

Questions from Attendees

“Democracy Under Threat: Symptoms and Citizen Solutions”

This event was held on October 17th, 2018, at the Irvine Auditorium on the campus of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies. The first five questions were presented to the panelists, selected by student volunteers. The remainder were not presented at the event, but compiled here as a way to share community concerns.

- Can moving our thinking away from dualities bridge the divide between the U.S. “left” and “right?” If so, how?
- Can you talk about how to keep the U.S. media unbiased and distinct from the U.S. government when six companies own 90% of the media in the United States?
- Our world seems to be trending away from open borders and globalization for nationalism and closed borders. In light of this, what is your opinion on media’s role in messaging fear and isolationism to the masses?
- Since Trump has become president, the U.S. economy has grown, unemployment rates are down, and so is poverty. Would you attribute this to a different methodology, or an unsustainable type of growth, or are these decreasing numbers simply not true?
- We are seeing a growing right-wing movement all around the world. Why do you think we got here?
- Can you discuss another democracy in the world (or other democracies) we need to learn from and emulate, given the wave of authoritarianism and nationalism taking place?
- After hearing these speakers who are rightly worried about the current administration and the general decline of global democracy, are any of the speakers involved on the ground (canvassing, phone calls, etc.) for the mid-term elections?
- Is it better in some cases to not have democracy? For example, in Switzerland, women did not get the right to vote until the 1970s, because democracy was opposing them. (see Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_Switzerland)
- A popular meme, citing Karl Popper’s “Paradox of Tolerance,” argues that in order to preserve an open and tolerant democratic society, we must proscribe not only speech inciting physical violence, but also speech promoting intolerance, i.e. structural violence. Do you believe this is truly the price of democracy, or that we must struggle against intolerance through other means?
- How close to the brink do you think our democracy is at this time? What is the most effective citizen action?
- How did the environment become such a bipartisan problem? How did PACS gain so much influence?
- For Jason Scorse: If all the political power is the hands of an extreme right (house, senate, presidency, justices), how can we ever be able to change any policy? Do we focus on voter rights, campaign finance, etc.?
- How can the Electoral College be eliminated and not create instability? How can Citizens United be repealed?
- Why has the GOP shifted to this extreme ideology?

- Although the panel is titled “Democracy Under Threat,” given Dr. Scorse’s and Dr. Cohen’s speeches, this is really about “Liberal Democracy Under Threat,” or “Liberalism Under Threat.” Especially given the fact that populism ideas are on the rise or even holding the majority in a lot of places, what is the convincing argument that liberalism is inseparable from democracy?
- The GOP changed and Trump got elected, but how is Trump changing the party? How threatened is American democracy if Trump is re-elected in 2020? Alternative voting systems? Isn’t civic assimilation more important than artificial divisions by “identity?”
- For Jason: How can we secure voter protection rights now, for the mid-terms? How can we do a major roll out of automatic voter registration (as occurred in the state of Oregon)?
- Do you, as a group, feel that the framework of “identity politics” has led to the rise of extreme right-wing viewpoints in the Republican Party, by allowing them an opening to force their views into the general discourse?
- I would love to listen to a few words about the Brazilian presidential elections, most notably the popularity of the alt-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro #ELENAO (see Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jair_Bolsonaro)
- If my representative does not survey constituents, how can they represent me and others accurately?
- What is the worst thing that can happen if our current trajectory does not change? (Be descriptive) How do we move away from tribal tendencies of identity politics? Is this a good idea? Why? Are there Democratic (Liberal) extremists and how do they affect the political landscape?
- For Jason: What do you think of Bernie Sanders?
- What is the solution to this “Democracy Under Threat, vote? But with voter suppression, how do we know our votes will count?
- Are you happy with the performance or direction of CNN today? What would you like to see changed about today’s programming?
- Where should we limit free speech from sources that offend some groups and speak to the views of others? What are the limits of technology and how can we allow the use of technologies for good while preventing 1984? What is the one thing (from each) that Trump has done well?