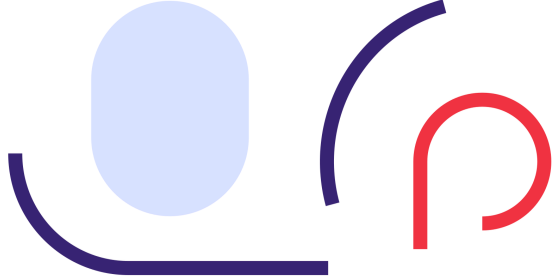


Democracy in America: Ideals, Challenges, and Paths for Improvement

A Critical Exploration of Historical Realities, Civic Participation, and Ongoing
Democratic Work

By Erion Wilson, River City Early College



Seminar Overview: Democracy's Pros & Cons



Central Question

What are the pros and cons of a democratic system of government?



Approach

Critical historical perspective on American democracy



Goal

Connect core democratic ideals to historical limitations and modern critiques

What Democracy Means (Core Features)



Representative government through elections

Representative government through elections



Constitutional limits that constrain power

Constitutional limits that constrain power



Ongoing accountability via participation and political competition

Ongoing accountability via participation and political competition

Historical Limitations of American Democracy



Slavery Contradicting Democratic Ideals

Slavery contradicting democratic ideals of human freedom



Disenfranchisement Limiting Voting Rights

Disenfranchisement limiting who could vote and influence government



Exclusion from Political Participation

Exclusion of Indigenous peoples and women from full political participation



Gap Between Principles and Reality

The gap between democratic principles and lived political reality

Pros: Liberty, Accountability, Participation



Liberty supported by political rights and freedoms

Liberty supported by political rights and freedoms



Accountability through elections and public scrutiny

Accountability through elections and public scrutiny



Participation as a mechanism for legitimacy and social input

Participation as a mechanism for legitimacy and social input



Peaceful transfer of power as a stabilizing democratic norm

Peaceful transfer of power as a stabilizing democratic norm

Thinkers: Foundations and Tensions



Tocqueville on democracy's social and civic conditions

Tocqueville on democracy's social and civic conditions



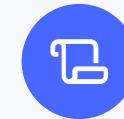
Mill on representative government and the need for liberty of expression

Mill on representative government and the need for liberty of expression



Dewey and education as part of sustaining democratic life

Dewey and education as part of sustaining democratic life



Aristotle and Plato as sources of classic concerns about regimes and civic character

Aristotle and Plato as sources of classic concerns about regimes and civic character

Modern Critiques: What Democracy Still Struggles With



The 1619 Project highlights foundational contradictions in American democracy

The 1619 Project points out inherent conflicts within the roots of American democracy, questioning its professed ideals versus historical realities.



Caste and related frameworks explain how hierarchy can persist within formal equality

Caste systems and similar social frameworks reveal the persistence of hierarchical structures despite the formal equality promised by democratic systems.



Sandel critiques how democratic life can be disrupted by moral and civic discontent

Philosopher Michael Sandel discusses the ways in which democratic societies face challenges due to underlying moral and civic dissatisfaction among citizens.



Bellah emphasizes civil religion and the danger of broken civic commitments

Robert Bellah stresses the importance of civil religion and warns about the risks posed when citizens break their commitments to the collective civic life.

Value of Civil Disagreement (Why It Matters)



Inazu on Democratic Strength

Inazu emphasizes learning to disagree as a democratic strength



Mutz's Perspective on Democracy

Mutz contrasts deliberative and participatory democracy and their effects on disagreement



Impact of Civil Disagreement

Civil disagreement can improve public judgment rather than only polarize

Deliberative vs. Participatory Democracy (Practical Tension)

Deliberative Democracy

- Emphasizes structured discussion and reason-giving to shape outcomes

Participatory Democracy

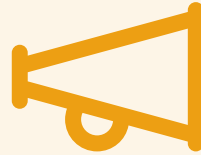
- Emphasizes broad involvement and direct citizen engagement to shape outcomes

Literary Warning: Democratic Vigilance



Animal Farm's Core Warning

Animal Farm warns how power can be consolidated even when democratic language is used



Risks to Democracy

It underscores the risk of manipulation, propaganda, and erosion of democratic checks



Citizen Responsibility

Democracy requires citizens to remain attentive to how authority is exercised

So What Are the Cons? (A Clear, Balanced List)



Historical exclusion undermines the promise of equal political voice

Historical exclusion undermines the promise of equal political voice



Disenfranchisement and hierarchy can persist despite formal democratic systems

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Disagreement can become uncivil, reducing shared democratic problem-solving

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Power can be manipulated when vigilance and accountability weaken

Power can be manipulated when vigilance and accountability weaken

So What Are the Pros? (A Clear, Balanced List)



Liberty Protection

Liberty is protected through rights and competitive politics



Strengthened Accountability

Accountability is strengthened by elections and public scrutiny



Participation and Legitimacy

Participation provides legitimacy and channels citizen concerns



Peaceful Power Transfer

Peaceful transfer of power supports continuity and reduces violent conflict

How Democracy Can Improve (Ongoing Democratic Work)



Linking Ideas Back to the American Context



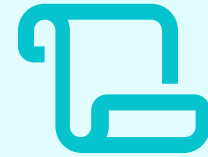
Aspirational and Constrained Democracy

American democracy is both aspirational and constrained by historical injustice



Modern Critiques on Civic Ideals

Modern critiques show how civic ideals can be distorted by hierarchy and discontent



Value of Historical Perspective

A critical historical perspective helps evaluate democracy honestly, not romantically

Conclusion: Democracy Requires Continual Improvement

Pros of Democracy

liberty
accountability

Cons of Democracy

historical exclusion
persistent hierarchy

Next Step for Democracy

keep improving democratic practice
through civil disagreement and vigilance

Works Cited (Readings Used)



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Nikole Hannah-Jones



Learning to Disagree

John Inazu



On Representative Government

John Stuart Mill



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Hearing the Other Side

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Animal Farm

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The Republic

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Caste

Isabel Wilkerson



The Creation of the American Republic

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The Broken Covenant — Robert N. Bellah

The Broken Covenant — Robert N. Bellah

Thank You

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