

Democracy: Cohesion Between People and Government

“What political power could ever carry on the vast multitude of lesser undertakings which the American citizens perform every day, with the assistance of the principle of association,” wrote French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville when he visited the United States to observe American government. Tocqueville evaluates the American governance and decides that for democracy to be effective in America, citizens and organizations must actively participate in the government. After the American Revolution, representatives from each state met together to write the Constitution, an American standard for how democracy would function. Recently, however, the government has been less productive than in the past. Some have begun to question if democracy can remain an effective form of government in the current era. Democracy has the potential to be a flourishing style of government, but is predicated on the protection of individuals' rights and liberties, people's access to education and information, and actively participating citizens, all of which, they claim, are resting on shaky grounds.

First and foremost, individual liberties must be guaranteed to everyone in a democracy. This provides protection to minority groups whose rights may otherwise be construed upon. Civil liberties can be encroached upon during times of national crises. A recent example of this is the Patriot Act, which was enacted after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Even though reining in civil liberties seemed appropriate for national security reasons in the immediate aftermath, there have been unintended consequences whereby our basic civil rights have been infringed. The current debate

over the role of the National Security Agency is currently being adjudicated in federal courts because many people feel that their fourth amendment rights are being violated. The expansion and retraction of our rights must continually be examined, and the government must provide enforcement of these rights to all citizens to create a bond of trust between the people and the government.

Secondly, education should be available to all citizens. Policies must be transparent, information should be widely accessible, and diverse points of views should be encouraged. When citizens in a democracy are educated, democracy functions much more effectively. Across countries, education and democracy are highly correlated. In other words, those who receive poor education are less likely to be politically active. Also, less educated people are more vulnerable to propaganda and false information, leaving them susceptible to vote based on the influence of others. Citizens also deserve access to uncensored information. In regimes where information is tightly controlled, citizens are restricted from developing their own opinions and this limits their capacity to fully engage in the political process. It is the government's responsibility to provide basic education and ensure freedom of the press so that citizens are engaged and empowered to play a part in a successful democracy.

Finally, citizens must fulfill their civic duties in a democracy. These include voting and jury duty but can also be as simple as staying updated on current issues and obeying the law. Unfortunately, many of these simple duties are commonly overlooked. Even in the last presidential election in 2012, where there was a record voter turnout, only about 60% of registered voters participated. Thus, the voices of around 40% of people were

not heard in the ballot. Similarly, fulfilling civic responsibilities is necessary for democracy to work well. For example, jury duty has been difficult to implement. According to *Sun Sentinel*, in South Florida about two of every three people skip jury duty with or without an exemption. Jurors in South Florida have only a 41% response rate and 3,000 people must be requested to fill 1,000 jury spots because of the high rejection rate. This may be an extreme case, but the lack of commitment to civic responsibility is not unique to Florida. Complacency in civic involvement ultimately leads to erosion of democracy and makes our system stale and unsustainable.

The “lesser undertakings which the American citizens perform every day” are essential in a democracy because government cannot fulfill all the needs of citizens. In a successful democracy individual rights and liberties must be applied impartially, education and current information must be readily available, and the citizens must do their part to allow the law to be applied fairly. America has survived and struggled through adversities to become one of the longest living democracies in the world because of its strong commitment to the Constitution, impartial application of the law and unrestricted information from varying political opinions. Democracy is an active and dynamic process; it flourishes with self-examination and engagement of its citizens, but languishes with complacency.

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