

Criticism of democracy

Democracy may be criticized as economically inefficient, politically unrealistic, dysfunctional, morally corrupt or sociopolitically suboptimal.

Important figures associated with anti-democratic thought include Martin Heidegger, Hubert Lagardelle, Charles Maurras, Friedrich Nietzsche, Plato, Aristotle, Carl Schmitt, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Oswald Spengler, Nicolás Gómez Dávila, and Elazar Menachem Shach. A variety of ideologies and political systems have opposed democracy, including absolute monarchy, aristocracy, Nazism, fascism, theocracy, neo-feudalism and anarcho-capitalism

Democracy is also subject to criticism from pro-democratic thought that tends to acknowledge its flaws but stresses a lack of appealing alternatives. An example is Winston Churchill who remarked, "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."^[1].

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Economic

Efficiency of the system

Economist Donald Wittman has written numerous works attempting to counter criticisms of democracy common among his colleagues. He argues democracy is efficient based on the premise of rational voters, competitive elections, and relatively low political transactions costs. Economist Bryan Caplan argues that, while Wittman makes strong arguments for the latter two points, the first is vitiated by the insurmountable evidence for voter irrationality. The problem is not merely the voters' lack of information, but their poor judgement. For many voters, the difficulty of learning about a particular issue is too high compared to the likely costs of ignorance, but this ignorance does not lessen their enthusiasm for voting.^[2] Other economists, such as Meltzer and Richard, have added that as industrial activity in a democracy increases, so too do the people's demands for subsidies and support from the government. By the median voter theorem, only a few people actually hold the balance of power in the country, and many may be unhappy with their decisions. In this way they argue, democracies are inefficient.^[3]

Such a system could result in a wealth disparity or racial discrimination. Fierlbeck (1998) points out that such a result is not necessarily due to a failing in the democratic process, but rather, "because democracy is responsive to the desires of a large middle class increasingly willing to disregard the muted voices of economically marginalized groups within its own borders."^[4] The will of the democratic majority may not always be in the best interest of all citizens.

Lack of political education

Voters may not be educated enough to exercise their democratic rights prudently. Politicians may take advantage of voters' irrationality, and compete more in the field of public relations and tactics, than in ideology. While arguments against democracy are often taken by advocates of democracy as an attempt to maintain or revive traditional hierarchy and autocratic rule, many extensions have been made to develop the argument further.^[5] In Lipset's 1959 essay about the requirements for forming democracy, he found that almost all emerging democracies provided good education. However, education alone cannot sustain a democracy, though Caplan did note in 2005 that as people become educated, they think more like economists.^[6]

Benefits of a specialized society

One such argument is that the benefits of a specialized society may be compromised by democracy. As ordinary citizens are encouraged to take part in the political life of the country, they have the power to directly influence the outcome of government policies through the democratic procedures of voting, campaigning and the use of press. The result is that government policies may be more influenced by non-specialist opinions and thereby the effectiveness compromised, especially if a policy is very technically sophisticated and/or the general public inadequately informed. For example, there is no guarantee that those who campaign about the government's economic policies are themselves professional economists or academically competent in this particular discipline, regardless of whether they were well-educated. Essentially this means that a democratic government may not be providing the most good for the largest number of people. However, some have argued that this should not even be the goal of democracies because the minority could be seriously mistreated under that purported goal.^[7]

Political

Uncontested good

Additionally, some political scientists question the notion that majority rule is an "uncontested good."^[8] If we base our critique on the definition of democracy as governance based on the will of the majority, there can be some foreseeable consequences to this form of rule. For example, Fierlbeck (1998: 12) points out that the middle class majority in a country may decide to redistribute wealth and resources into the hands of those that they feel are most capable of investing or increasing them. Of course this is only a critique of a subset of types of democracy that primarily use majority rule.

Cyclical theory of government

Machiavelli put the idea that democracies will tend to cater to the whims of the people,^[9] who follow false ideas to entertain themselves, squander their reserves, and do not deal with potential threats to their rule until it is too late. He put forth a cyclical theory of government where monarchies tend to decay into aristocracies, which then decay into democracies, which subsequently decay into anarchy, then tyranny, then return to monarchy.^{[10][11]} An example is the timeline of France before, during, and after the Revolution until the last Bourbon Monarch.

However Machiavelli's definition of democracy was narrower than the current one. He hypothesized that a hybrid system of government incorporating facets of all three major types (monarchy, aristocracy and democracy) could break this cycle. Many modern democracies that have separation of powers are claimed to represent these kinds of hybrid governments. However, in modern democracies there is usually no direct correlation with Machiavelli's idea, because of weakening of the separation of powers, or erosion of the original function of the various branches. For example, the modern United States executive branch has slowly accumulated more power from the legislative branch, and the Senate no longer functions as a quasi-aristocratic body as was originally intended, since senators are now democratically elected.

Political Coase Theorem

Some have tried to argue that the Coase Theorem applies to political markets as well. Daron Acemoglu however, provides evidence to the contrary, claiming that the Coase Theorem is only valid while there are "rules of the game," so to speak, that are being enforced by the government. But when there is nobody there to enforce the rules for the government itself, there is no way to guarantee that low transaction costs will lead to an efficient outcome in democracies.^[12]

Political instability

More recently, democracy is criticized for not offering enough political stability. As governments are frequently elected on and off there tend to be frequent changes in the policies of democratic countries both domestically and internationally. Even if a political party maintains power, vociferous, headline grabbing protests and harsh criticism from the mass media are often enough to force sudden, unexpected political change. Frequent policy changes with regard to business and immigration are likely to deter investment and so hinder economic growth. For this reason, many people have put forward the idea that democracy is undesirable for a developing country in which economic growth and the reduction of poverty are top priority.^[5] However, Downs argued that the political market works much the same way as the economic market, and that there could potentially be an equilibrium in the system because of democratic process. However, he eventually argued that imperfect knowledge in politicians and voters prevented the reaching of that equilibrium.^[13]

Oppression by the majority

The constitutions of many countries have parts of them that restrict the nature of the types of laws that legislatures can pass. A fundamental idea behind some of these restrictions, is that the majority of a population and its elected legislature can often be the source of minority persecutions, such as with racial discrimination. For example, during the mid-1930s and mid-1970s in the democratic country of Sweden, the government forcibly sterilized thousands of innocent women. They were sterilized due to "'mental defects', or simply because they were of mixed race."^[14] A second example is when, in 2014 in Pakistan, "a Christian couple were burnt alive in a brick kiln by a mob for their alleged burning of the pages of Quran."^[15] This was followed by little police retaliation and a statement from the President of Pakistan stating that his government would protect the rights and interests of the Christian

community. Some countries throughout the world have judiciaries where judges can serve for long periods of time, and often serve under appointed posts. This is often balanced, however, by the fact that some trials are decided by juries. While many, like Wittman, have argued that democracies work much the same way as the free market and that there is competition among parties to prevent oppression by the majority, others have argued that there is actually very little competition among political parties in democracies due to the high cost associated with campaigning.^[16]

John T. Wenders, a professor of Economics at the University of Idaho writes:

"Freedom and democracy are different. In words attributed to Scottish historian Alexander Tytler: 'A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until a majority of voters discover that they can vote themselves largess out of the public treasury.' Democracy evolves into kleptocracy. A majority bullying a minority is just as bad as a dictator, communist or otherwise, doing so. Democracy is two coyotes and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch."^[17]

US President James Madison devoted the whole of Federalist No. 10 to a scathing critique of democracy and offered that republics are a far better solution, saying: "...democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths." Madison offered that republics were superior to democracies because republics safeguarded against tyranny of the majority, stating in Federalist No. 10: "the same advantage which a republic has over a democracy, in controlling the effects of faction, is enjoyed by a large over a small republic".

Elimination of the opposition

Various reasons can be found for eliminating or suppressing political opponents. Methods such as false flags, counterterrorism-laws,^[18] planting or creating compromising material and perpetuation of public fear may be used to suppress dissent. After a failed coup d'état over 110,000 people have been purged and nearly 40,000 have been imprisoned in Turkey, which is or was considered to be a democratic nation, during the 2016 Turkish purges.^{[19][20]}

Control of the opposition

Fake parties, phantom political rivals and "scarecrow" opponents may be used to undermine the opposition.^[21]

Philosophical

Mob rule

Plato's Republic presents a critical view of democracy through the narration of Socrates: "Democracy, which is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike."^[22] In his work, Plato lists 5 forms of government from best to worst. Assuming that *the Republic* was intended to be a serious critique of the political thought in Athens, Plato argues that only Kallipolis, an aristocracy led by the unwilling philosopher-kings (the wisest men), is a just form of government.

Plato rejected Athenian democracy on the basis that such democracies were anarchic societies without internal unity, that they followed citizens' impulses rather than pursuing the common good, that democracies are unable to allow a sufficient number of their citizens to have their voices heard, and that such democracies were typically run by fools. Plato attacked Athenian democracies for mistaking anarchy for freedom. The lack of coherent unity in Athenian democracy made Plato conclude that such democracies were a mere collection of individuals occupying a common space rather than a form of political organization.

Timocracy and oligarchy

According to Plato, other forms of government place too much focus on lesser virtues and degenerate into other forms from best to worst, starting with timocracy, which overvalues honour, then oligarchy, which overvalues wealth, which is followed by democracy. In democracy, the oligarchs, or merchant, are unable to wield their power effectively and the people take over, electing someone who plays on their wishes (for example, by throwing lavish festivals). However, the government grants the people too much freedom, and the state degenerates into the fourth form tyranny, or mob rule.^[23]

Role of republicanism

The Founding Fathers of the United States intended to address this criticism by combining democracy with republicanism. A constitution^[24] would limit the powers of what a simple majority can accomplish.^[25]

Moral decay

Some thinkers believe democracy will result in the people's distrust and disrespect of governments or religious sanctity. The distrust and disrespect pervades all parts of society: seniority and juniority; for example between a parent and a child, or a teacher and a student. This in turn is suggested to be the cause of frequent divorces, teenage crimes, vandalism, hooliganism and low education attainment in Western societies, all of which are lower in Asian societies. It could be argued that democracy follows essentially a doctrine of moral relativism, where no particular moral code is privileged by any form of reasonable evidence or argumentation to be true or more worthy; only what a particular group of people (that defines a particular nation) would agree to value, is to be given any value. This intrinsic property of the democratic thesis appears to conflict the very meaning of 'moral values' in a way that still demands serious scholarship and careful academic consideration.^[26]

Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche, as an opponent of Christianity, saw western democracy as connected to it, claiming that "the *democratic* movement is Christianity's heir" and denounced the democratic man for being inherently unable to "feel any shame for being unable to rise above" his desire "to satisfy a host of petty wants through the calculation of long-term self-interest". Nietzsche claimed that in a democracy "[w]hen the individual's highest and strongest instincts break forth with a passion, driving him far and above the average, beyond the lowlands of the herd conscience", "the moral perspective now considers how harmful or harmless an opinion, an emotional state, a will, a talent is to the community, to equality". "Exalted, self-directed spirituality, a will to solitude, even great powers of reason are felt as a danger". "Morality in Europe today is herd animal morality".

Maurras

Charles Maurras, an FRS member of the Action française movement, stated in a famous dictum "Democracy is evil, democracy is death". Maurras' concept of *politique naturelle* declared recognition of inescapable biological inequality and thereby natural hierarchies, and claimed that the individual is naturally subordinated to social collectivities such as the family, the society, and the state, which he claims are doomed to fail if based upon the "myth of equality" or "abstract liberty". Maurras criticized democracy as being a "government by numbers" in which quantity matters more over quality and prefers the worst over the best. Maurras denounced the principles of liberalism as described in The Social Contract by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and in Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as based upon the false assumption of liberty and the false assumption of equality. He claimed that the parliamentary system subordinates the national interest, or common good, to private interests of a parliament's representatives where only short-sighted interests of individuals prevail.

Lagardelle

French revolutionary syndicalist Hubert Lagardelle claimed that French revolutionary syndicalism came to being as the result of "the reaction of the proletariat against democracy", which he claimed was "the *popular form* of bourgeois dominance". Lagardelle opposed democracy for its universalism, and believed in the necessity of class separation of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie, as democracy did not recognize the social differences between them.

Michels

A major scholarly attack on the basis of democracy was made by German-Italian political scientist Robert Michels who developed the mainstream political science theory of the iron law of oligarchy in 1911.^[27] Michels argued that oligarchy is inevitable as an "iron law" within any organization as part of the "tactical and technical necessities" of organization and on the topic of democracy, Michels stated: "It is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy" and went on to state "Historical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measures that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy."^[27] Michels stated that the official goal of democracy of eliminating elite rule was impossible, that democracy is a façade legitimizing the rule of a particular elite, and that elite rule, that he refers to as oligarchy, is inevitable.^[27] Michels had formerly been a Marxist but became drawn to the syndicalism of Sorel, Eduoard Berth, Arturo Labriola, and Enrico Leone and had become strongly opposed parliamentary, legalistic, and bureaucratic socialism of social democracy and in contrast supported an activist, voluntarist, anti-parliamentarian socialism.^[28] Michels would later become a supporter of fascism upon Mussolini's rise to power in 1922, viewing fascism's goal to destroy liberal democracy in a sympathetic manner^[29]

Shach

Israeli politician Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach promoted Judaic law to be the natural governance for Jews and condemned democracy, he claimed that "Democracy as a machinery of lies, false notions, pursuit of narrow interests and deceit - as opposed to the Torah regime, which is based on seeking the ultimate truth". Shach criticized democracy for having no real goals, saying "The whole point of democracy is money. The one does what the other asks him to do in pursuit of his own interest, so as to be given what he himself asks for; and the whole purpose of the transaction is that each would get what they want

Administrative

Short-termism

Democracy is also criticised for frequent elections due to the instability of coalition governments. Coalitions are frequently formed *after* the elections in many countries (for example India) and the basis of alliance is predominantly to enable a viable majority, not an ideological concurrence.

This opportunist alliance not only has the handicap of having to cater to too many ideologically opposing factions, but it is usually short lived since any perceived or actual imbalance in the treatment of coalition partners, or changes to leadership in the coalition partners themselves, can very easily result in the coalition partner withdrawing its support from the government.

Democratic institutions work on consensus to decide an issue, which usually takes longer than a unilateral decision.

M. S. Golwalkar in his book Bunch of Thoughts describes democracy as, "is to a very large extent only a myth in practice...The high-sounding concept of "individual freedom" only meant the freedom of those talented few to exploit the rest."

Corruption within democratic governments

This is a simple form of appealing to the short term interests of the voters.

Another form is commonly called Pork barrel, where local areas or political sectors are given special benefits but whose costs are spread among all taxpayers.

Mere elections are just one aspect of the democratic process. Other tenets of democracy, like relative equality and freedom, are frequently absent in ostensibly democratic countries.

Moreover, in many countries, democratic participation is less than 50% at times, and it can be argued that election of individual(s) instead of ideas disrupts democracy

Volatility/unsustainability

The new establishment of democratic institutions, in countries where the associated practices have as yet been uncommon or deemed culturally unacceptable, can result in institutions that are not sustainable in the long term. One circumstance supporting this outcome may be when it is part of the common perception among the populace that the institutions were established as a direct result of foreign pressure.

Sustained regular inspection from democratic countries, however effortfull and well-meaning, are normally not sufficient in preventing the erosion of democratic practices. In the cases of several African countries, corruption still is rife in spite of democratically elected governments, as one of the most severe examples, Zimbabwe, is often perceived to have backfired into outright militarism.

Psychological and intellectual

Irrational or ill-informed voters

Dating back to Plato, intellectuals have often criticized the efficiency of democracy, based on the argument that voters are irrational or otherwise highly uninformed about many political issues. Some political theorists argue, for example, that fierce individualism in democratic societies, or the tragedy of the commons concept, prevents societies from making decisions that benefit them as a whole.

For example, voters may not be adequately educated to understand the long-term implications of public policy decisions, and are therefore unable to cast a vote to that effect. But given the right to vote, an uneducated man would certainly cast a vote which will more likely be wrong as affected by the personality or charisma of the candidate or some other superficial reason. An ordinary voter may also be lured into casting a vote on the basis of financial help or other short-termist promises.

Many conclude that public opinion can be discounted or neglected in policy-making because of little interest, involvement or knowledge of citizens!^[30]

Ilya Somin states that when the only incentive to acquire political knowledge is to make better voting decisions, remaining ignorant makes good sense as the perceived weight of ones vote is minuscule!^[31]

Manipulation or control of public opinion

Politicians and special interests have attempted to manipulate public opinion for as long as recorded history – this has put into question the feasibility of democratic government.^{[32][33]} Critics claim that mass media actually shapes public opinion, and can therefore be used to "control" democracy. Opinion polls before the election are under special criticism.^{[34][35]} Furthermore, the disclosure of reputation damaging material shortly before elections may be used to significantly manipulate public opinion. In the United States the FBI was criticized for announced that the agency would examine potentially incriminating evidence against Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server just 11 days before the election.^[36] It has been said that misinformation – such as fake news – has become central to elections around the world.^[36] In December 2016 United States' intelligence agencies have concluded that Russia worked "to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate Secretary [Hillary] Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency" – including passing material against the Democrats to WikiLeaks to discredit the election and favor Donald Trump.^[36] Social bots^[37] and other forms of online propaganda as well as search engine result algorithms^[38] may be used to alter the perception and opinion of voters. In 2016 Andrés Sepúlveda disclosed that he manipulated public opinion to rig elections in Latin America. According to him with a budget of \$600,000 he led a team of hackers that stole campaign strategies, manipulated social media to create false waves of enthusiasm and derision, and installed spyware in opposition offices to help Enrique Peña Nieto, a right-of-center candidate, win the election.^{[39][40]}

In the Turkish constitutional referendum, 2017 Turkish citizens, with 51.41% in favor, voted for a constitutional reform that would significantly cut down on the separation of powers, leaving the country to approach autocracy. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) made active use of their positions, the media and various methods to swing the country's

population in favor of the proposal. For instance prior many opposing journalists were arrested and organizations closed while the 'Yes' campaign were able to make use of state facilities and funding to organise rallies and campaign events.^[41]

Furthermore, seeking and using a foreign enemy as a scapegoat, unifying force and yielding of sympathy is considered a common political feature.^[30]

See also

- [Authoritarianism](#)
- [Chinese views of democracy](#)
- [Collective problem solving](#)
- [Dark Enlightenment](#)
- [Democracy: The God That Failed](#)
- [Elite theory](#)
- [End of history](#)
- [Free market fundamentalism](#)
- [Group decision-making](#)
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- [The Myth of the Rational Voter](#)
- [Neo-feudalism](#)
- [Liberal democracy § Issues and criticism](#)
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- [Online participation](#)
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- [Plato's political philosophy](#)
- [Plutocracy](#)
- [Post-democracy](#)
- [Post-truth politics](#)

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