



The Principles of Democracy

The word *democracy* comes from two Greek words: *demos* = people and *kratos* = rule. Therefore, the word means “rule by the people,” sometimes called “popular sovereignty,” and can refer to direct, participatory, and representative forms of rule by the people. Today the word has a positive meaning throughout most of the world—so much so that, to connect themselves with this positive image, even some political systems with little or no rule by the people are called democratic.

The following analysis uses a simple model of the key elements of democracy as it exists today:

1. Citizen involvement in decision making
2. A system of representation
3. The rule of law
4. An electoral system—majority rule
5. Some degree of equality among citizens
6. Some degree of liberty or freedom granted to or retained by citizens
7. Education

The classic response to elitist theories is to argue that (1) efficiency is not as important as the positive influence of participation on the citizen and (2) the average citizen is probably capable of understanding most issues. The elitist theorists say, in effect, that classical representative democracy does not—even cannot—work in the modern world. Their opponents argue that a truly informed citizenry is even more important than in the past and that representative democracy can work even though new problems make it more difficult to achieve. But they also argue that people need to be actively encouraged to participate and given the means of informing themselves regarding the issues.

Pluralism

Closely related to the elitist view is pluralism, in which the political system is composed of interest groups competing for power with none strong enough to dominate. As long as competition exists and is fair, no single interest can gain too much power; one interest will always be held in check by the other interests. Advocates contend that pluralism is the best system for a representative democracy, because pluralism protects citizens from too great a centralization of power and allows all the diverse interests within a society to be expressed. In the United States today, pluralism connects neatly to the growth of interest in multiculturalism (structuring society around competing and cooperating cultures). But it is important to note that pluralism is about distribution of power and multiculturalism is about toleration of difference.

Most modern societies are pluralistic in that they are composed of a variety of groups based on characteristics such as wealth, race, gender, ethnic or national origin, profession, and religion. Defenders of pluralism argue that this diversity should be recognized and protected. Thus pluralism includes both a positive awareness of the group basis of most contemporary societies and the belief that democracy needs to incorporate that awareness. Pluralists in the United States assert that pluralism supplements the system of checks and balances enshrined in the U.S. Constitution with additional checks on power. Outside the United States, pluralists argue that competition among groups is often the primary means of limiting centralized power.

Critics of pluralism make two major points. First, according to the antipluralists, the only thing of interest to the competing elites is staying in office; all values are secondary to this overriding goal. Thus the suggestion that pluralism protects freedom is false. Pluralism is a protection for freedom, or any other value, only as long as that value is to the political benefit of the competing groups. Second, antipluralists note that the supposedly competing groups cooperate to maintain the present system and their positions of power within it. As a result pluralism and the groups that compete within it are obstacles to change, particularly in trying to avoid the emergence of new groups that might successfully compete for power.

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bureaucracies. Interest groups do not merely consult with government but are fully integrated into the process of policy making and implementation. As one writer put it, corporatism means the “negotiation of policy between state agencies and interest organisations arising from the division of labour in society, where policy agreements are implemented through the collaboration of the interest organisations and their willingness and ability to secure the compliance of their members.”²

The theory of corporatism has had a great impact on how interest organizations perceive their relations with one another and with government. Although corporatism has not significantly reduced competition among interest groups, it has provided the theoretical basis for their taking a more active role in actually developing policy in cooperation with government bureaucracies.

Critics of corporatism argue that it simply justifies greater power on the part of unelected people, that the similarity of the concept in fascism is no accident, and that corporatism explicitly denies the power of citizens to control their own lives in a democracy. Critics of elitism, pluralism, and corporatism often suggest that more, not less, direct participation on the part of the citizens is the best approach to democracy.

Participatory Democracy

The most direct challenge to the previous approaches is found among those who say that the low level of citizen involvement is a problem that should not be rationalized away but solved. Advocates of participatory democracy see elitism, pluralism, and corporatism as disregarding the most fundamental principle of democracy, and they contend that shifting power away from elected officials to citizens can save the principle. In other words, they propose moving the system away from representative democracy in the direction of direct democracy.³

The participatory democrat argues that laws they did not help make or participate in making should not bind individuals. In other words, the individual—all individuals—must be consulted in the making of laws that will affect them. If they are not consulted, the laws should be considered invalid.

In addition to asserting that more participatory democracy can work, advocates of this position contend that only with greater participation can the other principles of democracy be fulfilled. According to this argument, people will never be politically equal or free unless they become active and involved citizens committed to making the system work by making representative democracy more like direct democracy. At the same time, contemporary defenders of participatory democracy do not oppose representation; they just believe that voters should keep their representatives on a shorter leash.

Opponents of participatory democracy argue that it simply goes too far and, as a result, is impractical. It would be fine if it was possible, but it cannot be

² Wyn Grant, introduction to *The Political Economy of Corporatism*, ed. Wyn Grant (London: Macmillan, 1985), 3–4.

³ See, for example, Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge:

achieved in our complex world. Also, the fact that many choose not to vote raises questions about any participatory theory. These critics assert that contemporary political decisions require both expertise and time not available to the average citizen. As a result, they say, a system of representative democracy is necessary.

REPRESENTATION

If direct participation is difficult to achieve or not a good idea, then it is necessary to develop a way for people to participate indirectly. The primary means has been through representatives, or people chosen by citizens to act for them. In other words, citizens delegate to one of their number the responsibility for making certain decisions. The person chosen may be a delegate from a geographical area or of a certain number of people (representation by area or population). The citizens represented are called the *constituents*, or the representative's *constituency*.

The word *represent* is used in a number of different ways that help provide an understanding of the situation:

1. Something *represents* something else when it is a faithful reproduction or exact copy of the original.
2. Something that symbolizes something else is said to *represent* it.
3. A lawyer *represents* a client when he or she acts in place of or for the client.

Clearly, the third meaning is closest to the way we think of a representative in democracy, but it is not that simple because no constituency is composed of citizens whose interests are identical. As a result, there are two main approaches to the relationship between the representative and her or his constituency, with most actual representatives fitting somewhere between the two extremes.

Some representatives try to reflect the varied interests of their constituents as precisely as possible, while others take the position that they were elected to make the best decisions they can for the nation as a whole. The latter position was first put forth by Edmund Burke (1729–97), who said,

To deliver an opinion is the right of all men; that of constituents is a weighty and respectable opinion, which a representative ought always rejoice to hear, and which he ought always most seriously to consider. But *authoritative* instructions, *mandates* issued, which the member is bound blindly and implicitly to obey, to vote for, and to argue for, though contrary to the dearest conviction of his judgment and conscience—these are things utterly unknown to the laws of this land, and which arise from a fundamental mistake of the whole order and tenor of our Constitution.

Parliament is not a *congress* of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other

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with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member, indeed: but when you have chosen him, he is not a member of Bristol, he is a member of *Parliament*. If the local constituent should form a hasty opinion evidently opposite to the real good of the rest of the community, the member for that place ought to be as far as any other from an endeavor to give it effect.⁴

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Here Burke presents a case for the representative as an independent agent who is a representative solely in the sense that she or he is elected by the people in a particular area. In doing this, Burke specifically rejects representation in the third sense: the representative as agent for some individual or group.

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Seldom, if ever, will an elected official fit exactly one and only one of the roles assigned by the theories of representation. Even the most Burkean representative will act as a constituency agent at times or on certain issues. The typical representative is likely to act as a constituency agent whenever constituents are actively concerned with a particular issue or to assist individuals or groups of constituents when they need help in dealing with a bureaucracy. At the same time, the typical representative is likely to act as a Burkean representative on issues that do not directly concern the constituency (and thus about which little or no pressure is received from the constituency).

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As we have already seen in the discussion of participatory theories, an issue that concerns some theorists is how to give representative democracy some attributes of direct democracy. In the United States such practices as the initiative, referendum, and recall were developed to allow people to play a direct role in political decision making, and these devices are presently being used extensively.

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This issue can be seen most clearly in the thinking of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), who said, "Thus deputies of the people are not, and cannot be, its representatives; they are merely its agents, and can make no final decisions. Any law which the people have not ratified in person is null, it is not a law."⁵ Here Rousseau has used two of our definitions of *represent*. For him a representative is not an independent agent but one who acts only with constituent approval. Rousseau realized that within a large country direct democracy was impractical, even impossible, and although he maintained the ideal of direct democracy, he did discuss representation in a more favorable light. He said,

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I have just shown that government weakens as the number of magistrates [elected officials] increases; and I have already shown that the more numerous the people [are], the more repressive force is needed. From which it follows that the ratio of magistrates to government should be in inverse proportions to the ratio of subjects to sovereign; which means that the more the state expands, the more the government ought to contract; and

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⁴ Speech to the Electors of Bristol (1774), in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, ed. George Colley, 10 vols. (Boston, 1881), 11:96 (emphasis in the original).



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Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) is best known as a political philosopher. His works *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (*Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, 1750), *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité* (*Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, 1755), *Émile* (1762), a treatise on education, *Du contrat social* (*The Social Contract*, 1762), and others placed him in the forefront among critics of contemporary society. He argued that civilization was corrupting and that a return to a simpler society in which each individual could fully participate was the remedy for the current social ills. His arguments were used as justifications for the French Revolution. The meaning, intent, and effect of Rousseau's ideas are still widely debated; interpretations of his

thought range from the belief that he was one of the founders of modern totalitarianism to the belief that he was an important defender of democracy.

thus that the number of rulers should diminish in proportion to the increases of the population.⁶

Rousseau would have liked to see a country small enough so every person could be his⁷ own representative, but as population increases this becomes more and more difficult. Thus the number of rulers must of necessity diminish through the establishment of some type of representative system, and the larger the country the more powerful those representatives must be. Rousseau believed that the closer a system can come to a direct democracy through an increase in the number of magistrates, the better the system will be, but this is only possible in a very small country. Rousseau's approach to representation has gained favor in recent years in movements that support participatory democracy.

THE RULE OF LAW

In a democracy an elected representative participates in making laws but is still bound by the law. Once passed, the law is supreme, not those who made the law. Representatives can participate in changing a law, but until it is changed they, along with everyone else, must obey it.

⁶ Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, 59.

Rousseau (1712–78) is best political philosopher. His *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750), *Discours sur le Commerce et les Arts* (1755), *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité* (1755), *Émile ou de l'éducation* (1762), and *Le Contrat social* (1762), and placed him in the forefront among political philosophers of the 18th century. He argued that the current society was corrupting and that a simpler society in which each individual could fully participate was the best. His arguments were used as justifications for the French Revolution. The meaning, intent, and impact of Rousseau's ideas are still debated; interpretations of his ideas are central to modern totalitarianism and democracy.

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This apparently simple notion came about only after a long struggle. It was one of the basic principles demanded in the early conflicts that led to the establishment of democratic institutions. Before that, monarchs claimed that they had been appointed by God to rule (the divine right of kings) and were, therefore, above the law. The principle involved is that a society should be able to bind itself by the rules it collectively has chosen, and no individual or institution should be outside the rules so chosen.

Of course, the rule of law can be complex. For example, not all—perhaps even few—laws are so clear that everyone agrees on their meaning. Therefore, every country has procedures for interpreting the meaning of laws, and those interpretations can change over time. In the United States, for example, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 US 537 [1896]) that racially segregated facilities were legal under the U.S. Constitution. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (347 US 483 [1954]), it ruled that they were not.

Another way in which the rule of law is not so simple is that some laws conflict or at least appear to conflict with other laws. Countries have to rely on some mechanism for deciding which law takes precedence and must be obeyed. In the United States the Supreme Court has the role of deciding which laws conflict with the U.S. Constitution and is the ultimate arbiter of all disputes over conflicting laws. Other countries have a wide variety of institutions to make this determination, but some means is always available.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The means of choosing representatives is central to making democracy work, and there has been considerable conflict over procedures to do this. As we learned during the Florida vote count in the 2000 presidential election, the details of electoral procedures can be a significant part of determining the outcome of an election.⁸ What might appear to be simple questions prove to raise serious issues. Consider the following examples:

1. For what period of time should someone be elected?
2. Should elected representatives be allowed to be reelected to the same office? If yes, how many times? If no, can they be elected again after not holding the office for a period? How long?
3. What percentage of the vote does a person need to be chosen? Fifty percent plus one (called a *simple majority*) works nicely if there are only two candidates, but poses problems if there are more than two.
4. If there are more than two candidates, should there be a second election (called a *runoff*) to choose between the two highest vote getters in the first election?

⁸ The 2004 election was not close enough for major conflicts to develop, but thousands of

5. Are there any circumstances where more than a simple majority should be required?
6. How large should a representative assembly be?
7. How many representatives should be chosen from each area or for what population size?

All of these questions have been disputed at times, and most still are. Also, many countries are currently going through what is being called *democratization*, in which these questions *must* be answered in the process of establishing representative institutions where none had existed.

The electoral process begins with the selection of candidates. The means by which this takes place varies from country to country and even within countries. In some cases, the system is entirely under the control of political parties, and a citizen must become active in a party to influence the choice of candidates. In other cases, although the political party is still important, an election (in the United States this is called a *primary*) is held to reduce the number of candidates. In this situation citizens can influence the final list of candidates by voting, donating money to a candidate, or working actively for a candidate.

For a citizen who simply wants to vote intelligently, deciding whom to vote for will depend largely on the available information. For many offices a high percentage of voters vote on the basis of party identification alone; others depend on information provided by the candidate's campaign and the media. Reliable information is not always easy to come by, and voters often feel they are forced to choose without the information necessary to make a fully informed decision. This may be one reason for the low voter turnout in some countries. Getting adequate information can take more effort than some voters are willing to expend. And sometimes simply making a decision that reflects your own beliefs is hard. For example, recently there was a local election in my area. Both candidates took positions I liked and both took positions I disliked, and it was a fairly dirty campaign. In these circumstances, the temptation to not vote is strong, and it is hardly surprising that many people choose not to. But not voting is giving the decision on who holds power to others.

The normal rule of elections is that the side with the most votes wins, but it is always important to remember that this does not mean that those with the most votes are right; it just means that because more people voted for A rather than B, A must be accepted until the next election gives people the chance to change to B if they wish. Majority rule tends to be based on the assumption that any issue has only two sides. If, for example, there are three candidates in an election, majority rule becomes more complicated because it is harder to determine what the majority wants. In addition, in many elections relatively few potential voters actually cast their ballots; therefore, the majority may not be represented in the result. (Some countries, therefore, *require* their citizens to vote.) This objection can, of course, be answered by saying that those who do not vote do not care; but what if some of the people who do not vote do not feel that any candidate sufficiently reflects their position? This difficulty illustrates the advantage of having more than two candidates in an election, but we

have already seen the disadvantage of such an arrangement—if no one receives a clear majority, does this constitute majority rule?

To avoid these problems, various governments have made it difficult or impossible for more than two sides to be represented on the ballot, and other governments have used a system called *proportional representation* (PR), which allocates seats in the legislature on the basis of the percentage of the votes cast for an individual or party. In a simple example of PR, using a 100-seat legislature like the U.S. Senate, if a minor party got 10 percent of the vote it would get 10 seats, whereas in the usual system where only the party that gets the majority of votes in a district is seated, the minor party would almost certainly get no seats.

Another way to make a representative system more representative is to change from single-member to multiple-member districts. In the usual system, one person is elected from each district, but some places elect two or more people from a district. In most, but not all, cases, this results in more women and minorities being elected.⁹

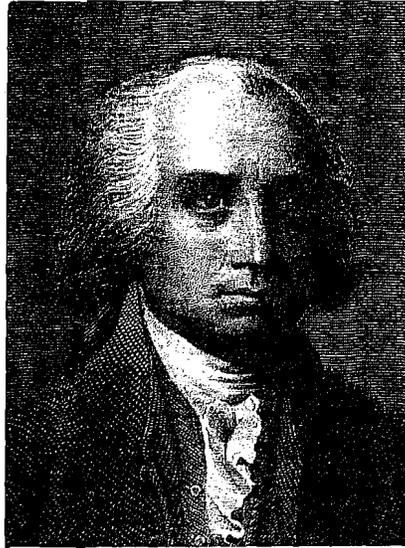
A final institutional arrangement designed to protect minorities is the common practice in the United States of requiring more than a simple majority on certain issues, such as money issues and amending basic sets of rules like constitutions. The purpose is to protect the rights of the minority, it being felt that at least on some issues a minority with strongly held opinions should not be dictated to by the majority.

The electoral system, although seemingly only a mechanism for determining the composition of the government over the next few years, actually provides the major and sometimes the sole means of political participation for individuals living in a large, complex, modern society. The electoral system, therefore, takes on peculiar importance for democratic theory. Because it often provides a significant or the only means of political participation, the electoral system is the key to whether the system is democratic. Individuals, when entering the voting booth, must be sure that their votes will be counted; that the election provides some choice; and that the choice is meaningful in that voters are actually free to vote for any of the options. It is also important to remember the most obvious point—that is, that an individual is allowed to vote in the first place. Finally, each vote should be equal to any other vote, although in the nineteenth century proposals for plural votes based on some criterion like education were fairly common.¹⁰

These questions of electoral procedure bring into focus other important problems. The electoral system, in addition to providing a means of political participation, is designed to guarantee the peaceful change of political power

⁹ On the different systems and their relationship to democracy, see Douglas J. Amy, *Behind the Ballot Box: A Citizen's Guide to Voting Systems* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000); Richard S. Katz, *Democracy and Elections* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and G. Bingham Powell, *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

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James Madison (1751–1836) was secretary of state (1801–1809) during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson and then was the fourth president of the United States (1809–17). Madison is now remembered mostly as one of the authors of *The Federalist Papers* (1787–88) and as a major contributor to the drafting of the U.S. Constitution. Madison was concerned with the problem of minority rights and argued that the Constitution as written would provide adequate protection for minorities.

from one individual or group to another. This in turn raises the issue of leadership within a democracy, a question confronting democratic theorists since ancient Athens. The importance of leadership in democratic theory is particularly significant in representative democracy. Whatever theory of representation is accepted, the elected official is given some political power not directly held by constituents. This power can be removed through the electoral process, but in the meantime it is held by an individual who can directly participate in political decision making to the extent of the power vested in the office. In addition, the official may exercise political leadership by helping form or inform the opinions of constituents and others by defining the political issues he or she believes significant and by propagandizing for particular positions.¹¹

Historically, most democratic theorists have been concerned with limiting the political power held by any individual or group within a society while at the same time providing intelligent and capable leadership. For example, James Madison (1751–1836), an important figure in the framing of the U.S. Constitution and the fourth president of the United States, was greatly worried about the possibility of some faction, including a “majority faction,” gaining political power and exercising it in its own interest.

In the tenth number of *The Federalist Papers* (1787–88), Madison suggested that the best protectors of freedom are the division of powers between the states and the national government; the separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government found in the U.S. Constitution;¹²

¹¹ On leadership, see Arnold M. Ludwig, *King of the Mountain: The Nature of Political Leadership* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

¹² The idea of the separation of powers came mostly through the writings of the French political theorist Montesquieu (1689–1755), particularly his *De l'esprit des lois* (*The Spirit of the Laws*) (1748).

and the diversity of a large country. Others involved in the writing and defense of the Constitution advocated an enlightened aristocracy exercising political power but periodically checked through election, rather than rule by the people. In other words, they accepted Burke's theory of representation and made it the essence of their theory of government.

A central problem with majority rule and the purpose of all these proposals to limit it is the tendency of majorities to suppress minorities. Systems like proportional representation, requirements for a higher percentage than 50 percent of the vote, and Madison's proposals regarding the U.S. Constitution are attempts to ensure that minorities are protected from the majority.

EQUALITY

Although equality has been discussed for centuries, it became centrally important only in the twentieth century. Today equality is one of those concepts, called *essentially contested concepts*, that produce fundamental disagreement (see Chapter 1). For some people the achievement of some form of equality is absolutely essential; for others the achievement of any form of equality is impossible; for still others, even if some form of equality were possible, it would not be desirable. Part of this disagreement comes from lumping together very different types of equality in one concept. *Equality* as a general concept includes five separate types of equality: political equality, equality before the law, equality of opportunity, economic equality, and equality of respect or social equality.

If there is a strict sense of equality applicable to human beings, it is sameness in relevant aspects.¹³ But the phrase "in relevant aspects" modifying "sameness" shows that we have to define carefully what is relevant in talking about equality; failure to do this is another source of disagreement over the meaning and importance of equality.

Political Equality

The importance of defining *relevant aspects* can be seen even in what would appear to be the simplest form of equality, political equality. If we assume the existence of some form of representative democracy, *political equality* refers to equality at the ballot box, equality in the ability to be elected to public office, and equality of political influence.

Voting Equality at the ballot box entails the following:

1. Each individual must have reasonably easy access to the place of voting.
2. Each person must be free to cast his or her own vote as he or she wishes.
3. Each vote must be given exactly the same weight when counted.

¹³ See the discussion in *Nomos IX: Equality*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman

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These conditions constitute an ideal and are much harder to fulfill than they at first appear. There are a number of reasons for this difficulty.

First, there is the question of *citizenship*. To vote one must be a citizen. Each country has regulations defining who is a citizen and how citizenship is acquired. For example, in most countries, if you are born in that country you are a citizen. But if your parents are citizens of another country, you will probably have the right to be a citizen of their country. Some countries also allow their citizens to be simultaneously citizens of another country; others do not. Citizenship also can be gained by being *naturalized*, or granted citizenship by a country. Naturalization usually requires a formal process culminating in a ceremony in which allegiance is sworn to the new country.

Citizenship can also be lost. In many, though not all, countries, swearing allegiance to another country will result in the loss of citizenship. In the United States, serving in the military of another country is supposed to result in the loss of U.S. citizenship. Each country has its own rules on the loss of citizenship: in some countries it is virtually impossible to lose citizenship, whereas in others many different actions can result in such loss.

Second, there is an age requirement for voting. Each country establishes an age at which citizens are first allowed to vote. At present the most common voting age is eighteen, although there are exceptions (for example, the voting age in Indonesia is seventeen and in India, twenty-one). No one under that age can vote.

Third, various people may have had the right to vote taken away from them. In the United States, for example, people convicted of certain crimes lose the right to vote in some states. Also, at times various countries have formally limited the right to vote. Examples of such limitations are requirements that a voter own a specified amount of property or belong to a particular religion; race and gender have also served as limitations and in some places still do.

In addition, there are many informal avenues of inequality. First, and perhaps most obvious, are racial and sexual discrimination. Even with legal limitations on voting removed, women and minorities in many countries still vote at a much lower rate than males of the racial majority. Second, some older and many disabled voters may have difficulty getting to the polling place. For example, the polling place in my area requires voters to negotiate two sets of stairs, and although arrangements can be made to vote without having to use the stairs, some voters don't know this or feel that the effort required is too great and choose not to vote. This example illustrates that the right to vote can be taken away simply by not thinking through what is required to actually vote.

Also, a person who cannot influence what names are printed on the ballot—that is, choose the candidates—is not equal to those who can. There are two ways to influence the choice of who becomes a candidate: money and active participation in the political system. For many people the lack of money makes it difficult to participate actively, but most people who don't participate simply choose not to.

Finally, each voter votes in a district, which should be roughly equal in population to other districts. If one district has a much larger population than another district, each vote is diluted in that it does not have the same strength in

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determining the outcome as a vote in a smaller district. The closer the districts are in population size, the closer the votes will be in strength. For example, to take an extreme case, if voter A lives in a district of 50,000 voters and voter B lives in one with only 10,000, B's vote will be worth five of A's. Some countries, such as the United States, require that district boundaries be changed regularly (usually after each census) to achieve this form of equality. The process is called *reapportionment*.

Running for Office Equality in the ability to be elected to public office means that everyone who has the vote can be elected to public office, although particular offices usually have age qualifications and other specific requirements, such as residence in a specified area. In many countries it has become very expensive to run for public office; hence equality in the ability to be elected to public office has been seriously eroded. Most countries have seen attempts to limit the effect of wealth by legally controlling campaign spending. Some countries, such as Great Britain, strictly limit the amount that candidates can spend. It has been estimated that an average recent U.S. Senate campaign cost \$5.6–5.7 million. In the United Kingdom, by contrast, candidates spent well under \$200,000 in a campaign for the British Parliament and under \$90,000 in campaigns for the European Parliament.

In addition, there are social constraints on running for office. Traditionally in the United States, it has been difficult or even impossible for women and African Americans, Hispanics, and other ethnic minorities, to name just a few groups, to become serious candidates for office. Similar situations, although with different groups, exist in most countries. Although members of such groups may have the legal right to run for office, that right has frequently been meaningless because there was no chance they could be elected. To avoid this, many countries set aside seats based on ethnicity or gender. In the United States, while districts used to be drawn to guarantee white representation, some are now drawn to guarantee black representation. Also, Hispanics are now better represented because their numbers have grown substantially in recent years.

Political Influence *Political equality* also refers to an equality of political influence among citizens. Such equality means that all who choose to participate can do so without any formal limitations based on their membership in any religious, racial, ethnic, gender, or economic category. The point is the lack of legal limitations prohibiting participation. Of course, all these categories have at times both formally affected political influence and informally affected people's ability to participate and the likelihood that they will choose to participate. In much of the world, most of these limitations still exist.

Equality before the Law

Equality before the law resembles the definition of equality as sameness in relevant aspects because it means that all people will be treated in the same way by the legal system, and it is not hedged about by so many formal definitions of

relevant aspects. Depictions of justice usually show a blindfolded woman holding a scale. The scale is an indication that the issues will be weighed; the blindfold indicates that they will be weighed fairly, taking into account nothing beyond the issues of the case.

Because a major function of law and legal procedures is to establish general rules that all people are expected to accept, law, by its nature, is an equalizing force in society if it is enforced fairly. Clearly, equality before the law in practice is undermined by the socioeconomic inequalities that exist in all societies. But equality before the law is one of democracy's clearest goals.

Equality of Opportunity

The third type of equality is related to social stratification and mobility systems. *Equality of opportunity* means, first, that every individual in society can move up or down within the class or status system depending on that individual's ability and application of that ability. Second, it means that no artificial barrier keeps any person from achieving what she or he can through ability and hard work. The key problem in the definition of equality of opportunity is the word *artificial*, which refers to individual characteristics that do not affect inherent abilities. Race, gender, religion, ethnic or national origin, and sexual orientation are most often cited as such artificial barriers.

Social stratification and mobility systems vary greatly from society to society. We tend to think of social status and mobility as easy to measure because we link them to an easily quantifiable object—money. In most Western societies today, that measure is a fairly accurate guide to status (except at the level of the traditional aristocracy) and the major means of gaining or losing status. But even in the West it is not quite that simple because status depends on the respect a position in society is given as well as the income that goes with the position. For example, clergy are not generally well paid but are accorded a status higher than their income. In a society that accords status on the basis of some other value (such as education), money would not automatically bring status. Equality of opportunity depends on the value accorded status.

Economic Equality

The fourth aspect of equality, economic equality, is rarely used to refer to economic sameness, but a complete discussion of the subject cannot ignore this definition. *Economic equality* could mean that every individual within a society should have the same income, and Edward Bellamy (1850–98) in his popular novel *Looking Backward* (1888) proposed such a definition. This definition is normally avoided because most advocates of economic equality are more concerned with the political and legal aspects of equality and with equality of opportunity than with strict financial equality. In addition, complete equality of income could be unfair to everyone because it would not take into account the differing needs of different individuals. Of course, if income levels were sufficiently high, differences in need would be irrelevant, because all individuals would have enough no matter what their needs were. But few exponents of

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economic equality expect such high income levels; therefore, what constitutes basic or fundamental human needs is a matter of considerable concern.

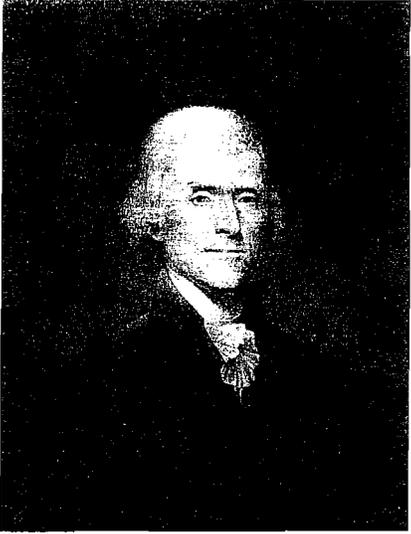
The usual argument for economic equality is that every individual within society must be guaranteed a minimum level of economic *security*. The stress is on security, not equality. Such security would allow the individual to become a fully active citizen. The major contention, the key to the argument, is that without some degree of security citizens will not be in a position to participate effectively even in the limited role of voter.

Extreme levels of poverty effectively bar an individual from participation in the life of the community and can create continuing inequalities. This effect is particularly significant in education. A child in a typical middle-class or lower-middle-class home has had toys and other objects that help teach many skills essential to learning. A simple thing such as having a book read aloud a number of times shows the child the turning of the pages and indicates that the English language is read from left to right, thus setting up a pattern the eyes will follow. The child without this preparation will start out behind the child who has. There are also certain skills essential even for relatively unskilled jobs that a child learns by playing with toys. A child who has simple toys to play with is learning these skills; a child who does not have such toys will not gain these skills and will have to learn them later or be barred from even those unskilled jobs. The effect of such deprivation on a child's life can be profound, and we are unsure whether some of these effects can be reversed for children who are already in our school systems. Thus children at age five or six may already have handicaps they will never be able to overcome. There are exceptions: Some children brought up in families that have suffered generations of extreme poverty do make it. However, the overwhelming majority do not.

Does great inequality in income eliminate equality of opportunity? How great an inequality is permissible? How can the extremes be brought closer together? We will look at these problems in greater detail as we discuss the differences between democratic capitalism and democratic socialism in the next chapter.

Equality of Respect or Social Equality

The fifth type of equality, equality of respect or social equality, is in some ways the most difficult to define. At its base is the belief that all human beings are due equal respect just because they are human; we are all equal in our fundamental humanity. Social equality is derived from this belief. *Equality of respect* refers to a level of individual interpersonal relations not covered by any of the other aspects of equality. The civil rights movement in the United States once developed a slogan, "Black Is Beautiful," which illustrates the point. In Western society, the color black has long connoted evil, as in the black clothes of the villain in early movies about the Old West. Advertising on television and in magazines used to reinforce this stereotype by never using black models. The slogan "Black Is Beautiful" was directed particularly at African American children to teach them that it was good, not bad, to be black, and that they could be black and still respect themselves and be respected by others.



Library of Congress

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), the third president of the United States, was involved in almost all the issues that dominated American political life during his lifetime. Of all the things he accomplished, Jefferson thought his three most important actions were writing the Declaration of Independence, writing the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, and founding the University of Virginia.

In a narrow sense, social equality means that no public or private association may erect artificial barriers to activity within the association. Again, there is the problem of defining *artificial*, but generally we use it in the same sense described earlier—that is, denoting characteristics, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnic or national origin, or religion, that do not affect an individual's inherent abilities. Examples of this type of equality might be the lack of such barriers to membership in a country club or the use of a public park. Thus *social equality* refers to the absence of the class and status distinctions that raise such barriers. In this sense, it includes aspects of equality of opportunity.

Education is believed to be one of the main mechanisms for overcoming inequality, but in many countries education is also a means of preserving inequalities. For example, in Britain large numbers of students are educated privately in what are called public schools. These students then proceed to the best universities and generally into the best jobs. (The same process takes place in most countries but on a smaller scale.) Thus these students are cut off from the broader society, and privilege, antagonism, and ignorance establish the basis for significant social inequality. Some countries have tried to overcome such patterns by establishing schools that bring together people from a wide variety of backgrounds in an attempt to eliminate class or racial ignorance and animosity.

FREEDOM, LIBERTY, AND RIGHTS

Historically, the desire for equality has often been expressed as an aspect of liberty. When Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), drafting the Declaration of Independence, spoke of equality, he meant that people were equal in the rights they

had. Equality of opportunity is often thought of as a right. On the other hand, many people believe attempts to achieve a degree of economic equality conflict directly with attempts to maintain economic liberty.

The words *liberty*, *freedom*, and *right* are most often used interchangeably. Although some distinguish carefully among the meanings, it is not necessary to do so. All three refer to the ability to act without restrictions or with restrictions that are themselves limited in specified or specifiable ways. *Freedom* is the most general term. *Liberty* usually refers to social and political freedom. *Right* usually refers to specific legally guaranteed freedoms. Also, *right* has been broadened to include basic human or natural rights. Finally, rights have become the focus of those in the United States who wish to expand constitutional guarantees and protections. As a result such questions as "Does the U.S. Constitution provide for a right of privacy?" or, more recently, "Is there a right to die?" have become the center of legal, political, and philosophic debate.

There is no such thing as complete freedom. In the first place, one must maintain life and perform a number of essential bodily functions. It is possible to choose when one eats, drinks, sleeps, and so on, but one cannot choose not to eat, drink, or sleep for long. In the second place, there are other people. Although they are essential for a complete life, they are restricting. An old adage states, "Your freedom to swing your arm stops at my nose." Although superficial, it does point out that the existence of others must be taken into account and that other people can limit free action.

A democratic society should be fairly free and open rather than controlled. It is the general assumption of democratic theory that whatever does no damage to the society as a whole or to the individuals within it should be the concern of no one but the individual or individuals involved.

Natural Rights and Civil Rights

The most influential approach to liberty is found in the distinction between the rights a person has or should have as a human being and the rights derived from government. The former are often called *natural rights*; the latter are called *civil rights*. Although the trend today is either to reject the concept of natural rights altogether and call all rights civil rights or to replace the word *natural* with *human*, the traditional distinction is still useful.

Many democratic theorists, such as John Locke, have argued that human beings, separate from all government or society, have certain rights that should never be given up or taken away. People do not give up these rights on joining a society or government, and the society or government should not attempt to take these rights away. If a government does try to take them away, the people are justified in revolting to change the government. Not all theorists make this last argument, but the point is that natural rights establish limits. The Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution is a good example. Many of the amendments in the Bill of Rights begin, "Congress shall make no law regarding. . ." The wording clearly indicates a limit on governmental activity. Isaiah Berlin calls this approach *negative liberty*. By this term he describes the area of life within which

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Library of Congress

John Locke (1632–1704) was an important British philosopher and political thinker of the seventeenth century. His most important works were *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and, in political thought, *Two Treatises of Government* (published in 1690 but written earlier). The first of the two treatises attacks the divine right of kings as put forth by Robert Filmer (1588–1653). The second treatise is an argument for rule by consent of the governed, a defense of private property and majority rule, and a justification for revolution. The U.S. Declaration of Independence was based on the second treatise, and Locke was a major influence on a number of thinkers in the United States at the time of the revolution and the drafting of the U.S. Constitution.

one “is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons.”¹⁴

In the United States, tradition emphasizes the danger of possible interference from government. Certain areas of life, such as speech, religion, press, and assembly, have been defined as areas of “negative liberty” where each person is left to do, on the whole, what she or he wants. Negative liberty as practiced illustrates the complexity of democracy. Government is seen as the most likely agent to attempt to restrict liberty. Government is also the major protector of liberty, and it must protect people even against itself. This is one reason many Western democracies have established what we call a system of checks and balances within the government. No segment of government should be able to rule unchecked by any other segment; as a result, the rights of citizens are protected.

Berlin also developed a concept that he called *positive liberty*. As used by Berlin, this refers to the possibility of individuals controlling their own destiny or their ability to choose among options. For Berlin, positive liberty is the area of rational self-control or “self-mastery.” For others, positive liberty means that the government should ensure conditions in which the full development of each individual is possible.¹⁵ On the whole, as will be seen in the next chapter, democratic capitalists stress negative liberty and democratic socialists stress positive liberty while trying to maintain most of the negative liberties.

¹⁴ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 121–22.

¹⁵ See, for example, the argument in Christian Bay, *The Structure of Freedom* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977), 17–18. See also Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 15–16.

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danger of possible interference with speech, religion, press, or “negative liberty” where each person gets what he or she wants. Negative liberty as opposed to positive liberty. Government is seen as the major threat to liberty. Government is also the major force against itself. This is one of the reasons why we call a system of government a system of government; as a result, the rights

of positive liberty. As used by Locke, positive liberty is the area of freedom, positive liberty means that each person has the full development of his or her potential. This will be seen in the next chapter. Democratic socialists stress positive liberties.

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The most important natural right—the right to self-preservation—is basic to this understanding of positive liberty. This right can be interpreted to mean that every person has a right to the necessary minimum of food, clothing, and shelter needed to live in a given society. Because standards vary considerably from society to society, the necessary minimum might vary a great deal.

From this perspective, positive liberty might include the right to an education equal to one’s ability and the right to a job. This approach to positive liberty logically extends to establishing as a right anything that can be shown to be essential to the development, and perhaps even the expression, of each person’s potential as a human being.

Thus positive liberty can include as rights a wide variety of economic and social practices in addition to the political rights that usually come to mind when speaking of rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁶ adopted by the United Nations includes such rights in its definition of human rights. For example, Article 22 states that “everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.” Positive liberty is not usually extended this far, but these examples illustrate the complexity of the questions involved.

Other so-called natural rights have also been widely debated. One of the most controversial is the right to property. Some contend that there must be a nearly absolute right to acquire and accumulate private property because ownership of property is an avenue to the full development and expression of the human personality. Others argue that private property must be limited because the control of such property gives additional power to those who own it. (Additional arguments for and against the institution of private property will be considered in Chapter 4.)

Although there is widespread disagreement on specific natural rights, it is generally agreed that after the formation of government, these rights must become civil rights or rights specifically guaranteed and protected by the government, even—or particularly—against itself. This formulation of liberty raises many difficulties. The most basic difficulty is the assumption that a government will be willing to guarantee rights against itself. Many thinkers have assumed that representative democracy with frequent elections will solve this problem. Any such government should recognize that an infringement of people’s civil rights would ensure its defeat in the next election. Experience has shown this is not necessarily true, and the result has been apathy, civil disobedience, and revolution, with apathy currently the greatest concern in most developed democracies. At the same time, protecting liberties is still considered a primary duty of a democratic political system and a central part of democratic theory.

¹⁶ “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights” was adopted by the United Nations in

Types of Liberty

It is more difficult to define types of liberty than types of equality; but, loosely, civil rights include the following specific liberties or freedoms:

1. The right to vote
2. Freedom of speech
3. Freedom of the press
4. Freedom of assembly
5. Freedom of religion
6. Freedom of movement
7. Freedom from arbitrary treatment by the political and legal system

The first six of these are areas of life that the democratic argument says should be left, within broad limits, to the discretion of the individual. Of these six, freedom of movement is the least commonly discussed among theorists of democracy. The seventh item, freedom from arbitrary treatment, is simply a way of stating positively the belief that government must protect the citizen from government. The various freedoms—particularly those of speech, press, assembly, and religion—are closely related. Among the other means by which freedom has been expressed are toleration, the silence of the law, and unenforceability.

The Right to Vote The right to vote without interference is, of course, the key to the ability to change the system. It is the ultimate check on government and the true guarantor of any freedom.

Freedom of Speech With some minimal disagreement, most thinkers consider freedom of speech the most important freedom. Within democracy freedom of speech has a special place. The right to vote does not mean much if it is impossible to hear opposing points of view and to express one's opinion. The same reasoning is behind the freedoms of press and assembly. The rights to publish opinion and to meet to discuss political issues are fundamental if people are to vote intelligently. The right to vote implies, even requires, a right to information and the free expression of opinion both orally and in writing. Freedom of speech requires freedom of assembly; freedom to speak is meaningless without the possibility of an audience.

John Stuart Mill (1806–73) explained the importance of freedom of speech and press in a slightly different way in his classic *On Liberty* (1859):

This, then, is the appropriate region of human liberty. It comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness; demanding liberty of conscience in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological. The liberty of expressing and publishing opinions may seem to fall under a different principle, since it belongs to that part of the conduct of an individual which concerns other people; but, being almost of as much importance as the liberty of thought itself

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from it.¹⁷

For Mill, thought requires the freedom to express oneself orally and in writing. The search for truth requires that challenge, debate, and disagreement be possible. Mill argued this from four different perspectives:

First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility.

Secondly, though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied.

Thirdly, even if the received opinion be not only true, but the whole truth; unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this, but, fourthly, the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct; the dogma becoming a mere formal profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience.¹⁸

Without freedom of expression truth is lost, is never found, becomes mere prejudice, or is enfeebled. Assuming that there is truth to be found, freedom of expression is essential: if there is no truth to be found, freedom of expression is even more important as the only device available to sort out the better opinion from the worse.

Speakers Corner on the northeast corner of Hyde Park in London, across from where people used to be executed for religious beliefs, is open every Sunday morning to anyone with the urge to speak. It was designed as a "safety valve" and appears to have functioned as such for some time. Today it is mostly viewed as entertainment.

Freedom of the Press Mill joined speech and press closely together and, for political concerns, the argument that a generally free press is essential in a democracy is almost noncontroversial. But there are areas of concern outside the strictly political realm, most obviously related to the publication of pornography, and there are even concerns about some more narrowly political issues.

If freedom of the press is absolute, there should be no restrictions on the publication of pornography. With some exceptions, much pornography depicts individuals of one of two groups—women or children—as objects to be used, often violently, by another group—men. Viewed this way, pornography is an

¹⁷ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 4th ed. (London: Longman, Reader & Dyer, 1869), 26.

¹⁸ Mill, *On Liberty*, 95.

issue with strong political overtones and illustrates a central concern of contemporary students of democracy, the conflict of rights. Whose rights should be protected, the publishers and consumers of pornography or the women and children who are turned into consumer goods?

A more narrowly political issue involves the publication of material designed to incite the overthrow of government by violence. Absolute freedom of the press would require the government to ensure that those trying to overthrow it have the right to publish calls for its overthrow and even manuals on how to produce bombs and directions on where and how to place them. Many people find such a position ludicrous; many find it perfectly reasonable.

A third issue is governmental secrecy. Some, particularly those working for the press, contend that the press should have free access to the whole government decision-making process. Others, especially those working in government, argue that government should be free to choose what the press is allowed to know and publish. Most people fall somewhere in-between, believing that some governmental actions must be secret and that other actions, ranging from a few to most, should not be secret. The problem is that governments decide what must be secret, and this leads to distrust. There is no way around this problem, and the press and government will inevitably be at odds about the extent of permissible secrecy.

A related issue is self-censorship by the press. Media that are privately owned (most of them in the developed world) must attract and keep readers/viewers/listeners to make a profit. Some media sensationalize material to attract a larger audience; others limit what they report or the language used to avoid upsetting their owners, corporate sponsors, or the audience they have already attracted. Both tendencies distort the information available and undermine the value of a free press.

In the United States, conservatives consistently argue that most journalists are liberals and bias their reporting to support the liberal position; liberals argue that most media outlets are owned by wealthy conservatives and that they require that reporting be slanted to support the conservative position. While it is impossible to be certain, on the whole journalists are more liberal than their bosses; but most media outlets and journalists strive for accuracy and balance. They do not always succeed, and it is not hard to find evidence for the arguments made by both conservatives and liberals.

Historically, newspapers and news magazines separated reporting and opinion, with pages devoted to opinion clearly marked. Today both print and electronic media are less careful in making such a separation, and getting accurate and balanced news is more difficult than it used to be. At the same time, electronic media provide a range of news sources never before available, and the Internet in particular is a source of serious investigative reporting, the expression of minority viewpoints, and bias presented as objectivity.

Tension between the press and government is unavoidable and probably healthy. Western democracies criticize countries with a controlled press while trying to keep their own press from publishing things they want kept secret. The degree of press freedom varies among democracies; there is no such thing as a completely free press, but a fairly high degree of such freedom is essential

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in a democracy because in the modern world the communication of political ideas requires the right to publish those ideas.

Freedom of Assembly The freedom to speak requires the freedom to have an audience. Although in broadcasting the audience need not be gathered in one place, the ability to meet together to discuss political issues, make decisions on those issues, and choose candidates is clearly still fundamental to a functioning democracy.

The political issues related to freedom of assembly are issues of public order. Should parades and demonstrations that may produce violence be allowed? What limitations on assembly are permissible to keep traffic moving or to prevent violence? All governments, from the local to the national, in all democracies constantly face the problem of how to regulate assembly without making it politically ineffective. Some governments clearly use the excuse of necessary regulation through the need for permits, for example, to limit the freedom of assembly, but on the whole such attempts have proved ineffective.

Freedom of Religion Freedom of religion is usually supported on precisely the same grounds Mill used to defend freedom of speech and press, and worshipping together requires the freedom of assembly. Even if we are certain that we have the whole truth—perhaps particularly if we are certain—we should always distrust our own presumed infallibility and welcome the continuation of the search. Freedom of religion has, particularly in North America, come to be identified with the separation of church and state. The search for religious truth, in this view, requires that government be a neutral bystander neither favoring nor suppressing any aspect of that search.

In many countries this issue takes a more complex form. Some countries have an established church or a church that is officially recognized by the government that may receive financial and other public support. In addition, many countries have political parties that are tied (directly or indirectly) to religious bodies. In Europe most of these parties are labeled *Christian Democrats* or some variant thereof. These parties are often conservative. In such circumstances the quest for freedom of religion becomes more problematic. But every religion has at some time faced the question of its relationship to political power. This issue is particularly important today in the Third World, and it deeply divides the Roman Catholic Church.

Freedom of Movement Freedom of movement is less commonly included among the basic freedoms, but it is as important as the others because the ability to move freely is a major protection for other freedoms. Some restrictions are already in effect. Many democratic countries, particularly in Europe, require their citizens to carry identity papers and, for example, require hotels to record the number on these papers when someone registers. All countries require passports for foreign travel. And the growth of government programs means that most countries have records of the location of and changes of permanent address for a growing number of citizens. But in no democracy is it necessary to get prior approval from a government to travel within its borders, and, most

important, within a democracy people can freely move from place to place for political activity.

Freedom from Arbitrary Treatment Freedom from arbitrary treatment by the political and legal system also protects the other freedoms. All democratic societies have clearly established procedural rights designed to guarantee that every individual will be treated fairly by the system. Without these procedural rights, the substantive rights of freedom of speech, press, and so on would not be as secure. Basic guarantees include those found in the U.S. Bill of Rights, such as freedom from cruel and unusual punishment (designed to prohibit torture, now an issue in the debate over capital punishment); the right to a writ of habeas corpus (Latin meaning "[that] you have the body") or the right to demand that a prisoner be brought before an officer of the court so that the lawfulness of the imprisonment can be determined; and the right to a trial by a jury of one's peers.

Toleration Toleration means that one accepts another person believing or doing something that one believes to be wrong. Religious toleration is the most obvious case, and in some ways it is the most difficult. If I am certain that my way is the only one that leads to salvation, I am unlikely to tolerate an opposing belief that I am convinced is dangerous to my and your salvation. Religious tolerance is, in fact, a relatively recent phenomenon; as late as the seventeenth century the word *tolerance* had a negative meaning and *intolerance* a positive one. Within a relatively short time, though, the connotation of the words shifted: tolerance became a virtue and intolerance a vice, although even now many do not tolerate beliefs or behaviors they are convinced are wrong. Today most people accept toleration and extend it beyond religion to other beliefs and ways of life. In this way, freedom includes a large area in which we accept other people even though we disagree with them.

Politically, tolerance is basic to modern democracy because one key to democracy is the recognition and acceptance of basic disagreements among citizens. The diversity of the population and the protection of that diversity through tolerance are extremely important. Tolerance must exist or democracy cannot work.

The Silence of the Law and Unenforceability Two other areas of freedom should be noted briefly: the silence of the law and unenforceability. It is part of the Anglo-American tradition that if there is no law prohibiting an action, that action is within the area of individual discretion until such a law is written. In the United States, when the law is written, it cannot affect actions that preceded it. In many other countries, newly passed laws can be used to find past acts illegal. Also, the experience of Prohibition in the United States indicated that there are unenforceable laws, laws that people simply won't accept. Thus unenforceability can also be seen as an aspect of freedom.

Liberty is limited to some extent by all political systems. The democratic system has built-in safeguards that protect individuals from having their freedoms too severely restricted. Of course, these safeguards do not always work.

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The most fundamental of these safeguards is the basic characteristic of a democracy—the people have some control over their government. Democratic theorists have never adequately addressed the problem of severe restrictions of rights that are desired or acquiesced in by the majority. Thus a problem for democracy is how to achieve sufficient tolerance of differences so that the majority is willing to protect the rights of the minority. For many the answer is education.

EDUCATION

Education as a fundamental principle of democracy may be mildly controversial, but it should not be. Democratic theorists such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill wrote treatises on education that tied their political theories loosely or tightly to the need for an educated populace. In the United States the founders of the democracy believed education essential to making an effective democracy possible. In fact, the statement that an educated citizenry is necessary in a democracy is commonplace. The argument regarding the need for education is fairly simple. Citizens are required to choose among candidates and issues. To do so they must have the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic (rather illiterately known as the three Rs) because the information provided is often communicated in print, because it may be necessary for citizens to communicate in writing, and because numbers are used extensively. Equally important, citizens must be able to evaluate the information, weigh pros and cons, and decide what positions best correspond to their interests. Of course, citizens must also be able to correctly identify those interests.

A democracy can operate without an educated populace. India is a functioning democracy with a high level of illiteracy. But a democracy of illiterates is limited unless the culture actively encourages oral dissemination of information and discussion of issues. The elitist model of democracy would have no trouble with a high level of illiteracy, but every other approach to democracy would find it an issue requiring solution. Thus it is fair to say that an educated populace is a prerequisite of a fully functioning democracy.

The principles of democracy all relate to one another, and all stem from the most fundamental democratic principle: citizen involvement. Politically, equality and freedom both characterize and protect citizen involvement. They characterize citizen involvement in that democracy demands the freedom to vote and equality of the vote: they protect citizen involvement because a free and equal electorate can insist on the maintenance of that freedom and equality. A free and equal electorate needs education to ensure that freedom and equality are meaningful and to make informed choices as citizens. Today the electoral system is the major avenue for the expression of citizen involvement, and of course the system of representation is the purpose and result of the electoral system and the way in which citizens are involved.