

Democracy Paradox Podcast

Javier Pérez Sandoval Reveals Democracy's Hidden Vulnerability: The Hollowing of the State (2/4/26)

Transcript

Introduction

Today's guest is Javier Pérez Sandoval. He is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in Democracy in the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Recently, he coauthored an article in the *Journal of Democracy* with Andrés Mejía Acosta titled, "Why Populists Hollow Out Their States."

I found the article shared a lot in common with Russ Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum's work on "ungoverning." You might remember my conversation with Russ in December about this concept. However, Javier and Andrés analyze this phenomenon from a global perspective and as a result come to different insights and conclusions.

Before jumping into the interview, it helps to reflect on the complicated relationship between democracy and the state. Throughout most of history the growth of the state came at the expense of democracy. The development of representative democracy changed this relationship. Representatives relied on the state to implement laws and policies made through the deliberative process.

But at the same time dictators still used powerful states to crush dissenting voices and avoid democratic reforms. As a result, many continue to view a powerful state as a threat to democracy and freedom. I'm oversimplifying things here, but in recent years scholars have renewed their efforts to reconcile the relationship between democracy and the state. Francis Fukuyama was among the earliest and most outspoken to emphasize the importance of a strong state for democracy. He argued weak states led to dissatisfaction with democracy.

However, a growing movement within scholarship of democracy now argues populists undermine democracy by reducing state capacity. This is controversial for a few different reasons. For starters, it turns traditional ideas about the relationship between the state and democracy upside down. But secondly, it also relies on a thicker conception of democracy than some find comfortable. Now in this conversation, I'm not concerned with whether you agree or disagree with Javier. I'm really just focused on allowing him to introduce his ideas. I gave him space to explain his theory and provide some examples. Still, I did challenge him a few times and found it helped clarify some of his positions in

ways that surprised me. But ultimately, I want you to develop your own ideas about the meaning and purpose of democracy. Hopefully, this conversation helps you on this journey.

The Democracy Paradox is made in partnership with the Kellogg Institute of the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame. Make sure to mark your calendar for the upcoming Global Democracy Conference on May 19th and 20th. This year's conference will take place at the University of Notre Dame. Check the link in the show notes to register today. But for now... here is my conversation with Javier Pérez Sandoval ...

Interview

Justin Kempf: Javier Pérez Sandoval, welcome to the *Democracy Paradox*.

Javier Pérez Sandoval: Thank you, Justin. Thank you for having me.

Justin Kempf: Well, Javier, I was really impressed with this new essay that you've got in the *Journal of Democracy*. It's called "Why Populists Hollow Out Their State." It's co-authored with Andrés Mejía Acosta. It's an interesting article because it touches on some of the themes that are percolating through the democracy community right now about the relationship between democracy and the state itself. But before we kind of get into the theory and some bigger ideas, can we start here? Can you give me a concrete example of how a populist hollows out the state?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: Yes. I can give you two examples. I'm drawing from the case that I know best, which is Mexico. One will be a past example, and one is an ongoing, unfolding example. The first example was during the previous administration. Then President Andrés Manuel López Obrador decided to do something with the health system in Mexico. This is an example that is in the paper. With the pretext or the narrative of combating corruption, he changed some regulatory aspects of the system, which then ended up creating a scarcity of medications and a depletion of the capacity. It was a low capacity to start with, but then that capacity was then eroded in terms of the health system to provide services for the population.

Redirecting budgets and manipulating how budgets are exercised ended up with a system of care that is in a worse position that it was before. That's one example. The other is an ongoing example which is perhaps more connected towards democracy. It has to do with what's going on in Mexico currently with

political reform and what is going to happen with the electoral management body in Mexico, the Instituto Nacional Electoral and what exactly it means when they say we want to make elections more cost effective and bring austerity to an electoral management body. So what are the potential implications for democracy and what it says about the state's capacity to ensure free and fair elections in Mexico?

Justin Kempf: So state capacity is a term that gets tossed around a lot among people who read and write about democracy currently. I get the impression that when you're talking about hollowing out the state, what you're talking about is that populists, as they pursue power, are actually looking to reduce what is known as state capacity. Can you just kind of confirm that we're on the same wavelengths in terms of those concepts, those ideas?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: Yeah. You're putting your finger on a very interesting point, which is both democracy and state capacity are what some people would refer to as contested concepts or very hard things to come to an agreement or a consensus about what they mean. The way that Andrés and I talk about it in the paper is the infrastructural ability of the state to do things to deliver public services. That's a very basic understanding. But then once you unpack that, then you have to think about what exactly we are talking about when we say delivering public goods and public services? What does that mean?

I'm thinking here of the work, for example, of Diana Graizbord, who's currently a visiting fellow here at Kellogg, or Susan Ostermann, who's also here at Keough. The work that they do is to try to tease out the different dimensions of state capacity. Deana's work is well known in terms of, for example, the informational capacity of the state to read society and read its problems. So Andrés and I make a very initial cut in that sense and talk about different aspects. Earlier, I talked about health, the electoral dimension, and the provision of justice, for example. This is something that if you give us more time or the next step of the project is precisely the sort of thinking about how we would analytically dissect what state capacity is and then measure changes in state capacity.

Justin Kempf: What I find interesting about the examples you provided initially is that Mexico is a case where we have a leftist president reducing state capacity, because traditionally we think of the left as wanting bigger government, more state intervention in effect. I mean, we think that the left wants to increase state capacity. If you go to the extreme end of the spectrum with the idea of communism, you think of incredibly large bureaucracy or government, complete control of the economy, and complete control through

the state. And yet the example that you're bringing up is one of somebody who thinks of himself as on the left, governs from the left, and yet he's also reducing state capacity. So, this isn't necessarily an ideological argument when we're talking about this. Why don't you explain why a populist, especially one from the left, would want to reduce state capacity?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: This is a very good question. It's actually one of the points that we make at the end of the paper, which is this is not necessarily driven by ideologies and this is a process that we've observed from both the left and the right. But when you were asking your question, I couldn't help but think about the contrast between Lopez Obrador in the Mexican case, and Milei in Argentina, which in the international scene, were kind of headbutting each other and were very critical of each other. But when it comes to the narrative about austerity, then surprise, surprise, you realize that they have more in common than they would like to admit.

Now, it is true, for example, that what we argue in the paper and what I think is the case for Mexico, is you have a reduction of the state in several domains and there are two reasons behind why populists would try to do that. The first one is, at least primarily in the Mexican case, this was a redirection of public spending towards what were perceived as priorities of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and primarily here, for example, I'm thinking of the increase of social spending that was implemented without a tax reform. That means that you have to rebalance and readjust the budget and there's a tradeoff there. You're going to increase social spending and you're going to increase transfers to families and individuals. That means you stop doing other things that the state should invest in. That's one thing.

The other is that usually these narratives from populists, both from the left and from the right, come with a diagnosis that the state is corrupt. It's not working properly and it needs some form of creative destruction in order for it to operate as the people would want and in order to serve the people. There's this understanding that is shared across populous politicians, but from the left and from the right that to quote Shakespeare that things are rotten in the state of Denmark and that they need some heavy lifting and heavy reshaping. But the other thing that we also sort of pose in the paper is we need more research and a clear understanding of the historical processes in which state capacity is built.

If you take a look at the literature what you end up realizing is that it is hard building institutions that work in which citizens can trust and expect the delivery and the provision of security and justice that is impartial and with certain characteristics is hard. It seems that the opposite process, this hollowing

out, this process of state erosion can happen in a very dramatic fashion in terms of its speed. We are facing a situation in which institutions that took a really long time to build up can be quickly undermined. So, there is an asymmetry in the processes of building up and in the processes of eroding the state.

Justin Kempf: Let's set Milei aside for a moment, because he's clearly working to reduce state capacity to make the Argentine state do less and he's doing it from a clear ideological direction. AMLO, to me, is much more interesting because of a few different reasons. One is the ideological dimension, but another one is he's also shuffling around state resources. He's not trying to reduce the overall size of the state. From what it sounds like, he's shifting resources from one place to another. So, in the case of Mexico, are we seeing state capacity increased in some aspects to the detriment of others or do you feel that there's an overall reduction in state capacity because of the way that those resources are shifting?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: This is a great question and I think that this allows me to qualify what I was saying earlier, which I was hinting at a rebalancing of capacities, perhaps redirecting and strengthening some at the cost of the others. But then if there are certain tasks of the state that are fundamental to statehood, then why would we redirect efforts if these are fundamental things that we need to ensure? Three things are coming to mind here. They are health, education, and obviously, security.

What does it mean to have an increase in a redirection of resources to social spending when you don't fully settle on an institutional design about how to tackle the security concern? We're constantly thinking about reforming our police institutions from one administration to another, which impedes that buildup of capacity in terms of providing the minimal definition of what Weber would call the legitimate monopoly of violence within the territory. I think that opens up the question of which functions are we thinking about. Then which of those functions are fundamental for the state to provide and why is it then that some other function might be electorally more visible or more viable and therefore behooves politicians, especially populist politicians, to pay attention to those to the detriment of other unseen or less popular tasks.

Justin Kempf: The security dimension is interesting, particularly in Latin America, because it's very salient throughout it at this moment with the rise of gang violence, with the rise of concerns about immigration, particularly because of the destabilizing effects of immigration coming from Venezuela, that leads politicians on the right, who traditionally talk about a limited role for the state, to want to increase state capacity in terms of the security dimension. In many

ways, the security dimension has become so disastrous that politicians on the left also have to tackle questions about how to deal with it in many countries, particularly in Mexico, but we're seeing it in many countries in South America as well.

In the exact same issue that just came out in the *Journal of Democracy* there's a fascinating article about Ecuador that talks about how reforms in the security sector since Correa left power have diminished the capacity of the state to handle the cartels and that has resulted in an explosion of power from the cartels and turned into what Guillermo Trejo, a scholar at the University of Notre Dame, would call criminal governance throughout Ecuador. It's just tragic what's happening there. But again, it's another example where state capacity is so essential to instill democratic values. Moreover, it's not as simple as just saying, government needs to be bigger. It's a question of government providing essential roles and security is one of those very important roles that government has to provide.

Javier Pérez Sandoval: Yes and I would agree with that. By the way, that's a really interesting article. But I would say that, again, going to this question of how do we conceptualize different dimensions of state capacity and which of those dimensions might be fundamental or at the core of what we understand as state capacity, the security democracy nexus is perhaps one of those things where we have had more research or more attention, but here I would like to shed some light or put the attention not only on the traditional effort to militarize or increase the size of the state that way, which is perhaps the low hanging fruit that everyone tends to think about, but more broadly about building capable criminal justice systems or thinking about building strong prosecutorial offices both at the national and the subnational level.

So, we have to ask what exactly is happening to the political independence of these institutions and to the actual budgets of these institutions? And so, maybe looking at the trajectories of the individuals that get the appointment, looking at the capacity of or educational background and the experience of the new individuals that are populating this institutions is key. Here again, I'll refer to Mexico, in which after the reform to the courts you have a plethora of journalists reporting that new judges were appointed to five positions. They do not necessarily have the experience to be ruling and making mistakes that are legally and technically visible and identifiable and that come to the detriment, ultimately to justice provision and how citizens then perceive the justice system.

This is perhaps another aspect that I would like to highlight, which is the rationale of populists and what exactly they do and why would they do it, and

when would they do it. The key question is not looking at the top down aspect, but also looking at the bottom up. If you have then fundamental functions of the state that not only remain low but then are further eroded, politicized or captured, then what does this mean or what is the impact of this erosion in terms of the citizen's perspective of what democracy might be delivering for them? We see a risk here in terms of will this then lead to further disengagement from politics or what exactly will be the reaction for the public in terms of the eroding capacity of the state?

Justin Kempf: So, if some aspects of the state are more core to democracy than others, does that mean that politicians, if they want to strengthen democracy, should reduce the scope and size of the state in some aspects to buttress other aspects of the state that are more core to democracy and more fundamental to what the state should be doing?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: I think the short answer to that is yes. The central issue is that when one thinks about these core aspects of the state that are more linked to strengthening democracy as well, they might not be the most electorally popular and might not necessarily win you an election. So how exactly as a politician do you navigate these trade-offs? It is clearly the case that when it comes to populists or illiberal politicians who are concerned perhaps with just winning the next election and staying in power, they will not necessarily prioritize state building or strengthening certain institutions. Instead, they will prioritize securing short term electoral gains. I think that opens up the question of what is the role of executives, of presidents, but more broadly of political actors in the political space in terms of which preferences do they have when it comes to democracy.

Are they aware of the long-term midterm cost to democracy? And if so, are they constrained or do they restrain themselves in making those decisions that might have negative impacts in the long term? I think that from the experience of Mexico, Argentina, and in some cases in the global North, we've seen that the answer to that is no. What is it that politicians in other domains can do to withstand that?

Justin Kempf: So one of my concerns about linking state capacity to democracy is that it turns policy debates into debates over who is acting democratic and who's acting anti-democratic. Now on some issues, this is valid. If we're talking about reducing the capacity of electoral management bodies that are overseeing elections that can produce anti-democratic results and that was one of the examples that you brought up for Mexico. So, let's set those aside along with things that directly link to the electoral process, that directly linked

to democracy itself, that link to checks and balances. You also brought up examples of health and education. Are you saying that if we reduce the capacity of the state in terms of what it can provide in terms of healthcare or in terms of education for its citizens that those politicians are acting anti-democratic in terms of pursuing those policy choices?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: This is a great question, because we have to be very careful. In short, my answer to your question is no, because we can all have policy differences. We would all like to live in a world where that's what politics is only about. The key thing, for example, is we can discuss whether the rate of taxation is 23% or 24%. Maybe that's a technical thing, but then people would say that impacts redistribution so it has huge effects. But the short answer to your question, I think would be no.

But then perhaps in a different domain the answer would be yes. And here is where I think we have to go perhaps a little bit more carefully, because I would say no if it is only about a budget for education that doesn't increase as it had in the past. But what about, for example, changes in which they shift the autonomy of certain labor unions related to education and then they make it more clear that there's a political bargain behind the arrangement of examinations. For example, in Mexico, I'm thinking of normalistas, which are the trained teachers and their organizing unions.

So what type of reform are we thinking about and what are the consequences politically for that organization, which is a huge part of the population of the electorate. Are we ensuring that they remain autonomous or is the reform intended to capture and then attach that union or that sector of the education network to a certain party or to a certain political leader. When it comes only to policy in terms of budget and in terms of perhaps I would say even the content of the educational programs in Mexico, I would say that that's up for debate.

That doesn't necessarily mean that makes one politician more democratic or less democratic, but when there are clear political implications to how interests are organized and represented and translated into the political arena that type of reform, even in the education sector, can have strong effects for how democracy operates and for how interests are represented and organized.

Justin Kempf: So I want to circle back to Javier Milei, because I want to touch on a concrete example. Now in your essay, Javier Milei is one of the key examples that you return to in multiple instances. So I feel that it's really important to talk about this case that's happening over in Argentina, and I feel that it's actually a difficult case to be able to talk about because on the one hand,

Argentina has a long history of having issues with a bloated state that has had issues with not only its currency, but also just in terms of being able to manage its finances. For instance, it has had multiple rounds of loans from the IMF.

Now, some of Milei's reforms have actually championed by publications like *The Economist*, which while it's a little bit more neoliberal, oftentimes criticizes other politicians for being anti-democratic. Are you saying that Milei's reforms challenge democracy within Argentina? I mean, is he wrong to pursue a reduction of the state within Argentina and pursue economic reform?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: That is a tough nut to crack, but I'll try my best. I think I'll have one initial caveat, which is I'm obviously not an economist. I'm a political scientist. But I would say that even economists disagree about what exactly the correct path for reform should be in the Argentinian case. I wouldn't like to comment on whether the measures are appropriate in terms of the economic outcomes, but perhaps what I will comment is on the procedures. Ultimately, democracy, if it's anything, is a process.

I think Przeworski was the one who said that in a democracy we should have certainty about the process, and there are certain expectations that are built into the system that might make the system a little bit slow to process those differences, but that generate a certain expectation about how politicians should behave and the things that they should do or not do so that everyone involved at least understands. They might not be happy with the policy outcome, but they might at least understand and see how we got to this decision and I see that the process was fair and my voice was heard. Ultimately, that was a decision that was made.

I think in the case of Milei, and again he might not like this, but very similar to Andrés Manuel López Obrador. What they're known for is by trying to steamroll this process. This is when the discussions around executive aggrandizement and what's happening with legislatures and Congress, which adopted diminished role becomes relevant. So they hurt the Democratic process, not so much because of the substantive nature of the policies that they implement, specifically when it comes to economics, but more importantly by the process that they used to get those policies implemented.

Again, I understand for example, someone might say we actually needed speed and quick decision making, because otherwise the economy would remain in shambles. This is perhaps the crux that these politicians face, but I would still think that there is value in allowing the democratic process to unfold, even if it delays the decisions, because then the policy decision that you end up with, the

legislation that you end up with not only has more broad consensus within the political elite, but it guarantees the democratic legitimacy of the decisions.

Justin Kempf: I can completely understand if we're talking about this from the perspective of executive aggrandizement that we can criticize politicians for how they go about implementing policies, but your essay is not about executive aggrandizement. It's about hollowing out the state and reducing state capacity. So when we're thinking about Milei in terms of his efforts to reduce state capacity, and again, this isn't about whether or not his policies are even right or wrong, it's a question of whether or not reducing state capacity within Argentina in terms of the choices that he's making, in terms of the reductions of state capacity, whether or not that is anti-democratic. So let me go back to the question again, is Milei wrong to reduce state capacity in the domains that he's pursuing? Is that anti-democratic or is this just a case of democracy unfolding in this way in terms of policy choices or maybe even a case of executive aggrandizement, but again, that's a very different story than one about state capacity?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: My answer to that will have to do with the dimension of time. I think that on the one hand it is anti-democratic, perhaps in the process in which these decisions get made. As we highlight in the essay, they have consequences for what the state is able to do. But not only what the state is able to do now, but what the state is going to be able to do through time. This is perhaps where the substantive policy decisions of today might have a deleterious or a negative impact on democracy. This is an empirical question that we have to track. For example, what are the consequences of the cabinet reshuffling and merging of state institutions in terms of democratic outcomes?

It's something that we cannot measure right now. We're going to have to observe. My suspicion is that by hollowing now and eroding the state in this way today, then it's going to be harder for Argentinians to rebuild those capacities and their democracy later on.

Justin Kempf: So this is a very nuanced and difficult question for democracy because what you're saying is the decisions that we make today to reduce the capacity of the state will impact the democracy for future generations to make choices. Their choices will be limited because they have fewer resources to get things done.

So, if future generations say we want to create different types of investments in terms of education, that that's not possible. If the institutions that we have to implement those policies have atrophied, we would have to rebuild them before

we can even implement those policies all over again. So, we're putting future generations into a bind, but at the same time, that's difficult because we're talking about what future generations might decide, when it's current generations that are making the decisions right now. You're putting a constraint upon democracy today because the democracy of tomorrow might want to do a different policy.

Javier Pérez Sandoval: This is a key dilemma, and people will have different opinions on how to go about it. But the way that you phrase it is absolutely right. By dismantling certain capacities today, you're making the democratic choices of tomorrow harder. It's not only about the know-how or the expertise that you develop through time, but it's also things that are harder to measure and are perhaps more informal and that are fundamental for institutions to operate which are things like trust. So, what happens once you politicize a bureaucracy? What happens when you politicize the provision of certain services? That means that then trust in those institutions in the provision of those services is diminished. It's diminished not only because citizens feel or believe that they won't get them, because the capacities are lower, but because they mistrust the political intentions behind the state.

One of the most difficult parts then will be rebuilding trust. This connects to the point that I was saying earlier about the implications from the bottom up perspective in terms of the citizen's engagement with democracy and with the state in the long term. Again, I go back to the Mexican case in which if you measure political trust or trust in governmental institutions and state institutions, there, it's really low. It's comparatively low. I would be curious to see what the empirical measures say in the following years, but my suspicion is that the realization that this is becoming heavily politicized, heavily captured, is going to further decrease that trust.

Rather than moving in the right direction, you're making it more likely that you move in a negative direction. I think it's both about the formal capabilities, the know-how, the expertise that you develop, but then also the building of informal expectations, the trust that people have in those institutions.

Justin Kempf: So what I'm hearing from you is that it creates a vicious cycle where the reduction of state capacity means that the state can't deliver fundamental public goods and then because they can't deliver fundamental public goods, populists can then blame the state and say that it's because the state is so ineffective we have to weed out and further reduce the state because it's so incompetent. As people don't receive those public goods, they have less trust that the state's capable of delivering it. So, rather than increasing the

capacity, they look to reduce the capacity of the state. But if that's the case, why wouldn't voters react differently and say the state's not delivering what I thought it would deliver, so I want to put somebody in office who's able to reverse that, increase the capacity of the state and deliver those goods that I care about.

Javier Pérez Sandoval: This touches upon the last section of the essay that Andrés and I wrote in which we outline a potential research agenda. The first of those questions has to do with how sustainable in time is this. So, you very clearly identify there's a vicious circle and when exactly is this vicious circle hitting a breaking point. When exactly is it tenable in time? The answer that I can give you is that I don't know and that we're looking into not only contemporary, but also historical cases in which we might have seen similar patterns to see what disrupts or tends to disrupt or end this negative feedback loop. Because you're right. This is part of the reason why we have seen the increased appeal of strong leadership, because then you have one strong leader saying, 'I'm going to be the one who solves this problem.'

But then it's just a perpetrating cycle. And to your point, why won't voters just put in someone else there? I think that the risk is the fact that there might be a segment of the electorate that reacts and says we need to engage and we need to vote them out. But I think there's also a large risk that a big sector of the electorate goes this has not worked for the last 10 decades. I am going to disengage. If you have the resources, then you privatize a lot of these functions. You go to private healthcare, private education, private security, and so on. You disengage from the state and that's another risk.

The question that we pose is it's not only about how sustainable is this in time, but then going back to the classic discussions of state legitimacy, where does the legitimacy of these decisions and of state actions come from? The second question that we pose is we tend to think in these very Weberian terms of performance legitimacy. The state is legitimized because it delivers certain goods and services understood sort of broadly, but we see this as a provocation that we are shifting the ways in which certain decisions are legitimized not so much by where they actually deliver, but by the performative aspect in which they're made. It no longer matters whether or not you get a capable state.

What matters is how the decision and the changes are presented. Then you see this is a strong leader that is seemingly doing something and then you agree with it without fully looking into the implications both for the state and for democracy. And just to complicate matters further, all of this is happening not only in a vacuum. One of the other questions that we ask in the paper is how does this process of decision making of populist executive led state erosion

interact with all the other issues that we know exist and permeate out there? The one that we put our finger on is corruption, but these are quite complex interrelated things that require increased attention.

Because the whole starting point for the essay is that as you said before we've discussed enough about backsliding, democratic erosion, executive aggrandizement, legislative checks and balances. We have a thorough understanding of those dynamics. But I think that the state dimension, what the state is able to deliver and the structural component of that erosion has been missing.

Justin Kempf: So, Javier, I'm going to ask you a general question, and it's a little bit dangerous because I know that every country's different. For instance, there's a lot more support for reducing the size of the state in Argentina with Milei there right now than there might be in other countries within Latin America or within the world. But do you get the sense that there's popular support to dismantle the system or is the system being dismantled because the public doesn't understand what's happening?

Javier Pérez Sandoval: I've always been skeptical and slightly suspicious of some of the literature that assumes that voters are either not interested or not completely informed, because I'm a citizen myself and that's not been my experience. If you jump in with an Uber driver or a taxi driver and you ask a few questions, you quickly realize that they are informed and that they have some understanding of politics. I don't think that it is the case that citizens are completely not understanding the process. Obviously a full complex understanding of how everything in politics and economics is connected... I don't think even senior scholars have a full map of everything, but I'm not favored to thinking it's just because people don't understand and they don't fully understand where they're voting. That's why we are where we are.

I don't think that's the case. We outline what allows this or what are the conditions under which this hollowing out, this process of state erosion is possible. I think there are three that I would like to highlight. Two are political and one is economic. The political one is polarization and a heightened sense of polarization. I think this is applicable both for countries in Europe, North America, Latin America. There's a sense that over the last years, the stakes of politics are higher everywhere. That's kind of a general sense and I think people do feel that. The other one is the increase that's been documented of negative partisan identity. That is more and more people who were not necessarily engaged in politics or were not registered partisans or party members engage in

politics because they oppose something in particular and that dictates their voting intentions.

It's hard to appeal to those voters because then they become what is known as one issue voters where they're opposing this one particular thing. Then the rest becomes a function of that issue that they're clearly opposing. And lastly, economic pressure, like the cost of living crisis. I live in the UK. Currently, I'm at Notre Dame, but I've spent the last 10 years in the UK and in Europe. You hear the pressures caused by inflation and the post-pandemic. Now in the US you also hear that concern. I spent my winter in Mexico.

You see and you hear people speaking about how things are way more costly and behind this is an issue of job markets and economic pressures that if you put all of this together puts a bonus on short term decision making and short term calculations. I think it's increasingly hard for politicians and for citizens to keep the long term in perspective. Increasingly, both citizens and politicians are faced with the short term and that might be one of the rationales behind why this hollowing is sometimes hard to spot, hard to see when it's occurring, and also hard to envision the consequences in the long term.

Justin Kempf: Well, Javier, thank you so much for joining me today. I want to mention the essay one more time? It's "Why Populists Hollow Out Their State." It's in the current issue of the *Journal of Democracy* and it's co-authored with Andrés Mejía Acosta, who's also a professor here at the University of Notre Dame. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me. Thank you so much for writing this great essay.

Javier Pérez Sandoval: Thank you, Justin. It's been a pleasure.