

Welcome to the rest of politics leading with me, Rory Stewart and me, Alistair Campbell. And it's a real treat for me today because we have a chance to interview Francis Fukuyama. Francis Fukuyama is almost the definition of a public intellectual. He's most famous, although I suspect during the interview he may say that he doesn't want to be famous only for this, but he's most famous for an essay in a book titled *The End of History*, which was about the emergence of Western style liberal democracy at the end of the Cold War. But he's been very, very thoughtful on many, many other issues which are directly relevant to politics on the subject of equality, of social justice, of the desire for dignity in people. And he's a rare mind because he's able to think sortfully and I think quite deftly about big historical changes, able to step back and look at decade-long changes. So thank you very, very much for joining us. Thank you for having me. Frank, if we can, can we maybe start a little bit just with where you are and what you're up to at the moment and then we'll get into some of the ideas? Well, I'm in a beautiful town, Carmel by the Sea, California, which in my view is one of the most beautiful spots in the whole US because it's right on the California coast, but I'm normally in Palo Alto. I teach at Stanford University, but it's only an hour and a half away, so I'm here for the weekend. Very good. Well, thank you. Thank you so much for joining us. And maybe to begin, I guess Alistair and I have been doing this podcast now for just every year and we tend to think about the period since 1989 in terms of three distinct periods. The first, I guess, is sort of 1989 to the early 2000s, which seems to be a moment of great optimism of the US liberal democratic model, explosion of democracies, violence reducing, peace, prosperity. Then something begins to sort of flatten out between the early 2000s and 2014. And then from 2014 onwards, we see populism, the increasing strength of authoritarian states coinciding with a substantial increase in violence and displacement of people. How do you think about those periods? Would you recognize that analysis that those are three distinct periods? Yeah, I think that roughly makes sense. I would say the year 2008 is probably also an important turning point. If you look at the period between 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell in 2008, in the time of the global financial crisis, that was a period of unparalleled American hegemony. So the American defense budget in this period was as large as all the other countries in the world's defense budgets put together. And politically, culturally, economically, in so many ways, America seemed to be the dominant model in the world. But I think that in the first decade of the 21st century, two things happened. After September 11th, you had the invasions of Afghanistan, and particularly the invasion of Iraq, that really was a overreach, a tremendous kind of arrogant overreach of American power that in many ways discredited the idea of democracy because the Bush administration at the time defended what they didn't find weapons of mass destruction. So then they said, well, actually what we're doing is promoting democracy. And now in the Arab world, if you say we'd like democracy, they say, oh, please don't invade us, you know, the way you invaded Iraq. So the Iraq war, I think, discredited the democracy model that the United States represented. And then the financial crisis in 2008, I think, discredited the free market, you know, kind of neoliberal economic model that the United States was also pushing. And really, a lot of the populism that appeared in the next decade was, I think, the direct result of both of these things, that Americans got tired of these foreign commitments, they said, why don't you take care of people at home? And it exposed a tremendous inequality that had emerged because of the particular style of

globalization that had been promoted by the United States, which left a lot of working class Americans behind. And I think that kind of explains all of the reactions that we've seen in the last few years. Frank, just to come in on Iraq and post 9-11, Rory and I did a podcast a few weeks ago where Rory kind of grilled me on Iraq for two hours because I was part of the Tony Blair team at the time. We obviously went with the Bush administration. I do remember some very difficult conversations

with Dick Cheney in particular about this whole question of what democratization actually meant. But just to press you a little bit, because at one point, you were initially very supportive of the Iraq war. And also, you describe yourself at one point as a neoconservative. And I always used to press the Bush people. I never understood what neoconservatism meant. So having identified

as a neoconservative and then rejected neoconservatism, can you give me your assessment of what that

actually meant at the time? Well, I think neoconservatives were basically, you know, they were sort of liberal universalists that believe that liberal values were required of, you know, all governments everywhere. And the particular form that it took in the United States was to link that to that American military might and hegemony that, you know, that I had spoken of. And I think that sort of a crusading liberalism, you know, was really the core of what neoconservatives believed. I broke with that for a number of reasons. First of all, it seemed to me that linking democracy explicitly to American power, and especially to American military power was in the end going to discredit the idea of democracy itself, because democracy is really something that needs to come from within societies and, you know, be an expression of the people's will, wherever it takes root. And I thought that it was also, you know, American foreign policy at that time betrayed a tremendous naivete about what the rest of the world was like, you know, the idea that you could build democratic institutions in either Afghanistan or Iraq, I thought was quite implausible for quite a number of reasons. I remember Condi Rice, you know, saying that these cultural arguments that democracy can't take root

in a Muslim world are just wrong, you know, they underestimate the appeal of democracy and liberal values. And I think it turned out that that's a much harder ask than certainly they anticipated. You know, this actually started a big line of research and writing on my part, because what Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated to me was that way before you got to democracy, you needed to have a state. These were both countries where the state had collapsed. Rory knows this, you know, from personal experience walking across Afghanistan, a stateless society in many respects. And, you know, it suddenly dawned on me that especially Americans take the state for granted, they assume that it's always going to be there and that the main problem is to constrain it, to prevent it from impinging on individual rights, but that if you don't have a state in the first place, you're going to be in even bigger trouble because you are back in, you know, Hobbes' war of all against all. And so, you know, that then determined much of what I, you know, was thinking about in writing over the next 20 years is where does the state come from?

Just on that, Rory and I have this motto that we try and disagree agreeably. I just wonder whether you lost friendships through that period, whether somebody like Paul Wolfowitz, who I always, to be frank, thought was a bit of a menace, but whether you lost that kind of friendship or whether actually in the sort of world that we three all live in, whether you think

it's possible to have real friendships that withstand political pressure and political change. It all depends on the individual. I have not spoken to Paul Wolfowitz in 20 years because of, you know, what happened. Bill Crystal, who was also a big neocon advocate of the war, I didn't speak to for about 15 years, but in the last few years, he's emerged as a big, very vocal critic of Donald Trump. And so, you know, we started speaking again. He gets something right.

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, actually, I think that's admirable because there's actually quite a number of neoconservatives that then turned into very vocal Trump critics. And I think that represented a real ideological consistency because they recognize that Trump is probably the biggest threat to American democracy or global democracy, for that matter, in the world today. And therefore, they, you know, they had to defend those democratic values. Now, Frank, one of the odd things about the coalition behind Donald Trump, though, is that it does still seem to attract highly educated senators from Ivy League universities. He gets support from Christians, despite his rather peculiar private life. He gets support from military types, despite his isolationism. I mean, how do you explain the paradox of his ability to master support from so many people whose values you would have thought he disagreed with

or you would have thought they would disagree with him at least?

Well, the support from establishment Republicans, I think it's just a matter of cowardice. They all understand who he is and how bad he is. But, you know, their base has just shifted. And so, you know, for any of them to be viable, they got to talk themselves into liking him, which I think is a rather despicable, you know, posture if more of them actually showed some backbone. I think we wouldn't be where we are today. The core of his base are, you know, it was always said to be these working class people that had been put out of work by globalization and offshoring. I mean, there are people like that. One of the big changes is that a lot of the white working class has shifted from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, but a lot of them are middle class people. And I think for them, it's actually the left that they hate more. And in particular, the kind of woke, progressive left that has emerged over the last, you know, decade or two that really offends them. I know plenty of conservative friends that understand perfectly well that Donald Trump is not fit to be president, but they just dislike the left so much that they're willing to hold their noses and either just be silent or actively support him. But Joe Biden doesn't represent that kind of left. He didn't when he was elected, he was elected as a centrist on the cultural issues. You know, he's been very supportive of, you know, a lot of that agenda, that identity politics agenda. It's really an economic policy where he's been more centrist. Although even there, he's moved, you know, further left than, you know, certainly the Clintons were willing to go.

Do you think that's him being dragged left by a Democrat party that's being pushed left because of their revulsion at Trump? No, well, it depends. I think that on some of the civil rights issues, like rights for transgender people, I think he actually believes a lot of that. And that's been fairly consistent on his part. It's just that in earlier years, these kind of cultural issues weren't so prominent. And so people's position on them didn't really matter all that much. And how worried do you think we should be? We're speaking into the recent aftermath of the Supreme Court decision on affirmative action. How big a shift is that within American life? Well, you know, I would say overall that this conservative court is not as bad as people

were fearing, you know, when they got this sixth conservative judge majority, because there actually now are three justices in the middle that actually are persuadable by argument. So it's true that they struck down affirmative action. By the way, that's a very popular position in the United States. You know, poll data shows 60% of Americans really don't like the idea of, you know, race conscious decision making and hiring and school admissions, this sort of thing. But the same week, they also came down with a six to three decision striking down this Republican effort to give full authority to state legislators to, you know, handle elections however they wanted, which is something that all the Trump, you know, linked election overturners had wanted to see passed. So we shouldn't be too alarmed, you don't think? Well, I think that in this Twitter age, it's really easy to incite a lot of immediate, you know, hostility and anger. But this court is actually not as consistently right wing as, you know, I think some people feared. You focused on the Iraq war and the 2008 financial crisis as part of the explanation for this dramatic change. But there's three other things that I'd be interested in you reflecting on. One of them is the way in which the rise of social media, Twitter and Facebook plays into this. The second is the way in which cultural wars play into this and perhaps a tendency amongst the left in many countries to take a more isolationist position because they're more suspicious of their own motives. And I think the final thing is potentially the rise of China, which suggests for the first time that there wasn't a necessary connection between democracy and prosperity in a large middle class. How much weight would you put on those three factors in this change? Well, all of them I think are important. The technology one is really important because, you know, really a lot of the disagreements that we have that lead to the polarization in contemporary America are based on completely different factual understandings of what the world is like, you know, so the people that believe that the Democrats overturned the 2020 election, they think that there's a lot of evidence showing that there was all this, you know, ballot stuffing and so forth. And I think, you know, the COVID epidemic really sharpened a lot of those disagreements, you know, actually that was driven in a way by the public health authorities, you know, making real mistakes or excusable mistakes, I think at the time, but they did overreach. But that then got transformed in social media to a deliberate elite conspiracy to want to control ordinary people. And, you know, right now, if you go on the internet and you say, you know, our vaccine safe, you'll get a million hits purporting that they're not. So that was really important. The rise of China is also, I think, something that undermines a theory that was out there in the social sciences that I believed, and I actually still believe a certain version of that, which is that as a society becomes more educated, more middle class, that people are going to want to demand more personal freedom and some degree of participation, you know, in their political system. And that was true, you know, in South Korea and Taiwan, as they modernized, they converted into democracies, Japan did that in an earlier age. But China, you know, has hit a level above where South Korea and Taiwan were, and they're still communists. And so I think that that theory, you know, we have to now treat a lot more skeptically. And that means that the motor that might be driving global democracy, you know, is really not such a motor. After all, I'm sorry, you had a second of your three was Yes, the second second was maybe the extent to which as the right has become more isolationist because they feel the world is none of their business, the left maybe feels that because of our uncomplicated histories of colonialism and slavery, we're better not getting involved in

other people's countries in the first place. I don't. That's actually very complicated, because if you look at the agenda of a lot of progressives, they do want to inject a lot of those cultural issues into the kinds of demands that are made, you know, so for example, LGBTQ rights, in many ways, kind of rise to the top of the Western liberal agenda, you know, when Uganda passes an anti gay law, I mean, this I thought this was very striking. So let me be clear, it's not a good law. It's a terrible law. It criminalizes, you know, homosexuality, big penalties are attached to, you know, homosexual acts so forth. So it's not a good law. But Uganda has done a lot of anti democratic things like, you know, undermining freedom of speech, not allowing opposition parties, jiggering elections. And the West doesn't say anything about those. But this is the one issue where, you know, the development agencies, the World Bank, President Biden all pile on, you know, attacking them. And I think that I've had a lot of democracy, activist friends, because we cultivate a big network of them from a lot of the global South that are saying, yes, we understand,

you know, you have to treat gays and lesbians and transgender people equally, you shouldn't discriminate. But a lot of times you people in the West come across as making that the only issue that you care about. And then this is picked up, I think, by the Putin's and Orban's of the world and converted into this narrative that really what Western liberalism is is all about, you know, LGBTQ rights, and not, you know, these more fundamental kinds of freedoms.

And just going back to China for a moment, you did a speech in Oslo fairly recently, and you basically made the point that even though we see and hear so much of the authoritarian countries, in particular, China, Russia and Iran, but you believe they are destined to fail. Maybe you can tell us why you believe they're destined to fail. But also, what about if both authoritarianism and democracy are failing? Yeah, that's a that's kind of a nightmare world. Well, on the authoritarian side, the word destined is a little bit strong. But I do think that there are reasons for thinking that authoritarian systems have got their own big problems of sustainability. You know, the first one is simply a matter of legitimacy that, you know, if people are supporting it because of good performance, rather than any kind of belief, you know, in sort of traditional values, then the moment the performance weakens, they're going to stop supporting. But the other one just has to do with decision making. You know, authoritarian states do not have checks and balances.

And in both Russia and China, we've seen this huge concentration of power in one individual by Putin sitting at the end of this 30 foot table, you know, apart from his foreign minister, and Xi Jinping in the course of zero COVID, you know, there probably wasn't a single member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo that could actually say to him, you know, I think this may not be the best policy, why don't we reconsider. So I think that lacking those checks and balances and the need to get societal buy in for your policies leads to, you know, poor decision making. And I think that China, it's not just zero COVID in China, you know, their economy is in real trouble. Yeah. You know, virtually all their municipal governments and cities are broke. They don't really have a fiscal, a sustainable fiscal policy, 20% unemployment for college graduates. They've got this oversaturated housing market. And I think that they could be facing just like Japan in the 1990s, you know, the next 20 years of stagnant economic growth and ultimately a shrinking population. And so I'm not sure that their model is going to look nearly as powerful, you know, down the road as it has. And what about the point about democracies and authoritarian regimes failing together? Yeah, I mean, the story we like to tell ourselves in liberal democracies



is that if we make mistakes, we can, we can correct. And I must say that that belief has gotten challenged in the past. We're not we're not correcting Brexit. And it looks like you might not be correcting Trump. Right. Yeah. So, you know, this is another problem with democracies that although they do require buy in, they also the same checks and balances prevent them from actually adjusting quickly. You know, one of the issues I've been looking at a lot in the last few years is infrastructure in the United States. And I think in many parts of Europe, we don't build infrastructure very well. It takes too long. It's too expensive, certainly compared to China, which is a kind of champ at this stuff. And people notice this, you know, they say, you know, this project has been going on for the last 15 years, you know, where's the new international airport in Berlin, you know, fifth runway at Heathrow, you know, all sorts of things like that. And I think that does have to do with the excessive proceduralism that liberal democracies tend to impose on themselves. Yeah. Yeah, I think there's a sense that I felt as a working politician that often in Britain, we feel powerless. And there seems to be an immense inertia and a real difficulty in getting things done. And part of the appeal of the authoritarians, the China's, which is connected to the lack of checks and balances that they're able to project a sense of energy forward direction, getting stuff done. And I sometimes wonder whether in a world that often feels paralyzed and powerless, whether simply the idea of energy and forward action doesn't bring a certain degree of legitimacy, almost regardless of what they're actually doing. No, that's right. I think that, you know, people want rule of law and procedural correctness, but they also want good outcomes. And sometimes those procedures and the checks and balances get in the way of achieving outcomes. You know, I think actually one of the biggest challenges to the liberal democratic model is the one going on in El Salvador right now. So El Salvador was absolutely consumed with gang violence and warfare. And, you know, you get this president, Naib Bukele, basically puts like 10% of the youth population in jail, you know, jailing all these gang members. And the rate of crime has dropped like 90%, you know, so families can now go out and actually enjoy a Sunday picnic without having to be worried about some Mara, you know, coming up and robbing them. And, you know, it's very hard to see any other democracy in Latin America that's been able to deal with this kind of security problem effectively. Frank, I want to give you four or five instances of populism in recent modern times. And I want you to try to rank them for me in terms of how bad they have been. I'm going to go Trump, Brexit, Modi and Orban. Give me your assessment of each of those on the populist Richter scale. Well, I would put Brexit at the bottom of that list in terms of the seriousness, because it now seems like a lot of people in Britain regret having made that choice. And they could do it all over again. They wouldn't. It's just that procedurally it's just hard to figure out how to get there. I mean, you know, one impressive factoid is that support for immigration, as I understand it, in Britain has actually gone up since Brexit. So, you know, I don't think it means that there's this growing kind of intolerant fascist, quasi-fascist society emerging. Only inside part of the government. Yeah. But it's part of the government. You know, Orban is, you know, is up there because he figured out this illiberal line of attack and is a very clever and smart politician. And so he pulls back just before the EU threatens to pull his subsidies. But, you know, he keeps, you know, he's still in power after all these years. Modi

is very dangerous just because it's such a big country. The thing that I don't understand about India, you know, India, if you look at it historically, it's been subject to a really strict centralized tyranny, relatively few times in its history, because it's completely different from China in that sense. China's got an extremely strong state and a weak civil society, whereas India, it's kind of the opposite. They've always had a rather weak state and powerful social forces that push back against it. And I think a lot of the stuff that Modi has done is very destructive of liberal values. But how far he can push that, I'm not quite sure.

Donald Trump, I think, is a very unique threat. And because the United States is so important to global democracy as a model and as a material supporter of democratic values, witness Ukraine, I do think that he represents a very unique threat. He's brilliant, you know. He figured out this wellspring of intense resentment that existed in many parts of American society. And he capitalized on that in a really devilishly clever way. And if he gets reelected in 2024, I think not just the United States, but a lot of liberal democracies are going to be in big trouble. Okay, Rory, Frank, let's just take a quick break.

Frank, you are a great exponent of, if I'm going to be pretentious for a moment on our podcast, of a Hegel and a Hegelian idea that you've got a kind of thesis and an antithesis and a synthesis. And initially, in the late 80s, early 90s, it seemed as though the final synthesis was going to be the form of liberal democracy that was emerging in the 90s. Is it possible to rethink this and perhaps see that what was happening in the 90s was, as it were, the thesis and the populism as the antithesis? And that we're looking for some future synthesis of these two moving forward? And if so, what would it be? Yeah, well, that Hegelian process is really not that different from classic Quig history in Britain that recognizes ups and downs, but the synthesis ultimately is going to be a higher form of liberal values. Look, I don't take a position on that. I think that there are reasons to think that in the long run, liberal political systems are going to be more durable because they're better at dealing with diversity than authoritarian ones. They don't have those decision-making problems that I mentioned in authoritarian countries. But I think that rather than one model winning out over liberal democracy, what you could have is just a lot of countries maintaining some form of either not very good democracy or not very good authoritarianism. And there is no ultimate convergence. And Frank, AI and biotechnology, give us your thoughts on how

that's going to inflect the next 10 or 20 years. Well, I hesitate to say anything about AI. I've seen so much pontificating on this subject in the last few months. And I think that I'm not going to add to that except to say that, you know, compared to something like blockchain or some of these other

things that have come along, I think the generative AI is a much bigger deal. And you can see that affecting society in much bigger ways. It could be competitive to existing, you know, workers and ways of doing business. It could be actually complementary. So it'll increase, you know, productivity and efficiency. But I think anyone that claims to know which of these is going to happen, you shouldn't listen to them because, you know, who could have predicted the impact of electricity when Thomas Edison, you know, turned on the first light bulb. I mean, now biotech, I actually wrote a whole book about this in the early 2000s, because I think that in the end, it has a much bigger capacity to shape society than digital technology. So I was wrong about the digital part. But, you know, I think biotech still is very powerful as a means of controlling other people. If you can get into germline engineering, you know, the pharmacological

interventions that we've been able to make with people permit some part of society to control another part of society in ways that people dreamed about in previous eras, but, you know, they didn't have the capacity to actually make good on. So I do think that that's coming down the road. Now, Frank, I don't do an interview, when I'm being interviewed, rather than interviewing, as we are now, I don't do an interview of longer than five minutes without the interview. I did one this morning with a Belgian newspaper, without the interviewer saying at some point, now I really must ask you about your role in the lead up to the Iraq war. And then, and I go into autopilot. And so I feel your equivalent, Rory mentioned the introduction, is your book, and this phrase, the end of history. And Rory mentioned Hegel, and I believe the phrase was originally his. Yes. So what, what did you, first of all, what did you mean? Secondly, has it surprised you the extent to which you have become so attached to this one phrase? And what has that whole process kind of taught you both about yourself and about the world? Well, okay, so just to turn the autopilot on, so what was the end of history? You know, history with a capital H, you would probably describe in other terms as modernization or development today. And the question is, is there a progressive evolution of societies over very long periods of time that leads to certain forms of institutions? And my answer to that back then and today is yes, that I do think that there is a coherent process of modernization. And I think people that don't believe that should go live in Guatemala or Myanmar or some other, you know, very poor, chaotic country that doesn't have, you know, the advantages and opportunities that Britain or the United States or Canada, many other countries offer. So that's the basic meaning of history. And then the end of history is, where does that process look like it's headed? And for many decades, the Marxist said it's headed towards communism, and there will be a higher form of civilization that will displace, you know, what they call bourgeois, a democracy tied to capitalism. And my argument was, I don't see that higher stage. I don't see a preferable form of government. And I think right now, the only rival, right, that seems plausible is China, which is definitely authoritarian. It's quasi capitalist, but they've certainly been very good at providing stability and growth. But is that actually going to displace, you know, the democratic model? I have my doubts about that, but I'm open to, you know, the possibility and Frank, can I come in just to reinforce Alice's question? And Alistair, of course, often makes jokes at his own expense that his obituary is going to have the word Tony Blair in the title and probably Iraq in the first line. And you achieved extraordinary fame. And in your late 30s, I guess you were sort of 37, 38, when the first article, The End of History came out. And it's still something that literally I can stand up in almost any audience in the world, mention you in this book, and everybody's heard of it. What does it mean for someone's life to be, as it were, defined in your late 30s? And you're now talking to us when you're 70. What's the psychological experience of this? Well, look, I've learned to get over the the frustrations that a long time ago. When I post something on social media or elsewhere, I almost never read the comments. Because inevitably, somebody's going to say, Oh, Mr. End of History, you know, what about this? What about that? And, you know, it's been going on for more than 30 years. And so I, you know, who needs it? You know, I do think in terms of my subsequent career, it's been actually a great boon because, you know, it got me a good academic position. I could write, you know, so I've written a total of 10 books now. I actually think that the two volume series I did on political order was really my effort to rewrite The End of History with much more knowledge about the world than I had when I was in my



30s.

And, you know, I made some corrections. And I think that, you know, most people on Twitter have not

worked their way through those thousand pages. But I think that, you know, in terms of the, you know, the more elite perceptions of what I stood for, that may count for more than the meme that's out there. But in terms of how you explained it and defined it and how you were defining it at the time, you've kind of not been proven wrong. I don't believe I have because I think if you take a long term view of historical progress, you do get these setbacks and recessions. I mean, you think about what happened in the 1930s. A collapse of democracy in Germany was a much

bigger development than anything that's happened in the last 10 years. And then the world managed to recover. And even, you know, in the 60s and 70s, you had military coups all over the developing world, all over Latin America, and that got reversed. So I just think that you can't make these big judgments based on the experience of the last 10 years.

No, you travel a lot, just as Roy and I travel a lot. Is there a country in the world that you can point to and say that's a really healthy democracy? Well, I think there are a number of examples in Northern Europe, right? So I have this phrase getting to Denmark that I use in my political order books, not because I liked so much social democracy, but, you know, the low levels of corruption, kind of effective government, I think that they've achieved are quite rare. And I think in that part of Europe, democracy is actually a lot healthier than it is in the United States, because you don't have the same degree of polarization. There still is a pretty healthy social consensus around the legitimacy of their own institutions. That's interesting, Canada, I didn't realize this, but they got 40 million people there, and they've got this plan actually to build their population as fast as they can through immigration. And they seem to be handling that quite well. I think I'm right in saying they've got the second biggest Ukrainian population outside of Ukraine. They've got the second largest Chinese, I mean, they've got everybody there, and they seem to be handling it quite well. Frank, one of the things that is so chilling, I think, in our democracies is the sense of inequality, and in particular, the conditions of the people at the very bottom of societies, maybe the bottom 10, 15% and the sense of how precarious their lives are, how underwhelming so much of their experiences, how much they feel

that notwithstanding this incredible growth over 70 years of the size of the economy, their lives are not dignified, fulfilling in the way that they would have expected.

Is this not a kind of fundamental crack at the heart of our systems?

Well, I think that the lack of respect is more a cultural phenomenon than an economic phenomenon. There's been this big debate ever since 2016 about whether the rise of populism is driven by just economic factors like inequality, people being left behind, or whether there's a more complex cultural source which is related to the economic decline, but it's not identical.

This feeling that elites do not respect me, and that's been combined. This is something that's become more and more evident to me. The essence of populism is this, basically, it's a belief that the world runs by conspiracies. This is the red pill thing in the matrix that you've been taking the blue pill up to now where you thought that all these institutions were legitimate, but now that you've taken the red pill you realize that there's actually this hidden world of elites that is manipulating the apparent reality that you're experiencing and everything is false.

I'm not sure that the situation of working class people in the rich world is so fragile and horrible compared to earlier periods that that by itself is what's driving this, but it's the combination of that experience with a cognitive environment that simply breeds and encourages in many ways distrust of any established authority. I think that it's this kind of pervasive distrust. We have this guy, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is the son of the first Robert F. Kennedy, who is a crackpot. He got his start complaining about vaccines, but basically he says his father was killed by this CIA. There isn't a conspiracy theory that he doesn't believe in and promote, and he's now, he's polling at 20% of Democratic voters. How do you explain that? I don't think that there's an economic explanation. The question, I guess, is how we get towards an answer. So how, I don't know whether we're getting to Denmark, but in trying to think about what a manifesto is, I mean, in Australia, I obviously very focused on Britain, but I think this will be true in any democracy. What is the manifesto that you can produce that can genuinely feel relevant towards the people at the bottom 10, 20% of society? How are we going to restore their faith in institutions, restore a sense of dignity so that people don't feel alienated, legitimately resentful, patronized, excluded, and barraged with social media images of elites apparently having luxurious lives completely at odds with their own daily existence? Well, look, obviously, there's no simple answer to that, but I would say you need to do a couple of things. First of all, you need to address the inequality, and that just means more social protections and more redistribution. I mean, I actually think that the classic European social democracy was really what stabilized Europe in that two-generation period after 1945, and because of the rise of neoliberalism in the 80s and 90s, we got away from that, and I think that pendulum needs to swing back. But the second thing is that governments have just gotten less good at delivering, whether it's welfare benefits or healthcare or infrastructure, a whole bunch of things, and they need to get better at that, and that's a slightly different issue than just voting money because, as I said, we've bogged ourselves down in a kind of proceduralism that really prevents us from getting to outcomes. A lot of what drives people crazy is the fact that you implement a policy and then nothing happens for the next two years because there's something in the system that's gumming it up. So I think a combination of a more active government with a more efficient and effective government is at least going to deal with some of the sources of that unhappiness. Now, we briefly mentioned Brexit, which I think is fair to say is an obsession of mine, and I think I'm quite pleased that you put it down as the least damaging of the four. I'm not sure I agree, but I did note that you said that the Brexit referendum was one of the biggest mistakes any politician has ever made. Do you mean the calling of the referendum or the outcome of the referendum? By the way, I wouldn't say that now. I would say the invasion of Ukraine was the biggest mistake any politician has made recently, but Brexit was up there. Cameron obviously thought that he'd win the referendum, and this was an easy way to lance that particular boil, and that was a big miscalculation. In the state of California, we hold referenda all the time. Should porn actors be forced to wear condoms on set, we have to vote on that. Is that where Frank? Oh, I say absolutely. You want to keep everyone safe. So I think in general, referenda are bad ways of making policy, and this was a gamble that just went really, really bad, and now it's really hard to undo. You mentioned the fact that you now think Vladimir Putin has overtaken David Cameron. Just explain why you think that. Well, he wanted to make Russia

great again by basically reincorporating Ukraine and toppling its democratic government, and he is now a year and a half into an incredibly bloody destructive war. You just had this prugosion uprising against him that shattered this illusion that he was trying to make, that he's in control of everything, and it's hard to imagine a result that is less in line with what he originally expected. He's kind of the father of the modern Ukrainian nation, because they now understand that they're not Russia, and they're determined to keep it that way. And where do you see the descending? I mean, the Allies tend to be a bit gloomy. We sort of imagine it like the Iran-Iraq war continuing for eight years, that it's difficult to see how either side really prevails. Are you more optimistic? Well, I have been all along. I do think that if we had been better at giving them certain kinds of weapons like F-16s and long-range missiles, they wouldn't be in the situation. They'd be much more successful. I don't think it's too late to rectify that situation. It's not yet the case that we can simply write off the counteroffensive as having failed. So I think if there's a breakthrough in that military conflict sometime this year, then things will look very different. And I think it's possible that that'll happen. And Frank, if I can finish on a final question, and then I'll hand back to Alistair. One of the great pleasures of talking to you is your extraordinary confident riot ability to reflect on things all over the world from democracy's emergence in Taiwan to the Progression Revolution to the conspiracy theories of Robert Kennedy. There is something sort of refreshingly, I think quite am I wrong about this sort of distinctively American about this sort of confidence ability to hold force on 180 countries simultaneously and wrap it into a global vision. Is there something about the American intelligentsia or universities or think tank cultures or the relationship with government that creates this particular narrative style, which I don't think we have so much in Britain. It'd be difficult to find an equivalent of you in Britain. Well, I don't know. I think you're probably the closest, Roy. Yeah, I don't know the self-confident opinions. I don't know exactly where that comes from. Maybe that is American. I mean, you know, I feel that where the intellectual milieu I come from is, you know, comparative political scientists. I remember earlier in my career talking to someone like Juan Linz at Yale University was a great comparative form. You know, one of my mentors, Seymour Martin Lipset, and they had this at the time I thought was this amazing ability to talk about different countries, different regions and very different situations, but to do it with a level of knowledge that was really, really impressive. And I always thought, boy, that would be great to be in that position. Now, you know, after 30 years of traveling to probably at least a dozen countries every year, I have actually been to a lot of places, you know. I can give you my opinions about the Solomon Islands because I've been there. They're pretty important right now. They are, yeah. And so, you know, I actually think it's that comparative framework that I kind of grew up in. And what comparative politics does is it actually tries to put any individual country in a larger framework than, you know, where you're seeing how things are different, but the same, you know, as other similarly situated countries. My final question, Frank, is this, we, Rory and I talked recently to another intellectual, Michael Natyev, who of course went on to go into politics. Two questions. One is whether you ever considered a political career. And the second is something we discussed with Michael was where are the new ideas coming from? And why did there appear to be so few new ideas in terms of political thought? Well, the answer to the first is no, I never thought that. I was always very shy and I couldn't imagine doing what politicians need to do in order to

run for office. And I still can't imagine that. I figured at some point in my life that the one thing I'm actually good at is writing books. And so I've now got a position where I can do that. I'm sorry. The second question you had was really whether you agree with something that we would discuss with Michael Natyev that there's a dearth of political ideas. Well, you know, the answer to that could be that we're actually at the end of history, you know, that we've kind of on a cyclical basis gone through, you know, all the major political forms that are possible. And, you know, now we're returning to a stronger state, you know, more state intervention in the economy. We've been there before. Yeah. It's not a new idea, but it actually may be one of the solutions to some of the problems that we're experiencing right now. Well, Frank, it's been lovely to talk to you. Okay, same here. Thank you so much to your patients and good humor. And it's been a real privilege to talk to you. Thank you very much. Okay. Well, thanks for having me on. Thank you. All the best. Bye-bye.

So, Alastair, listen, I mean, basically, he's just like you. He's been completely defined by a particular moment in his life. I think, I think he's more defined by his moment than I have by mind. I could be completely wrong. But there are some, there's some similarities, no? Totally. Yeah, I raised that. I mean, it's like, I thought of it this morning, I was doing this interview with a Belgian newspaper about the book. And she literally did this thing with the, you know, obviously, I have to ask you about Iraq. And it's like, I always think what a journalist says, obviously, I have to ask you, it's one of those things that it's just like a tick box that other journalists will be really pissed off if you don't. But I don't think it's imaginable that you could do a long interview with Frank Fukuyama without saying, or just tell us about the end of history thing. And it's interesting, at the swimming pool this morning, I'd mentioned a few people I was interviewing, Francis Fukuyama, a couple didn't know who I was talking about, but those that did, which was a majority, said, oh, yeah, they're the end of history guy.

Well, it's, it's, it's amazing, isn't it? Because there's, there's another guy that I knew at Harvard called Joe Nye, who invented this phrase, soft power. Absolutely. Yeah. And there is some kind of genius in getting the right words. It's not only the content of what they said, it's the phrase that's so clever. It's called people's princessology, Rory. People's princessology, beautiful. Exactly, the people's princessology. Exactly. By the way, can I say as well, Rory, the other thing that was fascinating, real interest in the swimming pool queue is the fact that you finally started to lift the veil on your time at high grave in such a dramatic way. Anyway, oh, getting off, getting off, getting off to be at high grave. So one of the things I think that's obviously so powerful about the phrase, the end of history is it doesn't make any sense. I mean, it's, it's incredibly memorable because you, it just doesn't compute what do you mean, the end of history? We're continuing to live, we're continuing to die.

And there are historic, historic events that may change. But I thought he explained it quite well in terms of what he actually meant. Yeah. But I mean, I wish I could produce one of these phrases.

Oh, you will. Rory, you will. You will. I mean, I've got a few under my belt, but you know.

Well, people's princess, we've had the people's princess. I think, you know, new labor.

New labor. New labor. That's very good. That was mine. That was recognized, acknowledged by the leader in his autobiography. Now, I find, I find him very, well, he's obviously very clever, but I do think very thoughtful. And I agree with you with your final question about, I'd find it hard to be as optimistic as he seems to be living in America right now.

His very first interaction with us was talking about how fabulous it was in California. And

I'm thinking wherever I was in the United States at the moment, I feel, oh my God, this place has just fallen to bits. Well, I'm, I'm here and I'm actually, I mean, as you know, I'm in New York at the moment. And it's, it's very strange. I mean, I've just, you know, I was in Washington Square this morning, and it's a combination of a lot of people with mental illnesses, a lot of homeless people, enormous amount of public drug use, and the Canadian wildfires, which are filling the whole air with invisible particles of soot. I mean, there is a kind of apocalyptic air to the whole thing at the moment, which is maybe influencing. I also think that it is a fundamental challenge to his idea. I mean, you know, obviously we can all sympathize with the idea that democracy is a better form of government than others. And that there are reasons to think that as people become more educated and more prosperous, they're going to want more liberty, more say over their lives. But my goodness, the last 10 years has been a pretty terrifying reminder of the fact that this doesn't feel inevitable at all. Well, he said in that speech I mentioned in Oslo, which I watched this morning, he said that democracy, according to Freedom House, democracy has declined for 17 successive years, which is pretty, you know, and I do think we are facing that, that sort of conundrum of well, what if dictatorships can't succeed and democracies can't succeed. And I don't know, you know, you're in America, and you've just, you know, gone there from, from the Middle East. But honestly, Rory, Britain right now feels perilously close to being a failed state. It's like nothing works here. Absolutely nothing works. And, you know, it's just, I don't know, I wish I could be as optimistic as he is. Well, this point about efficacy, I think, is one that he mentioned. And it's one that you agree with, actually, this strange sense of powerlessness. And we're not getting things done that the public, you know, remember thinking about that. One of the most obvious things in British life is the idea of a line between Leeds and Manchester. If you only wanted to help Leeds, you need to connect them with a fast train line. And even those politicians who are proposing it, it turns out that it's going to be delivered in 2036 or 2040. Crossrail too, first talked about in the 1970s, and, and you were reminding me that Heathrow, you know, the third runway. 1998, first paper, I saw that. And he, he actually, he was getting ahead of himself there, because he, I think he said, you still haven't got the fifth runway. Frank, we still haven't got the third runway. No, so it's, um, yeah, I'll go, I think I'm interested in this book he mentioned. I didn't, I thought I'd read these books, but I didn't know about this one about biotech. Yeah. Yeah. We should have maybe pushed him more on that. I mean, it's, he's, he's fascinating on it and quite scary on it. I mean, he was talking about so many other interesting things. I agree. We slightly missed a trick there, not pushing him on why he sees biotechnology as such a threat, but I think he, one aspect of it is the one that he mentioned, which is the way in which the people who control the biotechnology then have immense power over the people who are dependent on it to operate, but also a sense that he imagines it as fundamentally reshaping human nature. And if human nature was reshaped, then all these ideas about liberty, equality, democracy, which reflect assumptions about human nature, then, then come under threat. I also thought, I mean, I didn't quite put my finger on it, but I do think there is something very interesting about these sort of public intellectuals, these people who can speak with such fluency. And also the way that this rather shy professor was able to respond so confidently and deftly to you challenging him on which way he was going to vote about porn stars wearing condoms.



Yeah, he's got a very nice manner about him. I think the problem with a lot of intellectuals is that they're not very good at distilling their thoughts and communicating them in a very clear and concise way. And that's something that he's very, very good at. I thought that watching his speech in Oslo, I don't think he had an autocue. I think he was literally just standing up and talking. He was walking around the stage and very, very fluent. And obviously he thinks things through sufficient then. What he was saying to us is a kind of, it's a lifetime's work that he's distilled his own thinking about things, but he's also prepared to change. The other reason may be why, I don't know, the journey from neoconservatism to social democracy. Yeah, to liberal social democracy, I thought it was quite interesting. He was apparently a very, very close friend of Paul Wolff. It's like, sort of, you know, almost like best mates. Amazing. I knew Wolff, it's quite well. And he was a man. He was a man, wasn't he? Well, I knew him very well. I used to see a lot of him and I'd have lunch with him in Washington. And I mean, very, very similar to Frank Fukuyama, again, is incredibly fluent, very intellectual, reads is very earnest, very serious. And I became sort of strangely, although I disagreed profoundly with him and was slightly horrified by a lot of the things he was associated with, I also found myself becoming quite fond of him and quite sympathetic towards him. He was a big, big, big driver of neoconservatism. In a way, it was, I think it was like, you know, Cheney Rumsfeld and Wolff Wolff of its, were like the drivers. Yeah. Yeah. Well, Alistair, thank you. Thank you for doing that. Good. That was very good. And look forward to seeing you very soon. Absolutely. See you soon.