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Transcript

00:00:16 Speaker 1

Hello and welcome to the code podcast.

00:00:18 Speaker 1

A podcast by the quality of government in the city at the University of Gothenburg.

00:00:23 Speaker 1

In this show, we have conversations with well known experts to try to make sense of politics and governments worldwide.

00:00:30 Speaker 1

Who is Professor Victor la Cuenta?

00:00:32 Speaker 1

And in this episode he is joined by Giovanni Capoccia.

00:00:36 Speaker 1

Professor of comparative politics at the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford, Victor and Giovanni will discuss how democracies respond to extremism in the European and US politics, for example, how we should understand the relationship between Putin and Berlusconi while radical parties.

00:00:56 Speaker 1

And taking the space left by communist parties in European countries, if we are in a critical juncture of democracy right now, and whether democracy in the US runs the risk of extinction or not, stay tuned to your discussion around these questions and more.

00:01:12 Speaker 1

And don't forget to like, share and subscribe if you like the episode.

00:01:20 Speaker 2

Welcome to the podcast of the Quality of Government Institute, where we have conversations with well known experts to try to make sense of politics and governments all over the world.

00:01:29 Speaker 2

In the podcast we have Professor of comparative politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations.

00:01:35 Speaker 2

And fellow in politics at Corpus Christi College, Giovanni Capoccia, whose research focuses on the comparative study of democracy and political extremism within the European context, although now he's in the US, so we will also ask him about the similarities between the situation there.

00:01:52 Speaker 2

And here a major theme of Giovanni's research is the analysis of the causes and consequences of the strategies used by democratic governments to control extremist dissent.

00:02:04 Speaker 2

Many years ago, when almost no one in political science was looking at history, Giovanni started studying the the contrast between.

00:02:12 Speaker 2

Democracy and extremism in interwar era.

00:02:15 Speaker 2

So if Italy is a kind of laboratory of politics, as burgstein always says, where exotic products emerge like fascism in the 1920s, or the Red Brigades in the 60s, or Berlusconi and Videocracy in the 90s, then Italian political scientists like Giovanni are probably also pioneers choosing to study.

00:02:35 Speaker 2

I mean products that look like very exotic 20 years ago, such as the the rise of extremism and far right.

00:02:42 Speaker 2

But nowadays, everyone in the profession is is looking at it.

00:02:45 Speaker 2

So welcome to the podcast Giovanni and honored to have you here.

00:02:49 Speaker 3

Thank you for having me.

00:02:51 Speaker 2

I would like to start talking about the big and serious question of the fate of democracy in the world, but for that, let's start with a small and frivolous issue in the middle of the negotiations to form an Italian Government.

00:03:04 Speaker 2

These days we we have heard that Berlusconi seems to have renewed the his ties with Vladimir Putin.

00:03:10 Speaker 2

Through exchanging lovely letters were put in has called Berlusconi, allegedly number one among his five best.

00:03:18 Speaker 2

Friends and had sent him 20 bottles of vodka and in return Berlusconi has sent him back.

00:03:25 Speaker 2

Bottles of Lambrusco should should we just laugh about this or not?

00:03:30 Speaker 2

Is there any kind of rational political science explanation to what from the outset looks like a kind of irrationalist is an?

00:03:38 Speaker 2

Legal or categorical?

00:03:40 Speaker 2

What do you think, Giovanni?

00:03:42 Speaker 3

Well, Victor, thank you again for inviting me.

00:03:45 Speaker 3

Let me let me thank you again.

00:03:46 Speaker 3

I'm very happy to be here and have this.

00:03:48 Speaker 3

Nation now, you mentioned the fact that Italy is often seen as the laboratory of politics and the producer of exotic political products.

00:03:58 Speaker 3

This is right and probably the last one is Berlusconi.

00:04:02 Speaker 3

There are even more exotic products if you look back into history.

00:04:06 Speaker 3

You mentioned history before.

00:04:09 Speaker 3

Not just fascism or or Berlusconi, but think about the papacy, for example, an incredible incredible Italian invention that has lost.

00:04:16 Speaker 3

The couple of 1000 years or city states, of course, there were the ancient city states, but then the the medieval city states were these jurisdictional islands in, you know, feudal and world.

00:04:29 Speaker 3

So Italy does continue with the fascism in the in the 20s and perhaps even Berlusconi in the in the 90s.

00:04:37 Speaker 3

Of the last century to produce exotic political products now coming to your question about what should we make of this love letters with Putin that Berlusconi declares having exchanged together with gifts as well.

00:04:52 Speaker 3

Letters couple of days ago.

00:04:54 Speaker 3

Well, my take on this is that well, first of all, the personal friendship of Berlusconi with Putin is well known.

00:05:03 Speaker 3

He's never tried to hide that even after Putin invaded Ukraine, even though publicly there was going any party force Italia.

00:05:12 Speaker 3

Have always had a position that in official votes, for example, or in official statements, supported Ukraine and NATO.

00:05:21 Speaker 3

And so on.

00:05:22 Speaker 3

However, he is resurrecting this this relationship with Putin.

00:05:28 Speaker 3

I think as a function of his position in the negotiation for the new government, let me let me clarify what I mean.

00:05:35 Speaker 3

There is a psychological aspect there in that, and there is probably more important political aspect here.

00:05:42 Speaker 3

The psychological aspect is probably the Berlusconi doesn't find himself in a comfortable position for him in the negotiations for this government, he has never been a minor ally in this coalition.

00:05:56 Speaker 3

Never either.

00:05:57 Speaker 3

It was the uncontested leader.

00:06:00 Speaker 3

The leader of the largest party that would include parties that would be otherwise shunned by the rest of the political system, or it has been the challenged leader by some other leader within this party and he has always won these challenges by kicking out these other people.

00:06:20 Speaker 3

Or determining their political retirement and end.

00:06:25 Speaker 3

Now he is #3 in a coalition where he sees #1 Maloney, uncontested, and #2 Salvini, who has lost the election but is still has more votes than him as his political creatures. So.

00:06:44 Speaker 3

He doesn't.

00:06:45 Speaker 3

Like the situation of having to negotiate to obtain a few ministerial posts that are those that are closest to his art, given his personal interests, like, for example, whoever is in charge of telecommunications, or whoever is in charge of justice in the government so.

00:07:04 Speaker 3

I think these letters we put in and the bottles of vodka and so on are a function of this.

00:07:11 Speaker 3

Melonia has expressed a very strong pro NATO position from the very start, and she's got to the point to say of saying that unless the components of unless the allies in the government are not entirely on board with this, she will not form a government so that you don't get.

00:07:30 Speaker 3

Clearer than this.

00:07:32 Speaker 3

And so he is using this as a leverage.

00:07:35 Speaker 3

So it's like a signal to say if you don't give me what I want, you won't be able to form this government.

00:07:43 Speaker 3

I can take my votes up my my seats elsewhere.

00:07:48 Speaker 3

And there are other solutions because my party is centrally located and centrally positioned in the political spectrum, and there might be the space for a new call for a different coalition.

00:08:00 Speaker 3

Of course, Berlusconi and I finish with this.

00:08:01 Speaker 3

I don't want to take too much.

00:08:02 Speaker 3

Time on this, let's say, frivolous aspect, but quite important for the negotiation.

00:08:07 Speaker 3

That's the political side of it as is.

00:08:10 Speaker 3

Of course, he also has a problem, meaning that he might lose MP's to maloneys or or or other parties also because he's pushing 87, he's just turned 86 and therefore there is the problem of retirement looming. And what would happen after that? Who knows.

00:08:29 Speaker 3

But at that.

00:08:30 Speaker 3

Stage it's not clear.

00:08:32 Speaker 3

If he retires, let's say in 2-3 years, it's not clear that it still has the time. Let's put it this way. It still has the time to ruin the chances of Maloney's.

00:08:43 Speaker 3

That's I think that's the way we should interpret this.

00:08:47 Speaker 3

I don't think the Force Italia or coalition will undermine NATO efforts in in Ukraine.

00:08:57 Speaker 2

The particular case of Italy because come help us to illuminate what's going on in in the rest of Europe, because we can say on the one hand, well, there is the rise of the far right in many different countries.

00:09:07 Speaker 2

So and many analysts are seeing this as a kind of break with.

00:09:11 Speaker 2

The past, but others could say, looking at Italy, well, we have had this kind of coalition of the center, right, headed by Berlusconi, but also with alliances with Finney, or now with Meloni, sometimes one as a main actor, or sometimes the others, the main actors going on for over 30 years.

00:09:28 Speaker 2

So there is a kind of of continuity here and.

00:09:31 Speaker 2

And I would like to ask you about this.

00:09:33 Speaker 2

About the break.

00:09:34 Speaker 2

Or or continuity because we see that now in many European countries on, on average, more or less we have a close to 1/5 of the votes that are going to these far right parties recently in.

00:09:46 Speaker 2

Then we have the Sweden Democrats gaining the second position with 20% of the vote in the national elections a few weeks afterwards in Italy, 26% for brothers of Italy of Meloni, but also Matteo Salvini won nearly 9% in France over 40% in the second round of the presidential election. For for Lebanon, so north.

00:10:06 Speaker 2

Center South of Europe 3 very different countries with different situations within has, for example, very healthy public finances.

00:10:14 Speaker 2

Italy pretty bad.

00:10:15 Speaker 2

Once, but elections also dealing with different issues, criminality in in Sweden, European Union and also on and in Italy or France, but we have the same guys benefiting from this the same political family.

00:10:28 Speaker 2

So why what?

00:10:29 Speaker 2

What is driving them from your perspective as a as a research and an observer of the of the European reality in this.

00:10:35 Speaker 2

Latest to the.

00:10:37 Speaker 3

Well, as you know, the literature on this is immense.

00:10:40 Speaker 3

So I'll do my best to try to summarize the main axes of that here.

00:10:45 Speaker 3

There are two main issues here. One is identity and the other one is inequality. So you're right, these parties have been growing. They are about 20%.

00:10:57 Speaker 3

Badly counted in all the countries in.

00:11:00 Speaker 3

NE, North, northwest, South and so on. So these are different countries, but you have somehow different versions of the stream, right? Or the radical writers is sometimes called coming out they are.

00:11:10 Speaker 2

Sorry, and which label do you prefer?

00:11:12 Speaker 2

Do you prefer far right radical, right, Neo?

00:11:14 Speaker 2

Fascist national populists?

00:11:16 Speaker 3

These labels are laid in.

00:11:18 Speaker 3

All of them are there is a consensus in the literature or let's say a quasi consensus in the.

00:11:24 Speaker 3

To use radical right for the parties and that are that tend to break through into the system and be accepted by the other parties and extreme right for the more fringe movements, I am not sure I agree with that.

00:11:37 Speaker 3

I I don't think, given the lateness of these terms, I don't think there is going to be a full consensus.

00:11:45 Speaker 3

Anytime soon in the literature, the the general consensus is what I said before.

00:11:49 Speaker 3

Radical right versus a stream.

00:11:51 Speaker 3

Then of course, there is a strand of literature that talks about NEO fascism and fascism.

00:11:56 Speaker 3

I think I'm thinking about Finkel science work, for example, from New York, to say that these are just incarnations, model incarnations of or fascism, right?

00:12:05 Speaker 3

Other people can test that.

00:12:07 Speaker 3

So labeling is not a neutral, has never been a neutral.

00:12:11 Speaker 3

Act so I I.

00:12:14 Speaker 3

Think now we are simply at the level of intersubjectivity.

00:12:17 Speaker 3

We should understand each other.

00:12:18 Speaker 3

What what we mean by in each conversation.

00:12:21 Speaker 3

And then we may we may land on, let's say generally accept the label.

00:12:27 Speaker 3

Going back to the point that I was making before, after the end of the Cold War, there has been a, let's say, a resettlement or or a change in European party systems.

00:12:40 Speaker 3

Of course, in the East, because these are New Democracy that came up, but also in the West, in the east, obviously the new democracies.

00:12:48 Speaker 3

Came up in a moment in which.

00:12:51 Speaker 3

The organization of Political Life didn't look the same as it looked in Western Europe after 1945. At the time, the socialist parties were very, you know, strong and the idea of a party was based on a strong territorial organization. Media were not that developed. And so on in the 90s.

00:13:11 Speaker 3

The situation is completely different, so the very entity of a party in Eastern Europe is different from just after the transition is different from the West of Europe after the.

00:13:23 Speaker 3

So, but even in the West after 1990, you see a change, a higher much higher volatility of the electorate and a resettlement of the ideological divisions because all of a sudden the big, let's say structuring factor of this party system.

00:13:42 Speaker 3

Communism in there is simply vanished in the.

00:13:46 Speaker 3

And so the again, an interesting case by, by no means paradigmatic, but certainly interesting is Italy, the whole Italian party system was structured in order to resist the largest Communist Party in Europe.

00:14:00 Speaker 3

Again, this makes Italy a bit of an exception, but the same kind of processes you see elsewhere.

00:14:05 Speaker 3

Perhaps not.

00:14:05 Speaker 3

So intense.

00:14:07 Speaker 3

Once communism disappears and the Communist body itself goes through a very painful change, changes name changes.

00:14:14 Speaker 3

You know leadership and so on.

00:14:16 Speaker 3

A lot of people start thinking, OK, why should we vote for these other guys?

00:14:20 Speaker 3

There's no reason.

00:14:22 Speaker 3

To vote for the Christian Democrats or the Socialists?

00:14:25 Speaker 3

Yeah, because the their main function was to preserve our political system against the Communists, and now the Communists are no longer there.

00:14:33 Speaker 3

Both are much freer, and that's where you see the Northern League coming up skyrocketing.

00:14:38 Speaker 3

Really I'm presenting completely new issues now.

00:14:41 Speaker 3

This doesn't happen in other countries with the same intensity, but it does happen and this leaves less a lot of votes free in a certain sense and leaves space for new parties to emerge and those that have.

00:14:58 Speaker 3

Gaining this space are mainly these radical right parties.

00:15:03 Speaker 3

Now, going back to the issues, of course, as we know, inequality has gone up, it's been going up after the 90s and now it's at the level depending on which country you get you you look at, but in some countries at the levels of the 1880s or 1890s. And this also has a geographical dimension.

00:15:22 Speaker 3

So the financialization of the of the economy, the globalization ship industry to China essentially, and the Europeans have become.

00:15:32 Speaker 3

Rumors, but all of a sudden this creates in the European peripheries in the peripheries of which states say in the rural areas.

00:15:42 Speaker 3

Basically, the small places creates economic wastelands, so some countries have kept their industrial base at Germany or Italy, much less so France.

00:15:53 Speaker 3

But other countries have been completely stripped of that and therefore this creates difficult social transitions.

00:16:00 Speaker 3

It's not just a matter of being poorer, but also a matter of being poorer and excluded from certain processes of creation, of prosperity.

00:16:09 Speaker 3

And the other thing is, of course, the.

00:16:11 Speaker 3

Much, much more pronounced immigration from the South of the world.

00:16:17 Speaker 3

That brings people from different culture and you know, different countries and different religions, sometime into European countries and therefore poses a problem of identity preservation of.

00:16:31 Speaker 3

European culture for some parties and so on, that again gives these parties a lot of space in order to win votes.

00:16:40 Speaker 3

By simply having this identity theory and this identity based disco.

00:16:45 Speaker 3

So I I think these are the two main axes we could go on forever on this, but in the interest of time I'll stop there.

00:16:54 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think this is very interesting because we are pretty familiar with these two explanations of the identity inequality.

00:17:00 Speaker 2

But what you have explained us just now on the historical explanation how this might also be related with the space left by the disappearance of the communist threat and how that free votes in many European countries and how.

00:17:14 Speaker 2

The legal or other similar parties have been taking advantage of that, and again, Italy seems to be kind of a laboratory for what we have seen in many other other countries.

00:17:24 Speaker 2

So are the question now would be up to which extent these parties in Western Europe are a danger for democracy?

00:17:31 Speaker 2

They obviously are in Hungary and in Poland, but the question is why not in Sweden or Italy once that say that Europe has stopped being exclusively a a club of consolidated democracy or liberal democracies?

00:17:43 Speaker 2

Because according to some?

00:17:44 Speaker 2

Count Hungary on Poland do not fulfill, at least on the on the criteria or on the other hand, those that are scholars or observers that are a little bit understand, try to understand or are closer a little bit to the to this far right, they say.

00:17:58 Speaker 2

That quite the opposite, actually.

00:18:00 Speaker 2

This far new far right, this radical right or or extreme right even.

00:18:04 Speaker 2

Are defenders of a sort of radical democracy of direct democracy through referendums, for example, like the Brexit or the the referendums proposed by Le Pen.

00:18:13 Speaker 2

So they basically are discontent with the traditional parties.

00:18:17 Speaker 2

They want to replace them.

00:18:18 Speaker 2

But replace them by the will of the people, not the will of the enlightened autocrat.

00:18:23 Speaker 2

We don't want an extraordinary man like Mussolini or or or Hitler to rule us but and the ordinary masters to take the decision.

00:18:30 Speaker 2

Who do you?

00:18:33 Speaker 3

Well, the there's a lot there, so let's try to to take us an ensure the time.

00:18:38 Speaker 3

So are these parties a danger for democracy?

00:18:41 Speaker 3

These parties that have been around for about 30-40 years, depending on which case you you look at and have become very strong.

00:18:49 Speaker 3

Now typically they were framed two ways, right?

00:18:53 Speaker 3

One theoretical lens that look at them in the 90s, let's say was OK.

00:18:58 Speaker 3

These are Neo fascists.

00:19:00 Speaker 3

And now the new form of fascism is racism.

00:19:03 Speaker 3

OK.

00:19:03 Speaker 3

And that's what they do.

00:19:05 Speaker 3

They basically oppose immigration, but they oppose it because they are racist.

00:19:09 Speaker 3

And this is what for example, was said about the from national, not without reason.

00:19:14 Speaker 3

Perhaps at the time.

00:19:14 Speaker 3

Right the other.

00:19:15 Speaker 3

Way to look at them was no, no, these are single issue parties.

00:19:19 Speaker 3

These are.

00:19:20 Speaker 3

What is the look at immigration?

00:19:22 Speaker 3

Right.

00:19:23 Speaker 3

They they don't want to have immigration from poorer countries and they oppose that and they might do that because they have a form of perhaps nationalism in their ideology is not completely well expressed, but it's certainly ethnically based.

00:19:37 Speaker 3

And this is what drives their their opposition to immigration, but essentially they don't have another regime in mind.

00:19:45 Speaker 3

They have opposition to immigration, which is a specific policy.

00:19:48 Speaker 3

Then if you look at other countries specific countries, they might have another policy.

00:19:52 Speaker 3

For example, in Switzerland there was the automobile party.

00:19:55 Speaker 3

I thought that there was against immigration, but also in favor of the.

00:19:58 Speaker 3

And so on.

00:19:59 Speaker 3

This has changed now in both respects.

00:20:04 Speaker 3

The issue of are these parties NEO fascist or non NEO fascist?

00:20:07 Speaker 3

As I said before, it still exists, but it has become more marginal in the debate.

00:20:12 Speaker 3

There's a there's an interesting debate on that, but it's less mainstream in the in the research on these parties.

00:20:18 Speaker 3

And on the other hand, nobody really thinks about these parties as single issue parties anymore.

00:20:24 Speaker 3

Also, because they have developed, let's say, a discourse on other issues like law and order, for example, or others, but also because in my view things have changed, I started to change with Putin, but they definitely change with Orban in the following sense in the pre, let's say in the Cold War world.

00:20:45 Speaker 3

You had liberal democracies and communist regimes or, you know, some form of right wing authoritarian.

00:20:52 Speaker 3

And it was pretty clear that political pluralism was on one side and on the other side there was political monism, as we can call it, as the opposite of pluralism.

00:21:02 Speaker 3

There were different parties in communist regimes, as we know, but they didn't count.

00:21:06 Speaker 3

They all you know, they, they collaborated and basically they were the appendices of the ruling communist parties.

00:21:12 Speaker 3

And you know, military regimes, there was no party and and so, so.

00:21:16 Speaker 3

But there was no, no pluralism, no competition, not even the appearance of that with the end of the Cold War.

00:21:22 Speaker 3

These changes in the sense that authoritarian regimes are put in place, that includes some form.

00:21:29 Speaker 3

And more of quasi competitive elections, I should say fake competitive elections, but with different parties competing.

00:21:37 Speaker 3

But the playing field is so tilted in the in favor of the authoritarian incumbent that there is competition.

00:21:44 Speaker 3

But the authoritarian incumbent, either by because people vote for them just because they are induced to do so by the.

00:21:51 Speaker 3

Uneven field or because there's fraud or because of both, they can't.

00:21:56 Speaker 3

Instantly or almost constantly win elections.

00:21:58 Speaker 3

So this changes the game in a in a certain.

00:22:01 Speaker 3

Sense and where it?

00:22:03 Speaker 3

Really started to change the game for European right wing parties is with urban after 2010 and in particular after 2014 when you win selections again after.

00:22:16 Speaker 3

Change in the Constitution, and then even more with, as you mentioned, with with Poland, that is basically.

00:22:22 Speaker 3

Going on the same down the same Rd. as Orban. Why? It has changed the perspective, because urban already I think in 2014 clearly claimed a different democratic legitimacy, that is that of an illiberal democracy, as he calls it. And that's the the type of truer democracy that you mentioned in your question.

00:22:42 Speaker 3

So this connects of course with with what Putin had.

00:22:45 Speaker 3

Be done in previous years, but you know, for European parties, Russia is kind of a different world, so they won't have a lot of mileage by saying, well, you look we we'll do like they do say that think about marine lepen think about you know others in more in France or or other parties like that that admirers.

00:23:06 Speaker 3

Both there in the Netherlands, there are myriads of of Putin, OK.

00:23:10 Speaker 3

But now that admiration has moved from the political regime to the kind of traditionalist values that, in their view, of course, that Putin would represent.

00:23:19 Speaker 3

Well, for the institutions, for the model of regime, they are all more or less admirers of urban and also of the Polish law and justice.

00:23:30 Speaker 3

Government, because they say, and that's the the new rhetoric that at this stage doesn't include just a bunch of issues, but includes a different model of regime.

00:23:39 Speaker 3

This is the true democracy because democracy, democratic decision making has been hijacked by courts, by media, by supranational.

00:23:49 Speaker 3

Regimes, or even international regimes that take away that are politically unaccountable.

00:23:56 Speaker 3

That's the rhetoric and take away political decision making power from the electorate.

00:24:01 Speaker 3

So what we want is give back this power to the people so-called the people, and therefore invest.

00:24:10 Speaker 3

Directly with democratic legitimacy, a government majority and a government that then has the right to curb the power of all these other checks and balances, because that's what they are, the factor and.

00:24:22 Speaker 3

Aggrandize its own power.

00:24:24 Speaker 3

Many parties, even Western Europe, have this rhetoric now.

00:24:29 Speaker 3

Now they may not say we will do exactly like urban, but they are certainly not concerned by what urban does.

00:24:38 Speaker 3

So they're not.

00:24:39 Speaker 3

They are not saying this is undemocratic.

00:24:42 Speaker 3

They are saying, well, you know.

00:24:44 Speaker 3

This is Hungary, we are, let's say in France.

00:24:47 Speaker 3

We will do this differently, but that is, of course democratic.

00:24:50 Speaker 3

The people are voting, the people are electing or ban the people like that and he has democratic consensus and therefore he can do what he's doing.

00:25:00 Speaker 3

The fact is that now it's impossible basically not to elect or band because he controls the entire economy.

00:25:05 Speaker 3

Controls the entire state.

00:25:07 Speaker 3

He controls so many things.

00:25:09 Speaker 3

But this is never.

00:25:10 Speaker 3

Talked about by people like lepen or people like melonia or people like the Dutch, but they or or others.

00:25:16 Speaker 3

So this is the the shift that has happened.

00:25:19 Speaker 3

Now these parties have, at least at the rhetorical level, a regime image.

00:25:24 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think there is a aggregate data that clearly supports what you are saying, electoral autocracies, I think, have become the most frequent system in the world, more than democracies or straightforward dictatorships.

00:25:37 Speaker 2

And this is a slow process, as you are mentioning.

00:25:39 Speaker 2

That comes back to Putin.

00:25:40 Speaker 2

Or to urban and definitely after.

00:25:42 Speaker 2

After the Great Recession.

00:25:44 Speaker 2

I would like to ask you about this in first.

00:25:47 Speaker 2

People say that Orban could be a pioneer of a new style, as you argued of a new democratic legitimacy.

00:25:54 Speaker 2

Others would say that maybe he is the last samurai of communism or of the victims of communism, in the sense that his support comes from a lot of people, many of them alter that are resentful.

00:26:05 Speaker 2

With disappointed with the results of democracy and some way or another, they were socialised in the low trust Communist regime.

00:26:12 Speaker 2

So I I would like to know your opinion on this and and let me put it together with your with your research, because you're one of the world's most known scholars in the study of critical junctures which technically can be defined as moments in times that close off alternative options and lead to the establishment of institutions that generate self reinforcing.

00:26:33 Speaker 2

Path dependent processes definitely too much, too much jargon here, but maybe could you give us some example of of historical critical juncture?

00:26:42 Speaker 2

And do you think that we are precisely now in one of these critical junctures for for?

00:26:49 Speaker 3

So let's let me take this from the beginning, a critical juncture to define a critical juncture.

00:26:54 Speaker 3

In my view, a list, you need to define the institutional unit to which the critical juncture refers to a critical juncture in the development of bot.

00:27:04 Speaker 3

Exactly. I say that with my co-author in the 1st paper and then in a series of papers that I wrote.

00:27:10 Speaker 3

By my.

00:27:10 Speaker 3

Self leader This is an interest is a necessary corrective to the idea that was predominant before the critical junctures would be this just this, broadly defined or vaguely defined, rather moments of upheaval where everything seems to be possible, but then only something happens.

00:27:30 Speaker 3

That is too vague, and that of course opened the the was vulnerable to the criticism by people like Kathy Hill and others say well, but not everything is up for grabs and so on.

00:27:39 Speaker 3

But the question was badly posed, and in the sense that we need to identify what we're talking about first and then look for critical.

00:27:48 Speaker 3

So whether this is a critical juncture for democracy as a whole, probably critical juncture, is not the right term there.

00:27:56 Speaker 3

I would say this is a difficult phase for liberal democracy, for sure.

00:28:01 Speaker 3

It's in crisis everywhere, everywhere, where it exists.

00:28:04 Speaker 3

Also, democracy as such is in crisis in places where.

00:28:09 Speaker 3

Perhaps you don't have this level of articulations or checks and balances and constitutional structures, but you do have genuine elections, or you did have general elections.

00:28:20 Speaker 3

Now these are being rolled back in various ways, so democracy is in crisis, both in the more advanced system and in the the younger democratic system that have emerged that emerged before the the 90s or in the 90s, so that I would talk about a generalized crisis when we talk about critical.

00:28:40 Speaker 3

Branches we should look at a specific institutional or constitutional unit.

00:28:45 Speaker 3

So is this a critical juncture for the EU, for example?

00:28:47 Speaker 3

Yes, it is because it's clear that the clash today in the EU is between different visions of the EU vision that says the EU needs to deepen and become.

00:29:00 Speaker 3

More more of a positive political decision making body and others that say, Oh no, we like the EU, but we want the EU to do virtually nothing and everything should be repatriated to to the states.

00:29:11 Speaker 3

So the next couple of years will be important to to settle this question or not to settle, perhaps to.

00:29:19 Speaker 3

To steer EU in One Direction or or another, this is the way I would put the analysis of this current moment using the the critical juncture.

00:29:29 Speaker 3

If you want historical examples of of critical junctures, that's very interesting work.

00:29:33 Speaker 3

For example, I cite the work by Turner on Hitler.

00:29:37 Speaker 3

Clearly what happened in January 1933, he researched that very closely. There were still options, so it wasn't democracy was gone, but Germany didn't have to become Nazi regime. It could have become a military regime. It could have become an autocracy.

00:29:51 Speaker 3

Of the more traditional.

00:29:52 Speaker 3

Line. I imagine what consequences this difference would have had for the history of the world? Another very nice study of Tom Hartman, for example, in a volume that I Co edited, it talks about 1832 in Britain as a critical juncture. There's a moment in which very few decision makers and very few decisions.

00:30:13 Speaker 3

Are crucial to set a party system like in the case of Tom on a certain path and this.

00:30:21 Speaker 3

Has long standing concerns long lasting consequences.

00:30:25 Speaker 3

In this case he talks about the predominance of the Conservative Party on the right hand of the of political spectrum in the UK.

00:30:33 Speaker 3

This didn't have to happen.

00:30:34 Speaker 3

It was his thesis is at least that he uses this framework to understand what happened in in Britain in those.

00:30:41 Speaker 3

In those years thesis is that the predominance of the Conservative Party, even in the in the interwar years, now with the consequence that that had on controlling the right wing of our political spectrum in Britain in the interval.

00:30:55 Speaker 3

Was set by certain decisions taken a century before because it created certain institutions that that created certain incentives that then led to the party system to align in a certain way.

00:31:08 Speaker 3

So that's what I would say.

00:31:09 Speaker 3

So if we want to use the critical juncture concept, we need to.

00:31:14 Speaker 3

Link it to a specific institutional unit and then research quite deeply what happens in that unit.

00:31:21 Speaker 3

I would add just one thing to to close on this question, sometimes critical junctures.

00:31:26 Speaker 3

Are perceived only by like retrospective in the sense that not necessarily the people acting in 19 in January 1933 to give an example, except before that Turner researches so well, may not have been aware of the drama of the dramatic consequence at the certain decision might have had.

00:31:46 Speaker 3

One way or the other, in other cases they are aware, but the level of awareness is different across actors.

00:31:53 Speaker 3

What I see on the current situation in the current situation is that many more actors than perhaps in past similar.

00:32:03 Speaker 3

Have a sense of what could be called the tragic vision of history.

00:32:06 Speaker 3

One of them is Emmanuel Macron, for example, the President of France, he says very clear, has said many times.

00:32:11 Speaker 3

History is tragic.

00:32:12 Speaker 3

We should not take anything for granted.

00:32:14 Speaker 3

Anything can happen, and we should say we should not take democracy for granted.

00:32:19 Speaker 3

We should not take prosperity for granted.

00:32:21 Speaker 3

We should not take any of this.

00:32:23 Speaker 3

So these things can slip away and we need to do something to avoid that.

00:32:28 Speaker 2

It's very interesting this debate probably, as you say, we will not know until in maybe 10 or 20 years, whether we are living a second 1930s, hopefully hopefully not.

00:32:39 Speaker 2

Or maybe, as other people say, more kindly, what we are experiencing now is a new 1960s. But instead of having an anti system movement on the left, we have an anti system movement on the right.

00:32:51 Speaker 2

But it will not have terrible consequences for the the democracy and in that sense we can go to to America. In a recent article of yours, Biden's wake up call.

00:33:01 Speaker 2

You echo President Biden's recent speech in in Philadelphia stating that democracy in America runs a serious risk of of extinction, and the question is, well, some people could say, well, there have been other critical periods in the 60s or in the 70s with real assassinations also in the 30s in in America and and democracy, except for the.

00:33:21 Speaker 2

It will.

00:33:21 Speaker 2

Or let's say survived without the turmoil.

00:33:25 Speaker 2

Major turmoil.

00:33:26 Speaker 2

Let's say.

00:33:27 Speaker 2

What is the difference now?

00:33:28 Speaker 2

What makes buy then?

00:33:29 Speaker 2

And many observers, journalists and analysts and others be particularly worried because, on the one hand, we can say that we political scientists are catastrophists and like whether men we are just to focus on the.

00:33:42 Speaker 2

Hurricanes and not so much in the the good weather, but.

00:33:45 Speaker 2

But is there any concerning trends on on America that the the rest of the world should take note?

00:33:52 Speaker 3

Yeah, a great question.

00:33:54 Speaker 3

Let me start by saying that it's true that political science tend to focus on the big disasters, big events, and often these are big disasters.

00:34:02 Speaker 3

Let's put this way.

00:34:03 Speaker 3

In my little.

00:34:05 Speaker 3

Corner I tried not to do that in the sense that for example in the book that you were mentioning at the beginning of this conversation, I tried to focus on what avoided the disasters and so on the surface you don't see the disaster, but that actually doesn't mean that the.

00:34:19 Speaker 3

This could not have happened and I mentioned this because this is exactly the way I see Biden's speech now.

00:34:28 Speaker 3

In that book I talked about to get out of the metaphoric speech here that I talked about cases of democratic survival in Inter War Europe that.

00:34:39 Speaker 3

Were not necessarily always going to be cases of democratic survival where democracy was challenged by anti system party.

00:34:48 Speaker 3

Is at least to the level that democracy had been challenging.

00:34:53 Speaker 3

Countries that had collapsed as democracy, but these ones in the in the countries that I look at, this challenge was rolled back, was fought against successfully.

00:35:04 Speaker 3

So what is different today in America between?

00:35:08 Speaker 3

Other periods of turmoil, and you're right, America did have other periods of turmoil.

00:35:13 Speaker 3

Think about the 70s, but also before in the last century.

00:35:15 Speaker 3

In the previous century, the difference, in my view, is twofold. The first one is the 6th of January 22.

00:35:22 Speaker 3

The event, both in concrete terms, this was an in an attempted insurrection, the storm, the capital, the capital and even more in symbolic events.

00:35:33 Speaker 3

Right.

00:35:33 Speaker 3

And I'm thinking about the word of the work of Bill swell here on the transformative events at the symbolic level and at the.

00:35:42 Speaker 3

This was a pretty unprecedented.

00:35:45 Speaker 3

Event I mean to go back to similar event to really need to go back to the the Civil War or something like that.

00:35:52 Speaker 3

So what is the other difference is that the the Republican Party today has moved to anti democratic positions, especially in relation to this symbolic event.

00:36:03 Speaker 3

So both not just the electors or many.

00:36:06 Speaker 3

Sectors or the rank and file.

00:36:08 Speaker 3

All the Members or you know the sympathizers, the Members, the militants, all the Republican Party, but also the elites of the Republican Party, most of them, in any case, almost all of them, they.

00:36:18 Speaker 3

Tend to condone this event not as a moment in which American democracy was seriously threatened and could have died, because if Trump had managed to stop the election of the legitimate elected new President Biden, it's difficult to see how America today could be called.

00:36:38 Speaker 3

A democracy there would have been a cascade of events following that that certainly would have changed the face of the American political system.

00:36:45 Speaker 3

They don't consider that as a moment in which American democracy was at risk of death, but they considered that as a moment of tragedy.

00:36:55 Speaker 3

I'm using the words of Mike Pence here, my pence.

00:36:58 Speaker 3

Whose life was threatened in that very event goes out and says after a few months that that event was a tragic page in the book in the history book of the Marks, somehow absolving the participants.

00:37:12 Speaker 3

I don't know whether he wants to absorb those or Trump, whose role in organizing this.

00:37:17 Speaker 3

Event is becoming more and more evidenced through the work of January 6th Committee, but certainly was absolving the insurrectionists.

00:37:26 Speaker 3

So when a party is entirely in these positions and doesn't even condemn an attempted insurrection on the Parliament, something has changed.

00:37:37 Speaker 3

Something is.

00:37:38 Speaker 3

Deeply different from the previous moments, and that's where Biden's speech come in. He took away any doubt and any ambiguity he gave the speech in Philadelphia, highly symbolic place.

00:37:50 Speaker 3

And he said with so many words, American democracy is a risk of dying.

00:37:54 Speaker 3

And he called the attackers of democracy in America the Maga Republican, and then the Make America great again.

00:38:01 Speaker 3

Republican, IE the Trumpian Republicans, he he appealed to the Democrats and the non Trumpian Republicans to.

00:38:10 Speaker 3

Get together and to stop this.

00:38:11 Speaker 3

The problem is that the non Trumpian Republicans are fewer and fewer because the control of Trump and his.

00:38:18 Speaker 3

People on the Republican Party is becoming stronger and stronger.

00:38:21 Speaker 3

There's very little opposition left in the party, if any.

00:38:25 Speaker 3

Now this might change and if it changes then there's obviously more hope, but if it continues like that, then American market will be continue to be at risk of collapse.

00:38:37 Speaker 2

Well, let's finish our conversation with with the solutions to all these problems and and I think you also have been a forerunner.

00:38:46 Speaker 2

In discussing some of these solutions, you know there there is this democratic dilemma of how much freedom we have to grant to the enemies of freedom.

00:38:54 Speaker 2

And this has an important debate for legal theories.

00:38:57 Speaker 2

But as you have written, in contrast, political scientists have paid much less attention to how democratic regimes can navigate.

00:39:06 Speaker 2

This dilemma in practical terms, namely how, how and why democracies actually can respond to the actions of anti democratic.

00:39:13 Speaker 2

So I know it's a very broad question.

00:39:15 Speaker 2

It's it's difficult, but if someone is qualified to answer, I would say you are among the the group few group of privileged people who can answer that.

00:39:23 Speaker 2

And I would.

00:39:24 Speaker 2

Like to know.

00:39:25 Speaker 2

Your opinion to the very least on on this concept of militant democracy like define as policies that in a democratic state like in Germany for example.

00:39:33 Speaker 2

Limit the rights of expression and participate.

00:39:36 Speaker 2

And of perceived as anti democratic actors or anti constitutional actors.

00:39:40 Speaker 2

On the one hand I really like it.

00:39:42 Speaker 2

I see Germany and I see those restrictions that work.

00:39:44 Speaker 2

But on the other hand I then I go to Spain, I see how several parties claim for the banning of separatist parties in the Basque Country and Catalonia, arguing that they go against some articles of the Constitution, such as territorial integrity.

00:39:56 Speaker 2

Therefore, they need to be banned and they point out to Germany so.

00:40:01 Speaker 2

I am not very convinced that that would work, so I would like to know your opinion in general or in particular about about this issue.

00:40:09 Speaker 3

I let me say right away that I agree with you that that would not work.

00:40:13 Speaker 3

Actually not not only would not work, it probably might make things worse.

00:40:17 Speaker 2

Yeah, option.

00:40:18 Speaker 3

That's that's no so my interest.

00:40:21 Speaker 3

For militant democracy, which has is defined as you as you just defined, it was due to the fact that this seems to be a.

00:40:29 Speaker 3

Dominion that is present in many liberal democracies but not understood or studied at the same time.

00:40:36 Speaker 3

I am not an advocate of militant Mario.

00:40:38 Speaker 3

I'm not a somebody who thinks that that's the solution to the problem of, let's say, radical opposition.

00:40:44 Speaker 3

No, that's not the sort of it's a matter of conceptualizing and studying an aspect of.

00:40:50 Speaker 3

Liberal democracies, because these are liberal.

00:40:52 Speaker 3

You mentioned Germany, you mentioned Spain.

00:40:53 Speaker 3

You can mention all the West European democracy.

00:40:56 Speaker 3

That's what I'm working on now.

00:40:57 Speaker 3

These are all liberal democracies.

00:40:59 Speaker 3

That however include different levels of restriction.

00:41:03 Speaker 3

Two parties that, as you say correctly, are perceived as being anti democratic anti constitutional anti system.

00:41:09 Speaker 3

So my question is, given that these restrictions are not just on paper, if you're Germany, you know that this is not true.

00:41:19 Speaker 3

This parties parties or groups or individuals have been.

00:41:22 Speaker 3

Restricted and repressed in different moments of contemporary German history.

00:41:26 Speaker 3

And so it does happen in other countries, like Italy or Austria or France, to some respects or others.

00:41:33 Speaker 3

So my my question is, what drives these differences?

00:41:36 Speaker 3

What drives differences in the operators?

00:41:38 Speaker 3

That is put in place.

00:41:39 Speaker 3

What drives differences in the ways in which these operators is used and so on.

00:41:43 Speaker 3

Clearly this is not a solution to the problem of polarization or radicalism, and so on.

00:41:50 Speaker 3

It's just an aspect of that solution.

00:41:52 Speaker 3

Perhaps in some specific circumstances, if you want to talk about solutions, this is what.

00:41:58 Speaker 3

Most political science, it doesn't talk about in the sense that, for example, take the literature on today's crisis of democracy that we talked about before. The typical book on that is 300 pages on whatever.

00:42:11 Speaker 3

Problem is there polarization, identity, politics, inequality, erosion of democratic checks and balances, manipulation of voting rights order and one page at the end on what to do about this.

00:42:25 Speaker 3

That is generally not very well thought through.

00:42:28 Speaker 3

And so in another project that I have now.

00:42:31 Speaker 3

Parallel to the one that I completing on different levels of restrictions, I analyze different actors of restriction with it's a collective project the state can use restrictions like in the militant democracy style.

00:42:45 Speaker 3

If you want then there are parties that could use different levels.

00:42:50 Speaker 3

Of activity in order to counter the violation of constitutional informal norms on the part of extremists, the civil society reactions with mobilization, with pressure, with various forms of activity.

00:43:06 Speaker 3

And then there's of course the conditions under which the voters can defect.

00:43:10 Speaker 3

From autocratic party or anti system party and therefore and and go back to voting for more centrist parties.

00:43:18 Speaker 3

All this to say that I believe.

00:43:20 Speaker 3

Believe that political scientists and comparative politics people should pay more attention not just to the problem, but also on what to do to what to do about the problem, which seems to be a very urgent issue today.

00:43:33 Speaker 2

Thank you very much, Giovanni.

00:43:34 Speaker 2

We could probably be talking for for four hours, but I think we need to stop.

00:43:39 Speaker 2

Thanks for the conversation and for sharing your insights on the rise of populism and the threat to democracy and how to tackle it.

00:43:46 Speaker 2

Looking forward to having you again in the podcast when we when you release your new book on the potential solutions to cure Democracy.

00:43:53 Speaker 2

Thank you.

00:43:55 Speaker 3

Thank you very much.

00:43:56 Speaker 3

Thank you for having me.