose such irrational decisions into private life, I want to compare this with a man who selects his future wife out of ten prospective women only because she told him a very humorous intelligent joke while they had a meal in a cozy restaurant.

A disturbing factor in US elections is the huge amount of money that the candidates and interest groups spend to influence elections. During the presidential race in 2020 election influencers spent almost \$6 billion USD. This was more than double the amount that they had spent in 2016. If we add the cost for congressional races during the mid-term elections, influencers had spent a total of almost \$14.5 billion USD during this elections cycle. The 2024 election broke all records. Donald Trump and Kamala Harris managed to collect a total of \$15.9 billion USD in campaign funds.

These numbers are according to official reports, which lets us suspect that people spent much more money behind the scenes to influence the election results. Some of the money comes from the state coffers but interest groups throw much more money into the battle. Donors are not altruistic they give money with a quid pro quo in mind and expect that the candidate – once elected and in office – will take care of their interests. In plain English I call this corruption that democracies tolerate. The exorbitant numbers show in any way that donors and lobbyists dominate elections. No candidate can seriously compete if he does not bring these donors behind him. We can also express this phenomenon by saying that the donors determine with their money who will become a candidate and who will win. One democratic mega-donor, for example, threatened to stop donating his usual millions of dollars if the party were to field a certain candidate that the donor did not like. This is electoral democracy.

The general snap elections 2021 in Canada have cost some 600 million CAD and have not changed the political landscape. The political power remained in the same hands as before, which led people to complain that the money had better be spent for the education system or to fight global warming. I agree with these critics. Countries could save considerable amounts of money if they organized elections only on demand when people collect a certain number of signatures. This could also be a concept for a monarchy, called elective monarchy. In such a monarchy the people can opt for an election, in which the people either confirm the current monarch or elect a replacement. I find hereditary monarchies outdated anyway even if the powerless monarch has only a ceremonial and far too pompous role like in the UK.

## **Participation in Political Processes**

The candidates and their political parties offer in democratic elections their services for the management of the country. The collective of citizens 'buys' these services from a provider that they select in elections. On one side of this market place are providers who advertise their services aggressively but might not have the required skills and qualities.

On the other side of the market place is the electorate, which is a mass of people, who might not be able to judge the quality of providers and the viability of what they offer. Lack of critical thinking make most voters gullible and subject to herd instinct and mass psychology.

To cure the problem that uninformed voters go to the polls, the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung - BPB) in Germany has created an online service, which they call

“Wahl-O-Mat”. Voters can use the service as decision-making aid to check which of the political parties come closest to their own political position. The user answers 38 questions, for example: *‘the preamble of the Basic Law (Grundgesetz – Constitution) mentions responsibility before God. Should this be changed?’* Once the voter has answered all questions, the service will produce a list of all political parties with the first on the list that matches best the voter’s answers. Since 2002, when BPB introduced Wahl-O-Mat, voters used the service 130 million times with 21.3 million users before the general elections 2021 alone. To make the service transparent and immune to manipulations, all political parties contribute to the development of the 38 questions and of the methods how the computer analyzes the answers. If we develop decision-making aids in future to perfection, the computer can collect and use comprehensive personal data on the voter, including browsing history and publications on social networks. The system will then know which political party the user prefers and can cast the ballot on his behalf.

In the following we look first at the voters, the purchasers of government services, and then we look at the providers of government services, who want to get elected.

Participation in elections should not be mandatory because political freedom should include the freedom not to participate. Somebody who does not participate and remains silent is deemed to be happy and to agree with the current circumstances. The situation will be different if frustration is the reason for abstinence. A democracy is not in good shape if people are fatalistic and resign to the fact that things will not change anyway and that they have to accept misery as they accept thunderstorms and earthquakes. Unfortunately, it seems that frustration is the main reason for abstention. With the exception of two times, I did not go to the polls because I mostly felt that this did not make a difference neither for me nor for the country. And actually, nothing has changed after I had gone two times to the polls and nothing would have changed if I had voted all the other times. One vote during elections is like a drop in a huge bucket or has the same weight as a postal stamp on a bathroom scale. Mark Twain suspected that *‘If voting made any difference, they wouldn’t let us do it’*.

### Eligibility of Voters

The cornerstone of democracy is equality and universal suffrage. Everybody has the right to vote, regardless of wealth, gender, race or social status. But universal suffrage alone does not make a healthy democracy. Additional factors must contribute such as healthy institutions, an honest and free press, the rule of law and civic education.

Ideally, only those people should participate in democratic processes who are responsible citizens. Before they cast their votes in elections, they should have made an effort to familiarize themselves with the relevant facts. They should be able to critically evaluate facts and political arguments and should be able to distinguish between true and false statements. President Dwight D. Eisenhower said in 1954 that *“Politics ought to be the part-time profession of every citizen”*. When Eisenhower used the word ‘politics’, he did not only mean the right to defend one’s own interests against people who promote different opinions and interests. This is only the first part of politics. The second, more important part of ‘politics’ is to arrive at a solution that respects each other’s positions. Good compromises are an important feature in democracies.

A responsible attitude of citizens is the crux for a democracy to work properly. Some people might think that a democracy is self-healing. They seem to believe that people with opposite goals automatically neutralize each other. These thinkers are optimistic that if one segment of society is too hot and another segment is too cold the temperature in society will automatically be moderate and comfortable. This idea might have been valid in an environment hundred years ago when countries introduced electoral democracy and people had a more positive attitude towards common goals. It has become a utopian idea

with the arrival of the internet. Unhinged influencers abuse the internet and inundate gullible people with fake news and conspiracy theories. Using all tricks of mass psychology, they inculcate the populace with their strongly partisan messages and the majority of people don't have sufficient internet literacy and critical thinking capacities that would enable them to distinguish legitimate and true messages from misleading messages and fake news.

Troll factories disseminate extremist views like from Q'Anon and from Donald Trump. These views appeal with easily believable lies. Troll factories target the susceptible majority of disadvantaged and dissatisfied citizens but also lightly educated citizens.

Extremists regularly use crude and aggressive propaganda methods that easily enter the ears and minds of people. The squeaky wheel gets the grease. The supporters of well-balanced political positions and ideas, in contrast, have the disadvantage that their messages are more difficult to understand and to digest. The promoters of nuanced ideas regularly shy away from using the same crude style of language that extremists use but their messages sound boring and weak like a message from a bean counter. They shy away from using a loud voice even though they know that making a point with calm voice will not reach the listeners.

Unfortunately for the democratic system, internet literacy and critical thinking are currently at a very low level. As a result, opposing opinions don't develop into compromises but split the country and its population into enemy camps as we can observe with the opposing camps of republicans and democrats in the US.

All citizens are eligible to cast their votes in an electoral democracy with universal suffrage. Included in the pool of voters are uneducated people and even enemies of democracy. They are all allowed to elect leaders who are equally uneducated, or are convicted felons or enemies of democracy.

We know how crucial it is that voters are knowledgeable and responsible but in practice all democracies abandon this vital requirement by letting everybody participate in elections without screening. Governments neglect civic education and emphasize in schools too much on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). Only a small minority of graduates understands the purpose and importance of – for example - the Bill of Rights and the declaration of independence.

Many people know vaguely that the American Declaration of Independence was an important event in the establishment of the US. But they are not familiar with the details and might not realize that 13 states declared on 04 July 1776 the independence from the British crown. Many people who are not aware of this might therefore be impressed when a demagogic Donald Trump outrageously declared that his 2024 election campaign was '*a new fight for American Independence*'.

Only 10% of students in the US demonstrated acceptable knowledge of checks and balances by separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches. A voter who does not know anything about such political features risks to become victim of manipulation and will make irresponsible decisions during elections. Lack of knowledge will lead voters astray if manipulators expose them to fake news and misinformation. If the Supreme Court rules against abortion rights and a candidate in an election campaign calls this decision outrageous and promises to curtail the powers of the Supreme court, a staunch advocate of abortion rights will vote for the candidate because he does not understand the vital concept of an independent judiciary.

In a well-functioning democracy, the ruling of the Supreme Court should end a dispute. The Latin idioms '*Roma locuta – causa finita*' (Rome has spoken, the case is closed) and the term '*res judicata*' (a thing

judged) express this concept. If fighting continues after the highest authority in the land has spoken, there is no authority and without authority, even a liberal democracy cannot work.

Promoting democracy and neglecting the necessary civic education is like somebody saying that dough is a critical ingredient of a pizza but he then prepares the pizza without dough and he still claims that it is a pizza. Similarly, some people offer a 'shawarma pizza' without blushing. Instead of wrapping spicy marinated, spit-roasted meat into pita with pomegranate molasses, they put the meat on top of pita bread and call it shawarma pizza. This is how flexibly the word 'pizza' is being used. In this way, you can prepare a sandwich with only one slice of bread and call it 'breakfast pizza'. Many people use the word democracy with similarly flexible meanings.

The word pizza reminds me of a joke if you allow me another casual side-track. A Chinese anecdote claims that the Chinese actually laid the groundwork for the invention of the pizza. They say that Marco Polo in the 13<sup>th</sup> century discovered the Chinese Stuffed Flatbread (燒餅 - shāobǐng). Marco Polo liked this delicacy so much that he took the recipe back home to Venice where he had come from. But he did not understand the recipe clearly enough because the translation from Chinese into Italian was very bad. As a result, or by mistake, the stuffing did not remain inside the bread but came on top.

But let's get serious again and let us stay on track. One important goal of education in general, and specifically civic education (Staatskunde) should be to produce citizens who are able to participate responsibly in society and in democratic processes including in social networks. But the current education systems in democracies cover only marginally theoretical and practical aspects of citizenship and of society. If teachers promote the idea that politicians must tell the truth some politicians will criticize the teacher for not allowing politicians to advocate alternative facts, which are actually errors or lies. It is psychologically interesting that falsehoods, untruths or delusions become more respectable if the speaker calls them alternative facts and if many people repeat it numerous times.

Liberal democracies make People abundantly aware of their individual rights but don't mention the duties and responsibilities of citizens. Many advocates of wide-ranging personal liberties say that it is reactionary to talk about traditional values and about the obligation to show pro-social behavior. Individual happiness, they say, is more important than the collective good.



Decoration in Zhuhai on the occasion of the Chinese New Year

This is different in China where you will find beautiful and expensive decorations everywhere in public parks and squares especially on the occasion of the Chinese New Year. The government never forgets to use abundantly flowers but also includes billboards by which they remind people of the "Core Values of Chinese Socialism" These flower arrangements are beautiful as shown here.

The billboard shown in the photo above with a white arrow is an example. It lists the core values of Chinese socialism as: *'Rich, Strong, Democratic, Civilized and Harmonious, Freedom, Equality, Justice and the Rule of Law; Patriotic, Dedicated, Honest and Friendly'*. The majority of people in liberal democracies would find that the public use of such educational buzzwords is inappropriate. They think that reminders of core values, which anyway not everybody shares and cherishes equally, constitute an infringement of the freedom of thinking and of celebrating. Freedom for these people is also the freedom not to be bothered with reminders of common values especially not during holidays.

People in liberal democracies and in pluralistic societies fear that their governments abuse civic education if they promote community values and traditional ideologies. Many people consider that reminders of these values are government propaganda and outdated anyway. The prevalent goal of education today



is to increase a person's freedom and the right to self-determination. Others say that education must increase human capital as a guarantee for economic growth, meaning the right to make much money.

The concept of civic education has the goal to prepare individuals for a peaceful life with others in society. This requires the unpopular commitment to societal values. Currently, the opinion prevails that educators must keep social values unspoken and must not promote them in schools. They demand that education must be free of value judgments, because promoting societal values discriminate against those who don't share these values.

Most people today perceive the state and its government as service providers and not as entities for which all individuals are jointly responsible. Behind the over-emphasis of individualism is the utopian idea that self-interested actions are beneficial for society and that the common good is best served when each individual pursues his own interests and aspirations. This idea might be correct if individuals are not excessively selfish. But people – as we painfully know – are far from being modest. Billionaires are not only obsessed by the fear to lose what they have; they also want to increase their wealth at the expense of others. Billionaires want to become trillionaires. *'Wealth is like sea-water; the more we drink, the thirstier we become'*. This is how the German philosopher Schopenhauer has put it in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The term democracy comes from the Greek words *dēmos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). The remarkable feature of democracies in ancient Athens and in other city-states in Greece was that the people who were eligible to vote were only a minority. They made up only between 15% and 30% of the total population. Government allowed people to vote only if they qualified according to certain criteria. They had to be adults, male and free. The latter criterion excluded slaves, which by numbers represented the majority of the population in ancient city states. The advocates of democracy in old Greece predicted that anarchy would develop if the entire populace as a mass of people were running the country.

Their prediction was not absurd if we look how some countries, including the US, practice democracy today. A large portion of voters seem to be irresponsible citizens who seriously believe and widely disseminate conspiracy theories, lies and incendiary messages.

The Greek concept of limited eligibility of voters continued to be dominant in the Roman Republic and many centuries later in city states in ancient Europe. Geneva, for example, was proud of its democratic system. They called it democracy not because everybody had the right to vote – far from this. For the people in Geneva, their political system was a democracy because there was no king like in neighboring France. Only common people lived in Geneva. Not being the subject of a king was the main criterion for the citizen of Geneva to call their state proudly a democracy. They used the term *'vox populi'* simply as the opposite of *'vox regis'*, the voice of the king. This did not at all mean that everybody has the right to speak. The century in which the common man is celebrated, had not yet arrived.

Not all people but only male "citizens" participated in the Geneva democracy. Only the wealthy minority of Geneva's residents were 'citizens' and had the right to elect the "Council of Two Hundred", which delegated their power to an executive body of 25-members called the 'Little Council'. This council held the real powers.

In Britain's 19<sup>th</sup> century, only adult males had voting rights and this only if they owned property or had regular income. The reason for this criterion was that only those who had an economic stake in the country should have a voice in public affairs. In Prussia of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, payment of direct taxes was a criterion. The more taxes someone paid, the more weight his vote had in elections. Prussia at that time apparently considered that someone who did not pay taxes, had no stake in the nation's economy and had therefore no voting rights. The republican vice-president J D Vance suggested

in 2024 that women without children to which he referred as 'childless cat ladies', should not have political power because only people with children have a stake in society. After all, most republicans declare themselves as 'pro family', which means having children.

It was only in 1870 that the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment of the American constitution gave black people voting rights. Women received voting rights only 50 year later in 1920. Similarly, Prussia's three-class suffrage system of 1871 allowed the richest 15% of the population to elect approximately 85% of the delegates in the Reichstag, which land-owning 'Junkers' dominated. Women had no voting rights until 1918 when many things changed in Europe as a result of the disastrous end of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. Dramatic changes are often possible only in the wake of cataclysmic events like wars and revolutions. Dramatic changes are mostly not generated on ballot papers and in ballot boxes.

In most current election systems, all citizens can cast their ballots. The majority of political thinkers consider this as progress towards the full development of democracy. We can indeed call it progress if more people become eligible to vote. But the principle 'the more the better' is a fallacy. We should use the word 'progress' as a value statement that does not blindly count numbers but evaluates if universal suffrage is the proper method to improve the quality of a democracy.

The general public accepted before the 20<sup>th</sup> century the criteria for eligibility that the election systems used at that time. People considered ownership of land and regular payment of taxes as legitimate eligibility criteria. But the more the years went by, the more people wanted to introduce more equitable criteria to comply with the paramount human right of equality. But in my opinion, the dogma of equality should not exclude the introduction of reasonable eligibility criteria. Blind and indiscriminate inclusiveness leads to the deterioration of the democratic system if we allow incompetent or irresponsible citizens to vote. I am not saying that the few voters before the introduction of universal suffrage were all responsible citizens while those citizens who were not allowed to vote were irresponsible. I am just sympathizing with the concept of introducing in the best interest of democracy some reasonable eligibility criteria.

In universal suffrage, everybody is eligible if he is registered. The registration process only verifies that the voters reside in the voting district and are not registered elsewhere. Voters must also be adults, which means people 18 years of age. Some countries like Germany consider reducing the age of voters to 16 years. After all, adolescents win Olympic gold. Nadia Comăneci, for example, was 14 years old when she won gold in gymnastics at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. Michael Phelps, to give just one of many other examples, was 15 years old when he broke several records in swimming and won multiple golds as a teenager in subsequent Olympics starting when he was 19 years old.

Governments nowadays don't want to discriminate against young people even though the level of maturity can be quite low. Success in sports or in business is not evidence of maturity.

There are no other criteria than the few mentioned above that governments verify during the voter registration. This is the principle of universal suffrage. All citizens without any restrictions – including teenagers - have the right to go to the polls. Except are in some countries only felons of certain crimes who lose their right to vote – even after completion of a prison term. Otherwise, everybody is eligible as voter no matter their finances, mental health or intellectual and cognitive capacities. Democracies even allow confessed enemies of democratic principles to go to the polls.

A system that allows incompetent or irresponsible citizens to select their representatives is self-destructive and puts democracies on autopilot for self-induced disaster. It is like letting inexperienced passengers of an airplane democratically decide who should pilot the plane. A democratic rule would

require that the co-pilot must be female if the chief-pilot is male or must be a member of a minority group of passengers. It is likely that a democratically elected pilot will make the airplane crash. But many people consider that a similar democratic system for the election of government is a guarantee for good governance.

Many people admit that democracy is not perfect. They compare it with other forms of government and conclude that democracy is the lesser evil. But before we celebrate the viability of full universal suffrage, we should keep in mind that this system is in historical dimensions quite new and was not tested before its introduction. In the US, the full universal suffrage was only established 1965 when they lifted the requirement of 'poll taxes'. Voting rights before 1965 were dependent on paying a uniform head-tax independent from income. The motto apparently was that you should pay for the right to vote and, if you are not willing to pay, you are deemed to be not interested. It sounds more sensible to say that a voter should show his interest not by paying a head tax but by participating in civic education and in developments of public policies.

America granted voting rights to women, native Americans and Chinese residents only in 1920, 1924 and 1943 respectively.

Full universal suffrage exists in Germany only since 1919. China, where the National People's Congress consists only of members of the communist party, introduced full universal suffrage in 1953 only for local elections, including for women. Overall, countries in this world introduced universal franchise only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All this indicates that these systems are still in a trial phase and will have to prove in future how smoothly and well they work in the long run. We will know only in some decades if it was a good idea to allow the populace to govern a country. Masses of people might steer their country unstoppably into the wrong direction. There are not sufficient self-regulating and self-healing forces.

When I worked in the Marshall Islands, I bought my daily provisions in a grocery store in Majuro, its capital city. When the clerk at the check-out counter detected bottles of beer in my shopping basket, he asked me to present a 'Liquor Permit', which the local people call a 'Drinking License'. The government required such a license to buy alcoholic beverages. They did not grant it to people who were too young or had shown evidence of alcohol abuse. To my knowledge, parts of India, Dubai and possibly other countries have also implemented this interesting concept.

In my opinion, democracies should introduce a 'Voters License'. They could grant such a license automatically for graduates of schools if the school includes civic education. Democracies should deny a voter's license to people who have shown blatant opposition to democracy and its values or who have disseminated misinformation and conspiracy theories. People are also not responsible voters when they suffer from dementia or from an advanced state of Alzheimer's disease or if they are grossly gullible or otherwise unable to critically evaluate political arguments.

In China, only members of the communist party participate in the democratic processes on the national level. The criteria for becoming and remaining a member of the party act as filters to exclude voters who do not qualify. In that respect, I dare to say, that the Chinese concept addresses my concerns in principle. By saying this, I will attract heavy criticism because China-bashing has become in the west an obligation for politically correct behavior. People in the West treat someone like me as a traitor. You are not allowed to appreciate positive features in the enemy's political system no matter the reasonableness of the feature that you refuse to criticize.

We could implement the Chinese practice in multi-party democracies by establishing the requirement to join one of the political parties to become eligible to participate in elections. After all, only active party

members show commitment to politics and are likely to know democratic rules and will probably adhere to political discipline.

I am glad that I am not a politician who has to come up with the definition of the criteria that will exclude certain persons from voting or for joining a party and to remain a party member. Promoting such ideas would be political suicide in a democracy. You will probably not call someone a politician who makes a proposal by which he annihilates his political career. My idea of establishing eligibility criteria will for sure generate widespread and passionate protests from those who will be excluded and who probably represent the larger segment of the population.

Political agendas and decisions generally have no chances to succeed in democracies if they are unpopular. Even if a country needs urgent measures for its survival, these measures will not find a majority. We know that it is not a good idea to let mentally ill and irresponsible people vote in elections. But proposals and plans to prevent such people from voting remain in the realm of utopia. We acknowledge the existence of toxic risks for a democracy but we are unable to mitigate them. Government spending beyond a country's means is a direct result of people's irresponsible demand for benefits.

A democracy with universal suffrage is self-destructive. The germ for the downfall is built-in. I would like to live long enough – let's say a few more decades - to receive confirmation of my suspicion that the introduction of the system with full universal suffrage was not really a good idea. In terms of history this is a very short period of time as I have already mentioned. Democracy with universal suffrage is still in a testing phase, which – at least in the US – shows already now that corrections are necessary to weaken or disable disruptive individualism that paralyzes efficient and responsible government.

### **Eligibility of Candidates in Elections**

The organizers of elections in the US will include a candidate for presidency in the ballot paper if he meets a bare minimum of criteria. He must be a citizen by birth, at least 35 years old and must have been a resident of the US for at least 14 years. There is no upward age limit because this would be discrimination against old age. Old people can participate without restrictions. Nikki Haley, a Republican candidate for the 2024 US elections, suggested without success a mental competency test for politicians over the age of 75. She did not suggest such tests for younger candidates who often sound as if they also needed such a test.

Intelligence, education and moral standing of a candidate are currently not relevant for eligibility of a candidate in democratic elections. I think that there should be eligibility criteria. I suggested in the previous section to let people vote only if they have a voter's license. Following up on this suggestion I would recommend as a minimum requirement that someone must have at least a voter's license or even a more prestigious candidate's license, if he wants his name to be listed on the ballot paper.

### **Criminal Contenders**

A convicted criminal or a person who is indicted for a crime, can present himself as a candidate. Even a criminal who is convicted for subverting the democratic system can present himself as candidate for the presidency and can win the elections. Courts of law can bar a criminal from holding office for certain but not for all crimes. But many – mostly conservative – people argue that convicted criminals must have the right to be candidates in elections. Let the people decide if they want a criminal to be their president, they argue. They say that the vox populi is above the law. This is insane. It shows that liberal democracies are suicidal. The vox populi should have limits. But there are no limits. The voice of the populace expresses itself freely in parliament. Parliament can even abolish human rights in the constitution,

provided the amendment finds a qualified majority. I talk about the question if human rights prevail over constitutions in my essay about human rights.

An example for candidate who should not have been allowed to present himself for elections was George Santos who also used the names Anthony Devolder and Anthony Dee.



George  
Santos

The republican George Santos, son of Brazilian immigrants, competed in the 2022 mid-term elections against the democrat Robert Zimmerman for the position as a congressman for New York. In his resume, which he used during his campaign to promote his bid, he claimed to have graduated from Baruch College and from New York University but he had never seen either of these institutions from the inside. He claimed to have worked as 'associate asset manager in the real asset division' of Citigroup and then at Goldman Sachs.

These were two other lies. He also stated that he and his family own 13 rental properties. But he later admitted that *"George Santos does not own any properties"*. He finally stated that his grandparents immigrated to the US from Belgium. He claimed that they had survived the Holocaust as Jewish refugees from Ukraine. In November 2022, in a public meeting with the Jewish News Syndicate, he passionately repeated this claim. He boasted that he was very proud of his Jewish heritage. This was a chutzpah, which is the Yiddish word for a daring effrontery. After he had won the elections, he admitted that he was actually a Catholic. Investigative journalists had found out that his grandparents were born in Brazil as Catholics. Claiming to be Jewish is a clever strategy because bringing the important Jewish electorate of New York on one's side is almost a guarantee for election victory. After the elections, the media easily found out that he had systematically fabricated a series of lies. Had the media published their findings during the election campaign, they would have faced accusations of election interference. Because revealing a criminal past of a candidate during an election campaign is interference in elections.

George Santos called his crude fabrications an 'embellishment' of his CV. *'A lot of people overstate in their resumes, or twist a little bit'*, he played down his blatant lies and added that *"We do stupid things in life"*, by which he meant that we, human beings, are all not perfect and we must be forgiven. He did not acknowledge that he deceived his voters, including his Jewish voters, with his 'embellishments', which were actually massive lies. You can only embellish something that exists but he invented everything in his CV as a pathological liar. He knows and exploited the fact that honesty and morality have no relevance in politics. He won the elections. If he had obtained a job with his fabricated CV, his employer could rightfully dismiss him for fraudulent job application. But Santos declared that he was after all not a convicted criminal and was therefore fit to serve as an elected member of Congress. If he had been convicted, he would probably say that it was a 'kangaroo court' that sentenced him. Santos' attitude and the support he received from his party reveal the extent to which morality in politics has disappeared. Politicians who might have previously resigned in shame are now shameless. They are even defiant and counter-attack.

The main scandal, however, is that his republican party apparently saw for a very long time no reason to sanction him. They argued that the electorate, which is above the law, has spoken and has – so to speak – redeemed Santos' fraudulent claims.

Donald Trump's lawyers argued in the same way in a court case in Colorado, by which a group of voters invoked the insurrection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to remove the former president from the 2024 ballot. The voters correctly stated that Trump had played an active role in the 06 January 2021 insurrection. But Trump's lawyers argued that the removal from the ballot, which the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment prescribes, was interference in the election process and that it was up to the people to decide. This



argument is silly because it firstly insinuates that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the constitution is applicable to everybody but not to candidates in elections and secondly that the populace stands above the law. But Trump's lawyers were successful. The court ruled that Trump's name must remain on the ballot paper for the electorate to decide.

In the Santos case, the members of the House of Representatives by-passed the electorate and expelled the fraudulent colleague three years after his election with a two-thirds majority. After his expulsion he left the House of Representatives saying to the reporters *'To hell with this place'*. But this did not prevent him from the chutzpah to present himself as candidate in the 2024 elections for a seat in the US Congress. He subsequently withdrew his bid after he had received a sentence of 87 months in prison for aggravated identity theft and wire fraud.

Candidates in democratic elections in the US can be convicted criminals and can serve time in prison for felonies or crimes and are still allowed to run for elections. Donald Trump is a prime example. A jury of 12 jurors in New York declared him guilty of 35 felony charges but Trump's election campaign continued unabated and he won.

Ron Reynolds, a Texas law maker, is another example. He was imprisoned in the jail of Montgomery County in 2018 because he had misused funds in his personal injury law practice and was suspended from practicing law. He had been punished previously for other misdemeanors and conducted his election campaign from inside the prison. The people in his constituency nevertheless re-elected him in an act of exoneration. Ron Reynolds was released from the Montgomery County just a few days before the start of the 86<sup>th</sup> Texas legislature.

Another example is Jeremy Brown, who is Special Forces Combat Veteran of 20 years and member of the far-right Oath keepers' group. He was sentenced to 80 months in prison for the illegal possession of weapons and for his participation in the riots that attacked and occupied the US capitol on 06 January 2021. The rioters tried to prevent the certification of Joe Biden as elected president. The organizers of elections nevertheless allowed him afterwards to be a candidate for the Florida House of Representatives and he directed his campaign from a jail cell using a "campaign commander" as he called his campaign manager. However, he did not get elected but Donald Trump pardoned him along with more than 1,500 convicted rioters of which Trump pardoned some and commuted the sentences of others.

I find it appalling if rules of a democracy allow criminals to run for high office and that criminals have the chutzpah to present themselves as candidates. The sad state of democracy's health becomes terribly evident when criminals can present themselves as candidates. But it is an even clearer sign of a sick democracy if people elect these criminals. Voters become accessories to the crimes.

Marine LePen is the leader of the French right-wing political party called Rassemblement National (RN), which is controversial but growing in popularity. The recent polls indicate that she has chances to become the French president in the 2027 elections. However, as member of the European parliament, she had embezzled millions of Euros of public funds that she had used not for work in the EU parliament but to pay workers in her political party. I find it refreshingly different from American political culture that a court in Paris not only sentenced her in 2025 to four years in prison and to a fine of 100,000 Euro but the court also declared that she was not allowed to run in elections for five years. LePen did not deny the embezzlement but explained that she had done this for a good cause, by which she implicitly referred to Robin Hood who robbed representatives of authority and gave the gains to the poor. She also reiterated what all politicians usually say after a criminal conviction. She said that her prosecution and sentence were politically motivated and that the judiciary always abides by the orders of government and not by

the rule of law. She called her exclusion from elections an '*attack on the will of the people*'. She implicitly argued that the people must have the right to elect a criminal as their president. American right-wing politicians always call criminal prosecutions against them a political witch-hunt.

Contenders for the highest office in the country should not only be ineligible if their conviction as criminals is accompanied with the declaration that they are barred from holding public office. All serious criminal convictions should make candidates ineligible.

#### *Commitment to Democratic Values*

In liberal democracies electoral commissions admit candidates who openly oppose democracy or speak and behave in a way that undermines the foundations of democracies. I have only to name Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, Donald Trump in the US and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, whom they call 'the Trump of the Tropics'. There are innumerable other examples on the African continent, where irresponsibility of voters meets the irresponsibility of elected officials.

A famous example is Hitler. Germans voted in the 1932 elections the Nazi party with 37% of the votes as the largest party into parliament even though Hitler in his book '*Mein Kampf*' ('My battle') had clearly advocated antisemitism, including the terrible program that he later implemented. He should not have been admitted as a candidate in elections. Instead, Hitler became in 1934 chancellor in a clean democratic process. Hitler's party then skillfully corrupted the German population by drastically reducing unemployment with large infrastructure projects. His organization "*Kraft durch Freude*" (strength through pleasure) offered the general public sports programs and generous holidays, including sea cruises. Satisfaction with these benefits made people blind for all other programs of the Nazis. The German people were 'sleepwalking into a dictatorship' as Liz Cheney warned before the American People elected Donald Trump into a second term as president.

Donald Trump is an example of a politician who uses the powers of his democratically obtained position to convert his country into a dictatorship. In his rallies during the 2024 election campaign, he pledged to use – if elected – his executive powers to a maximum extent to remove restrictions of the executive branch of government. He announced to do away with the independence of the civil service by making most of them political appointees that he can remove if he feels that they are not sufficiently loyal to him. Trump also pledged that he will abolish the independence of the Justice Department. He can then direct the Justice Department to prosecute people who are disloyal to him and can spare his friends from prosecution. In 2019, he already claimed "*I have the right to do whatever I want as president*". With these words, Trump presented himself openly as a man who is unencumbered by legal, logical and political restraints. Unfortunately, the conservative majority of the Supreme Court of the US has ruled that a president was mostly immune from criminal prosecutions when he violates the law.

Because Americans have elected this man for the second time as their president, the path is open for tyranny, which the Americans then deserve because Trump had informed them beforehand about his intentions. Americans should afterwards not pretend that they were not warned.

It sounds reasonable not to admit a candidate who is not committed to democratic principles and values. The Liberal Party in Canada, for example, can reject a candidate, who has demonstrated in '*public statements or by past improper conduct, a lack of commitment to democracy*' and is therefore '*manifestly unfit for the office*'. The liberal party's review committee has used this provision to reject Chandra Arya as candidate for the succession of prime minister Trudeau.

On the other hand, the eligibility criteria of the liberal party are widely open for interpretation. There is the danger that the organizers of elections don't include a candidate on the ballot paper out of bias.

### *Morality, Integrity and Intelligence of a Candidate*

Factors like education, morality and integrity should ideally be criteria for eligibility. But these essential requirements are utopian for two reasons:

Firstly, it is evident that moral integrity prevents candidates from winning the elections in most countries, including the US. Election campaigns are dirty and costly business. You need a full toolkit for manipulations and deceit in addition to billions of greenbacks at your disposal to run for president. Barbara Tuchman, an American historian, stated that a person, who managed to be a candidate in the elections for president, will have lost on his way to the candidacy all moral qualities that are needed for the office. It is a peculiarity of the American election system that candidates are not nominated by an internal process within a political party but by the general membership of a party, which process is called the primaries. This procedure gives the potential candidates plenty of opportunities to appeal to the voters with populist arguments and to receive huge donations from political friends and lobbyists.

There is a second reason why we cannot make morality a criterion for eligibility of a candidate. It is the vagueness of the term. Morality is one of the holy words that almost everybody holds in high esteem but nobody knows for sure what it means in a special situation. The treaty of Versailles, which imposed heavy reparations on Germany after the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, provided in its article 227 that the allies would prosecute the former emperor "*for a supreme offence against international morality and the sanctity of treaties*". A codex for international morality has never existed. The reference to morality in the infamous treaty of Versailles just expresses the emotional desire to find a culprit and to punish the emperor. The allies subsequently did not implement article 227 of the treaty.

The evaluation whether a candidate in elections is intelligent enough and morally responsible to hold office is left to the voters who themselves might be totally misinformed and as much uneducated, irresponsible and immoral as the candidate.

In a free and multi-cultural society there are no reliable and generally accepted criteria to evaluate a person's morality and integrity. Fundamental protestants on one side of the wide spectrum of morality embrace different standards than certain ethnic groups, business tycoons or militant Muslims on the other side of the scale of morality.

Discussions about morality are very fast leading into quicksand. To start with, we have no short and clear definition of morality on which everybody agrees. Some social scientists use a standardized framework, that they call the 'moral foundations theory'. These scientists break down the valuation of social behavior into five aspects. One is loyalty, which is the devotion to a person's own group. Another element is authority, which is the respect for leaders and rules. Purity in terms of cleanliness and piety, they say, is another element of morality. In addition, the standardized framework relates morality to the care for others and to fairness. Let's assume that the above list of elements of morality is correct and complete. We then have the fact that people give different weights to each of these elements.

Loyalty is for some the ultimate expression of morality while fairness is for others the ultimate sign of morality. It might be easy to judge the morality of a decision or of an action. But it will be more difficult to judge if someone is a moral person because a person who is overall behaving in a moral way might act from time-to-time in a way that some people consider to be morally questionable.

We can measure temperature and air pressure. But we are not able to measure, for example, the levels of loyalty and fairness. If we were able to establish that someone is 80% loyal but cares for others only at a level of 20%, how would you judge the person's overall morality? The calculation of a balanced scorecard of morality is not possible.

Some researchers focused on morality of politicians. They did not look at positive characteristics like loyalty and care for others. In a national survey they asked their respondents what they perceived as moral transgression of political candidates. Respondents mentioned transgressions such as committing wrongful imprisonment, tax fraud, embezzlement or animal abuse, watching child pornography and cheating on a spouse or beating her.

Obviously, we don't have a scientific method to judge the morality of a political candidate using any of the criteria for moral transgressions. We cannot measure the weight of merit points and demerit points for the morality of a candidate's behavior. We also have no precise method to calculate the sum of merit and demerit points to arrive at a judgement of the overall morality of a political candidate.

People use their intuitive feelings for the judgment of morality. They might reject an otherwise moral candidate because he was not faithful to his wife or was caught shoplifting when he was an adolescent. Whatever the judgement, it will always be totally subjective.

People often hide their financial and business interests behind a fake veil of morality to which they claim that they adhere. The fakeness of this veil is probably the reason why people are suspicious if someone emphasizes the importance of morality. They will accuse him of hypocrisy, bias and exaggerated moralization.

Even if we had clear-cut criteria for morality, the weakest factor in the assessment of a candidate's morality is that voters have to rely on descriptions of the candidate by media and social networks, which are the products of influencers not only within the country but also from foreign countries that have an interest in the outcome of an election. If someone spreads the rumor that a candidate has beaten his wife or has sexually harassed a woman, this might nowadays be the death sentence for his candidacy.

The skillful self-projection and showmanship of a candidate also prevent the voters from gaining a true and clear picture about the person. This is in addition to voters' bias in favor of candidates who look handsome, youthful and charismatic and are able to make powerful speeches. These are in many cases the only credentials that a politician needs.

#### *Physical Attractiveness*

Researchers have established that voters in elections almost automatically form their opinions about the competency and trustworthiness of a candidate by taking the shape of the faces as clues. A strong square chin – for example – suggests strength and dominance while a square chin with a turned-down mouth conveys trouble. The researchers showed students in fast sequence the faces of persons and asked them to make a rapid assessment of the competencies and trustworthiness of the persons that they saw. The students did not know that all the people that they briefly saw candidates in elections. The result of the experiment showed that the persons that the students judged as most trustworthy and competent, were the candidates that actually had won the elections.

Nobody opts for a leader if he looks like Frankenstein. They must look like John F Kennedy or at least like Justin Trudeau. The liberal party fielded Justin Trudeau as candidate in the 2016 federal elections not because of his moral standing or knowledge and skills. In this respect he had only the credentials as a bachelor of arts and as a bachelor of Education. He worked as a teacher in Vancouver and as a snowboarding instructor and drama teacher. The Liberal Party nominated him only because he was tall, young and handsome. In addition, he was an excellent speaker and had the same name as a popular former prime minister, who was his father. All other criteria did not count for the liberal party that forced him to resign in 2025 for lack of credibility that he had been unable to hide while in office.

Politicians, if they want to win, must have a Midas Touch, which expression refers legendary king of Phrygia who converted everything that he touched into gold. I am not an expert for beauty or handsomeness of people but I wonder if Catholics would have elected Pope Francis as the 266<sup>th</sup> head of their church in 2013.



Peng Liyuan



Xi Jinping

French would most likely also not elect Christian Tein, the leader of New Caledonian independence movement as their president. I finally wonder if Xi Jinping, would have been elected president of China if he had stood as a candidate in a multi-party election.



Christian Tein



Pope Francis

But it certainly helps if a candidate is married to a beautiful woman, which is a handicap for a Pope who must adhere to celibacy. It helps the public image of Xi Jinping that he is married to Peng Liyuan, a good-looking soprano folk singer and actress who is very popular in China. People might see the reflection of Peng Liyuan's glory and beauty in Xi Jinping's face and will subconsciously give him credit for this.

Donald Trump married the young Melania Knave who modelled as Melania Knauss. She might have benefitted Trump's political career with her beauty and youth. As his wife she *"is the glory of the man"* (1 Corinthians 11:7). But Trump always was and still is convinced that his own handsome appeal makes him irresistible for voters. Trump answered on 19 September 1999 to a journalist of New York Times who asked him why people would vote for him: *'To be blunt, people would vote for me. They just would. Why? Maybe because I'm so good looking'*.

#### *Required Competencies of a Candidate*

In workshops about competency-based training (CBT) in different countries, I discussed with the participants the competencies, skills and experiences that are needed in various occupations. We covered as examples many different occupations like plumbers, auto mechanics, carpenters etc. We also discussed the competencies needed by lawyers, doctors and other high-level professionals. The skills needed in these professions, we agreed, were much more difficult to describe and to break down into competency units. However, the need to complete university studies and to be a member of professional accreditation bodies guarantee a certain basic level of quality. Members of such regulated professions also have the obligation to adhere to their respective code of ethics failing which their professional organizations suspend or expel them. Politicians are not subject to any rules governing their work.

At the end of the workshops, I used to ask the question which competencies, skills and knowledge the president of their respective countries should have. The participants always answered with bright smiles of helplessness. I might have asked a religious audience, which competencies they think a Pope should have. Nobody knows what makes a good president or a good Pope. We might only be able to judge by our feelings or by results that a leader achieves. But results might be the product of coincidences and we evaluate short term results differently than medium-term or long-term outcomes. What looks good in short-term might turn out to be nasty mistake.

An incompetent populace can elect an incompetent president. This is a practically incurable risk of democracies. We should consider the creation of an accreditation board for political leaders even if this sounds like a utopian proposal. The communist party in China functions to some degree as an



accreditation body because without maintaining good standing in the party nobody can access and advance in government positions.

An accreditation board for politicians is utopian because we will have great difficulties to establish the criteria for accreditation. As I have just stated, a test of morality is not possible except if we take a clean police record as the only litmus test.

One criterion could be the knowledge about the history of the country and about the main features of geography, culture and society and about the principles of law, justice and government. This would be like a test that immigrants have to pass before they can become German citizens (Einbürgerungstest). The candidate has in this test to answer 33 multiple choice questions from a list of 310 potential questions from an item bank. But questions, for example, about which the first 10 words of the National Anthem are or what happened on 09 November 1938 (the so-called Kristallnacht) are certainly not targeting the knowledge that a candidate in elections should have before a ballot paper can include his name. In addition, the person taking the test can easily memorize the answers to the 310 potential questions without understanding their meanings and forget them right after the test. On the other hand, a well-informed and well-read professor of science, philosophy or theology might not only fail the multiple-choice test but might be overwhelmed by the task to govern a country if elected. A medical doctor might not be the right person to become minister of health. A medical doctor might not even be a good manager of a hospital. And someone who was extremely successful in business or in sports has not necessarily the skills to be the head of a government.

A recent infamous example of a businessman who became twice a disastrous president of the US is Donald Trump. I also feel very uncomfortable when I imagine Elon Musk at the helm of any nation. He feels compelled to attract the public's attention by tweeting provocative political ideas and comments. He insulted, for example the German president by publicly calling him '*an anti-democratic tyrant. Shame on him*'. His emotional interest in politics will not automatically make him a good president and for sure not a diplomat.

An intelligence test sounds plausible to determine the eligibility of a political candidate. But intelligence alone is no guarantee for the quality and honesty that we require ideally of a politician. Bobby Fischer, Boris Spassky, Magnus Carlsen and other chess world champions are certainly very intelligent but this might not be enough to become a good leader of a country. Bobby Fisher's great intelligence, in particular, did not prevent him from denying the holocaust and to call the United States "*a farce controlled by dirty, hook-nosed, circumcised Jew bastards*". He certainly had not the intelligence and skills to fight his emotions and did not show the important skill and willingness to compromise and to seek consensus.

Studies about the relationship between intelligence and anti-social behavior are inconclusive except that some researchers have established that felons in prisons usually have lower IQs than the population outside prisons. But this is not evidence that lower IQ levels are causes for criminal behavior, particularly because different aspects of intelligence like cognitive skills and verbal skills will have different impacts on social behavior. Overall, it seems that people with high intelligence commit as many crimes and anti-social acts as people with low intelligence. The types of crimes that intelligent people commit might be different and high intelligence might enable the offender to better conceal his acts particularly if he has the money to hire a lawyer to engineer an acquittal.

A politician should have the cognitive skills and the intellectual capacity to see and analyze the facts, and should have the patience to listen to unbiased advisers. Selecting the right advisers is probably the most important ingredient for success of a government leader but we don't know which competencies are

required for such selections. Government leaders are anyway not free to select their ministers and other members of their governments. They are bound by the demand for proportional representation of races, gender and minorities or by the requests of a political party in a coalition government. Generous donors for the election campaign in the US have also an important influence on staffing decisions. Some of the donors have the ambition to obtain a prestigious government job like ambassador in a foreign country. The American ambassadors in Fiji, where I lived for five years, were regularly substantial donors. The president always has to accommodate the ambitions for prestige and for a diplomatic passports as a thank-you for generous donations.

Recent examples are Warren Stephens, who donated \$3.3 million USD to Trump's 2024 election campaign and became ambassador to the UK and Charles Kushner, who donated 2 million USD to the same campaign before Trump appointed him ambassador to France. These appointments are in addition to the positions of secretary of education, secretary of commerce, secretary of treasury and under-secretary of state, for which Trump selected mega donors as well. I cannot see a big difference to the corrupt system in Vietnam, where – as a friend told me – you have to pay a bribe of some \$500,000 USD to officials of the communist party to get short-listed for a high government job.

John F Kennedy said: *'A clever person must be clever enough to employ people who are much smarter than he is'*. We know only in hindsight if a politician made a good choice when he appointed an advisor. A famous example of a blatantly wrong selection was Willy Brandt's appointment of Günter Guillaume as his personal assistant. Police uncovered Guillaume in 1974 as a high-ranking spy for East Germany. Brandt's bad choice forced him to resign. Many people anyway suspected that he was a hidden advocate for communist interests. And Brandt might have naively thought that his communist friends in the soviet block would not betray him in such a crude way. He should have known that trusting someone – even a tovaritch (comrade) – is foreign in soviet mentality and generally in politics. A Russian proverb says *'Trust but verify'* (Doveriyai, no proveryai - доверяй, но проверяй)

The main problem in my eyes comes from the fact that getting elected necessitates the capability and skills to fight with all means through a dirty election campaign. Once elected, holding on to power against opposition, also requires the same skills. But a good political leader needs ideally very different skills and a different character to govern the country wisely and with compassion. Becoming a politician is not difficult, but being a government leader is very challenging.

To win the political battle, a person has to have the characteristics of self-assertion as a top dog or dominant stag (Platzhirsch or Alphonse) and has to use both elbows combined with strategic and often deceitful manipulations to gain the upper hand. Such people usually have not the character to care for others and to respect the wishes and aspirations of a minority. We do not even know what the skills and competencies are that a good leader of a country needs. However, I have anyway the impression that the ultimate success of political leadership is less the result of skills and wisdom but the result of good or bad luck and of random circumstances.

Once in power, a politician should strip off the rough skin that he had during the election campaign and should become a compassionate and considerate leader. The US have extremely long campaigns for presidential elections every four years. Between presidential elections are so-called mid-term elections, in which people elect half of the numbers of their representatives in parliament. Politicians are in permanent election mode, which does not allow the president and his party to calmly focus on government business. Once he has taken possession of the Oval Office, the American president has to focus on the mid-term elections to maintain or gain majorities in the two houses of parliament. In addition, the president will start his own election campaign for a second term right after his election to the first

term. Campaigning is not only permanent and costly but also time-consuming with frequent rallies and fund-raising events.

Politicians do not get elected because the voters have the capacity to judge the competencies of a candidate. Most voters are more concerned about how to feed their children, how to pay the rent and how much it costs to refuel their cars. These necessities have priority over the 'philosophical' question which candidate is qualified to be a good president. The popular focus on daily needs and on kitchen table issues brought Hitler to power. He provided jobs and income to many citizens after the terrible years during and after the great depression. These were the most important things for people who did not look at other things that Hitler instigated.

As I have just stated we do not even know which competencies make a good politician. Most voters don't judge a candidate by his or her management competencies. They show enthusiasm for a good-looking and charismatic candidate and vote for him even if he is an intellectual or moral lightweight. Other voters might cast their ballots for a politician who promises things that a voter needs no matter their evaluation of his competencies. But many others vote for a candidate not because they are convinced that he is competent but because they do not like his opponent. This is actually how I made up my mind on 07 May 2017 when I visited the French Consulate General in Guangzhou to cast my ballot in the presidential elections. I gave Emanuel Macron my vote not because I thought he was competent, which I could not judge, but because I did not like his competitor, Marine Le Pen. Voters in many elections are confronted with options that they equally dislike. In a certain sense, this means that we don't have elections, in which we can express our free will, we have often only the privilege to opt for one of equally undesirable candidates. It is often the choice between two rotten apples as I heard a Chinese say when he referred to the choice that voters had at one time between Donald Trump and Joe Biden during the 2024 elections. After Joe Biden had dropped out of the race, Americans had the choice between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. If I were an American, I would have voted for Harris not because of her competencies, which I cannot judge, but because I want to vote against Trump.

The following joke highlights the issue of qualities of leaders:

A man walks into a pet shop to buy a parrot. The sales person shows him three beautiful birds in bright colors. One was blue, the second was green and the third was red. Pointing at the blue bird, the seller explains that he costs 1,500 USD because the parrot can answer the door and usher visitors into the office. He then explains that the green parrot costs 3,000 USD because the bird can not only answer the door but can also take phone calls and take down notes about the caller. The salesman indicated 12,000 USD for the third parrot, the red one. The client asks with surprise: "Wow, this is a stiff price. What can this bird do?" and the salesman answers: "I don't know, but the other two parrots call him Leader".

Robert Louis Stevenson put it with less humor this way: "*Politics is the only profession for which no preparation is thought necessary*". This statement covers also monarchs and dictators. The only set of skills they need is to gain power and to hold on to it, if necessary, with force.

### *Success of a Politician*

In hindsight we might want to judge a head of government by the results that he has achieved. But we don't know what the 'success' of a politician means beyond winning elections and holding on to power. We don't know the longer-term effects of political actions and we don't know what the consequences would have been if the leader of a country had made a different political decision. It is impossible to figure out – for example – the course of history if America had not engaged in the Korean and Vietnam wars and in the many other wars that the US have started for unfathomable reasons.

What looks like a good result in the moment might be very much detrimental in the future. And vice-versa, what looks like a bad decision today might subsequently have beneficial results. Politicians and the voters cannot predict the future consequences of political decisions. I have written more about the art of telling the future in the essay 'Trying to Predict the Future'.

I remember one significant political decision that looked in my eyes at the time very bad but did not prevent good results to occur many years later. When Germany was divided into West Germany (BRD) and East Germany (DDR) the West German policy was to prohibit all other countries to recognize DDR as a sovereign country. They called it the 'Hallstein Doctrine' after Walter Hallstein, a key foreign policy adviser of Konrad Adenauer. The obligation to work towards re-unification was even written into the preamble of the first version of the German constitution (Grundgesetz). Not pursuing re-unification was unconstitutional. This is similar to the policy related to Taiwan that China enforces. China considers Taiwan a breakaway province and wants to reunite it with the mainland. China reacts with determination if another country dares recognizing Taiwan as an independent nation. In drastic deviation from the German policy, Chancellor Willy Brandt decided in 1972 to recognize East Germany as a nation. I thought at that time that this was an act of treason because it looked as if Brandt's decision cemented forever the division of Germany into two antagonistic countries. If a politician in China promoted the independence of Taiwan, the government would certainly consider him to be a traitor and would treat him accordingly.

Willy Brandt, whom the Soviet Union considered as a friend, was anyway, as I said above, not free from the suspicion to have the interests of communism more in his mind than Germany's re-unification. As we all know today, the two Germanys reunited 17 years later and we don't know if the re-unification happened despite Brandt's decision or if his decision was a clever move in the attempt to reunite Germany. We do not even know what Brandt's strategy and real intentions were.

### **Democracy in a wider Meaning**

One understanding of democracy goes beyond the simple requirement of free and universal elections. It says that democracy must include political freedoms, civil liberties and the full set of human rights, about which I talk in another essay. Human rights and democracy are two different concepts. The right to determine the government is not included in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). But many people see human rights and democracy as two integral parts of one political system. One must come with the other. However, an absolute monarch or an authoritarian ruler can guarantee human rights and vice versa, there can be electoral democracies that allow people to elect their government but do not guarantee all human rights. Many followers of Donald Trump claim that the current democracy in the US has features of a tyranny that he wants to replace with his own unrestricted powers.

There are advocates of a democratic concept, who go even further than this. They include in the definition of democracy not only civil liberties and human rights but also some additional features that determine the depth and quality of democracy in a country. The Intelligence Unit of "The Economist" in the UK, for example, suggests that we should also look at the details of how fair the electoral process is organized and how well the government functions. They also believe that political culture and participation in political processes define the quality of a democracy. And indeed, it looks like a problem when only 32% of eligible voters cast their ballots in an election, as in local elections in France 2021 and only 38.7% in the 2025 general elections in Vanuatu. I mention this small Pacific Island country because I lived there for six years and understand the disinterest in complicate national party politics when a population of some 325,000 is scattered over 65 islands that stretch over a distance of around 1,300 kms from north to south.

Only 49% of eligible voters went to the polls in Iran in 2021 and only about 65% of the US voting age population bothered to get registered for the election in 2012 and only 55.7% of the eligible voting population went to the polls in the presidential elections 2016 in the US.

Generally, we interpret silence as approval. The Latin phrase “Qui tacet consentire videtur” (who remains silent is deemed to agree) indicates exactly that. But it will be an indication of an unhealthy democracy if abstinence does not come from lack of interest but comes out of frustration that people feel because participation does not seem to have any practical impact. It is abstinence out of resignation.

Countries like Belgium, Turkey and Australia, have made it a legal obligation to participate in elections but these countries do not enforce it for good reasons. Governments cannot generate interest by threatening non-voters with fines. If someone is forced against his will to go to the polling station, he might make his cross in the wrong place of the ballot paper or might select a candidate randomly or out of protest.

Some political thinkers go one step further with their definition of democracy. They promote an all-encompassing understanding of democracy. They want to include levels of economic and social wellbeing of citizens as criteria to measure the quality of a democracy. This has nothing to do any more with the original concept of electoral democracy it is rather a measure for how efficiently and nicely a country is organized, managed and beneficial for its citizens. If there is general happiness and prosperity, the type of the political system does not count for citizens.

Democracy is indeed not a purpose in itself. If people live a miserable life of hunger and poverty, they will certainly not accept their misery and praise their nation only because their country is called a democracy. Any form of government must ensure that people are not hungry and are reasonably happy. We should not have a problem with an authoritarian regime that cares efficiently for the well-being of its subjects. I personally prefer living a comfortable and safe life in an absolute monarchy than a miserable life in a democracy. In the US, nearly 41 million people, or 13% of the population, lived in poverty in 2016. This is a bad track record for a country that claims to be a model democracy for the world. If I were one of these poor people in the US and noticed that I am surrounded by millions of multi-millionaires and more than 770 multi-billionaires, my appreciation of democracy would probably be quite weak.

I might also add that it is essential that people in a democracy are familiar with the importance of justice and with the need for rules and laws and the presence of a well-functioning legal system. Familiarity with these features of society are indicators for a positive political culture in democracies and in all other forms of government. However, given my – thankfully – few experiences with lawyers and with courts in Canada I would prefer having a legal problem in China than having to enter a law office in Canada. The fees of lawyers in North America- no matter their professional competence - are so high that this boils down to no access to justice and no rule of law. If we define democracy more comprehensively beyond the existence of democratic elections, a democracy with a deficient legal system is not perfect.

The advocates of an all-encompassing definition of democracy do not answer the question whether a country is a democracy with a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. The Economist’s Intelligence Unit, for example, classifies the countries in four groups. These are ‘Full Democracies’, ‘Flawed Democracies’, ‘Hybrid Regimes’ and ‘Authoritarian Regimes’. It is interesting that the Economist classifies the USA, which sees itself as trailblazer in this issue, as a ‘Flawed Democracy’. In 2022, the US holds only rank 30 out of 167 countries in the world. The US received particularly low marks in the categories ‘Functioning of Government’ and ‘Political Culture’. The Economist counted only 25 full democracies in the entire world. The ‘V-Dem Institute’ (Varieties of Democracy) in Sweden gave the US rank 20 out of 179 nations.



In the same year, the Economist classified China as an authoritarian country with rank 156 out of 167 countries while the V-Dem-Institute gave China rank 177 out of 179 nations – only two ranks better than the infamous regime in North Korea. But such a punitive low rank for China is not justified if we use criteria like wealth, health and satisfaction that average citizens in China enjoy. The low rank for China does also not consider the much lower rates of violent crimes and of drug overdoses. The US might classify themselves as a democracy but if a city like Philadelphia counted 535 homicides per 1.5 million inhabitants in 2021, an important feature of a peaceful democracy is missing. In comparison, there were in 2018 only 53 murders and homicides per one million inhabitants in China if we can believe official statistics.

The Chinese state media publish reports about the US and Canada, by which they want to discourage people to demand a change their system into a western democracy. They therefore show often shocking videos, for example, of homeless drug addicts that ply the streets of Philadelphia or of Vancouver. I have not seen such scenes during the last 20 years in China. I have seen many poor people in the streets but they were not drug addicts and presented no eye sores like in the screen grab of a Chinese video shown here.



Video of Drug Addict on East Hastings Street, Vancouver, Canada

On the other hand, if such situations existed in China, the communist government will obviously not allow their citizens to publish such scenes in the internet.

A nasty feature of the US are regular mass shootings. Before I access the news in the internet every morning, I no longer wonder if there was a mass shooting but I only learn how many of them had occurred the day before. Youths, mentally ill people and ultra-right or ultra left extremists frequently kill innocent people as lone wolves. Many of the victims outside schools are colored. In 2022, a white 15-year-old boy opened fire in a Raleigh, N.C. and killed five people indiscriminately wounding many more. We read about many more young students using guns for mass killings. The students typically use guns that their parents keep in unsecured cabinets. But they also use guns that they received as a birthday or Christmas gifts from gun-addicted parents who go with their young kids to shooting ranges for practice.

In an elementary school in Virginia, a first-grade student as young as six years old, shot in January 2023 with his gun at his teacher who was seated at her reading table in the classroom. The teacher, Abby Zwerner is her name, was lucky because she was not killed but only wounded in the hand and in the chest. This event is gloomy evidence that guns in the US are everywhere and easily available for everybody to use - even in schools. The other dismal part of this story is that such events don't trigger legislation for gun control. Instead, they trigger only lawsuits for astronomical compensations. The lawyer of the 25 years old teacher in Virginia sued the school board for 40 million USD with the claim that the school could have prevented the shooting.

Old men also commit mass shootings but only 7 percent of shooters are over the age of 50. In January 2023, the 72-year- Huu Can Tran killed 11 people and wounded nine others in a shooting at a dance studio in Monterey Park, California. Two days later, another senior citizen of 66 years, Chunli Zhao, killed in Half Moon Bay, California, 7 people. Even if you accuse me of discrimination against men, I want to add that 98% of mass shooters are male in the US. You definitely will call me a racist when I report that 18% of mass shooters were black and 8% were Latinos.

The media reported recent mass killings of unsuspecting people in Las Vegas, Orlando, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, Charleston, Columbine, Parkland, El Paso and San Bernardino. The list of cities that experience mass shootings grows every day.

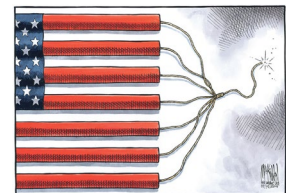
During January to September 2022 alone, we heard about 560 mass shootings, which indiscriminately killed 588 people and wounded 2,280. Media reported between 300 and 400 mass shootings in 2024. A country with such a track record should not be called an exemplary democracy if we define a democracy as a political system that features not only elections but typical benefits of a civilized society.

When it comes to efficient responses to a pandemic, the US don't show the same performance as China because citizens in China – unlike their counterparts in the US and in Europe - abide by government restrictions responsibly. A citizen in Shanghai, who got impatient with restrictive measures to fight the virus, approached a health official in hazmat-suite during the COVID-19 crisis. He asked him angrily why he enforced inconvenient restrictions. The health official answered *"Stop asking why. There is no why. We have to obey our country's regulations and epidemic control policies"* and the man – like most of his compatriots – accepted this answer without heated discussions about whether the government should implement less burdensome restrictions. I lived in China during the entire COVID-19 epidemic and had to queue every third day at a health-check post to obtain clearance for access to public places. I found this very inconvenient but reasonable.

Probably as a result of Chinese discipline, China reported only 3 COVID deaths per 1 million inhabitants while the US recorded more than 3,000 casualties per 1 million inhabitants. Warriors of individual liberties in the west did not support their government's fight against the pandemic. They instead not only insisted on the freedom not to wear masks and on the freedom to endanger others. They also claimed the freedom to protest in the streets against the obligation to wear masks during the health crisis. Some fighters for individual freedom in western countries seriously claimed that a certain number of deaths in a pandemic must be accepted as the price for the freedom not to wear masks and not to get vaccinated. A democracy is sick if such opinions not only prevail but if people advocate such nonsense in violent public protests against their government.

It is also not a sign for the health of the American democracy that more than 106,000 people died from drug overdoses in each of 2021 and 2022. Some seven people died every day during 2023 in Vancouver alone on overdoses after British Columbia had decriminalized the possession of less than 2.5 grams of hard drugs. The corresponding numbers of deaths by drug overdoses in China are sketchy but some investigative journalists assume that China has only 10% of the deaths from drug overdoses in the US.

The British magazine 'The Economist' voiced the opinion that the political culture is damaged in the US. Donald Kettl called it "The Divided States of America" (DSA) in his 2020 book with the same title. A fault line splits the US in blue and red states which fight cultural wars. Society suffers from the lack of a constructive political spirit.



Discussions on all levels, which should be peaceful in a functioning democracy, have become irreconcilable and violent in public and in parliament. People fiercely fight for their respective extreme positions. The fight has entered and divided even families. I have read reports that some people don't want to go home for Thanksgiving because they fear fights about politics within their families.

Republicans use freely fake news and the coarse language of Donald Trump. A gridlock exists in many areas in the red-blue divide. This made the trust in institutions fade away, including the trust in democratic elections. Trump and his faithful believers called without any evidence the elections manipulated and rigged. I talk more about this sad situation [below](#).

In any case, it is a sign of a sick political culture that Donald Trump, when he was a presidential candidate, repeatedly made in campaign speeches the following statements with resounding cheers and applause of an excited audience of followers:

He firstly claimed without providing evidence that news media like CNN and MSNBC publish systematically fake news. All pieces of information that don't make him shine as a hero are fake news for egocentric Trump – no matter their truthfulness.

He secondly said about his opposing candidate, Hillary Clinton, that *"she is as crooked as a three-dollar bill"* and must be locked up. The mass of people in the audience started excitedly to chant *'Lock her up, lock her up'*.

He thirdly asked his followers in many campaign speeches to "knock the crap out of" everybody who tried to throw a tomato at him. *"I promise I will pay for the legal fees, I promise"*, he added to encourage his listeners to become violent.

Trump finally said that he will in future not accept the result of democratic elections if he loses his bid. I want to quote in full length the sarcastic and bombastic words by which he made this announcement. He said *"I would like to promise and pledge to all of my voters and supporters and to all of the people of the United States that I will totally accept the results of this great and historic presidential election, if I win."* Following up on this promise, Tom Fitton, president of 'Judicial Watch', seriously recommended before the 2020 presidential election that Trump should declare victory already before the elections.

And indeed, when Trump did not win the election and lost the presidency to Joe Biden in 2020, he declined to concede defeat and tried instead to overturn the election result. If he had lost the elections of 2024, he would have followed up on such a pledge and, he and his sick followers would probably have been successful in overturning the elections.

Doug Mastriano is a republican senator for Pennsylvania who participated in the riots on Capitol Hill on 06 January 2021. A mob that Trump had ignited with his claim of rigged elections, tried to overturn the result of the 2020 elections, which Biden had won. Mastriano not only claimed in his campaign for governor in 2022, that God had asked him to run for governor but he also promised his followers that – if elected – he will certify Pennsylvania's election results only if the Republican candidate for president wins. This blatant rejection of the most basic principle of democracy did amazingly not disqualify him but disqualifies the electorate that did not criticize Mastriano's announcement. In the opposite, his constituents re-elected him in 2020 to the Pennsylvania State Senate with 68.7 % of the votes but they did thankfully not elect him as their governor in 2022.

All the above observations raise the question if the United States can continue to function as one unified country or if it will more likely fall apart in a national divorce as Marjorie Taylor Greene suggested. She proposed in a tweet on President's Day that *'we need to separate by red states and blue states and shrink the federal government'*. It is unclear how this can practically work since red and blue states have geographically no shared borders. The only likely solution would be to curtail federal powers to a level that might even be lower than the relatively weak powers of the European Commission over its 27 member states. Overall, I think that a healthy democracy will look much different from what we see in the US today.

### **Promotion of Democracy in the World**

The US government is the loudest promotor of democracy in the world. They see themselves as political teachers of the world. The Indian prime minister Narendra Modi also feels a mission as a 'vishwaguru'

(teacher of the world), when he promotes nationalism and radical Hinduism. India and Modi are good friends of the US and of its president. Teachers unite!

While Americans promote democracy in the world, they have difficulties defending and strengthening democracy in their own territory. They don't mean to promote in the world the core of democracy, which is a system of free elections with universal suffrage. The US rather promote individual freedoms, which they consider the main feature of democracy. They criticize and condemn countries that they think restrict these individual freedoms.

To be more precise, the US condemn only those nations and call them authoritarian if they threaten – like China – the US position as the largest economy and the strongest military power on our planet. The US don't care about lack of individual freedoms in countries like Vietnam and in myriads of other undemocratic nations. The US don't care about democracy in countries that don't interfere with American interests and don't pose a threat to American dominance in the world.

As we have seen above, rating agencies give the US relatively low marks as a liberal democracy. The US might promote democracy with words but they certainly don't promote democracy by displaying a model of an exemplary country. There are clearly visible signs in the US of a political decay and a decline of public appreciation of democracy. According to surveys, less than 25% of the US population today feel that it is "essential to live in a democracy". This rate was 75% in the 1930's. Pew research established that in 2015 only 19% of people trusted the government in Washington. The trust level in 1958 was above 70%. Pew research also revealed that only 29% of respondents said that the word "honest" describes politicians correctly. Even if these numbers have a certain error margin, they show that the appreciation of democracy and of its government is low in the US and constantly declining.

Despite these facts, the US continues to claim that it is a beacon of democracy for the rest of the world. The federal holiday in the US is called Independence Day and not Democracy Day. The founding fathers of the US had independence from the UK and from its monarch in mind and not primarily democracy. The founding fathers did not give the American government the mandate as missionaries for the globalization of democracy. The US government nevertheless sees it as their obligation to promote democracy on our planet. I don't know who gave them such a mandate.

The US is also not a beacon for peace. In the opposite. The United States are the product of wars. It started with the War of American Independence (1775-1783), which was followed by the second war of independence (1812-1815) against the British again. The US then fought a war against Mexico (1846-1848) as a result of which the US expanded its territory into areas that later became the states of California, Nevada and Utah. In the extremely deadly and cruel Civil War (1861-1865) the northern states fought successfully against the southern states, which had seceded from the US to become a Confederacy. To end the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the US fought successfully the Spanish-American War (1898) after which the US annexed Hawaii. As a result of its defeat, Spain also surrendered Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico to the United States.

The US continued their military engagements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with their participation in both World Wars. They continued totally unsuccessful military actions during the Korean War (1950-1953) and the war in Vietnam (1959-1975). They started the Gulf War (1990-1991) to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. Only God knows why they engaged in this war. The US started the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the senseless war of 20 years in Afghanistan (2001-2021) and in Iraq (2003-2011). In both countries Americans were completely unsuccessful in creating peace and democracy. This was actually not the purpose of

these wars. Overall, if my calculation is right, the US were not engaged in wars during only 17 years of their 250 years of glorious existence.

By trying to spread democracy in the world, the US government behaves like Calvinistic missionaries or Jehovah's witnesses who fervently spread their respective faiths. Some people say that we must sponsor democracy to counter China's and Russia's attempts to promote authoritarianism as an alternate government model. But this is wrong. I have at least not observed any missionary activities of these two countries to spread their government system into other countries. This was different during the lifetime of the Communist International (Comintern), which was established in 1919. The Soviet Union and Comintern aggressively tried to impose communism in the entire world. But this became history with the fall of the Soviet Empire and the dissolution of the communist party in Russia at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When democratic values and strategic goals collide, the US government puts its democratic mission aside and gives preference to its political and economic priorities. Nevertheless, US politicians always claim that democracy is high up on the list of foreign-policy priorities even though – as we have seen above – the US is only a flawed democracy and far from being a model for the world. Norway and Canada, which hold ranks one and five respectively in the Economist's Democracy Index 2020, qualify more as models but they are modest and wise enough not to impose their systems on other nations. Why should they? The motto in a free world should not be the imposition of a political system. It should be freedom according to the French saying: "À chacun son gout" - to each his own taste.

The US is very fast in accusing other countries of being undemocratic. Their criticism targets selected countries opportunistically at their convenience and with unrelated and often hidden agendas. If a foreign government arrests a journalist or meets anti-government protest with strong measures, the US impose sanctions or freeze assets as if they were parents who punish their children for misbehavior. The US under president Jimmy Carter boycotted the Summer Olympics in Moscow to protest against the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The irony is that the US did the same 23 years later.

But the self-declared missionaries of democracy put a blind eye on countries which are definitely not democracies. Myanmar is such a country since the military toppled the democratically elected government in 2021. Saudi Arabia is another example of such a country. It ranks 156 out of 167 countries in the Economist's ranking but has not attracted criticism from the US. The US remain very friendly with Saudi Arabia despite the fact that its royal rulers severely restrict freedom of speech and harshly punish criticism against the royal family, the government, Islam and religious leaders.

In 2023 Saudi Arabia sentenced a blogger, who was a retired teacher, to death for the crime of '*describing the King or the Crown Prince in a way that undermines religion or justice*'. In 2022, to give another example, they sentenced a women's rights campaigner, Salma al-Shehab, to 34 years in prison for her activity on Twitter, by which she was '*providing succor to those seeking to disrupt public order and undermine the safety of the general public and stability of the state*'.

Women have no rights in Saudi Arabia. A young woman, Loujain Alhathloul is her name, was put in jail for more than two years because she drove a car, against the law, which did not allow women to drive a car in Saudi Arabia. Thankfully it seems that Saudi Arabia has since-rescinded this law.

In addition to all of the above, self-serving elites in Saudi Arabia amass fortunes and rule above the law. Mohammed bin Salman, the de-facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, ordered in 2018 the abduction and killing of Jamal Khashoggi, an American journalist. Salman had lured the journalist into the Saudi-Arabia consulate in Istanbul, where his men cut his body with a chain saw in small pieces to fit into a suitcase. But this atrocious act attracted only polite verbal criticism from the American president, who made him four years



later an equal and trusted partner again when America needed oil from Saudi Arabia. Joe Biden called his unconditional pardon for bin Salman's crime a 'recalibration' of the US-Saudi relationship. Trump claimed during a trip to Saudi Arabia in 2025 that far too many US presidents in the past had seen it as their job to dispense justice for the crimes committed by foreign rulers. He added that *'it is God's job to sit in judgment, my job to defend America and to promote'* economic interests of the US.

American Jews also appreciate America's friendship with Saudi Arabia, because Saudi Arabia is an outspoken enemy of Iran, which is Israel's enemy. For Jewish people in America, an enemy of Iran is always a good friend no matter its horrible human rights records. Joe Biden picked up this stance and called his visit to Saudi Arabia a peace mission. He apparently has learnt this nomenclature from Putin who called his invasion of Ukraine also a peace mission. The US attitude towards Saudi Arabia is a prime example for a situation, in which political ambitions overrule the commitment for democracy and for human rights in the world. It is a prime example for a situation in which America's values clash with its national interests. Everybody likes to talk about democratic values but nobody wants to pay any price for maintaining or promoting these values. Morality and politics are antonyms.

The political systems in Vietnam and in China are both similar. They are communist countries. The Economist Intelligence Unit classifies both as authoritarian regimes with Vietnam and China occupying ranks 131 and 148 respectively out of 167 countries in the World Democracy Index. Both countries feature a one-party system like Cuba, Eritrea, Laos, and North Korea. Vietnam has a very poor human rights record. But while the US silently let the Vietnamese government violate human rights, they target only China with sanctions because Vietnam has neither the strength nor the will to challenge the world leadership of the US.

As one of many other countries that the west does not criticize, I mention the Philippines. The US treated the Philippines as friends while its former president Rodrigo Duterte encouraged the illegal killings of thousands of suspected drug traffickers without trial. Duterte had even proudly claimed that he had started killing others when he was 16 years old and that he himself had in a drive-by shooting on a motorbike shot a suspected drug trafficker. The International Criminal Court in The Hague eventually arrested Duterte who now awaits in jail his trial for crimes against humanity.

But despite all this, the Philippines never lost the status as a trusted partner of the US. Donald Trump is not far away from Duterte's idea of extrajudicial killings. He suggested seriously in a campaign speech that local police should have the right to shoot suspected shoplifters on the scene. *"Very simply, if you rob a store, you can fully expect to be shot as you are leaving that store,"* he said in an outspoken contempt of fundamental right of due process.

I cannot understand that the US did not impose any sanctions against Germany when it became clear, starting in 1933, that Hitler was violating the human rights of Jewish citizens. In the opposite, in June 1939 the M.S. St. Louis arrived in Miami with 937 Jewish passengers on board, who tried to flee from the Nazis. The refugees had previously tried to land in Havana, Cuba, but the authorities did not allow them to disembark. The American immigration authorities then did also not give the passengers permission to disembark. They sent them back to Germany, where the Nazis killed 254 of them. Apparently, the St. Louis was not an exception.

The primary motive for the US to fight Germany was not to save Jews or lives in general. Their motive was also not to spread democracy. It was their political and military response to Hitler's invasion of Poland. If the intention of the US had been to save Jews, they would have intervened much earlier. One year before the invasion of Poland, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy signed in 1938 peacefully a treaty

with Hitler, in which they agreed to the German annexation of the Czechoslovak areas called the Sudetenland. The signatories to the so-called Munich Accord did not voice any concerns about Jewish persecutions which had been at that time in full swing for five years already. They did a pact with the undemocratic devil.

### **Vox Populi – The Voice of the People**

Let's step back and focus for a moment on the pillar of democracy, which is the dogma of the supremacy of the 'vox populi' (the voice of the people). This Latin expression is short for 'Vox populi, vox Dei', which means that the voice of the people is the voice of God. This Latin expression does not date back to the Roman Empire. Alcuin of York, the Master of the Palace School in Aachen mentioned it for the first time in the year 800 AD in a letter to Charlemagne, the first emperor of what was later called the Holy Roman Empire. At that time Latin was the lingua franca in all of Europe.

'Vox populi, vox Dei' does not mean that the people are always right as God's words always are. In the opposite, some thinkers go as far as to say that the vox populi is the 'vox diaboli', the voice of the devil. Alcuin of York warned Charlemagne that he should not listen to the vox populi because the voice of the crowd *'is always close to insanity'*.

Christians say that not the people but only God has the right to speak in important matters. God uses the Pope as his mouthpiece and kings and emperors claimed long time ago that their voices were God's voice. It is unthinkable that God uses the populace as his mouthpiece.

In a more realistic attitude, we might say that the Latin proverb factually states with resignation that the will of the popular masses counts even if the collective will is wrong, dangerous or self-destructive. The devastation and pain that the vox populi sometimes causes are God's punishment for a sinful society. It is God's will that a sinner is punished. It is only logical that God punishes a society if people collectively sin. The results of what the people decide is like the peoples' Karma.

Looking at history I have the impression that people often get the government that they deserve. It seems very likely that an irresponsible society gets an irresponsible government. In this light, I conclude that the German people who allowed Hitler to rise to power in 1933, received the punishment that they deserved. The Philippines got Duterte, Italy got Berlusconi and Brazil got Jair Bolsonaro. Similarly, I fear, that the American people will have to face dire consequences for having elected Donald Trump for a second presidential term. Nobody at the end should say that people who elected him, did not know what he was up to. He declared his dangerous intentions in his speeches as clearly as Hitler had announced his plans in his book 'Mein Kampf' (My Struggle).

People voice their opinions and act not only during elections. Revolutions, general strikes or mass-demonstrations are examples of events, in which the vox populi demands – and often obtains - changes. The French Revolution in 1789 and the October Revolution 1917 in Russia are famous examples. A more recent example was the regime of Ferdinand Marcos that a movement "People Power" had chased away in 1986.

The core of the peoples' demands is often justified. But the angry vox populi, once unbridled, can result in cruel excesses with thousands, if not millions, of people losing their lives in atrocious acts of killings and torture. During the short reign of terror (règne de la Terreur) in the 1790's in France, blood-thirsty revolutionaries executed some 40,000 people, mostly nobility and clergy, out of a total population of only 27 million at that time. The revolutionaries believed that the victims had been standing in the way of their cherished revolution and had therefore to be destroyed.

Some political leaders caused havoc by manipulating and intentionally setting free the vox populi and by putting fuel into the fire of peoples' passion and anger. Hitler with the holocaust, Stalin with the great purge, Mao Zedong with China's Cultural Revolution and Pol Pot with his Cambodian genocide did this by unbridling the primitive side of herd instincts and of the vox populi. They could not do it on their own. They used the populace as their tool. Some call it euphemistically the 'dynamism of masses'. The natural phenomenon of mass psychology assisted the self-appointed leaders who use the masses of people like wax in their hands.

### **Is modern Democracy doomed?**

The following is a summary of the reasons why I think that modern liberal democracies are doomed.

When journalists asked Mahatma Gandhi what he thought about western democracy, he allegedly answered "*I think it would be a very good idea*". Democracy would indeed be a good idea if its concept were realistic and viable in the longer term. But it is utopia.

I am convinced that the concept of democracy that includes universal suffrage, carries inherent and incurable risks and dangers coming from three of the following features:

Liberal democracies firstly over-emphasize individual liberties. They allow people to do and to say anything they like. They see democracy as a system that gives all citizens the right to live their selfishness without considering the needs and values of society. People consider government only as a service provider.

Electoral democracies secondly give everybody the right to vote in elections no matter their commitment to democracy and their capacity to understand the issues at hand. Democracies even allow confessed enemies of democracy to go to the polling stations.

The third danger comes from the observation by crowd psychologists that the will of masses develops differently than the decision of individuals, who might be reasonable in isolation but behave like rams when they are in a herd. A person, who individually might make judicious decisions, often behaves differently as a member of a mass. Charismatic persons can easily manipulate masses. People follow their flutes as our ancestors followed the ratcatcher in Hamelin. Irresponsible and hostile influencers in the internet are grave dangers to democracy. Troll factories in enemy countries add to the damage by infiltrating the internet with the intention to create dissatisfaction in the population and to destabilize the country.

Universal suffrage is only a little bit older than 100 years. In historical dimensions this is a very short period of time as I have mentioned above. We must consider universal suffrage as still being in a trial phase. Many countries implemented it before they had thoroughly investigated its long-term viability. It will probably need a few more decades before we can judge if the introduction of the current form of democracy was really a good idea. Historians in a few hundred years might look back at the democracies in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as a short-term aberration of utopian politics. My negative judgment is similar to Plato's opinion who considered 2,500 years ago a possible universal suffrage as a recipe for disaster.

The derailment of democracies in the US and elsewhere, that we can observe, is not entirely the fault of the original concept. Societies 100 years ago were not faced with the limitless possibilities of communications technologies that hostile users easily abuse within a country and globally across countries. When countries introduced democracy, they did not foresee the revolution of communications technologies. Democracies have not yet built the necessary protection against widespread

misinformation that influences actions, public policy priorities and memories of people. Newspapers in the past occasionally disseminated fake news. An example is the "Great Moon Hoax," in which New York Sun published in 1835 the fake news that researchers had discovered life on the moon. Another example is the wrong news that Dewey had defeated Truman in the 1948 elections in the US. But these incidents were extremely rare. Authorities at that time were able to identify and sanction the authors of the fake news. Fake news like the Great Moon Hoax are now on the daily agenda without control and corrections.

There is one other difference that makes our society different compared to the time when democratic systems evolved. One hundred years ago people were more committed to society and acknowledged the necessity of some discipline. Discipline at that time was spelled with a capital 'D' in schools, in families and at the work place. It has to some extent survived only in the military and reappears in militant right-wing groups. I find it cynical that some associations that want to fight the establishment strongly promote military discipline and adherence to a strict code of conduct within their group while they denounce as tyranny any attempts by government to implement law and order in society.

A look at the current democratic system in the US shows deepening and more and more violent political divisions in the population along the fault line separating democrats and republicans who don't trust each other. A Pew Research poll during the 2020 elections revealed that 90% of party members in each party are worried that a victory by the respective opposite party would result in 'lasting harm to the United States'. People make a bogeyman out of opposition parties.

We can observe unreconcilable disunion across the floor of the two houses of parliament. Demagogues of conservative and liberal color face each other like on a battlefield waiting and ready for a final showdown. Conservative and republican members of the House of Representatives and of the senate fight each other for no other reason – as it seems – than to automatically oppose their respective political foe in a hyper-partisan attitude. Bi-partisanship for the well-being of the nation has left the minds of these politicians like a soul who has left a dead body. The uncompromising controversies in society permeate all levels of government where virtually all issues become politically contentious and unsolvable. The red-blue divide has made the US ungovernable. Almost everybody in the 'Divided States of America' (DSA) seems to be engaged in a bitter cultural war.

A democracy developed in India when the British left the subcontinent. The Indian people and the west considered this as a success story of democracy and as a shining beacon in Asia, where democracy did mostly not gain foothold in other countries. India's democracy, which is the largest in the world by population numbers has not aged well. 75 years after its introduction, India's democracy is in regression and is backsliding under the leadership of populist politicians like its prime minister Narendra Modi. Modi is a long-standing member of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist paramilitary volunteer organization, that supports Hindu nationalism to the disadvantage of Muslims and Christians. Modi's huge track record of human rights violations while he was Chief Minister of Gujarat, gained him a ban to enter the US and Europe but the US and the European Union lifted this ban of ten years when it became clear that Modi became more powerful as Prime Minister of India in 2014. It is like fighting the devil when he is far away and ending the fighting when he knocks at the door.

With silent approval by the US and the EU, Modi continued to dismantle democracy by muting criticism in the media, by jailing activists, suppressing religious minorities and stamping out peaceful protests and critical voices in the internet. Modi apparently wants to convert his country from a secular nation into a 'divine' Hindu nation. He sees himself as the king of Hindu gods and as 'vishwaguru', the teacher to the world. This sounds as he had lost contact with reality but he enjoys strong support from the populace in India, which is 80% Hindu.

The US don't criticize Narendra Modi because India with its nuclear arms and with its 1.4 billion people is an important partner in the Indo-Pacific region, which the US considers as their front yard.

Poland is one of many more examples where the post-war concept of freedom and democracy is in retreat. Toxic politics are increasing. Opposing ideas split the nation into factions that are irreconcilable. On one side was the conservative government that diminishes civil rights for women, for LGBTQ+ people and for minorities. The government was successful to weaken the power of the judiciary and to also bring the media under increased state control. The conservative camp openly opposes Western European social and cultural values. Under the motto "God, honor, and motherland" they want to protect, as they say, Poland's Catholic heritage.

On the other side of the divisive political spectrum in Poland are younger liberals who support abortion rights, and freedom for LGBTQ and favor other features that they perceive as western European values. The worst feature of the current situation in Poland is that the two sides merciless fight instead of compromising. One side of the political spectrum declares that Jarosław Kaczyński, the former de-facto government leader, should be imprisoned while Kaczyński claims that Donald Tusk, the current leader, is the "*personification of pure evil*" and should be "*morally exterminated.*" This hostile way of describing the political opponent is reminiscent of what republicans in the US do to their democratic opponents that they consider enemies and not just political opponents.

Anti-government movements have become strong in the US and also in Europe. Many people and their organizations promote the idea that the government, the state and traditional media are enemies of the people. They must, as they demand, be replaced with anarchy, by which they mean a utopian society without rulers and without rules. It would be a feasible solution only if the populace were '*most far-sighted, most selfless*' as Mao Zedong said of the working class people.

Donald Trump is a champion in railing against journalists and actually against anyone who disagrees with him. The media are '*corrupt and illegal. What they are doing is illegal*' he said during a speech at the Department of Justice in 2025. While he was at it, he also accused the judiciary as corrupt and illegal if they sometimes disagree with his decisions. It is evidence of a totally sick democracy if the head of the executive calls a decision of the Supreme Court 'illegal' and nobody contradicts.

We still think by habit that democracy is firmly enshrined in the minds of people. However, the confidence of people in the survival of democracy has become low in the US. According to a poll conducted in March 2022, almost half of Americans believe the United States might in the future hopefully no longer be a democracy. The negative opinion about the government goes hand in hand with a negative opinion about the Supreme Court. According to a Gallup poll, nearly 60% of the population think that the justices of the Supreme Court do not handle their jobs appropriately. Loss of trust in the judiciary is in my opinion as noxious for a country as a pernicious cancer is for the human body.

The Allensbach Institute had conducted an opinion poll in 2022, which showed that one third of the German population think that their democracy is fake and that the people had no saying in the management of the country. This opinion is with 45% much more popular in the eastern part of Germany, which used to be governed by communism until the re-unification. Overall, almost one third of the population think that the German democracy needs a fundamental overhaul. France shows an even more negative picture. According to a 2024 survey, 75% of the respondents don't trust their members of parliament and 78 % percent of respondents think that democracy in France works "rather poorly".

People's criticism targets the government's power, for example to impose taxes. People also complain that governments collect extensively data from individuals and exploit such data. Some people call data



collection by government 'colonialism' because they see in this exploitation of data and information a parallel with colonial powers which extracted resources and exploited people in their colonies.

People also criticize governments when police dissolve protests that block critical infrastructure. People finally protest against a government that sends young people to fight wars against foreign countries that have not even posed a threat. And indeed, the unproductive wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan, which had no credible purpose, have killed tens of thousands of people and cost billions of dollars. They have seriously damaged the people's trust in government's reasonableness. Not the slightest risk for the country and no need to defend the country against an attack by enemies justified these wars.

Some opinions published in the internet go as far as to suspect that the government has in 2001 instigated the attack on the Twin Towers in New York to justify the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan to make the manufacturers of weapons flourish. For a war veteran who suffers from PTSD and for citizens who are frustrated by an oversized and over-complicated government administration, it is tempting to believe such plausible conspiracy theories. A government that is not reasonable in one area is probably also not reasonable in others. Conspiracy theories can provide comfort for all citizens who feel disenfranchised when facing a difficult personal situation and an overly complex government. It is indeed comfortable for many uncritical and stressed people to blame an easy and convenient scapegoat. Conspiracy theories that are simple and plausible and that explain the problems in this world forthright, enter straightforwardly the mind of people.

Some anti-government movements seriously claim that their country is in a deplorable state of affairs and that a secret elite, which they call the Deep State, is behind the terrible situation of the country.

Alex Jones, the former owner of a media empire that includes 'Infowars', for example, had published many conspiracy theories. One was that the 2012 mass shooting in the Sandy Hook Elementary School, that killed 26 people, was actually staged. Jones called it 'a giant hoax' and said that nobody had actually died. This and many more mass shootings, he fabricated, had been false flag events. In a subsequent lawsuit that parents of killed children launched against him, Jones publicly called the court a 'kangaroo court', the judge a 'tyrant' and portrayed himself as a victim of an elaborate "deep state" conspiracy against him. It is a bad sign for the status of health of a country if someone with high profile voices such an opinion and nobody seriously objects. It is bad when this person widely disseminates his statements without government interference. But the worst is that many uncritical people believe wild conspiracy theories.

The conspiracy theorists often use for one reason or the other the Jewish Rothschild family and George Soros, a Jewish native of Hungary, as proxies for a secret group of money-hungry slave-drivers. Conspiracy theories accuse members of this secret elite of drinking blood of abducted babies. They have allegedly bought, bribed and manipulated the elected officials and use them as puppets to stay in power behind the scene and to enrich themselves at the expense of honest people. And indeed, immensely rich people and companies that pay no or little taxes, use their wealth to influence public policy priorities. The Adelson family, best known for their interests in gambling businesses, has made in 2019/2020 contributions to federal candidates, to parties, and to political action committees in the amount of 128 million USD. They rank number two in the slate of donors. Michael Bloomberg, is number one. He has donated 152 million USD to influence the outcomes of the 2020 election cycle. But Elon Musk became the king of donors when he spent more than \$290 million USD to assist Donald Trump to win the 2024 election.

The vast majority of citizens who pay taxes and struggle in daily life, are – as they complain - abused as voting fodder to legitimize the dictatorial and selfish activities of the elite that subjugates the people.

And indeed, the members of Trump's cabinet and key appointees form an assembly of billionaires and millionaires with the world richest man, Elon Musk, being the closest of the president's associates. In contrast to this, the median household's net worth is only about \$193,000 USD while at least 37.9 million Americans are living in poverty, according to the U.S. Census. The dramatic irony is that many followers of Trump harbor the delusional belief that their current president will dramatically improve the living conditions of the poor.

Dissatisfaction with the excessive wealth and power of the rulers was an important motive to violently abolish the monarchy in France. The disadvantaged majority today is now sufficiently motivated to overthrow the establishment and the wealthy ruling elite. The constitutional right in the US to buy and carry assault rifles facilitates the military build-up of opposition groupings.

Here comes the dangerous catch. It is not yet too late to act, say groups like Q'Anon. Since peaceful protests have turned out to be useless, the time has come to use violence for the abolition of government in a final assault of democracy. Violence has become inevitable they say and invite the public to join the militant movements of either the 'Oaths Keepers' or the 'Proud Boys' as they call themselves. There are many more groups of this type.

Followers of Qanon, of Proud Boys and of similar movements have a term for this final battle. They call it 'the Storm' or the 'Great Awakening'. The weapons of the warriors are currently the media and the uncontrolled internet, which they abuse to manipulate people with their inflammatory opinions, fake news and conspiracy theories. Nobody knows nowadays with certainty what is true and what is false. The majority of Republican voters still believed during Joe Biden's presidency that Donald Trump was their president because the 2020 election had been rigged. They publicly claimed that the Democratic Party is an enemy of real Americans and that Trump's followers must "*fight like hell*" against democrats or they will lose their country.

The Oaths Keepers and Proud Boys also call for civil disobedience and boycott. Their outspoken goal is to overthrow the government. They call for armed resistance and advocate a civil war. McInnes, the founder of the Proud Boys said in 2016 that violence is "*a really effective way to solve problems*". This statement reflects – as polls have shown – the opinion of a large percentage of Republican voters and of Trump supporters. They claim that political violence and some forms of terrorism are justified to protect their constitutional rights.

The 'Reichsbürger' (Citizens of the Reich) in Germany form a movement of far-right. Ex-military of the far right advocate the abolishment of the current political system. The right of free speech covers the dissemination of such opinions. The democratic government started prosecuting the leading figures of the Reichsbürger only after police had gathered evidence that some members had made concrete preparations to storm the parliament building, the Reichstag, and to abduct and kill politicians. They had made real plans to seize power and to restore the second German Reich to the perceived glory of 1871.

Probably as the result of calls for violence, some 88% of the American population are now concerned that political divisions have increased the likelihood of politically motivated violence. An ABC News/Washington Post poll conducted in 2022 showed that 63% are with good reasons "very" concerned since right-wing extremists have taken the habit to attend demonstrations against the government in combat gear and carrying openly assault rifles, which is legal in the US.

Dissatisfaction with living conditions is a breeding ground for unrest no matter the form of government and no matter the causes of difficulties. Governments are the lightning rods that people easily target.

Modern civilizations like the US have grown into huge organizations with confusing high numbers of laws and regulations and with a gargantuan size of civil servants who execute the laws and regulations in complicated and frustrating procedures that the general public does not understand. Size and complexity of government have become Kafkaesque. Normal and average citizens must feel estranged when they deal with government and particularly if they have the misfortune – for example - to be drawn into a court case and to have to depend on overly expensive lawyers. Being a party in court proceedings can be a life-changing torture that might drive the participants of such procedures into the arms of movements like the Proud Boys or the Oath Keepers. It is remarkable that a good education does not prevent someone from getting involved in radical movements. The founder of the militant Oath Keepers, Stewart Rhodes, is former U.S. army paratrooper but also a Yale Law-School graduate who was later disbarred as attorney for violating rules of professional conduct. His love for firearms got him into trouble with a self-inflicted firearms injury that makes him wear a prosthetic eyeball. His endeavor to overturn the presidential elections of 2020 also got him in trouble since he was sentenced to 18 years in prison for seditious conspiracy. The media coined Rhodes' life as 'From Yale to Jail'. But Donald Trump, who had encouraged the rioters, stood by them. He thanked them for their criminal acts in his favor by pardoning more than 1,500 of them, including Stewart Rhodes and by commuting sentences. I assume that judges who convicted and sentenced rioters must be extremely frustrated that their president pardoned the criminals.

Democracies have the disadvantage that necessary changes are difficult to organize because nobody wants to pay the price for necessary changes if they are painful. Instead of scrapping overly complex laws, parliaments amend them and make them more complicated. Instead of dissolving government offices, they add new ones without really contributing to solutions of problems. Joseph Tainter, professor at Utah State University's Department of Environment & Society, published in 1988 the book 'The Collapse of Complex Societies'. He has established that many ancient societies vanished when their bureaucracies had accumulated unmanageable complexities. In Tainter's view a disaster like a deadly pandemic or rapidly climate change had never been the only or the main reason to cause the collapse of an empire or of a culture. The main reason, he says, is the complexity that makes them unable to respond to disasters and risks.

It is easy to predict that the features of the current type of Kafkaesque democracy will contribute to its end. The current excesses cannot continue. Something has to change. The only question is how the change comes about.

One possibility could be that the system can recover through peaceful democratic processes. Democracies have some self-healing capacities that – for example – might neutralizes extremists if they oppose each other. But these moderating capacities of a democracy will not be strong enough to achieve necessary changes through peaceful and orderly reforms.

The second possibility will be a violent revolution, a civil war or a massive defeat in a war with an external enemy. Starting and losing a major war or a total economic breakdown are often the only opportunity to achieve necessary fundamental changes. If another health crisis like COVID-19 during the years 2020 to 2022 arises in future and the government imposes heavy restrictions, people's frustration will boil over. They will become impatient and might start a revolt. Thomas Jefferson, the third American president, even said that *'the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure'*.

A violent revolution – or civil war - is quite likely in the US, which was born with a civil war. Civil war might erupt after elections if a large portion of an extremist population does not accept the outcome of elections by claiming without evidence that the election process was manipulated. They are already heavily armed

and motivated as I have mentioned above. This then opens either the path for the seizure of power by an authoritarian regime, for which Donald Trump is on stand-by as its leader. Or – if the crisis is very serious – we will see a complete violent breakdown and subsequent re-organization of the political landscape. A gigantic disaster might reform the minds of people. They might then come to reason, to commitment and to responsibility as we have seen in Germany after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The catastrophe of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War ended the pandemonium of the Nazi regime and changed people suddenly from more or less active promoters of the holocaust to peaceful Christian democrats.

A third possibility will be that a dictator-in-waiting – for example Trump – uses his position as elected president to transform the democracy into an authoritarian regime. He can achieve this with a series of legislative measures and executive orders and by placing like-minded friends in influential positions. This will be a smooth overthrow of democracy from within. A panel of experts predicted in 2022 that this is what will happen after Trump became president for a second term.

Hitler did exactly this. People elected him democratically in March 1933 because he had promised changes before and during the election campaign. He then used executive powers to make himself a dictator with the silent approval of the populace that was satisfied and blinded by the initial successes of job creation and economic recovery. By looking only at ephemeral achievements, they failed to notice that Hitler had given himself the powers of a brutal dictator. More recent examples are Hungary's Viktor Orbán, Russia's Vladimir Putin, India's Narendra Modi and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. They were all democratically elected and then easily dismantled the democracies of their countries.

To conclude my gloomy outlook for democracy - at least in the US – I want to present the off-putting examples of two erratic republican politicians who both enjoy Trump's endorsement and support. They both are 'weapons of mass delusion', as one American author called it. CNN called them 'merchants of mayhem'.

These two republican politicians that I present below have become very prominent political arsonists with innumerable followers who believe their absurd conspiracy theories. They are only the tip of an ominous iceberg that might sink the democracy as the iceberg did with the Titanic. These two politicians are Doug Mastriano, whom I have already mentioned above, and Marjorie Taylor Greene. The profiles and world views of these two politicians are unfortunately not restricted to a few dangerously crazy individuals like Donald Trump. They represent grosso modo the opinion of almost half of the population in the US and of the majority of republican politicians who express exactly the same points of view, some with a tempered rhetoric. They all basically share hostility toward demographic and racial changes and don't acknowledge the fait accompli that America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no longer the white Christian country that it might have been in the past two and a half centuries.

### **Doug Mastriano**

Doug Mastriano went into politics as a retired colonel after 31 years in the military. At the time of writing he is a republican senator for Pennsylvania to which position almost 70% of the votes elected him. His constituents nominated him in 2022 as candidate for governor, which election he eventually lost.

Mastriano represents the movement of Christian nationalism, which has the broad goal *"to take this country back for the glory of God"*. Members of the movement are patriots that *'arise for God and country'*.

This reminds me of the similar but outdated Prussian axiom to live and work and to die 'for God and fatherland' (für Gott und Vaterland).



Doug Mastriano

Christian nationalism promotes the amalgamation of nation (US), race (white's only) and religion (evangelicals). This is similar in principle to the concept of Israel, where the nation, the race and religion form one single essence.

As a side note, I want to mention that a school board in the Toronto area tried to break up the Jewish trinity of race, religion and state. They decided in 2024 to use in its multifaith calendar as a symbol for Judaism not the Star of David but a Menorah, the Jewish candelabra. The sensible intention was to distinguish between, on one hand, the religion of Judaism and on the other hand the nation and government of Israel that was killing tens of thousands of civilians in Gaza at that time. The school board explained that *'Menorah was chosen over the Star of David due to its purely religious significance, while the Star of David carries political connotations with the state of Israel'*. But they had to back down under the relentless attacks by powerful Jewish lobbyists who claimed that the school board's decision had caused harm to the Jewish community because the Star of David had been for centuries the most widely recognized symbol of Judaism and Jewish identity.

The Christian nationalist movement envisions the re-establishment of an American culture that they want to form with the holy trinity of evangelical Christianity, of white identity and of American nationalism. There is no room for immigrants. There is also no room for Islam, because Christian nationalists claim that Islamist principles violate the American constitution. Mastriano claimed on Facebook that *'Islam wants to kill gay rights, Judaism, Christianity and pacifism'*. Mastriano's campaign rallies have the heavy smell of megachurch events and always start with prayers.

Mastriano promotes the expansion of gun rights. He denies that ubiquitous weapons facilitate mass shootings and murders. He therefore introduced legislation in Pennsylvania that provides for arming teachers and staff inside of schools. He sees abortions as a *"barbaric holocaust"* and wants to ban abortions starting with the conception of a baby. This is what El Salvador has written in its constitution making abortion illegal in all circumstances and eliminating any exceptions. This is also what right-wing republicans in the US want to achieve with a 'Life at Conception' Act. They argue that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution guarantees the right to life for every baby even before it sees the light of the world. But this argument is not correct. This amendment covers many different things. The only vaguely relevant provision is the requirement that states to provide equal protection under the laws to all people.

The concept of 'Life at Conception' can lead to the grotesque situation that prosecutors can accuse a mother of murder or manslaughter after she had a miscarriage. Her crime, as they suspect, is that she was probably negligent in preventing the miscarriage and the death of the baby.

In line with this fundamental stance, Mastriano does not allow for exceptions in case of rape, incest and not even when the life of the pregnant mother is in danger. This senator follows Christian fundamentalists and opposes same-sex marriages because *'no amount of disinformation or political correctness'* will change the fact that *'marriage is between a man and a woman'*. Mastriano supports legislation to ban any surgery for gender transition. These surgeries, he says, are *'experimental medical procedures that distort the concept of gender'*. By using the word 'gender' in this sentence, Mr. Mastriano gives evidence that he is not familiar with the terminology that the World Health Organization (WHO) proposes. 'Sex' is according to WHO the biological and physiological characteristic of females, males and of intersex persons at the time of birth, while 'gender' is the identity that a person feels independent from the person's physiology or designated sex at birth. He should have talked about 'the concept of sex'.



To top it off, Mastriano supports or condones a variety of conspiracy theories that QAnon and many other right-wing groups promote. These theories claim, for example, that there is a global cabal of democrats who are trafficking children. The destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001 was, as Mastriano claims, a false flag attack and vaccines amount to '*genocide therapy*'. Finally, Mastriano harbors the theory that Adolf Hitler faked his own death – for reasons and purposes that the senator does not make clear. In Mastriano's opinion the climate change is '*just a theory based on pop science*' and he tries to support this opinion by pointing out that the weatherman cannot even reliably predict the weather for the next 24 hours. The fact that weather and climate are two different things is a negligible minor detail for this man. Mastriano finally condones the conspiracy theory that Nancy Pelosi, a five-time mother, "*loves to drink the little children's blood*" and that Joe Biden is actually dead and being played by an actor.

Mastriano deals a final blow to the basics of democracy by promising his followers that he will – if elected governor of Pennsylvania - certify Pennsylvania's election results only if the Republican candidate for president wins. He had already started implementing such an idea by supporting actively the violent attempt to overthrow the result of the 2020 elections and by participating in the riots, where a right-wing mob on 06 January 2021 aggressively tried to prevent the certification of Joe Biden's election victory in the US Capitol.

### Marjorie Taylor Greene

Marjorie Taylor Greene, 48 years old at the time of writing, was an unsuccessful business woman before she went into politics in 2016. She became in 2020 member of the House of Representatives for Georgia despite her total lack of political experience. But voters gave her high scores for her provocative and incendiary speeches.



Marjorie Taylor  
Greene

She describes herself as '*proud American, 100% pro-life, pro-gun, pro-Trump*'. She is a self-confessed white Christian nationalist who promotes antisemitic ideas and the conspiracy theories of right-wing white supremacists. She embraces Donald Trump's unproven contention that the 2020 presidential election was rigged and his landslide – as he claimed - election victory had been stolen. But she fails to mention who the thief was and how exactly the thief of the election went about it. Greene consistently calls the US government disrespectfully '*a regime*'.

She is like many right-wing republicans convinced that fundamental changes of the political system are necessary and that people cannot produce these changes through general elections. In a chat in January 2021 with members of her group she endorsed violence by saying that "*the only way to save our Republic is for Trump to call for Marshall Law*". This statement reveals that she does not know what Martial Law is but she clearly says that she favors force to topple the democratically elected government. In December 2022 she confirmed her endorsement of violence by claiming with impunity under loud cheers of a young audience that '*we would have won*' if she had been the leader of the storm of the Capitol in Washington on 06 January 2021. "*Not to mention, it would have been armed*", she added. Nobody in the republican party demanded her expulsion from the party for her traitorous statements. If such statements remain unopposed, they risk to encourage people to violently fight against results of democratic elections. In January 2023 the populace in Brazil showed the same contempt of democracy when thousands of demonstrators stormed Congress, the Supreme Court and the presidential palace. These firebrands vandalized the interior of these buildings and climbed on their roofs. They called for a military intervention to oust the winner of the elections, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva ('Lula'), from the presidency and to restore the power of the loser of the elections, Jair Bolsonaro, the '*Trump of the Tropics*', who has never formally conceded his election loss.

Taylor-Greene's utterances abound with conspiracy theories. An example is her claim that Hillary Clinton had committed several murders. Clinton, she alleges, had engineered John F. Kennedy Jr.'s death in a plane crash in 1999 to get rid of a possible rival in her election as senator for New York. Greene equals the democratic party in the US with Nazis, fascists and with communists. *'Whatever you want to call it'*, she added to emphasize that clear terms and definitions are irrelevant.

She also says quite often that elites of the Democratic Party are running a satanic child sex trafficking ring and that the government had orchestrated a series of mass shootings at schools with the intention to promote the introduction of gun control. Barack Obama, she claims, has secretly visited North Korea to sabotage *'nuclear diplomacy'*. Obviously, Greene also shares with other conspiracy theorists the claim that the destructive attack of the World Trade Center in 2001 was orchestrated by the American government. She blamed, to give another example, Jewish investors like the Rothschilds to have ignited in 2018 a devastating forest fire in California with a *'Jewish Laser Canon from Outer Space'*.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when American authorities recommended that children wear face masks, she claimed without giving details that this was *"unhealthy for their psychological, emotional, and educational growth"* and was *"emasculating"* for boys. Overall, she was not shy in comparing COVID-19 safety measures with the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust. She added without blushing that getting vaccinated is the same as pledging allegiance to the devil.

In line with most of her republican friends she opposes gun controls. When Canada in response to mass shootings in the US introduced such controls, Greene was fast in arguing that these measures would leave the neighbors in the north *"weak and vulnerable of being invaded and easily taken over by another stronger country"*, such as Russia. This sounds as if a Russian invasion of Canada could be foiled by teachers if they wear AR-15 rifles in classrooms.

Marjorie Taylor Greene is no foreigner to violence, which is scaring. In February 2019 she posted on Facebook a video at the office of Nancy Pelosi, in which she stated that Nancy Pelosi would either be killed or imprisoned for treason. Prior to this in 2018 she said that she wanted to see House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama executed.

In an interview in 2020, Greene said that *'the only way you get your freedoms back is it's earned with the price of blood'* and she sympathized with the suggestion to remove Nancy Pelosi saying that *'a bullet to the head would be quicker'*.

In the same year she posed in her campaign ads with a custom AR-15 rifle. She compared the democrats during a campaign event with destructive feral hogs that roam the countryside to destroy it. She then grabbed a rifle, boarded a waiting helicopter, from which she tracked down and shot an escaping hog. Her performance ended when she proudly posed next to the dead animal and invited the watching followers to participate in a lottery, the winner of which would accompany her on the next hog-killing trip. She finally acts as a fear monger by making the absurd statement *"I am not going to mince words with you all. Democrats want Republicans dead and they have already started the killings."*

The problem that I see is not the insanity of Marjorie Taylor Greene but the insanity of voters who allow her to talk such nonsense or even believe what she says. Her followers have made record amounts of seven-digits contributions to her election campaign. And obviously, it is remarkable that the democracy is too weak to stop these people from making inflammatory speeches against government and to run for government offices at the same time.