**‘Very good chance’ democracy is doomed in America, says Haidt**

New York University Professor Jonathan Haidt, who is on a speaking tour in Australia, believes current trends indicate democracy is likely to fail.

By Paul Kelly, Editor-at-Large

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Liberal multicultural secular democracy is not a natural occurrence for human nature and trends in America suggest there is a “very good chance” the US democracy will fail in the next 30 years, according to the professor of ethical leadership at New York University, Jonathan Haidt.

In an interview with *The Weekend Australian* at the start of his visit here on a speaking tour, Professor Haidt said that in his two public lectures in Sydney and Melbourne he would “talk about the problems that have hit us in the United States and how Australia can avoid winding up like us.”

Haidt’s 2018 book *The Coddling of the American Mind*, co-written with lawyer Greg Lukianoff, dissects the crisis in the US higher-education system, its central theme being that “good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for failure.”

But Haidt, a social psychologist based in the Stern School of Business specialising in moral psychology and political, economic and educational systems, argues that the culture war between progressives and conservatives, exacerbated by the impact of social media, is a threat to the US political system.

“I am now very pessimistic,” Haidt said. “I think there is a very good chance American democracy will fail, that in the next 30 years we will have a catastrophic failure of our democracy.

“The current political civil war is between two groups of educated white people with radically different views about what the country is, what morality is and what we need to do to move forward.

“Most Americans are non-political, but in the age of social media they have become like dark matter. The modern civil war is being fought by the extremes.”

Haidt’s thesis originates with humans’ evolutionary journey. He says the “human mind is prepared for tribalism” and that humans are “deeply intuitive creatures whose gut feelings drive strategic reasoning.”

The delusion is to believe that liberal, secular, multicultural democracy is a natural condition for human nature. Haidt says this is false. The achievement of our democratic model based on diversity is a “miracle” that is far more fragile than we realise.

He warns that the mixture of social media, eruption of common-enemy identity politics, and entrenched rival moralities of progressives and conservatives is provoking a reversion to tribalism.

“We just don’t know what a democracy looks like when you drain all the trust out of the system,” Haidt said.

His 2012 book *The Righteous Mind* identified the moral conflict now undermining the culture.

The progressive/conservative struggle is turning into a perceived conflict between good and bad people, the sure path to greater division and breakdown.

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Paul Kelly is Editor-at-Large on *The Australian*. He was previously Editor-in-Chief of the paper and he writes on Australian politics, public policy and international affairs. Paul has covered Australian governments from Gough Whitlam to Scott Morrison. He is a regular television commentator on Sky News. He is the author of nine books including *The End of Certainty* on the politics and economics of the 1980s. His recent books include *Triumph and Demise* on the Rudd-Gillard era and *The March of Patriots* which offers a re-interpretation of Paul Keating and John Howard in office.