# *Democracy in Brief*: Ancillary Resources

## Summary

People often assume that they are familiar with the concept of democracy; however, there are different types of democracies.

The first part of the word “democracy” comes from the Greek word “demos,” meaning “for the people.” However, we understand the word as “government by or for the people.” The way that democracy is practiced might vary from direct democracy, representative democracy, or illiberal democracy, which is not truly a form of democracy. Why would some refer to illiberal democracy as democracy, when it is not a democracy?

Democracy is not easy, and direct democracy in its purest form has not existed. While the Greek direct democracy is viewed as the germinal example, it was fraught with problems. Women, slaves, and non-Athenian born men could not vote and were not considered citizens. Thus, only a small portion of the population was able to participate in direct democracy. Direct democracy works well with smaller numbers of people. Today, we are more likely to see attributes of direct democracy at the municipal level.

In a democracy, the people should have fundamental rights protected and understood by the government. The health of the democracy affects how a government defines fundamental rights. A strong democracy will protect free speech, a free press, and the right to assemble. It will also hold regular, free, and open elections.

Democratic ideals were discussed at length via a wide array of political philosophers during the Enlightenment era during the eighteenth century. For further reading on some of the original work or responses to the Enlightenment ideals, see Jean Jacque Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, John Locke, Iris Marion Young, Carole Pateman, James Tully, and Charles Mills.

Democracy is often referred to as one of the better forms of government thanks to its focus on protecting the legal rights of the people. We have witnessed the growth of democracies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In a representative democracy, the electorate votes for people to represent their needs in the government. Representative democracies can vary; however, typically there would be fair, frequent elections, a free press, freedom of speech, a judiciary, equal protection under the law, as well as a means for the public to give feedback to their elected representatives. This list is not exhaustive. A good exercise is to do an online search for “representative democracy” and review the findings.

A strong, healthy democracy will balance majority rule with protecting minority rights. Likewise, it is common to see the protection of rights vary over time based on the government and the political culture.

The United States’ Declaration of Independence starts off noting that the people have rights. The peoples’ inalienable rights are noted at the start, so that they are declaring that their rights were not protected while under British rule and therefore they are separating from the government.

## Discussion Questions

### Introduction

1. Abraham Lincoln is often noted for stating that democracy is, “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” But democracy is not as easily realized. Why is democracy difficult to understand? Why is democracy hard to put into practice? Can you think of a modern nation where democracy is in practice and effective and another nation where democracy is not effective?
2. The concepts of democracy and freedom are not interchangeable; however, they are connected. How are democracy and freedom different? What are some examples of freedom (or freedoms)?
3. People are instrumental to the health of a democracy. The people must vote, have the right to assemble, have religious freedoms, vote, and read the press (media). What are other ways that people can help a democracy thrive?
4. The Magna Carta was an important early democratic document. Why? Can you think of other democratic documents? What are they called? How are they similar to one another?
5. The Magna Carta was key to moving from an absolute monarchy to more democratic governance, whereby King John of England acknowledged the legal rights of the people. Since the Magna Carta, nation-states’ constitutions note the rights and limitations of the government. Many modern countries have constitutions or other founding documents. If you had the power to right a founding document, what would the document say?

### Characteristics of Democracy

1. Democracy is a concept, and it is a practice. Democracy is about institutions, values, attitudes, and practices. When you think of democracy or democratic rights, can you think of examples of democratic institutions? Democratic values? Democratic attitudes and practices?
2. Democracy tempers majority rule and protects minority rights. Majority rule is important, but not at the cost of adversely affecting minority rights. This is why voting on measures is important—so that the people have an opportunity to weigh in on issues. What does this mean? How can a nation or government acknowledge majority rule and minority rights?
3. Basic human rights are understood as the right to free speech, press, assembly, equal protection under the law, the right to vote, religious freedom, toleration, and the ability to fully participate in life. Can you think of what a typical day would look like for someone living in a democratic state where their human rights are protected? How would this vary from a non-democratic state?
4. Direct democracy is hard to practice. Why? Representative democracy is the most common form of democracy. Why?
5. Technology and social media have become more pervasive during elections. In general, people are using the internet for a host of things. How does the internet help or harm democracy? Do you think that electronic voting can be effective?

### Rights and Responsibilities

1. Are monarchies democratic? What does it mean that people are citizens of the democratic state and not subjects? (This question will require additional research).
2. Democracies are noisy. Why should a healthy democracy be loud and busy? What does this mean for the rights of the people?
3. Freedom of speech is an important right. At times, this means tolerating speech that we do not like or completely disagree with; however, there are limits to free speech. Slander and libel are not protected forms of speech. What are they not protected speech? Please provide some examples.
4. Freedom of religion exists in democracies, and this includes the right to worship and observe in private or in public. Why is freedom of religion a fundamental right?

### Democratic Elections

1. In the past, taxes, tests, and other requirements such as owning property were used to prevent certain people from voting. Why are free, competitive, and regular elections important to a democratic state? How often are elections held in your city, state, province, or country?
2. The extension of democratic rights to women, religious minorities, and different racial or ethnic groups have varied. Why? If these rights are fundamental, how could democratic states withhold full rights to different groups?
3. Public debate is important; however, we have witnessed more inflammatory discussions or violence in parliaments, in the streets, and online harassment. How do we support public debate and temper anger or violence?
4. The winner-take-all model is common in representative democracies; however, many representative democracies have proportional systems. Which is more democratic? Which system are you more familiar with? Which system is better for parties and for the public?

### Rule of Law

1. The rule of law is meant to protect the people from governmental tyranny. Rule of law also protects the people from lawlessness from one another, since all people are equal under the law. Why was it acceptable to not extend the rule of law to women and other groups who were denied their equal rights? Has ideology influenced rule of law?
2. Due process protects the right of the people from governmental abuse and outlines the protections that all people have with regards to charges being laid against them and how the state will process the charges. Here, the judiciary or courts are important. Justice and transparency are integral parts of due process. Why? How is maintaining law and order connected to due process?
3. The rule of law also means that people have the right to a speedy trial, not be subject to cruel and unusual punishment, not be compelled to witness against themselves, as well as not be charged for a crime twice (double jeopardy). These protections are typically the purview of the judiciary. Can you explain why the judiciary or courts are an important part of a healthy democracy?

### Constitutionalism

1. A democratic state’s constitution is the supreme law of the land and everyone must abide by the rights, privileges, and rules outlined in the constitution. The authority of the national or federal government is outlined in the constitution. Is government corruption less likely to take place in a democratic state?
2. Why is British Common Law referred to in this section? How were eighteenth century philosophers instrumental to discussions about fundamental rights or founding documents? (You may need to do some research to answer these questions.)
3. In the United States, the Bill of Rights are the first ten amendments in the U.S. Constitution. These amendments were crucial to the passing of the Constitution, and they outline the basic rights that are guaranteed to the people. The next seventeen amendments were added to the U.S. Constitution. Are you familiar with other founding documents or constitutions? How are they similar or different?
4. Federalism is power shared at different levels of government. There might be a federal, provincial (or state), and municipal levels of government, and they are expected to work well together in a democratic state. Can you think of examples where the different levels of government can work well or be at odds with one another? For instance, transportation issues often intersect with the local and state or provincial levels of government.

### Three Pillars of Government

1. The executive branch, legislative branch, and the judicial branch are often referred to as the three branches, or three pillars, of a democratic government. Do you think that this is correct? Is there a missing branch or institution?
2. The executive branch executes the law, the legislative branch makes the law, and the judicial branch reviews the law. The separation of powers between the three pillars offers them checks and balances on one another. Do you think that one branch is more powerful than another? Which one and why?
3. The executive branch in a modern democratic state is normally part of a parliamentary system (with a prime minister) or a presidential system (with a president). Which one (prime minister or president) is more effective and why? (This will require some additional research.)
4. An independent judiciary can review the law and work as a check on the other two pillars to ensure that laws meet the constitutional guidelines. If the law does not, the law is unconstitutional. Is this a strong check on the executive and legislative branches?
5. In many democratic states, the people do not vote in the justices or jurists sitting on the courts, as they are appointed by the prime minister or president. And, the justices often have a long appointment (or in some cases, a lifetime appointment). Is this democratic or merely an effective practice to ensure that there is no political retaliation for their decisions?

### Free and Independent Media

1. A free and independent media is key to a strong democracy. However, in the U.S. and Canada media monopolies exist with the print newspapers, television, and radio stations. How is this a free and independent media when media conglomerates own the vast majority of the media outlets?
2. The internet and smart technologies have allowed people broader access to different news sources and apps (applications). This means that people have access to not only traditional news outlets, but also citizen journalists’ points of view. One consequence of citizen journalism and ideological news sources is that “fake” news has become more prominent. How can a consumer of news or information discern what are real or legitimate news sources and what are more ideological or “fake” news sources?
3. In a democratic state, the media should inform, educate, and serve as a watchdog on the government and other institutions. Do you think that the media fill this role today? Please provide some examples.
4. There are many theories about the media and the way they work. This book refers to the agenda-setting role of the media. How does the media set the agenda? Is this more common with a strong media monopoly, or can small media outlets also set the agenda?

### Political Parties, Interest Groups, and NGOs

1. Political parties provide people different ideological choices for their particular ideological leanings; however, some see political parties as ineffective, partisan groups. How are political parties effective, and when can they be perceived as ineffective? (This might require additional research.)
2. Political parties provide a vetting process for possible candidates. They also set the party’s platform, recruit candidates, nominate party leaders, offer policies, and educate the public. If political parties do this and so much more, why are they often viewed with disdain? People will often say that the candidates are the same or lament that it is not worth voting. How can political parties work more effectively to change these opinions?
3. Interest groups represent peoples’ political, social, religious, and other personal interests. Some interests groups write policy and try to influence politics. Why would people want to join an interest group?
4. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are interest groups that have a more national or international focus and tend to work more closely with governmental agencies as part of their advocacy. Are you familiar with any NGOs?

### Civil-Military Relations

1. In a healthy democracy, the military serves the nation. Can you think of countries where the military is in charge? Are these nations more authoritarian in nature? Do you think that this is a coincidence?
2. Military officials must remain neutral and serve the nation. Active military members can vote and participate neutrally in politics. Are there advantages to having a neutral military? Should active military remain neutral in politics?
3. Elected officials lead countries and seek the counsel of the military for issues related to war. Given the military member’s expertise, should they be allowed to run for public office while active in the military?

### Culture of Democracy

1. Democracy is a balance of competing values and interpretations of democratic rights. How can we balance peoples want for freedom and need for societal order?
2. Education should thrive in a democratic state and be viewed as a basic need to ensure that the people are supported. Should college tuition be paid by the state? Is it acceptable for a government to dictate which subjects receive more state funding or should the state be value neutral with higher-education funding?
3. If democracy is both a promise and a challenge, why is it one of the most coveted types of governmental systems? Democracy is typically noted as the highest form of government that respects the people’s rights. Why?
4. Economics can challenge democratic needs, as many Western democracies have witnessed during economic downturns. How can we balance societal needs and the reality of economics?

## Multiple Choice and True/False Questions

In *Democracy in Brief*, democracy and freedom are explained to be the same thing.

1. True
2. False

B, False, page 3. Democracy and freedom are not synonymous. However, freedom is more likely to take place in a democratic state.

Democracies are categorized as direct or representative.

1. True
2. False

A, True, page 5. Democracies are described as being direct (where all the people participate) or representative (where the people elect others to represent them to the government).

Direct democracy refers to the ability to interact directly with politicians on a daily basis.

1. True
2. False

B, False, pages 5-6. Direct democracy refers to the ability of people to engage in democracy directly and is typically done with a small number of people in a meeting.

Inalienable rights are rights that

1. Cannot be denied by the government
2. Are better than alienable rights
3. Are protected in Russia
4. Are related to email servers in Canada

A, pages 10-11. In a democracy, people automatically have inalienable rights that the government must protect.

Democracy provides freedoms and protections to people.

1. Yes, but only if they voted in support of freedoms and protection
2. Yes, but only for citizens living in the country
3. Yes, democratic rights are protected for all citizens in a democracy
4. Yes, an illiberal democracy is important to protects rights

C, pages 11-12. A democratic government protects the rights of its citizens. Fundamental rights are protected in a healthy democracy.

In the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson noted that people are born with inalienable rights that governments must protect.

1. True
2. False

A, true, page 11. From the Declaration, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men (sic) are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights…”

An educated populace is important to a democracy because

1. The people need to feel supported
2. Citizens have responsibilities
3. Toleration is an important part of democracy
4. The government should not mandate a religion, but support education
5. All of the above

E, all of the above, pages 13-15 and 56-57. In a healthy democracy, the people will have opportunity to participate in the democracy and also have their rights protected.

Democracy requires the commitment of the people and government. Democracy is not easy thanks to

1. Ideology
2. Partisanship
3. People often have very different points of view
4. All of the above

D, all of the above, as evidenced throughout *Democracy in Brief*. Democracy is complicated and by protecting democratic rights, people have options. They can chose what political parties to support, and they have the right to think differently and practice different ideologies and religions.

Political parties are important to a democracy

1. False
2. True

B, True, pages 47-48. Political parties help recruit, nominate, and campaign to elect candidates. Elections are an integral part of democracy—thus having political parties with different ideological views is important.

Interest groups help citizens follow interest rates

1. False
2. True

A, False, pages 49-50. Interest groups represent citizens’ views, and then attempt to influence policy. Interest groups are advocates for their members.

The culture of democracy includes

1. Understanding conflict and consensus
2. Education
3. People
4. All of the above

D, pages 55-60. People want freedoms, but tempered with equality. The culture of democracy is meant to have checks and balances with the institutions and different levels of government.

Media informs and educates the people and

1. Advocates for some positions, as well as serves as a watchdog of the government
2. Advocates for all policies
3. Is only concerned with clicks on websites
4. Serves as a watchdog of popular culture

A, pages 43-45. An important part of any democracy is a media with competing points of view. The media will inform, educate, advocate, and serve as a watchdog for all forms of the government.

The judiciary needs independence, as it serves as a check on the other two branches of government, and judges need to

1. Make judgments based on flipping coin
2. Make judgments on lawful decisions
3. Make sure that they watch and learn from Judge Judy
4. Support the prime minister

B, page 40. The judiciary works as an important check on the other branches of government. Judges need to provide sound judgments on lawful decision without facing elections once they are on the bench.

The legislative branch makes the laws based on deliberation and working with one another. Which of the following statements is true?

1. The legislature is not a check on the other branches of government
2. Legislators serve for the duration of their lifetime
3. Need to support the general welfare of the people
4. Must support their political views

C, pages 38-39. The legislature serves as a check on the executive and judiciary branches, and legislators do not have lifelong positions. However, they must represent the people and support their general welfare.

Executive authority refers to the way that the prime minister or president is the leader of the free world.

1. False
2. True

B, False, pages 34-38 *Democracy in Brief* explains the ways in which the executive is a check on the legislature and judiciary.

Presidential and parliamentary systems are different. Which of the following statements is true?

1. Parliamentary systems are more common
2. Presidential systems have regular elections and the president is elected separately from legislative representatives
3. The prime minister is the leader of the majority party
4. All of the above

D, pages 34-38 *Democracy in Brief* explains the differences between parliamentary and presidential systems.

The rule of law means

1. Some people stand above the law
2. People are created equal under the law
3. People need to obey the laws
4. A song by Sza
5. B and C

E, pages 26-27. The rule of law means that no one stands above the law and that all people are created equally under the law and need to abide by the rule of law.

Civil-military relations walk a fine balance in a democracy. Which of the following statements is true?

1. Military leaders offer advice to elected officials
2. Military leaders need to run democracies
3. The military protects the people and the nation-states’ interests
4. Military states are the strongest democracies
5. A and C

E, pages 53-54. The nation-state relies on the military to protect the nation, but the military works for the government. Typically, the prime minister or president is the leader of the country, and the military reports to them.

What is a constitution?

1. A founding document for a democracy
2. A document establishing the authority of the nation
3. A living and breathing document that adjusts with the government and the people
4. All of the above

D, pages 30-33. Constitutions provide accountability for the government and are typically drafted in a way that makes amending the document tedious.

What is the direct connection between education and democratic values?

1. Thomas Jefferson noted that there is a connection.
2. There is a passive acceptance between the two.
3. Education supports habits of democratic governance.
4. Political arrangements are unnecessary.

C, pages 56-57. Democracy takes practice and part of the practice is supporting an educated people.

Why are the separations of powers not neat?

1. The powers are often overlapping, and the three branches of government need to work together to support democratic rights.
2. Democracy is messy and complicated.
3. Regulation and rule-making is a process, which in some instances will require judicial review
4. All of the above

D, page 34. The three pillars of government have their set roles; however, this will require that they work together in support of democratic governance and practices.

Due process is a common part of constitutional democracies as it protects the people’s rights. Which of the following statements is true?

1. Police must have a warrant (court order) in order to search a home. People cannot be arrested without being charged. People have the right to a speedy and public trial. People will not be subjected to double jeopardy. Cruel and unusual punishments are illegal.
2. Cruel and unusual punishments are against the law. Double jeopardy is illegal. Police do not need a warrant to search a home.
3. The state does not have the means to enforce the laws.

A, pages 27-29. Due process ensures that the state is not arbitrary with the enforcement of the law.

Democratic elections are competitive and are

1. Periodic and inclusive.
2. Inclusive, and held when the prime minister calls an election every other year.
3. Expensive and part of the periodic table
4. All of the above

A, pages 19-24. Democratic elections must be free, frequent, and transparent. The elections must be held periodically, and be inclusive of all the parties. The results of an election need to be viewed as legitimate.

The winner-takes-all system is also referred to as the first past the post. Which of the following statements is true of a first-past-the-post system?

1. Winners always win
2. The person who wins the majority, wins the election.
3. First past the post is about newspapers
4. All of the above

B, page 25. Electoral systems vary. Winner takes all or first past the post is one type of electoral system. Some have argued that it is not as fair as proportional representation, where a percentage of the seats are allocated based on the election results.

Citizens have a number of responsibilities. What do these responsibilities include?

1. Passive participation, a lack of free speech, and a state-mandated religion.
2. High rates of involvement on social media, a lack of following the news, and passive participation.
3. Participation in society, exercise rights to vote, free speech, religion, and educating themselves about policies, and serve on juries.
4. Serve on juries for criminal trials every four years

C, pages 16-19. The rights of citizenship include these responsibilities. Citizens can vote, have speech and religious protections, and the opportunities to participate in civil society.