

Lessons from America

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In 1831, at the dawn of American democracy, the French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville spent the best part of a year in the United States. His book *Democracy in America*, remains a classic of political observation, one of the most penetrating analyses of the dilemmas of democracy ever been written. Like many books written by Europeans about the United States, it was really directed to the politics of his own country. America was an early experiment in republican government, an inspiration to Europeans but also a warning. The same will be true of my talk this evening. Today, the United States is a laboratory of democratic decline. This is a major issue for Americans, but not only for Americans. What is happening in the United States reveals some of the vulnerabilities of democracies everywhere.

De Tocqueville believed that the United States was fertile ground for despotism. This was because of the natural tendency of democratic electorates to seek security in over-regulation by a powerful state, enforcing conformity and snuffing out originality, initiative and creativity. This, he thought, was a problem for the whole of what we would now call the western world. 'It leads me to think', wrote De Tocqueville, "that Christian nations will end up living under governments just as oppressive as the despotisms of the ancient world."

De Tocqueville thought that there was no real risk of Presidential despotism. This was because the federal government was obliged to share power with the component states of the Union; and because even at federal level the President had to share power a representative Congress. There was, however, an important reservation. The checks and balances of the constitution only worked because the federal executive had very few domestic functions. The President's role was limited to the conduct of foreign affairs and the command of the armed forces. His office therefore provided little scope for would-be despots. In 1832, he pointed out, the federal payroll comprised just 12,000 civilian officials, as opposed to 138,000 in France at the same date. In any democracy, De Tocqueville argued, the risk of despotism is directly proportionate to the degree of control exercised by the executive over its internal affairs.

Since De Tocqueville wrote, events have combined to falsify his grounds for optimism. The federal government, and therefore the President who directs it, now has functions encompassing most aspect of public welfare. Its 12,000 civilian employees of 1832 have grown to 2,000,000 in 2025 in addition to another million employees of the individual states many of whom are employed on federal programs. In the same period federal government expenditure has increased from an estimated 0.02% of GDP to 23%, dwarfing the expenditure of the individual states. This is a pattern common to all

modern democracies. At the time of the census of 1851, the United Kingdom employed just 1,628 civil servants, as against 560,000 now. At the end of the nineteenth century government expenditure in European countries stood at about a tenth of GDP on average, as opposed to just under half today. Even these figures do not capture the whole picture. Until relatively recently, the main limitation on the power of governments was their ignorance. The German sociologist Max Weber defined bureaucracy as 'domination through knowledge'. That domination has been greatly increased by modern techniques of information gathering, storage and retrieval.

Article II of the U.S. Constitution concentrates all executive power in the President's hands. He has an electoral mandate independent of Congress. He hires and fires all federal agents and employees. All of them are answerable to him. He is the commander in chief of the armed forces. He nominates all federal judges, subject to Senate confirmation. He is not answerable to Congress for the way that he uses these powers, except by way of impeachment, and then only for treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors. Since a decision of the Supreme Court's in 2024, he has been constitutionally immune from criminal liability for acts done in his public capacity.

These awesome powers are characteristic of presidential systems. The only other region of the world in which presidential democracies have been the norm is Latin America. Every Latin American country has adopted the US constitutional model, with greater or lesser variants. Every one of them has at some points in its history experienced the subversion of its democracy by its President or the usurpation of Presidential powers by a military dictator. The only significant European country to have a presidential system comparable to the American one is France. The Constitution of the fifth French Republic was created for a relatively benign strongman, General de Gaulle, but the French presidency may well in 2027 fall into the hands of a markedly less benign strongman of the extreme left or right.

The great German-American constitutional scholar Karl Loewenstein observed that the success of the American presidential model was due to factors unique to the United States: its historical prosperity, its relative freedom from external threats, and its political culture. These things had, as he put it, "converted an intrinsically absurd constitutional mechanism into a cherished national myth". When transplanted to a less privileged environment Loewenstein pointed out that the American model has almost always failed. His emphasis on the moral and physical environment of democracies was an important insight. The moral and physical environment may change. All democratic constitutions, whether formal and legal like that of the USA, or informal and political like Britain's, are vulnerable to the collapse of the basic cultural norms on which democracies depend. When this happens, the formal institutional framework usually survives. There are elections, legislatures, courts and so on in Vladimir Putin's Russia. But the rule of law and substance of democratic accountability have gone, and been replaced by a brutal autocratic reality.

Hence the historic significance of Donald Trump. There is a tendency to suggest that Trump is a by-product of American democratic politics, difficult perhaps to accommodate within traditional political categories, but nothing like the totalitarian tyrants of the twentieth century. This view is fundamentally mistaken. Trump exhibits the three classic symptoms of the totalitarian mind: a personal cult around a charismatic leader; the total identification of the state with himself; and a refusal to accept the legitimacy of any opposition or dissent. He has dismantled the checks and balances of the world's oldest and most formal constitution in an astonishingly short time. By now the examples are all too familiar: the bogus claims to emergency powers, part of the classic toolkit of despots the world over; the deployment of ICE's paramilitaries on the streets of American cities; the attempt to impose taxes (in the shape of tariffs) by executive order; the brazen corruption. He has conformed to the pattern observable throughout history that sooner or later the authoritarian rulers of powerful states become international predators.

The core principle of the rule of law is that the state has no power to coerce anyone other than in accordance with public and settled rules of law applicable generally and not just at the discretion of the ruler. That principle has been directly violated by presidential directions not to enforce mandatory legislation of which the President disapproves, such as the laws against international bribery, or mandatory congressional appropriation of funds to things like education or foreign aid. Trump's identification of the state with himself and his war on dissent have led him to vindictive attacks on any prominent voice which opposes him, attacks which directly violate the basic principles of the rule of law. We have seen the use of public authority to pursue private vendettas against those who have crossed him, including two Democrat governors, a mayor of Chicago, various retired generals, a former director of the FBI, a former director of the CIA, law firms who acted for his enemies, various universities whose teaching staff do not see the world as he does, and just about anyone who worked on Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election or Jack Smith's investigation of the Capitol riots of 6 January 2025. Some of these acts have been stopped by the courts, provoking from the President a stream of vulgar abuse against the judges responsible. These things follow a pattern that exposes Donald Trump's systematic unwillingness to be constrained by the rules that mark the difference between a democratic chief executive and a tyrant.

It is easy to say, as we observe these things, that the current constitutional problems of the United States are all down to the megalomania of one individual. But that is to underestimate the gravity of the situation. The real problem is that this unlikely figure represents something very attractive for many Americans. They were not deceived when they elected him in 2024. Trump made no secret of his plans and his impatience with democratic constraints during the campaign. Yet half of American voters voted for him.

On current polling at least a third of the electorate would vote for him again if it was not for the two-term limit. There is, however, no two-term limit for voters. The people who want to confer supreme executive power on someone like Trump will still be around in future presidential elections. The critical question therefore is not why does Trump behave as he does, but why do so many Americans applaud him.

All mature societies are divided by differences of interest and opinion, some of which are fundamental. A liberal democracy can only survive if these differences are transcended by our common acceptance of the legitimacy of the decision-making process, even when we disagree with the outcome. This calls for cultural values which do not come naturally to human beings. You have to care more about ensuring that the decision-making process works, than about “winning” on any particular issue. It requires a large measure of political sensitivity, tolerance and cooperative empathy among both politicians and citizens. It requires conventions about how even lawful powers will be exercised so as to avoid capricious, vindictive or oppressive decisions. Above all, it requires people to treat political opponents as fellow-citizens with whom they disagree, and not as enemies to be trashed or prosecuted. In the United States, the polarisation of opinion has meant that people have lost their common respect for the decision-making process if it yields results that they do not like, as it inevitably will from time to time. Without that, people who are disappointed with democratic government spontaneously turn to more authoritarian regimes.

The origin of the current polarisation of opinion in the United States lies not with the right but with the American left. The liberal consensus of the 1960s and 70s approached the political process with a high degree of entitlement, and achieved a considerable measure of control over the courts, executive agencies, universities and other cultural institutions. They used this cultural control to move into intolerant identity politics and critical theory, and to promote social and cultural policies for which there was no consensus in the population at large. They treated alternative opinions as lacking legitimacy and therefore unworthy of notice. The word “deplorables”, which may have cost Hillary Clinton the 2016 presidential election, perfectly sums up this attitude.

The right-wing backlash, however, has been a great deal worse than the liberal arrogance which provoked it. Today it is the Republican Party which has an invincible sense of entitlement. Hence its irrational rage against the Presidents Clinton and Obama, its persistent constitutional obstructiveness under both of them, and its ruthless use of voter suppression and gerrymandering to disenfranchise Democrats. Hence also the refusal to accept adverse election results on the basis of invented allegations of fraud. These things have happened because the MAGA movement which today dominates the Republican party, is not prepared to accept the legitimacy of any political views but its own. The result has been to junk the political culture that made the Constitution workable.

We can see this process unfolding in Congress's abandonment of its traditional role as a bipartisan guardian of the constitution. A good example is the willingness of the relevant Senate committees to confirm the parade of stooges and crackpots that Donald Trump nominated to major federal offices in his second term, people who would swiftly have been shown the door in an earlier era. Perhaps the low point of Congressional partisanship came with the refusal of the Republican majority on the Judiciary Committee to schedule confirmation hearings for Merrick Garland, Obama's last Supreme Court nomination until his term ended so that his Republican successor could fill the vacancy instead. The same people then accelerated the hearing for Amy Coney Barrett, the last appointment of Trump's first term, so as to get it confirmed before he left office. There was nothing unlawful about any of this, but it illustrates the ease with which even the most carefully designed democracy can be subverted once the underlying spirit has gone. The result has been the most partisan Supreme Court since the 1930s, and arguably since the 1850s.

The delegitimization of political opponents can be seen at its crudest in the current issues about redistricting and voter suppression. Redistricting, otherwise known as gerrymandering, is a device used to dilute the votes of one's political opponents. It has been described as a way of enabling incumbent lawmakers to pick their electors instead of the other way round. In *Rucho v Common Cause* (2019), the Republican-appointed majority the Supreme Court held that there was nothing unlawful about overtly partisan redistricting. I believe that the only other country in the world which expressly allows the practice is the Pacific republic of Micronesia (population: 100,000). In June 2025, Donald Trump persuaded the Republican majority in the Texas state legislature to redraw their congressional districts so as artificially to eliminate five current Democrat representatives and replace them with Republicans. Other States with incumbent Democrat majorities responded by redistricting to create extra Democrat seats at the expense of Republicans. In some states, such as California and Virginia, these changes were approved in state-wide referenda. Recently, Republican lawmakers in Indiana, who had resisted the partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, were deselected in the Republican primaries in favour of Trump-backed candidates committed to allowing the gerrymandering to go ahead.

What are the lessons of all this for the United Kingdom? There are important institutional differences between the United States Britain. Britain, like most European democracies, has a parliamentary system. Parliamentary systems are better at dispersing power than presidential systems. The British prime minister and his government are daily answerable to the House of Commons for everything that they do. Their hold on power lasts only as long as they retain the confidence of the House. A would-be despot in our system would have to carry many more people with him to succeed. Boris Johnson was the leader of a party with a large overall majority in the House of

Commons, but was nevertheless unable to find enough supporters among them to remain in power. In Britain judges are appointed by a non-political Judicial Appointment Commission. The executive cannot stuff the judiciary with its ideological supporters. In Britain the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies are fixed at prescribed intervals by a non-political Boundary Commission. Election expenses are limited by law. The courts are vigilant in challenging ministers who exceed their legal powers or use them for illegitimate purposes, and they act a great deal faster than the federal courts in the United States. Boris Johnson's decision to prorogue Parliament in order to escape parliamentary scrutiny of his negotiations with the European Union was quashed in judicial proceedings which lasted less than two months from their commencement to the judgment of the Supreme Court.

All of this means that under the current law our institutions are better equipped to resist the despotic tendencies of democratic politics than those of the United States. However, Britain's institutional defences against despotism have some serious weaknesses.

The first is that under our constitutional settlement it is impossible to entrench any of the legal protections against the establishment of a British despotism. The statutory provisions about electoral boundaries, electoral expenses or judicial appointment could be swept away by legislation by a majority of one in each house of Parliament, or after a year in the House of Commons alone. There are substantial advantages in our unwritten political constitution, which has enabled us to adapt to radical social and political changes in our society that would have broken most written constitutions. But we have to recognise that a greater exposure to the threat of totalitarian takeover is the price that we have to pay for these advantages.

The second institutional weakness is that like the American Congress the House of Commons is elected from single-member constituencies on the first past the post system. No political party has achieved a majority of the national vote in the UK since 1935. The effect of the first past the post system is artificially to increase the impact electoral swings. This will normally give the largest party an overall majority in the Commons even if it lacks one in the electorate at large. In a two-party system such as we have had until recently, it has been a valuable source of stability. In a multiparty system such as ours is now becoming, the effect is intensely destabilising. The largest of seven parties may have a quite small proportion of the popular vote. The present government has one of the largest overall parliamentary majorities since the war with only a third of the popular vote. No government has ever before enjoyed an absolute majority in Parliament on such a small proportion of the national vote. In local authority elections, insurgent parties have sometimes achieve large majorities of council seats on small proportions of the vote. Such parties can capture the House of Commons, without the need to negotiate coalitions that might restrain their exercise of power. It is worth remembering that, albeit under a very different political system, Adolf Hitler became

Chancellor of a minority government on just 37 per cent of the popular vote in the general election of 1932, the last free election to be held in Germany before the war. In Britain less than that percentage can capture not just the highest office in government but an overall majority in the House of Commons.

Thirdly, the leaders of the three traditional UK-wide parties are no longer chosen by their MPs unless someone can contrive to be the only candidate. Normally they are chosen by their grass-roots members. This has been a very significant change. MP's are there to represent the public interest. It is in their personal interest to appeal to a much broader spectrum of opinion than just their own base, if they want to be re-elected. Most grass roots members look at the world differently. Their parties are no longer the mass movements that they once were. Their membership rolls are small, and consist mainly of enthusiasts who congregate at the outer edges of the political spectrum. They are interested in no one's opinion but their own. The result is that party leaders and therefore potential prime ministers are chosen by very small groups of activists who are unrepresentative of those who vote for their party, let alone the electorate at large. Jeremy Corbyn and Liz Truss were the natural products of that process. In a system where the endorsement of a political party is a precondition for election, this is a promising scenario for a would-be despot. Again, the United States is a warning. Candidates for the presidency and Congress are selected in primaries, which are usually closed, i.e. limited to registered supporters of the party. Registered supporters, like their British equivalents, are generally activists at the outer edge of the political spectrum. This has enabled Donald Trump to arrange the deselection of sitting Republican Congressmen who cross him or who show any tendency to independent judgment, and their replacement by candidates endorsed by himself. It has happened recently in Texas, Kentucky and Louisiana. The effect has been to reduce the Congressional majority to a servile loyalty to one man, at a time when that man is becoming unpopular in the nation at large. This not only could happen here but it does. In November 2019, Boris Johnson personally purged 21 members of his own party who did not share his vision of Britain's relations with the European Union, refusing to allow them to stand as conservatives at the general election and thus ensuring that they lost their seats.

It is, however, a mistake to concentrate exclusively on institutional barriers to despotic government. The United States has succumbed to despotic politics in spite of having a carefully written constitution expressed to be "the supreme law of the land" and a strong tradition of judicial and legislative independence. The recent history not just of the United States but of other democracies such as Poland and Hungary shows that even with a written constitution institutional barriers to despotism are permeable. The executive branch of the state is so powerful in the modern world that it can swamp any system of checks and balances if its directors are prepared to be sufficiently ruthless.

Ultimately no democracy, however robust its institutional framework, can resist the collapse of the cultural values on which democracy depends.

The main problem faced by modern democracies is common to the United States and Britain and indeed to most of Europe. Public expectations of the state are so high that no state can possibly satisfy them. Either the state is incapable of satisfying them full stop. Or else it can satisfy them only at the expense of other equally important expectations. No policy area arouses higher expectations than the economy. People expect their economic lot to improve, generation by generation. We have got used to the idea of ever increasing prosperity, because that has been our experience since the Second World War. But historically there have been very few societies and very few periods of history in which economic growth has been sustained for more than a short period, say two or three generations. Governments can create the conditions for economic expansion. They can refrain from wealth destroying policies. But they cannot actually generate prosperity. Yet people's voting choices tend to be based on the assumption that they can and that economic misfortune is necessarily the responsibility of government.

This matters because historically democracies have always been heavily dependent on economic good fortune. Western democracy was born in the nineteenth century, in an age of creative optimism, economic expansion and western domination of the world. This is particularly relevant to the current state of the USA. The United States has enjoyed a great deal of economic good fortune. The indications are that this may be coming to an end. Looking at the US economy as a whole, it is in good shape by international standards. Its growth rate is impressive. The problem is that most earners have not experienced the benefits. Middle class and blue collar incomes were traditionally based on extraction, agriculture and manufacturing. These sectors were labour intensive activities calling for many different skill levels, and were therefore relatively efficient distributors of the benefits of American prosperity. But they have experienced little real growth since the 1980s. Technological innovation is essential to growth, but it is disruptive, altering the distribution of wealth in favour of the innovators. American productivity has for some decades been generated mainly by a few dynamic sectors of the economy, such as the tech industries and financial services, which employ relatively small numbers of intellectually gifted people. The benefits have been concentrated in the hands of these elites. This is reflected in high levels of graduate unemployment among young people who have tried to make their careers in other fields. Older skills have become redundant or displaced by competition from low wage economies. In the longer term, the outlook is bleak, as the American technological lead over countries like China and India shortens and in some areas disappears altogether. We are already seeing this in areas like AI and electric vehicles.

I illustrate these points by reference to the United States which is probably the extreme example. But this is not just an American issue. In Britain, the most dynamic sectors of the economy are financial services, which account for about a tenth of GDP, digital services including AI which account for another 7%, and the technically advanced areas of manufacturing. These are also sectors whose prosperity disproportionately benefits an educational and technocratic elite.

Economic frustration has a lot to do with declining belief in democracy and rising support for authoritarian alternatives. The Pew Research Institute has been tracking confidence in democracy internationally for some thirty years. Its surveys suggest that in most western countries a majority of people are dissatisfied with democracy. The figure is 62% in the United States. In France, Italy, Spain and Greece, the proportion is significantly higher. In Britain it is 51%. The same surveys establish an exact relationship between dissatisfaction with democracy and economic pessimism.

One of the more striking electoral trends in western democracies has been the high levels of support for authoritarian parties among the young, who for obvious reasons are those mainly affected by the closing out of economic opportunities. Analyses of the US presidential election of 2024 suggests that 56 per cent of American men under 30 and 40 per cent of American women in the same age group voted for Trump. This was a substantial increase on the 2016 election, even though Trump's autocratic tendencies had become more obvious in the meantime. In Britain, surveys of opinion such as those published in 2020 by the Bennett Institute in Cambridge or in 2023 by the Open Society Foundation, all suggest that disillusionment with democracy is strongest among younger citizens. They are much more dissatisfied than their elders were at the same stage in life, and the situation is getting worse. Britain and the United States are not alone. In France, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National is the most popular party among voters under the age of 35.

In the life of any political community, the shattering of optimism is a dangerous moment. Disillusionment with the promise of progress was a major factor in the thirty-year crisis of Europe which began in 1914 and ended in 1945. That crisis was characterised by a resort to autocracy in much of Europe. Britain, the United States and France escaped that fate, but in all three countries, there were powerful authoritarian movements of left and right that drew their strength mainly from economic misfortune. When people are disappointed, they blame 'the system', the 'deep state' or the whole class of democratic politicians. They lash out, spontaneously turning to strongmen, and kidding themselves that strongmen get things done. All this is consistent with the historically high levels of electoral support for authoritarian figures such as Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Jörg Haider, the leading lights of *Alternativ für Deutschland* and (until recently) Viktor Orban, all of them, incidentally, politicians for whom Donald Trump has expressed admiration.

Political polarisation, which has done so much to undermine constitutional values in the United States, has not gone as far in Britain. But it is a phenomenon of growing importance. The issue which has done most to undermine constitutional values in Britain in recent years is Brexit. The referendum created a sense of entitlement in the majority which inhibited compromise and invited absolute outcomes. This was the mentality summed up in the oft-repeated statement that “the British people” had voted to leave the EU. In fact, only just over half of the British people had voted to leave the EU. The statement implied what many people said out loud, that the 48% who voted to stay were not for this purpose to be regarded as part of the British people and did not count. The effect was to delegitimise the views of nearly half the population who had voted to remain and wanted to retain a closer relationship with the EU even while leaving its institutions. There are obvious parallels with the attempt of the MAGA movement in the United States to delegitimise the views about immigration, tariffs or foreign relations of the 49% of the electorate who voted Democrat in the presidential election of 2024. In Britain, this attitude reached the outer limits of hyperbole in September 2019 when the Attorney-General (of all people) told the House of Commons that having voted to frustrate the government’s plans for the hardest possible form of Brexit, the Commons had “no moral right to sit”. This approach encouraged a more authoritarian style of government, characterized by the conservative party purges of November 2019, the manipulation of the procedures of the House of Commons to silence opposition and ultimately the attempt to prorogue Parliament at a critical point in negotiations with the European Union.

I have dwelt a little on Brexit not in order to rake over the embers of old quarrels, but because it is the extreme example of polarization in modern British politics and the most significant single cause of the decline of a shared political culture. It fragmented our political world, cutting across party lines, sundering the four nations of the United Kingdom and dividing us by class, by region, by economic status and by generation. It split families and alienated friends, something reflected at a trivial level in polls which suggest that a surprisingly large proportion of the population would object if their children dated someone on the other side of the political divide. This has had a continuing impact on our politics, because Brexit was not just a policy. It was the badge of a certain outlook on the political world reflected in many other areas of political controversy, such as immigration and climate change. In the recent local elections, we witnessed the steep decline of the centre as voters migrated to the outer edge of the political spectrum. Like American voters, they lashed out at the inability of governments to deliver a better life.

Many of them are protesting, like the MAGA faithful, against the whole political process and the whole class of politicians. Donald Trump essentially stands for a rejection of deliberative politics because they get in the way of the kind of decisive

outcomes that he and his supporters favour. Those who think like this rarely reflect on how dangerous it is. Politics is the essential mechanism of the democratic state. You cannot have democracy without politics, or politics without politicians. Those who reject politics are really rejecting democracy itself. Their position almost inevitably involves a resort to authoritarian forms of government.

Unfortunately, those who lash out against the political process are not entirely mistaken. There are major issues in our world that historically democracy has proved unable to address because the electoral cost is too high. Climate change is probably the most obvious example. Across the world, democratic electors are rejecting measures designed to deal with climate change because they almost always involve reducing consumption or raising its cost. The effect is to pass on the problem in aggravated form to the next generation. There are other examples. We cannot resolve the high cost of housing in Britain without loosening planning and environmental controls to which existing home-owners are understandably attached. Almost any attempt to reform the funding of old age pensions and care at a time of increasing longevity, risks an electoral backlash from the beneficiaries of the current system, who are numerous and who vote more diligently than any other group. It is no coincidence that many of these dilemmas of the democratic state involve conflicts between the interests of different generations. It is the young who will suffer most if we fail to deal with climate change. It is the young who cannot get onto the housing ladder until they are in middle age and often not even then. It is the young whose taxes support the cost of old age provision. It is the young who are unable to find jobs in a stagnant economy. It should be no surprise that it is the young who are most disenchanted with democracy.

Democracy has a natural tendency to create interest groups for whom the preservation of their current advantages or the acquisition of new ones are the dominant factors in their political choices. Political philosophers from Aristotle to Montesquieu have observed that a harmonious society requires what they have called “virtue”. What they meant by virtue was an ability to put common interests above personal ones. In a democracy, this kind of virtue is almost impossible to achieve. It is asking a lot to expect people to look beyond their own interest at the broader interests of society and to future problems that may not materialise until after their death. Historically, it has never happened. But the political cost of voting exclusively according to our current material interests has never been as high as it is today. The inability of democracies to adopt unwelcome measures in response to critical issues is likely in the long run to lead to a much more autocratic model of government.

Democracy is fragile. Its history in the west has been relatively brief – barely a century and a half. The default condition of mankind has always been some form of autocracy. The Economist Intelligence Unit, which has published a Democracy Index since 2006, reckons that only 25 of the 167 countries covered, with 6.6 per cent of the world’s

population, ranked as full democracies. Even before Donald Trump's second term, the United States was not one of them. It ranked only as a "flawed democracy", thus putting it in the same category as fragmented countries like South Africa and unstable ones like most of South America. Today, most of the world's population lives under authoritarian regimes of one kind or another. Britain and the countries of western Europe still rank as full democracies. Unfortunately we cannot take it for granted that they will still be there in the next generation.