

HOW CAN WE SAVE DEMOCRACY?

Friday 27 september, 04:30 p.m. - 06:00 p.m., Auditorium



Xavier Chemisseur, Laure Mandeville and Raphaël Culliford

In the middle of the 19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville, democratic philosopher, Normand, former French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, made a trip to the United States and published a text, *On Democracy in America*, consisting of two volumes (1835 and 1840). This text created a legacy and led to the construction of a model of liberal democracy. But more than 180 years later, what remains of this model, now losing momentum and threatened by populist ideas? Russia's invasion of Ukraine showed that everything can collapse very quickly. Was it the Western democracies that Vladimir Putin wanted to attack? Ekaterina Kotrikadze, news director and presenter at TV Rain, had no doubt about this. 'We're at a pivotal moment where the West must show strength and prove its efficiency.'

But beyond the example of Russia, this resurgence of populist ideas, these political crises and the multiple interferences have profoundly destabilised the democratic foundations throughout

the world. Laure Mandeville, senior reporter at Le Figaro and co-founder of 'Conversations Tocqueville' described the ultra-problematic conjunction of a West grappling with turmoil within its borders and outside, where 'geopolitical hurricanes are bearing down on it, born of alliances of neo-totalitarian states like China, Russia, Iran and North Korea.' This populist malaise in our societies long predates the election – and re-election – of Donald Trump in the United States. According to Laure Mandeville, it dates to the 1960s. 'Nietzsche said God is dead. And indeed, since the 1960s, the disappearance of religious

MODERATION

Xavier Chemisseur, Editor-in-Chief
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SPEAKERS

Raphaël Culliford, General Delegate
of the Parlons Démocratie Association

Laure Mandeville, Senior Reporter
at Le Figaro and Co-Founder of
'Conversations Tocqueville'

Ekaterina Kotrikadze, News Director
and Presenter at TV Rain

transcendence as the basis of balance in Western societies, shaped by Greco-Roman antiquity and the Age of Enlightenment, has considerably disoriented them.'

The basis of democracy is the art of conversation between opposing views

Laure Mandeville

Then, the election of Donald Trump has effectively marked a turning point. Many observers, obsessed by his extravagant personality, have forgotten the wave of rebellious and radicalised supporters he brought with him. The culmination was the invasion of Capital on 6th January 2021, to protest his defeat in the elections against Joe Biden. 'When Joe Biden arrived, he wanted to calm this fire. But Trumpism isn't the only destabilising political element, there are also others on the left side of the political spectrum that are worsening the fracture in this society. There are now two camps that no longer speak to each other, whereas the basis of democracy is the art of conversation between opposing views,' explained Laure Mandeville.

Vladimir Putin is relishing the situation, and even added another layer in September 2024, announcing his support for the candidacy of Democrat, Kamala Harris, confusing the issue and making these elections even more difficult to predict. 'When you see how Russian propaganda is spread outside the country, you see that it is not as effective as it seems, in any case, less effective than inside the country,' ex-

plained Ekaterina Kotrikadze. The audience figures for her TV Rain medium are a source of hope for her, with 65% of them generated in Russia, at a time when the Kremlin is trying to isolate the population from political debates and current affairs, by placing itself above the fray and adopting a paradoxically reassuring posture. Even though the Kremlin's propaganda isn't effective on the outside, it does instil a sense of fear, particularly when it wields the nuclear threat. 'And no one knows how far he's willing to go. This must be taken very seriously.'

Laure Mandeville shares this concern but is more moderate about the strength of Vladimir Putin's power, which is much weaker than the West thinks. Beyond the forces present, what weapons does the West have to fight and preserve this liberal democracy, the foundation of its identity? Raphaël Culliford, general delegate of the association, Parlons Démocratie, had no pretensions about saving democracy, but he address the moral problem posed by democracy and interference in it. According to him, democracy is a simple idea that can be weakened in several ways. First, when a non-democratic country manages to achieve prosperity, it can cause people to question the effectiveness of democracy. Secondly, one of the fundamental criteria of a functioning democracy is public and compulsory education. 'It is clear that these promises are flawed. If we want to resist interference from disinformation or identity division, knowledge allows us to do so. But how? In France, we have men and women whose job it is to bring democracy to life: judges, parliamentarians, etc.' For example, his association, Parlons Démocratie, organised a meeting in a district of Saint Denis (93) with the public prosecutor François Molins. 'The first question he was asked was: «Is justice racist?» It was that direct. When we confront things so brutally, we create an encounter. In France we have

people who are ready for that. 'This is how democracy lives,' he explained.

Because if there is one feeling that gnaws at this democracy, it's that of inequality. So, shouldn't we tackle the economy, society in depth, before thinking about democracy? Laure Mandeville recalled Alexis de Toqueville's concerns about the creation, by the democratic system, of a class, an elite, which would

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Ekaterina Kotrikadze

gradually, even subconsciously, dispossess the people of power by distancing them from it. 'Democracies need to reform,' continued Ekaterina Kotrikadze. 'Autocracies are a bit like those bad boys in high school that girls fall for because they're more attractive, while the good students, like democracies, seem boring. I believe that democracy must become more attractive. Because for those who don't know what autocracy means, I know. I lost my rights, my home, my job and I had to flee my country,' she concluded, adding that one of the solutions to promote democracy would be, according to



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her, to work with young people on these subjects via Instagram or Tik Tok.

Participatory democracy could perhaps be a solution to limit this feeling of helplessness and distrust among the population when it comes to elections. 'But democracy is a value that we strive to achieve but never fully achieve,' noted Raphaël Culliford. 'Pierre Ronsavallon, the sociologist, speaks of two legitimacies: that of the electoral mandate and the sociological mandate, which states, «aren't we better placed to represent butchers when we are butchers?»' But are these two legitimacies compatible? 'If we want to address these problems, we have to question this democratic machine and its workings, and how it could better align itself with the general interest.'



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