

**‘Why corruption charges brought against Nicolas Sarkozy could give the former French President a path back to power.’**

**Elected president in 2007 for going against the grain of traditional French politics, Nicolas Sarkozy now finds himself on trial for following suit in his approach to the law. But could the platform of his ongoing trial provide him a path back to power?**

### **The Trial(s) of Nicolas Sarkozy**

Like it or not, politics has changed in recent years, no more so than in Western democracies. Distrust of traditional institutions of power and information has spread with the rise of (neo-) populism, creating exploitable divides between voters; divides which Sarkozy could capitalise on to find a path back to power.

During his five years in office Sarkozy became deeply unpopular after campaigning on apparently empty [promises](#) of social and economic reform. His situation, along with his popularity, hasn't improved since leaving the Elysée Palace in 2012.

In 2017 he launched a failed presidential bid, [losing out in the primary](#) after leading a hard-right campaign on French national identity, which targeted Muslims and minority groups. Alongside his political troubles, the conservative now faces the first of at least three corruption allegations, following a fraud fuelled fracas on the way to, and during, his tenure as President.

The trial, which began last week on Monday, resumed [after a short postponement](#) due to health concerns of Sarkozy's co-defendant and former lawyer, Thierry Herzog.

Both stand accused of trying to bribe a magistrate [by offering a prestigious job in Monaco](#) in return for information about a criminal inquiry into his political party, the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement, which has since become Les Républicains). The trial, known as the [“wiretapping case” in France](#), is tied to a long running investigation into the politician's suspected use of secret donations from former Libyan leader Colonel Gadhafi [to fund his 2007 presidential campaign](#).

But despite his legal troubles Sarkozy seems determined for a [political comeback](#); an ambition renewed earlier this month when a key witness in the campaign funding case, [Ziad Takieddine](#), unexpectedly withdrew his accusations.

Reacting on Facebook the former President [said](#): “I’ve always said the truth will eventually triumph. She’s on her way. Everyone be sure I have no intention of stopping until all the authors of this unprecedented manipulation are unmasked.”

### **Condemning Democracy to Death**

Sarkozy’s trial comes at a significant point in the life of Western democracy which, as its supporters triumphantly declared, dominated the political landscape in the early 90’s.

In 1992, Francis Fukuyama proclaimed that with the proliferation of liberal Western democratic values after the end of the Cold War, the world had reached [“the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution.”](#) But with each passing day his words appear increasingly naïve – even dangerous.

Now more than ever, democracy and its institutions are vulnerable to exploitation, as are those it seeks to represent. Trump’s election in 2016 (and his continuing idiosyncrasies – to put it mildly) undermines the liberal narrative of progress preached by a group of hubristic academics who, along with many mainstream politicians, ignored a conservative counterculture which has found a home in the reactionary practices of the (far)right.

Not limited to North America, this brand of politics has been brought into the global spotlight, arguably [overturning the consensus of liberalism](#) and trust in traditional democratic institutions along with mainstream media, the electoral process, opposition voters and leaders.

Having been ostracised and ignored by traditional sources of information and power the voters swayed by this emerging politic have opted to believe in a new narrative, narrated by exploitative politicians; one in which these so-called “populist” leaders are unquestionably factually and morally right, enabling them to fulfil the role of judge, jury and executioner in the trial of democracy and even the meaning and value of truth.

The particular danger of this trend is not only its ability to undermine due democratic process and truth but, crucially, that it thrives as much on its own degradation of both as it does from rebuttals provided by each. Even when mainstream sources expose the untruth of the trend’s exponents this is interpreted by its followers as further proof that traditional institutions seek to undermine, demean, and destroy them with disinformation.

## **Playing (to) the People**

With crisis comes opportunity, and for Nicolas Sarkozy there's plenty of both. Set against a background of domestic and international political instability his hearing offers the ex-President the chance of a show trial in which he, the star performer, can cast himself as the victim of yet another example of a politically motivated persecution against a leader who challenges the status quo.

The fact he has been an incumbent diminishes this narrative slightly and according to one [political commentator, Pierre Haskey](#), although France's political right is seeking leadership it's unlikely that Sarkozy would be the answer: "You have the same phenomenon you had with Trump, he has supporters who will be with him until the end, but can he convince the rest of the country that he's really honest? I'm not sure."

Nevertheless, the trend embodied by Trump – and which has been witnessed worldwide - has shown the malleability of both the once seemingly unwavering nature of truth, and the tendency towards the universal adoption of liberal democracy, its institutions, and values.

## **Truth to Power**

With the fragile nature of our political reality fully exposed, voters must be ever vigilant of opportunities such as the one presented to Sarkozy and, more specifically, those who may wish to exploit them. A fact brought to the fore with the redaction of Ziad Takieddine's testimony, which has led many across the political spectrum to speculate on the paradoxically positive impact this trial is having on [Sarkozy's bid to return](#) as the [leader of the right](#).

But the message to take away isn't one of fear or suspicion but is one of positive cynicism, a willingness to engage in open discussion, and most crucially to listen. We find ourselves in this mess because of naivety and a liberal triumphalism which ignored and failed to address the concerns of those whose views didn't align with its own. Therefore, it's now crucial that to prevent further domestic dislocation and disenchantment with democracy (or the meaning and value of truth) that we strive to understand rather than demean those we don't agree with.

Ironically, we might do well to heed the [words of Sarkozy](#): "We must create conditions for dialogue. All this must end as soon as possible, because each day that goes by strengthens conditions for confrontations, for problems and maybe even for tragedy."