

Democracy is the
worst form of
government politics
essay



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Democracy is a strong and emotive concept. It has sparked debate and discussion since its first inception in ancient Greece, right through to its modern conception of 'western liberal democracy'. Today, it has become the predominant form of government around the world, and, indeed, countries go to war to defend the values and principles that it enshrines. Huntington defined democracy as involving two dimensions: contestation and participation, and that "it implies the existence of those civil and political freedoms to speak, publish, assemble and organise that are necessary for political debate" (1991, p. 7). There are, of course, problems peculiar to democracy; however, do these problems warrant the description of democracy as being the 'least worst' option?

Perhaps one of the most prevalent criticisms of democracy is that it can lead to ineffectual government. When Aristotle first established typologies and started to categorise political systems, he considered democracy to be a 'perverted' form of 'rule by many'. This idea of the masses being unfit to govern is still evident in Britain up until 1862, and perhaps even 1928 when universal suffrage was introduced. There are still free market economists up to this day, such as Milton Friedman, who believe that democracy produces inefficient economic systems. They argue that in order to create effective economies, governments need to make what are generally considered to be deeply unpopular decisions - such as mass privatization, de-regulation and removing worker's rights; particularly relevant at this time of economic austerity. This is an example of the 'governing paradox' (Flinders, 2010, p. 311). In part this is due to what they see as an inherent contradiction between Capitalism and Democracy - that as economic agents, people are

expected to act in their own self-interest, whereas, when it comes to casting their ballot, they are expected to act in the interest of the society as a whole. However, democratic countries 'tend to be more prosperous' (Dahl, 1998, p. 58). India, for example, the world's largest democracy, grew by 5.5% in the first quarter of 2012. In more general terms, the West - predominantly America and Europe - consist of the most developed economies in the world, the overwhelming majority of which are democracies.

Increasingly, there have been those who have argued that democratic national governments have become ineffective in the face of globalisation. Democracy has spread around the world, in a development that Fukuyama referred to as the 'end of history', but now, as Gilbert (2009) argues; this is being undermined by the process of globalisation. Indeed, there is now a 'structural crisis' in Democracy (Ghali, 2009), where the need for governance is stretching beyond states. Indeed, 'national legislatures are increasingly impotent' (Gilbert, 2009). Thus we see ineffective global governance, and there are concerns over how democratic any solution can be. Is it feasible to consider democratically elected global institutions? Or should we consign ourselves to the economic oversight of appointed economists at the World Bank and the IMF? The solution lies not with Gilbert's radical devolutionary ideas, but rather with the case put forward by Ghali for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (2009). We cannot answer the problem that globalisation poses by shrinking away from it, we must embrace it and accept that global democratic oversight is becoming increasingly necessary.

The globalisation of democracy, on the other hand, has brought benefits.

Namely, that it has brought peace (Dahl, 1998). Since the Second World War, <https://assignbuster.com/democracy-is-the-worst-form-of-government-politics-essay/>

there have been few wars between democratic countries. This is because democracies are built on the basis of rational debate and discussion that tends to limit aggression. Although, there is an argument to be made that this era of peace between democracies owes itself more to free trade, and market economies rather than democracy itself. Nevertheless, there is a correlation between democracies and peace. However, we should not defend democracy on the benefits that it happens to bring about. A defence of democracy must come from first principles, that it is intrinsically good.

Democracy is fundamentally a pluralist system of power distribution, in that it diffuses power among many different competing groups albeit perhaps not equally. Thus, democracy achieves a greater level of political equality amongst citizens than any alternative (Dahl, 1998) reflecting the fundamental belief that all humans are born equal, and that consent for governance must be derived from the governed. Moreover, this allows individuals to protect their own interests. Human nature dictates that we all desire some control over our needs and wants, and J. S. Mill stated that this, the ability to protect one's own interests, protects us from evil at the hands of others. This competition between different groups within society is what protects democracies from authoritarianism. In short: 'difference is good' (Flinders, 2010). Debate and discussion, the exercise of the right to freedom of speech, are the pillars upon which democracy is built. Furthermore, democracy is 'inherently a system of rights' (Dahl, 1998, p. 48).

Democracies, by definition, grant basic political and civil rights to its citizens, so that they may participate fully in the democratic process. In order for citizens to participate, to hear the 'voice of the people', it must therefore be

necessary to grant them the right to freedom of assembly that would not be granted within an authoritarian or totalitarian regime. Enshrined in democracy is the belief in equality, and thus, establishing and enforcing rights gives that greater degree of equality than any non-democratic alternative. Moreover, granting these rights protects minority groups from persecution and allows them to protect their interests, as written previously. The society we live in has evolved so much over the generations. Society is no longer as homogenous it once was, it is increasingly made up of heterogeneous (Flinders, 2010) groups all of which represent different and varied interests, all of which must be to a greater, or lesser extent, respected. Otherwise, we commit ourselves to rule by an elite, a select few who determine their interests are above those of all others.

And therein lies democracy's intrinsic goodness. It enshrines several principles: political equality, that all citizens should have an equal say in who governs them; guaranteed and enforced political and civil rights that allow citizens to be a part of the democratic process and to protect the rights of minorities. These rights and freedoms therefore allow citizens to preserve their own interests, and to protect themselves from persecution. Of course, democracy has its problems. There will always be problems, but the idea that power should be spread, albeit unevenly, amongst citizens and not concentrated in an elite is perhaps one of the most noble. Maybe this is why Winston Churchill, an aristocrat, treated democracy with such revulsion.