**Democracy**

**Democracy has never been and never can be so durable as aristocracy or monarchy. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide. *(John Adams, U.S. president)***

**Anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that “my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge*.” (Isaac Asimov)***

**The basis of democracy is the willingness to assume well about other people. *(Marilynne Robinson)***

**Some people say beards look good, some say bad. Those who say “good” talk about free-spirited individuality. Those who say “bad” mention “silly,” “dirty” or “affected.” In a modern democracy, you know which outnumber which by whether current political candidates do or don’t wear beards. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**I like the noise of democracy. *(James Buchanan)***

**Good education is the essential foundation of a strong democracy. *(Barbara Bush, in a preface to America’s Country Schools by Andrew Gulliford)***

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**America’s Founding Fathers studied the history of democracies going back to ancient Greece. They drew the lesson that democracies can be quite fragile. *(David Brooks, in Atlantic magazine)***

**Democracy, like love, can survive any attack – save neglect and indifference. *(Paul Sweeney, in The Quarterly)*  
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**Even in a fake democracy, people ought to get what they want once in a while. *(George Carlin)***

**Democracy means that anyone can grow up to be president, and anyone who doesn’t grow up can be vice president. *(Johnny Carson)***

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**Democracy is the worst system ever invented – except for all the rest.**

***(Winston Churchill)***

**At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man walking into the little booth with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper. No amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of that point. *(Winston Churchill)***

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**Democracy consists of choosing your dictators, after they’ve told you what you think it is you want to hear. *(Alan Coren, British humorist)***

**The chief defect of a democracy is that the only political party that knows how to run the country is always the one that’s out of office. *(Bits & Pieces)***

**Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife. *(John Dewey, education reformer)***

**It has been a disappointing decade for democracy. The fall of the iron curtain is receding into the past. Instead, in places like the Arab world that were supposed to be turning the corner, we have seen an authoritarian revival. In Russia and China, any tilt toward democracy has been reversed; Hong Kong stands as a searing example of how freedoms can be taken away. Established democracies have taken a turn toward cults of personality. Each of these – Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Narendra Modi in India, and, yes, Donald Trump in the United States – comes with its own flavor. But they all share a basic disregard for minority rights and institutional safeguards. Modi in particular has risen with a brand of explicitly xenophobic and violent Hindu nationalism. Yet last week the United States hosted Modi in lavish style. At home, autocrats are cracking down. Abroad they are showing off and playing their strong hands. The unfortunate truth is that increasingly the United States is being forced to choose between evils. There are the evils that are known – Vladimir Putin – and those that are substantially unknown, like Yevgeny Prigozhin. There are the adversaries we need to keep in check, like China’s Xi Jinping. And there are the autocrats whose goodwill we need to cultivate. Worst of all, the autocrats know this, and have become skilled at triangulating between the U.S., China, and Russia, and pulling the levers – oil, refugees – that make the West swallow hard and put moral conviction on the back burner. There is no easy solution here. But in the long run, advancing democracy and safe-guarding human rights are our own brand of realpolitik; our values are also our interests. The only world that is safe for the United States is one in which democracy is ascendant. Whatever compromises we make along the way, that remains the goal. *(Mark Gimein, in The Week magazine, July 7 / July 14, 2023)***

**Democracy, in its essence and genius, is imaginative love for and identification with a community with which, much of the time and in many ways, one may be in profound disagreement. *(Marilynne Robinson, novelist)***

**In a democracy, agreement is not essential; participation is. *(Gene Brown, in Danbury, Connecticut, News-Times)***

**In a democracy, dissent is an act of faith. *(J. William Fulbright)***

**Democracy In Action: Seen on the corner of Broadway and Sixth Avenue: A guy holding a sign that reads: “Running for President -- Need Money for Campaign.” *(Rocky Mountain News)***

**Today, September 15th, is the International Day of Democracy, a day for individuals and governments to promote and uphold principles of democracy including truth, justice, equal opportunity, individual rights, the common good, and the rule of law. *(The Daily Chronicles)***

**It’s not the voting that’s democracy – it’s the counting. *(Tom Stoppard, Czechoslovak-born British author and dramatist)***

**Less than 8 percent of the world’s population live under a monarchy, down from more than a third in 1950. *(The Wall Street Journal, as it appeared in The Week magazine, September 30, 2022)***

**Just 34 of the world’s 195 nations are liberal democracies, down from 42 in 2012. Seventy percent of the world’s population, or 5.4 billion people, currently live under a dictatorship, while only 13 percent live in a liberal democracy with free elections, the rule of law, and individual rights. *(Axios, as it appeared in The Week magazine, April 15, 2022)***

**It is a strange fact that freedom and equality, the two basic ideas of democracy, are to some extent contradictory*. (Thomas Mann)***

**Democracy is not a matter of entertainment, it’s a matter of engagement. *(John Herbers & James McCartney, in American Journalism Review)***

**I swear to the Lord I still can't see why democracy means everybody but me.**

***(Langston Hughes, Harlem Renaissance poet)***

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**Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it – good and hard. *(H. L. Mencken, journalist)***

**Democracy is the art and science of running the circus from the monkey cage*. (H. L. Mencken, journalist)***

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**Democracy may not prove in the long run to be as efficient as other forms of government, but it has one saving grace: it allows us to know and say that it isn’t. *(Bill Moyers, in Newsweek magazine)***

**Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary. *(Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian theologian)***

**Our democracy is not a speedboat. It’s an ocean liner. *(Barack Obama, U.S. president)***

**Democracy is like a tambourine – not everyone can be trusted with it. *(John Oliver, on Last Week Tonight with John Oliver)***

**Every government is a parliament of whores. The trouble is, in a democracy the whores are us. *(P. J. O’Rourke)***

**Democracy is the only system that persists in asking the Powers That Be whether they are the Powers That Ought to Be. *(Sydney J. Harris, journalist, Publishers Hall Syndicate)***

**Poll Watch: Only 20% of Americans are very or fairly satisfied with the way U.S. democracy is working. In Sweden, 58% are satisfied with how their democracy is working – the highest total in the world. In France, 29% are satisfied with democracy, and in the U.K., 28% are. *(The Week magazine, December 29, 2023/January 5, 2024)***

**Democracy is a process by which the people are free to choose the man who will get the blame. *(Associated Press)***

**Democracy produces both heroes and villains, but it differs from a fascist state in that it does not produce a hero who is a villain. *(Margaret Halsey, writer)***

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**We Americans grow up assuming that democracy is the ideal form of government. But is it really? The ancient Greek philosophers didn’t think so.**

**Neither did the founding fathers who wrote our Constitution. Pure democracy – one person, one vote – gives the average person a lot to say about how things are run. But is it wise to trust the future of a great country solely to the opinions of an average voter? More than 2,000 years ago the Greeks had some unfortunate experiences with democracy. Demagogues led the people blindly into regrettable, bloody decisions – mob psychology at its worst. The Greeks, as a result, distrusted democracy. They preferred to put their faith in a government by a well-educated, public-spirited aristocracy. The trouble is such aristocracies don’t last forever. And when they turn selfish and self-interested, what can you do about it? Short of a revolution, that is.**

**The founders of our Constitution tried to combine the best of both approaches. First they established the House of Representatives, which is chosen directly by vote of the people in a general election. Representatives have to be reelected every two years. If they don’t represent the public point of view, the voters can get rid of them promptly. The Senate was more along the lines of an elite aristocracy. It was supposed to consist of two outstanding citizens from each state elected, not by the public, but by the state legislatures. Senators were subject to reelection only once every six years, and that not by the general public. This gave them more freedom to do what they thought best for the country without worrying about the immediate voter reaction.**

**Unfortunately, in 1913, in order to give the average person more voice in the government, we amended the Constitution and changed the way of electing Senators. Now they are elected by popular vote, the same as Representatives, and have to be much more alert to voter opinions. This has seldom been more obvious than it was during the Senate hearings concerning the nomination of Judge Bork to the Supreme Court. Pressure groups on both sides were openly threatening to oppose various Senators at their next election if they didn’t cooperate. The change in Senate election procedures may also be responsible for the fact that we can no longer control public spending. Saying no to the public demand for various spending programs is substantially more risky than it used to be. Few Senators care to stand up and do it.**

**Is this what we want in both houses of Congress – people who merely reflect the views of the average voter? Shouldn’t we have, in at least one house, people of superior background and experience who are free to do what they think best for the country, people without such fear of losing their jobs in the next election? That’s what our founding fathers intended. We suspect they knew more about what they were doing than the people who amended the Constitution in 1913. *(John Luther, in Bits & Pieces, March, 1988)***

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**Our great democracies still tend to think that a stupid man is more likely to be honest than a clever man. *(Bertrand Russell)***

**Democracy is the process by which people choose the man who’ll get the blame. *(Bertrand Russell)***

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**The real impact of democracy in Eastern Europe won’t be realized until people have to stand in line all day for concert tickets instead of groceries. *(Doug Larson, United Feature Syndicate)***

[**Midterm Elections: It turns out that “securing democracy did resonate with voters.” All told, according to the nonpartisan group States United Action, “94election deniers ran for offices that oversee elections and only 14 won.”**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)[**“The stakes could not have been higher, said Charlotte Alter in Time. In last week’s midterms, a host of candidates who trumpeted Donald Trump’s Big Lie that the 2020 election was stolen were seeking offices that would have put them in a position to oversee elections – and “sow chaos” – in swing states in 2024. But nearly all of them lost.**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)[**Still, there are signs “the hornet of election denialism just might be losing his sting,” said Austin Sarat and Dennis Aftergut in The Hill. Lake, who called her narrow loss “BS,” may yet prove to be a prominent exception, but its “remarkable” that nearly all the Republican losers have yet to cry fraud. Their concession speeches were “the sounds of democracy,” and it was “good to hear them.” *(The Week magazine, November 25, 2022)***](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)

**The idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process. *(Adlai Stevenson)***

**A democratic government is only as strong as the alert conscience of its people. *(Charles W. Tobey, in The Return to Morality)***

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**Television is democracy at its ugliest. *(Paddy Chayefsky)***

**Television has made dictatorship impossible but democracy unbearable. (Shimon Peres)**

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**The thing about democracy, beloveds, is that it is not neat, orderly, or quiet. It requires a certain relish for confusion. *(Molly Ivins)***

**I’m tired of hearing it said that democracy doesn’t work. Of course it doesn’t work. It isn’t supposed to work. We are supposed to work it. *(Alexander Woollcott)***

**Democracy is supposed to give you the feeling of choice, like Painkiller X and Painkiller Y. But they’re both just aspirin. *(Gore Vidal)***

**We may have democracy, or we may have wealth in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both. *(Louis Brandeis)***

**Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time. *(E. B. White)***

**Why liberals are losing to autocrats: “The central struggle in the world right now is between liberalism and authoritarianism,” said David Brooks, and “the authoritarians have the momentum.” The populist tide is lifting quasi-autocrats in the U.S., India, Hungary, and Turkey, while “straight-up dictators” Vladimir Putin of Russia and Xi Jinping of China expand their power and influence, Why is liberalism in trouble? It has much to recommend it: its strong respect for individual rights and personal choice, its “live-and-let-live tolerance.” But by focusing so heavily on the individual, liberalism fails to address a powerful human need for “primal bonds” with family, ethnic culture, national traditions, and religion. Authoritarians appeal to “faith, family, soil, and flag,” and warn the masses that liberals seek to eradicate all that seems solid – “from your morality to your gender” – and replace it with personal whim. That opens the door to the claim that “we need a strongman to defend us from social and moral chaos.” For liberalism to survive and thrive, it must acknowledge that “people need to feel connected to a transcendent order” that provides continuity, belonging, and meaning. Otherwise, “this is going to be an ugly election year.” *(The Week magazine, May 31, 2024)***

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