



DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE

Rebuilding its future



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PHILIP KOTLER



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CHAPTER 1

WHY DEMOCRACY ISN'T WORKING WELL IN AMERICA OR ELSEWHERE—WHY HAVING ELECTIONS ISN'T ENOUGH

'People shouldn't be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people.'

Alan Moore, *V for Vendetta*

We live in an age when the majority of people say they want to live in a democracy. But still, many of the world's seven billion people are suffering from oppression, corruption, and dictatorship. They have a terribly low living standard and they don't feel safe or free to talk. They yearn for democracy and prosperity. We saw them start a freedom movement in Egypt on January 25, 2011. Even earlier, on December 10, 2010, demonstrations started in Tunisia precipitated by the high unemployment, food inflation, corruption, poor living conditions, and a lack of political freedom. The Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions then led to demonstrations in other Arab countries, including Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Syria, and Libya.

More recently the dictatorial regime and war in Syria has led more than four million refugees to leave Syria for Europe and other destinations where they could acquire a modicum of peace and opportunity. Their hearts beat for a place where their families can live normal lives and find work and freedom. Democracy is the system they yearn for and Europe and America come first in their minds.

America's experience with democracy began in 1776 with the start of the American Revolution when the American colonies broke away from Britain. The Continental Congress worked to design a new political system, a democracy. Some elements were drawn from the ancient Greek idea of democracy as practiced in Athens, where eligible citizens listened to orators and directly voted on various proposals to improve their lives and living standards. More than

2,000 years later, in early New England towns, citizens would meet to vote on various proposals affecting their community.

On July 4, 1786, the U.S. founders drafted and passed the Declaration of Independence that stated that men are endowed by their Creator with unalienable Rights to 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.' Almost a year later, on May 25, 1787, they met in the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall) in Philadelphia to begin to draft a Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation. They ended their work and adopted and signed the Constitution on September 17, 1787. The process of ratifying the Constitution began that day, and ended when the state of Rhode Island ratified it on May 29, 1790, three years later.

Then on December 15, 1791, the Congress added The Bill of Rights to the Constitution as the first ten amendments establishing freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the right to a fair and speedy trial. They were greatly influenced by the July 14, 1789 storming of the Bastille fortress and by the French Revolution dissolving the French Monarchy and replacing it with a system that would deliver to the people 'liberty, equality, and fraternity.' Many of us would prefer not to live than live without the values these words represent. The French Revolution was greatly influenced by our Declaration of Independence, and in turn influenced our passage of the Bill of Rights.

Two hundred years later, in May 1989, a million Chinese crowded into Tiananmen Square in central Beijing to call for greater democracy and to do away with the one-party rule of the Chinese Communist Party. The protesters kept up daily vigils for three weeks and on June 4, 1989, Chinese troops and security police stormed the Square and fired indiscriminately into the crowds. Many young students fled; others stoned the attacking troops and set fire to military vehicles. At least 300 protestors were killed and as many as 10,000 were arrested.

On March 19, 2003, the U.S. Government invaded Iraq on the grounds that the Saddam Hussein Government possessed weapons of mass destruction and that this posed a terror threat to peace-loving countries. Although no such weapons were found, George W. Bush in a speech to the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia on December 12, 2005, justified the invasion as our effort to help the Iraqis build democratic institutions such as a rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, a free economy, and freedom to worship. In retrospect, implanting democracy in a desert country appears a naïve aspiration and more a cover to disguise the real reason for the invasion, namely to protect our need for oil from the Middle East.

On August 8, 2013, public commemorations took place in Myanmar (Burma) to mark the 25th anniversary of uprisings that launched their pro-democracy movement. For over 20 years, Aung San Suu Kyi was kept under house arrest by the military to prevent her in leading a pro-democracy movement. After her release, she stirred up the pro-democracy movement. In November 2015, her party, the National League for Democracy, or NLD, won more than 80% of the contested parliamentary seats. Aung San is now the most important person in Myanmar and she is announcing new policies to build a better life for more people.

Why do I mention these episodes? They show the power and passion for the idea of democracy in different parts of the world. Is democracy the right system for every country in the world? No, not every country is ready for democracy. But when enough people believe in the idea of freedom and popular voting, such a country is ready for democracy.

WHAT QUALIFIES A COUNTRY AS BEING A DEMOCRACY?

There are probably more countries claiming to be a democracy than the actual number of democracies. In one study, the following 73 countries were listed as democracies:

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jamaica, Kiribati, North Korea, South Korea, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Micronesia, Mongolia, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Palau, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Thailand, Taiwan, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay.¹

One needs to be suspicious of some of the countries included in this list. How did North Korea get on this list? Maybe these countries run elections, however honest or dishonest they are. But it should be noted that Russia is not on this list and yet it has elections.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) prepared a much better analysis of democracy. The EIU measures the extent of democracy in 167 countries based

on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories measuring pluralism, civil liberties, and political culture.² The EIU categorized these 167 countries into four regime types: *Full democracies*, *flawed democracies*, *hybrid regimes*, and *authoritarian regimes*. Only 24 countries were identified as full democracies and they covered 12.5% of the world's population. Flawed democracies numbered 52 countries which covered 35.5% of the world's population. Full and flawed democracies operate in about 76 countries of the world.

Freedom House is another source of measures on how many democracies there are and it distinguishes between free and partly free democracies.³ Their discouraging finding is that the world is experiencing an eight-year decline in political rights and civil liberties. They saw an abridgement of freedom and democracy in such countries as Egypt, Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Venezuela. Their governments have either been taken over by military coups or authoritarian leaders bent on destroying the opposition and perpetuating their power and oppression.

Unfortunately, many democracies around the world function poorly. Democracies in Latin America have to contend with a high level of poverty, high income inequality, and rampant corruption. In Brazil, the executive branch and legislative branch have difficulty getting broad agreement given that there are 13 political parties. President Rousseff has to build continuous coalitions to get anything done. She created at great cost a cabinet of 39 ministries to please the various parties. Raising political money has led to a major corruption scandal involving Petrobras, the large oil company. Much has to be done to clean up democracy in many of the world's democracies.⁴

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY ANYWAY?

Democracy comes from the Greek words 'demos' (people) and 'krates' (rule), which literally means 'people power.' Democracy is essentially a political system where the ultimate power lies with the people. It lies in their power to vote for or against particular laws, rules, and regulations, and the freely rendered majority opinion determines the outcome. The seed idea of democracy is self-government and majority rule.

Intrinsic to democracy is the idea of one person, one vote! If one person can cast more votes than another person, the system of democracy is corrupted. Consider this. In a monarchy, only one person can vote, namely the King. Everyone else's vote is irrelevant. In an aristocracy, the aristocrats have more

voting power than the plebeians, even though there are far fewer aristocrats than ordinary citizens. In a plutocracy, the rich have much more voting power than the average citizens. This can happen if the rich use their money to influence the media to influence average citizens to favor certain candidates over others. The Koch brothers are plutocrats in that they have declared that they are ready to spend almost a billion dollars to get their favorite conservative candidates elected. They have a whole plan to infiltrate American state and city legislatures with legislators who will represent their ultra-conservative views. Sheldon Adelson, another plutocrat, is unrestrained in spending his money to get conservative politicians elected.

The source of this voting corruption of democracy lies in the lack of restrictions on campaign finance.⁵ The big setback was the decision of the Supreme Court in the *Citizens United* case that recognized companies as 'persons' who could spend unlimited amounts on political campaigns and candidates: 'Hostile forces in Congress, the U.S. Supreme Court and state legislatures are rolling back decades' worth of progress on campaign finance reform.'⁶

Clearly, democracy has some design flaws. But as Winston Churchill famously said, 'Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the other forms that have been tried from time to time.' It is the only political system with moral legitimacy. Its major virtue is that it has the capacity to be 'self-correcting.' Inept leaders and policies can be replaced.

MOST DEMOCRACIES ARE REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACIES, NOT DIRECT DEMOCRACIES

A *direct democracy* exists when citizens gather in (say) a small New England community to discuss and cast their votes on various local issues with the majority vote winning. The community would run meetings usually attended by all citizens. This was a frequent feature in the early Colonial and post-Colonial days of the U.S. Today it takes place notably in California where many referendums are proposed by citizens and citizens have a chance to vote on them.

But in larger, more populous areas where there are many issues, it is more expedient for the citizens to elect a set of representatives to vote on the issues for the citizens. This is variously called an *indirect democracy*, a *representative democracy*, or a *republic*. In fact, the U.S. is more a Republic than a Democracy in its original sense. The citizens may not have the time or aptitude to study and vote

on the various issues. They elect candidates they trust to study the issues and vote for their interests. The framers of our Constitution shared a fear of direct elections. Elbridge Gerry of the Massachusetts delegation said: ‘The evils we experience flow from the excess of democracy.’ Fellow delegate Virginia Governor Edmund Randolph said: ‘The people do not want [lack] virtue, but are the dupes of pretended patriots. In tracing these evils to their origin every man had found it in the turbulence and follies of democracy.’

The framers knew that indirect elections—voters electing representatives who voted on issues—was the key to overcoming this problem. The citizens would vote to choose among the candidates who were running for office, rather than on the issues themselves. Still, citizens retain the ultimate control because they have the opportunity every two years to re-vote on the representatives they want. They will vote to replace disappointing representatives with new representatives who come closer to matching their issue preferences.

This system of representative democracy raises an interesting question on where these representatives owe their interest. Consider a bill that proposes expanding this year’s military budget by 10%. A representative needs to decide in whose interest he or she should vote. There are three possibilities:

- 1 The representative can vote for what he or she perceives to be the majority opinion in the district.
- 2 Or vote for what he or she thinks is in the best interest of the country.
- 3 Or vote for what his or her party favors.

Many observers side with (1), that the representative should reflect the majority opinion in the district. That’s why the district voted for the representative. If the representative consistently votes differently, he or she will be voted out of office.

Other observers want the representative to be a statesman. What is best for the nation? The representative may feel that the country’s military budget is big enough and vote against increasing the military budget.

Still others who are more cynical will expect the representative to vote for what is in the representative’s best interest. If the party pressures the representative to vote for a 10% increase in the military budget, the representative will vote for it. Every representative needs to get re-elected and it is the party that will help him or her with the finances to get re-elected. This third way of voting is probably the most frequent. It explains the lack of statesmen among our politicians.

The critic Michael Moore thinks that American citizens have lost the right to vote for what the majority favors. A poll might show that 80% of citizens want the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010. But under our system, some active

House Representatives may keep attacking and emasculating the ACA until it no longer works or collapses.

The Idea of a Representative Democracy Evolved Over Time

Wherever people live together, they need to have political organization. They need to decide how much liberty and how much authority to accept. At one extreme, people can have extreme liberty—minimal government—but this might lead to anarchy and the survival of the strongest. At the other extreme, the people might accept a supreme leader or a dictator where individual interests are submerged. At what point must individual rights be curbed to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people? The public and the government must determine what the proper relationship is between the state and its citizens.

Political theory started with Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece. Plato had the view that a good government would promulgate an austere code in diet, dress, and amusements. Plato did not favor universal suffrage and believed that only capable and informed citizens should have a right to vote.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) wrote insightfully and systematically on the different political systems. The Romans contributed greatly to the literature on how to run a parliamentary system under the rule of law. During the Dark Ages, most European populations were ruled by kings and tribal leaders. The King was seen to have the right to rule through God, not through the consent of the governed. Kings varied in their views on how to use their power.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), the first deep political thinker since Aristotle, became famous for advising kings on how to treat their subjects in his book, *The Prince*. As the founder of modern political science, Machiavelli focused on the art of government rather than on developing a theory of the state. He considered such questions as whether a Prince should be liberal or mean, whether he should be loved or feared, and whether he should keep promises or not. He concluded that the Prince should seek to be seen as liberal but have a reputation for meanness. He would be more effective if he is feared than loved. Machiavelli drew a picture of people as fickle, false, and covetous and the Prince should deal with a strong hand.

In the 16th Century, the Protestant revolt took place to challenge the Catholic Church and its Popes. **Martin Luther** (1483–1546), **John Calvin** (1509–1564),

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and other religious leaders placed their faith in reading the Bible rather than in the pronouncements of the Pope. The doctrine arose that people could resist tyranny, not by the masses rebelling, but by the efforts of their magistrates or assemblies.

In the 17th Century, new rumblings occurred about democratic ideas. Political thinkers considered the concept of liberty, the nature of popular consent, the social contract as a basis for the state, and the right of revolution against an oppressive government. **John Milton** (1608–1674) wrote about the freedom of the press. He viewed rulers as the agent of the people. He said that their power should be limited by laws and that the people are sovereign and liberty is their birthright. People should have a wide sphere of activity unrestricted by government. They should have the opportunity to work out their own destiny in their own way.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) held a different view in *Leviathan*. He favored divine authority because he viewed men as bestial in a state of nature and they needed a common power to overawe and control them into keeping their agreements. He favored a ruler with absolute power and people should surrender all their rights to the sovereign.

John Locke (1632–1704), in *Two Treatises of Government*, embraced a liberal view. He attacked the idea of a divine prerogative and even justified the right of revolution against an oppressive government. He developed a systematic discussion of the origin, character, and scope of government. He said that the laws of nature indicate the rules for the conduct of men. Men must receive equal treatment under the law. They have the natural rights to life, liberty, and property. They form a contract whose purpose is to preserve and protect these inalienable rights. Government was the agency of the collective will and it could be called to account if it oversteps. Locke favored majority rule and the separation of powers. He maintained, however, that the legislative branch of government should rule supreme.

Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755) wrote *The Spirit of Laws* in 1748, advocating the principle of separation of government powers into legislative, executive, and judicial to preserve the equilibrium of government. He warned against any two branches of government being under the same leadership.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), in *Of the Social Contract, Principles of Political Right*, held a natural view of man, who he sees as coming together to form a social contract. He held that men could revoke the social contract if it was oppressing their natural rights. He held that the right of revolution was

an inalienable right. In many ways, he was the apostle of the French Revolution and his writings led to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man.

These Ideas Come to America

So many of the previous ideas came to America and fortified the idea of declaring independence from Britain and shaping a new political system and Constitution. **Thomas Paine** (1737–1809) in *Common Sense* popularized the idea of popular sovereignty and the right of revolution. Locke's ideas greatly influenced Thomas Jefferson, who was the main author of the Constitution.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) held that the role of government is to guarantee the rights of citizens and the consent of the governed. He wanted citizens to have the right to criticize government and those who govern. He believed in:

- 1 Equal and exact justice.
- 2 Rights of election.
- 3 Majority rule.
- 4 Guarantee of civil liberties.
- 5 Subordination of military to civil authority.
- 6 Economical administration.

He believed in the importance of local government. He also believed in the periodic revision of the Constitution to meet the changing conditions in the world. He believed in the separation of Church and State.

Jefferson's nemesis was **John Adams** (1735–1826), who died the same year as Jefferson. Adams distrusted the masses and defended inequality among men and advocated a government by an aristocracy based on birth, education, and wealth.

A more populist view of American government finally came with the election of **Andrew Jackson** (1767–1845). Jackson extended suffrage, abolished property and religious qualifications for holding office, aimed his appeal mostly at the voters rather than the party officials, and favored popular ratification of state constitutions.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), although British, contributed important ideas about a democratic society. He wanted a nation to be 'a free marketplace for ideas.' He valued freedom and said that people should be free to say and think what they want. Citizens should pick the rulers and not let the few tell the many what to do.

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All said, the past two centuries have shown notable progress in human rights and political organization. Political privileges of birth and class have tended to disappear. The rule of law has grown stronger governing personal rights as defined by the Bill of Rights. The U.S. Constitution remains strong as the ultimate document defining American democracy.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR BENEFITS CLAIMED FOR A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY?

The first major benefit is the maximization of individual liberty. This includes the freedoms of association, speech, voting, and uncensored media access in addition to other basic human rights. The U.N. Commission on Human Rights stated that no society without basic civil liberties can be classified as a democracy. It is essential that people can express their views and enjoy assemblage and debates to build consensus.

The second major benefit is that all citizens have legal rights to a speedy trial and an impartial judge and jury. They are given an opportunity to defend themselves and if convicted, they will not be subject to torture or inhumane treatment.

The third benefit is that a democracy is likely to experience less internal violence, fewer wars, and less mass murder by governments. This leads to more stability and gives the citizens a chance to change their representatives with peaceful means rather than through violence.

Clearly, the first sign of moving to a more authoritarian regime is that the leader or party starts abridging civil liberties of freedom to assemble or speak or vote or have access to media conveying many opinions about nation events and government decisions.

Fortunately, the U.S. still operates as a full democracy with its civil liberties intact. The U.S. has been in the forefront of advocating the spread of democracy, but with limited success. It tried to create democratic governments in Iraq and Afghanistan after its military intervention only to realize how tribal these countries are and their lack of readiness for full democracy. Some might even argue that countries such as these would achieve faster economic growth under a benign authoritarian regime than under a gridlocked democratic system. Look at China's 15 years of rapid economic growth and astonishing reduction

of poverty under a Communist one-party system. Contrast this to India's slower rate of growth under the regime of a democratic political system. Needless to say, the U.S. accepts the authoritarian systems of many of its allies in the Middle East because economic self-interest takes priority over spreading democracy to countries that are not ready for it.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM AND A PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM?

The U.S. representative democracy is called a presidential system where every four years the citizens cast their vote for the President. The U.S. consists of a two-party system where each party proposes a candidate. Citizens choose between the two opposing party candidates, the winner being the one who receives the most electoral votes (this is not necessarily the popular vote, to be explained later). The new President can run again four years later but cannot serve more than two full terms.

The citizens also vote for their Representatives and Senators. Many will be elected from a different party than the President's party. This leads to a check and balance system where the President and the Congress can be at odds. The U.S. has a bicameral legislature with each state allowed to vote for a number of House Representatives that will reflect the State's size and a Senator who might be up for election or re-election. Today the U.S. House of Representatives has 435 members and the U.S. Senate has 100 Senators, given that there are 50 states and each is entitled to two Senators.

The national elections take place every two years. In the past, campaigning activity would usually start up about six months before the election. At least there would be 18 months of no electioneering. Today we have permanent campaigning. As soon as House Members are elected, they have to think of lining up supporters and donors who will finance their campaign for re-election in two years. It is estimated that a House Member might spend as much as one-third of his or her time raising money and making friends. At least Senators who are elected for six years are free from active campaigning for re-election for a much longer time.

Today's candidates are guided by marketing and public relations (PR) people and consultants. They need to become a brand. They cannot let any opposition members look good. The Republican Mitch McConnell said just after Barack

Obama won in 2008, 'our number one goal is to make Barack Obama a one-term President.'

The cost of campaigning in the U.S. presidential system keeps growing. The 2016 cost estimate is that politicians and political groups will spend between \$7–\$10 billion on this election. Billionaires Charles and David Koch plan to spend almost \$1 billion to influence the election. This is the highest cost yet in carrying on a U.S. presidential election. Much of the higher cost is due to the Supreme Court's 5 to 4 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision in 2010, recognizing a company as a person and opening up floodgates of money to go to PACs and Super PACs. In addition, this election attracted more presidential candidates and many more billionaires to fund their preferred candidates.

What is a PAC and a Super PAC?

A PAC is a federal political action committee that raises money to defeat or elect candidates (Senators, Representatives, Presidents) to federal office. PACs must register with the Federal Election Commission. PACs may receive up to \$5,000 from an individual, another PAC or party committee each calendar year. PACs can give \$5,000 to a candidate committee per election cycle (primary, general, or special). They can also give up to \$15,000 each year to any national party committee and up to \$5,000 annually to any other PAC. Corporations, unions, and associations cannot make direct contributions or expenditures in connection with any federal election. However, they may set up PACs that 'can only solicit contributions from individuals associated with sponsoring organization.' Examples include a Microsoft PAC, a Teamsters PAC, or a National Rifle Association PAC. PACs have been influencing elections and campaigns since they first appeared in 1943.

Citizens can contribute money directly to parties and candidates as well. Individuals can give a maximum of \$30,800 to a national political party committee such as the Republican National Committee and to an individual candidate in the amount of \$2,500 per election.

Super PACs first emerged as a result of the Supreme Court's 5–4 *Citizens United* decision in January 2010. The Court defined corporations as persons that have the right to free speech. It gave corporations and unions the right to raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions, and associations and to spend unlimited sums for or against political candidates. However, Super PACs are prohibited from donating money directly to political candidates. They cannot coordinate their efforts with campaigns or political parties. Super PACs are required to report their donors to the Federal Election Commission on a monthly or semiannual basis.

Technically, Super PACs must be 'operated exclusively to promote social welfare.' Political activity is allowed but must not be the organization's 'primary' mission. Yet the current Inland Revenue Services (IRS) commissioner said that groups could spend up to 49% of revenues on political activity and still keep their tax exemption.

As of February 1, 2016, 2,186 groups organized as Super PACs have reported total receipts of \$353,533,929 and total independent expenditures of \$140,079,965 in the 2016 cycle.

Presidential systems are found in at least 48 countries of the world, with many variations. One of the features of a presidential system is that the voters can never unelect the whole government with one stroke.

Let's turn to parliamentary systems. These systems can unelect the whole government with one stroke. Parliamentary systems are found in 60 countries, including all the British colonies and many countries in Europe and elsewhere.⁷ In a parliamentary system, the voters vote for a party more than a person. When a party wins, it appoints its leader who is called the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister can be removed by legislators in a vote of no confidence. Or the voters can elect a different party at the next election.

The parliamentary system first developed in England in the 1700s. It consisted of a House of Commons and a House of Lords. Today in the U.K. there are two major parties — the Conservatives and Labour — and several smaller parties. At an election, one party will receive the majority of votes and form the government. The head of the winning party becomes the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and the party appoint the other ministers. The party remains in power until either a re-election date is set or there is a no-confidence vote in Parliament. In the latter case, the party has to schedule an election to take place at a certain date, and the campaigning of the parties can begin. Usually campaigning will last for 30 days and the winning party takes over.

There are at least three alleged benefits with a parliamentary system:

- 1 Elections can be called outside of the normal schedule when Parliament reports a no-confidence vote in the majority party.
- 2 The majority party can get new legislation passed faster and easier than in the 'grid-locked' presidential system.
- 3 The majority party is more flexible about shifting course sensing the pressure of the voters.

My conclusion is that the U.S. needs some of the elements of a parliamentary system so that if a great proportion of voters feel that the country is going nowhere and want to consider throwing out the present ruling party and starting fresh, it would have a chance to do this. Under the present presidential system, a great number of legislators continue running the country whoever wins the presidency. There is no chance to throw everyone out and start afresh! We need to realize that there is no chance to move to a parliamentary system without changing the U.S. Constitution.

In a sense, our framers wanted the power in the system to be fragmented. The original founders were largely rich people: Landowners, manufacturers, merchants, shipbuilders, and bankers. They wanted to create the semblance of democracy but without giving too much power to the masses. Slaves and women couldn't vote. The framers favored a republic to a democracy. In fact, the word 'democracy' isn't mentioned in the Declaration of Independence nor in the Constitution. Control and legislation would largely be in the hands of Representatives who are more likely to protect the interests of the wealthier propertied class. Although Representatives and Senators would be elected by popular vote, the Supreme Court would not be subject to popular vote.

Checks and balances were built into the system to prevent legislation being carried too far by the popular vote. The framers, while not wanting a monarchy because of their terrible experience with Britain, still wanted a country ruled by meritorious people rather than just a popular vote. Even as a representative democracy, voting periods cannot bring about a whole new group of leaders. The President is voted on every four years, one-third of the Senate is voted on every two years, all of the House of Representatives are voted on every two years, and the judiciary is appointed for life.

Even Senators were originally to be appointed by the state legislatures, not directly by the voters. Finally, in 1913, the 17th Amendment was passed turning over the election of Senators to the voters in each state.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH FOR A COUNTRY TO RUN ELECTIONS

Let's establish that running elections would be one sign that a country might be a democracy. But let's add some additional conditions:

- Every citizen can vote.
- Citizens can assemble and are free to speak and exchange views, including the chance to organize a peaceful protest.

- The country has a free press so that newspapers, radio and TV, and digital media are free to report news and opinions.
- Citizens are free to have any religious beliefs they choose.
- Citizens are free to start businesses or choose the businesses they want to work in if jobs are available.

Each condition is subject to further qualifying. Consider 'every citizen can vote.' In a real democracy, it would be one citizen, one vote. There would be no stuffing of ballot boxes with false names or the names of deceased people. There would be no one paying money on the side to voters if they voted for a certain candidate. There would be no threatening-looking persons hanging around polling booths who look like they would harm you if you didn't vote in the right way. There would not be very short hours for casting a vote, or voting centers that are far and difficult to reach.

Consider 'freedom of assembly.' Can the government stop certain groups from assembling because they have radical ideas, or form gangs, or carry a lot of guns? Can the government put a limit on how many people can gather to protest a certain issue?

Consider 'freedom of the press.' Are the press members sufficiently diverse in their opinions so that citizens hear a range of views? Is the press permitted to say bad things about the country's president or his or her political party? How should the country handle press members who distort the truth or even lie in quoting their findings? One of today's major issues is to protect the Internet's 'net neutrality.' Internet service providers such as Big Cable and Big Telecom wanted to slow down websites they dislike or disagree with in the interests of giving faster access time to businesses over citizens. Fortunately, the FCC proposed new rules protecting net neutrality for years to come.

Consider 'freedom of religion.' Are people relatively free to change their religious affiliation or even to decide to be an agnostic or atheist? Does any religious group have considerable power to influence legislation in their favor?

Finally, consider 'freedom to start a business or join a business.' Are citizens free to move to other cities in search of a best job? Are they free to choose the work they want to do, including starting their own business if they can find the capital?

WHAT DO MOST PEOPLE WANT FROM THEIR SOCIETY?

What constitutes a good society? This question would come up if a group has gathered to design a new society or a utopia. The agreement would be high on the following items:

- We would want to have a good chance for decent and safe food, clothing, and shelter.
- We would hope to have good health care and facilities.
- We would hope to benefit from a good educational system.
- We would want to be able to gather with others and speak freely.
- We would be free to worship where and how we wish.
- We would want free and honest reporting of news and opinion.
- We would want good opportunities for entertainment and safe travel.
- We would want a government that works well, gets things done, and is trying to improve life for all of us.

WHAT WOULD CITIZENS WANT FROM THEIR POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS?

What would citizens want to see in their political institutions? If we polled citizens about the features they would want in their political institutions, the following would draw high agreement:

- We want to have regular elections where we can express whether we are satisfied with the President and his party and individual legislators.
- We want the election period to be short and without much money being spent by the candidates to influence voting or to slur opponents and we would not want powerful groups to spend excessive amounts of money to influence or buy votes.
- We would prefer that political candidates get their campaign money from the government rather than raising funds without limit from wealthy donors.
- We want affairs to be settled by the rule of law and the existence of legal precedents.
- We want Congress and the Courts to respect property rights and human rights.
- We want a Congress that is able to pass needed laws efficiently and fairly.
- We want a government where the Executive branch respects the Legislative branch and the reverse is true.
- We want an efficient and fair court system where each case is decided quickly on its merits and not on one ideology or another.
- We want a government that respects our right to privacy while balancing it with our needs for security.
- We want a federal government that respects states' rights but also states that are willing to work with other states to get some uniformity in our laws.
- We want a federal government that defines a thoughtful foreign policy and aids industry in growing their foreign business.
- We want a federal government that builds national strength and a high level of national security.

The U.S. needs to recognize how far it is from obtaining these simple wished-for arrangements. There is a two-party system sworn to two opposite ideologies and not willing to work with each other and seek compromises. There is great tension between the White House and Congress, stunting the President's ability to lead. The Supreme Court is ideologically divided, where many of the nine votes are predictable whatever the case to be a 5-to-4 decision. The electioneering period runs much too long and is too expensive for the candidates. Less than 55% of the eligible citizens vote. There are lobbying systems where most of the legislation is influenced by huge amounts of money swaying the legislators to vote a certain way. A gerrymandered system ensures that voting districts are reshaped to increase the chance that any incumbent legislator will be elected again and again.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO IMPROVE THE OPERATION OF OUR DEMOCRACY?

In 2015, the League of Women Voters (LWV) cited three problems that are weakening democracy:

- Congressional districts are drawn and gerrymandered to benefit self-serving politicians.
- Access to voting is being limited and denied.
- 'Dark money' is infiltrating elections so voters don't even know who is bankrolling the political messages that we see and hear.

The League said: 'We should not stand by as our democracy falls into the iron-fisted grip of billionaires, special interests, and the political machines they fund.' The League, along with other groups, raise money to correct these problems and make democracy work better.⁸

HOW DO CITIZENS VIEW GOVERNMENT?

We have to also ask how citizens view their government. Americans are prone to boast about American exceptionalism and American democracy. This has led America to believe that the rest of the world admires its system and that America holds a duty to bring democracy and freedom to every country. Iraq and Afghanistan are said to be invaded to bring about freedom

in those countries, and America preaches its system to Africa and Asia, totally ignoring the differences in their cultures and beliefs.

These faults are becoming visible to Americans and the rest of the world. Citizens may experience incompetent government workers and bureaucracies; a judiciary that delays or fails to dispense justice; a system of continuous clashes or gridlock between the President and the Congress or between the two major parties; a police force that is abusive; local politicians who use the political system to feather their own nest; or a government that doesn't address the main problems such as immigration or expensive medical care or a deteriorating infrastructure but instead kicks these problems down the road. Americans cannot be pleased with their public school students' low ratings in science and math compared to students in other leading countries; or that their health system costs significantly more than other countries' health systems without any better results. The U.S. ranks 49th in life expectancy and 173 in infant mortality. No wonder the Pew Research Center pointed out that our citizens' belief in American exceptionalism had declined ten points since 2011.⁹

The trouble with believing in American exceptionalism is that it neglects infrastructure and taxes, and meanwhile much is spent on projecting power abroad in an ever expanding defense budget. The priorities appear wrong, and from time to time voices arise to plead that foreign involvement be reduced in favor of focusing on the nation's economy and American society. The argument is that if American society was improved, this would contribute more to the view of genuine American leadership and exceptionalism than just spending so much money on broadcasting an image of U.S. power overseas.

America has to recognize that world leadership is today being shared with a number of countries, including China, India, Russia, and others. It has a poor history of collaborating with other countries on international agreements such as regulating pollution (by not signing the Kyoto Treaty), refusing to strengthen the ban on biological weapons, and not joining the ban on land mines or the use of napalm and cluster bombs. If America is going to be part of the international community, it can't continue to exempt itself from following the moral and legal standards held in common by many other nations.¹⁰ It needs to work more collaboratively with other strong nations rather than alone.

Consider the poster put out by the Occupy Wall Street group that provocatively raised the following points:

- In the Nordic countries—Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland—education is tuition-free including at universities. Nordic governments go further and give a monthly allowance to help university students cover their living expenses. Although this

- results in higher taxes, Nordic students are better educated. Their free education reduces social inequality and benefits both individuals and society in the long run.
- In the U.S., college students incur crippling debt to become educated and they enter their work life burdened by this debt.
 - The U.S. has more people in prison than in any other country and spends more money on its prisons than on its college students.
 - The rich own most of the politicians, who are able to fool young men into fighting in military engagements.¹¹

The Occupy Wall Street group forgot to mention how many guns are found in the U.S., how much sugar, salt, and fat is found in most of our food products, and how litigious and costly our judicial system is.

So how exceptional is America? A 2016 report prepared by U.S. News & World Report, WPP's BAV Consulting and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania named the 'Best Countries' in the world, based on ratings in 24 categories. Germany was first, Canada second, the United Kingdom third, with the U.S. ranking fourth, followed by Sweden fifth.¹² Another study, by scholars from the Harvard Business School and Duke University, asked Americans which country they would prefer to live in. They were shown the income distribution of country A and B (and were not told the countries, which were actually Sweden and the U.S.). About 90% of Americans preferred to live in country A—the one with the Swedish income distribution!¹³

It is true that the American brand and mix of democracy and capitalism deliver many great outcomes—the U.S. is the richest and most powerful country in the world with a high standard of living. But there are many questionable features that we will examine in the next ten chapters.

NOTES

- 1 See: www.answers.com/Q/How_many_countries_have_democratic_form_of_government. (accessed 03.03.16).
- 2 See: Wikipedia, 'Democracy Index,' March 16, 2015.
- 3 See: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2014#.VQbwtI7F-PZ>, (accessed 03.03.16).
- 4 Bello, 'Cleaning up Latin American Democracy,' *The Economist*, March 28, 2015.
- 5 L. Lessig, *Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress – and a Plan to Stop It* (Hachette, New York, 2011).
- 6 See: www.publicintegrity.org/2012/10/18/11527/citizens-united-decision-and-why-it-matters (accessed 03.03.16).

- 7 See: www.semipresidentialism.com/?p=195 (accessed 03.03.16).
- 8 Mailed letter from Elisabeth MacNamara, President of the League of Women Voters in 2015.
- 9 C. M. Blow, 'Who Loves America?', *New York Times*, February 23, 2015.
- 10 See: J. R. Orenstein, *Fixing American Government* (Sun Coast Digital Press, Satasota, FL, 2015).
- 11 Occupy Posters: owsposters.tumblr.com.
- 12 A. Boulton, 'UK Named the Third Best Country in the World', *Daily Telegraph*, January 20, 2016.
- 13 N. D. Kristof, 'Why Let the Rich Hoard All the Toys', *New York Times*, October 3, 2012.