

Rethinking American Electoral Democracy

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Starting with an in-class exercise

Think about the term “represent”. What does it mean to you? In which situations in life do we find ourselves represented?

Thinking broadly (i.e., not just in terms of politics), who best represents you (including people or groups)?

- 1
- 2
- 3

Thinking in this same way, who do you represent?

- ①
- ②
- ③

Name three general categories where you need representation.

- ①
- ②
- ③

What qualities compelled you to include them. Is there anything special about their (your) identity? In what ways does having representation make life better?

Some dictionary definitions of the term include:

- to substitute in some capacity for : act the part of, in place of, or for (as another person) usually by legal right: as
- to serve especially in a legislative body by delegated authority usually resulting from an election
- to provide legal representation to as a lawyer
- to act as the representative of in a class action
- to describe as having a specified character or quality

Rethinking American Electoral Democracy

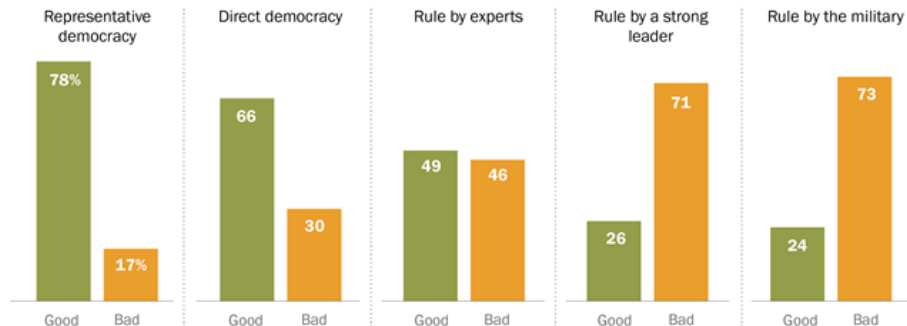
Chapter 1 - Creating a Model Electoral Democracy

Positive view of democracy

-American widely view democracy as a good thing

Widespread support for representative and direct democracy, but many are also open to nondemocratic alternatives

Would ___ be a good or bad way of governing our country?



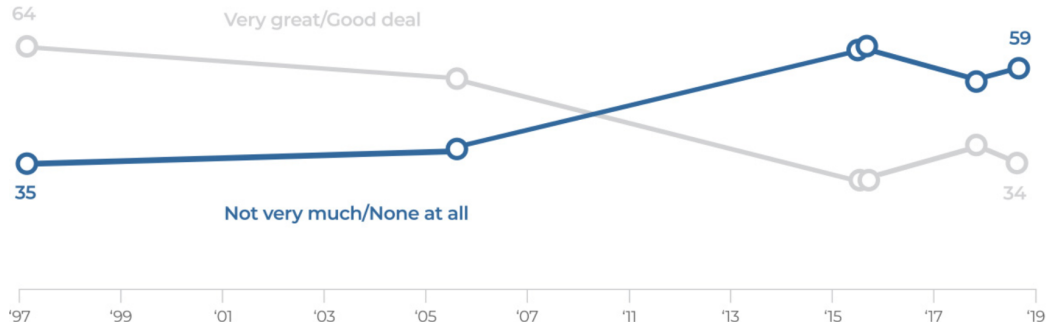
Note: Percentages are global medians based on 38 countries. Full question wordings for political systems: Representative democracy, "A democratic system where representatives elected by citizens decide what becomes law"; Direct democracy, "A democratic system where

Declining trust and confidence

- But American's trust and confidence in the wisdom of other Americans to make political decisions is in decline

Less than half of Americans express confidence in public's political wisdom

% saying they have ____ (of) trust and confidence in the wisdom of American people in making political decisions



Democracy in trouble?

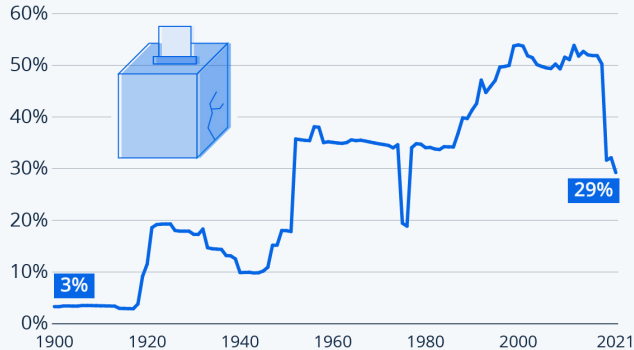
- A majority (52%) of young Americans believe that our democracy is either “in trouble,” or “failing”¹
- On American Exceptionalism, less than one-third believe that “America is the greatest country in the world”
- Young Americans place the chances that they will see a second civil war in their lifetime at 35%; chances that at least one state secedes at 25%
 - Nearly half (46%) of young Republicans place the chances of a second civil war at 50% or higher, compared to 32% of Democrats

¹The Harvard Youth Poll, 2,109 18 to 29-year-old U.S. residents conducted between Oct. 26 and Nov. 8, 2021. <https://iop.harvard.edu/youth-poll/fall-2021-harvard-youth-poll>

Global Share of the Population living in a democracy

Fragile Democracy

Share of global population living in a democracy*
(1900-2021)



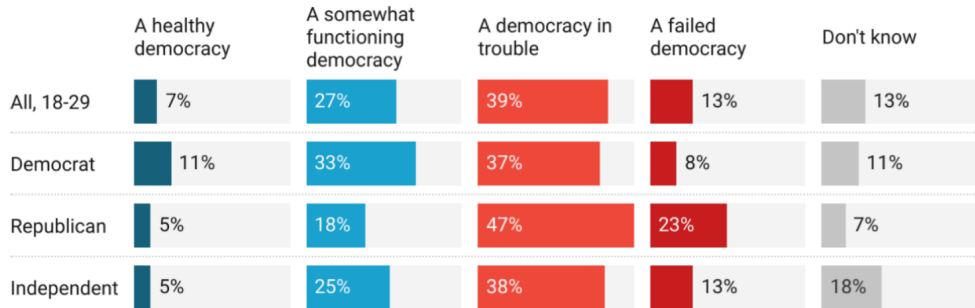
Political regime classifications are based on criteria set by Lührmann et al. (2018) and as assessed by V-Dem Institute.

* 'Electoral' or 'Liberal' democracies

Source: Our World in Data

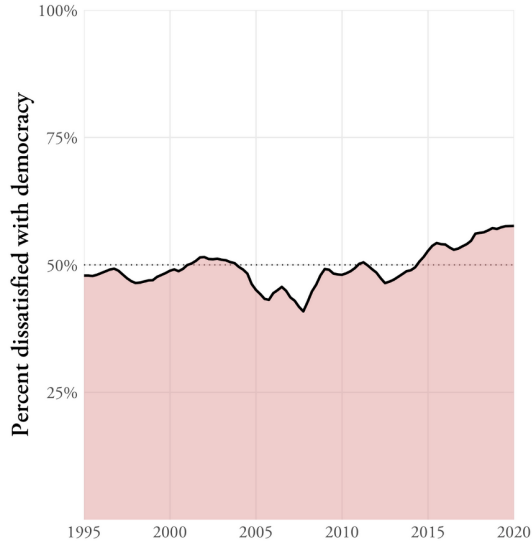
Public is split on how well democracy is working

Which of the following phrases best describes the United States today?



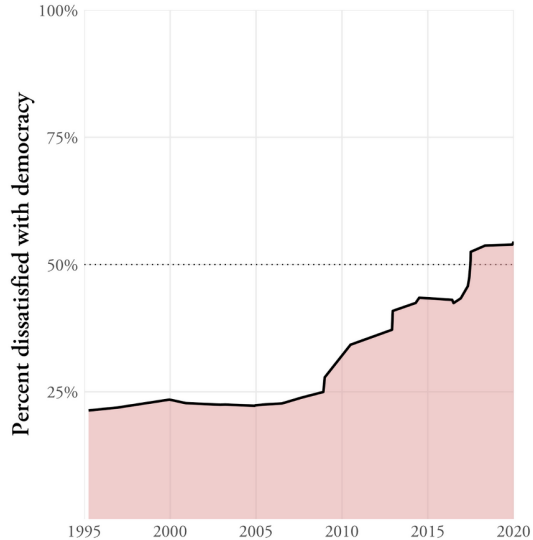
Source: Harvard IOP Youth Poll; Fall 2021 • Created with Datawrapper

Dissatisfaction with democracy in all democracies



Graphic by David H. Montgomery; Source: University of Cambridge's Centre for the Future of Democracy

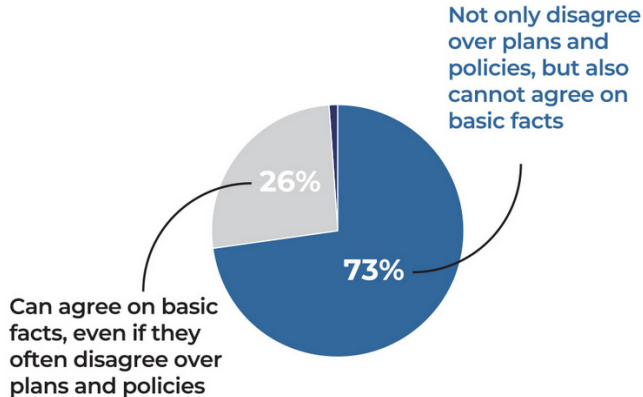
Dissatisfaction with democracy in the United States



Graphic by David H. Montgomery; Source: University of Cambridge's Centre for the Future of Democracy

Republicans and Democrats say they can't agree on 'basic facts'

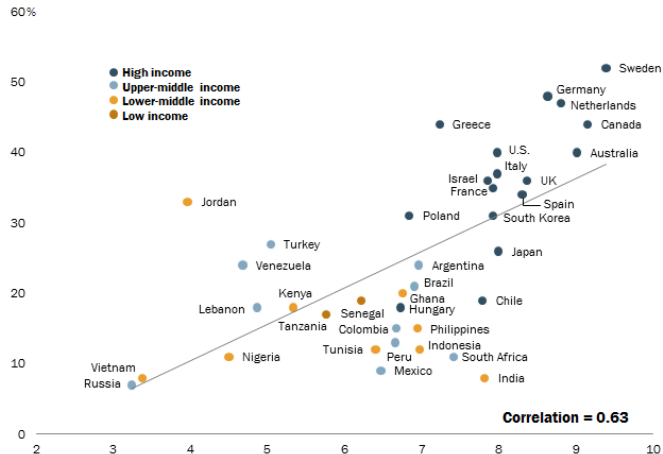
On important issues facing the country, most Republican voters and Democratic voters... (%)



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*% committed to representative democracy**



Assuming Democracy is good. . .

Assuming democracy is good:

- How much and what kind of democracy should we have?
 - Should we have direct democracy where everyone votes on the internet?
 - Should this happen for all levels of government, from city issues to federal issues?
 - What offices should be elected, and which appointed?
 - Who should appoint, and who should confirm? Can the public recall?

Criteria for a Model Electoral Democracy

- “In every democratic country a substantial gap exists between actual and ideal democracy. That gap offers us a challenge: can we find ways to make ‘democratic’ countries more democratic?”²
- One Person, One Vote
- Competitive Elections
- Transparency
- Rules that are not burdensome

²Dahl, R.A., Dahl, and Yale University Press. 1998. On Democracy. Yale University Press.