

Is our democracy dying?

Published: October 12, 2026, 6:04 am

Democracy requires much more than voting every few years. It requires people to have the time, security and mental capacity to understand political choices, consider competing arguments and participate meaningfully in society. In this video, I argue that too many people are losing that capacity.

Work, caring responsibilities, insecure housing and financial pressures consume enormous amounts of people's time and attention. Meanwhile, constant media distraction increasingly reduces complicated political questions to slogans, reactions and instant opinions.

This is not simply a problem of individual political interest. It is a political economy problem. How we organise work, distribute income, provide housing and fund public services directly affects people's ability to participate in democracy.

Time and attention are also unequal. Some people have considerable freedom to engage with politics, while others have little capacity left after work, caring responsibilities and dealing with economic insecurity. Economic inequality can therefore create political inequality.

Democratic rights only work when people have the capacity to use them. The right to vote matters, but meaningful democracy also requires people to understand their choices, develop informed opinions and have enough security to think beyond immediate survival.

Disagreement is essential to democracy. The problem is not that people disagree, but that too many people are being denied a meaningful opportunity to participate in that disagreement.

If we want to save democracy, we need secure incomes, housing, reliable public services, reasonable working conditions and enough time away from work to participate in society. And with AI increasingly shaping how we receive information, the question is whether technology will expand that democratic capacity or diminish it further.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcrxNI3kdUA?si=VWqpu1DhOfYTphwK>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=x2rm3-1b7ffb9-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&font=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Of the many crises that I think we are facing in this world, the fact that our democracy is dying is one that worries me enormously.

People are lacking the capacity to take part in our democracy, and for me that matters because democracy requires much more than voting every few years. It requires time for people to think about the issues that shape their lives. It requires attention to understand competing arguments and choices. But work, insecurity and what I now think to be deliberate, constant distraction are taking that capacity away. That threatens the foundation of the society in which we live, and we need those foundations at present because we have a crisis coming our way, and the future has to be built on democracy.

So let me go into this in a little more detail.

Democracy is competing for our attention, and I think it is losing. Work and family pressures consume much of most people's available capacity.

Financial and housing insecurity add constant demands. Many people now need two jobs to survive. Meanwhile, media, of various sorts, compete relentlessly for whatever attention remains. And complex questions are reduced to slogans, reactions and instant opinions, squeezing out serious political engagement.

And I stress that this is a political economy problem and not just a failure of individual interest. How we organise work determines how much time people have. Income, housing and public services determine how secure they feel. Caring responsibilities consume time that economics frequently ignores. These economic arrangements shape who has the time, security and capacity to participate in democracy. Maybe this has always been true to a degree. I don't think I can dispute that, but we seem to be going

backwards, and that is my concern at this moment.

As we know, time and attention are unequally distributed, just as our income and wealth. Some people have considerable freedom over how they use their time. Others have almost none after working and caring responsibilities. Economic insecurity also consumes mental capacity. Some don't face it. Too many do. They have little chance to express their interest in democracy.

Those inequalities determine who has the greatest opportunity to engage in politics. Political inequality can therefore follow directly from economic inequality.

Democratic rights need democratic capacity if they are to mean anything. That is vital.

The right to vote matters, but meaningful democracy requires the ability to understand the choices being offered.

Freedom of speech matters, but so too does having the time and opportunity to develop an informed opinion.

Participation requires enough security to look beyond immediate survival.

Formal democracy can therefore survive even while meaningful democracy declines. That is the risk that we are facing.

And disagreement is not the issue here. Disagreement is not a problem because democracy depends upon it. I do not want a society where everyone agrees with me. That would be horrendous. Who would I have left to argue with? I live by arguing. I need that disagreement. We all do because different experiences will inevitably produce different political views, and arguments can expose weaknesses and help us to develop better ideas.

The real question is whether everyone has the opportunity to take part in those arguments. Right now, I think far too many people are being denied the opportunity. And this is not a choice; it is something they simply cannot do, and that is the difference that I'm highlighting. Excluding people because of their circumstances is the issue that I'm worried about.

Democracy needs people who can think rather than simply react. People need time in that case to understand arguments, to distinguish evidence from assertion and to encounter ideas that challenge their assumptions.

Once there were institutions that helped create these conditions: evening classes, debating societies, the Workers' Educational Association, which appears to have largely disappeared, at least around where I am, and very much more. We have lost much of that infrastructure whilst insecurity, exhaustion, and constant distraction have increased.

An insecure and distracted society risks becoming a less democratic society. If we want democracy to thrive, we need to give people back their capacity to participate. That means providing them with sufficient income, secure housing, reliable public services, reasonable working conditions, and time away from work. It means giving people the security to look beyond today's pressures and to imagine how society may be different in the future.

I want more informed disagreement, and not enforced agreement. Saving democracy means giving people the capacity to use it.

And my question is: will AI give us that chance or deny it? My fear is that denial is most likely. It might swamp us with information, but deny us the opportunity to choose. We need to have that opportunity to choose. It's on that foundation that we can build a better future.

That's what I think. What do you think? There is, of course, a poll down below. Let us have your comments. We do appreciate them. We do analyse and read them. Please do like and share this video if you do those things. And please do subscribe to the channel and hit the bell button. And if you like what we do on this channel and you'd like to support us, please do buy us a coffee. There's a button to help you do so just down below.

Poll

[poll id="554"]