

The Tyranny of the Minority

The principles of democracy are fundamental to the functioning of any free state. The United States, a country whose values are defined on the principles of democracy and that is currently the world's longest standing democracy, was founded under the premise that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Under these principles, democracy should flourish; it is presumably self-evident that a government "of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."¹ Democratic governments hold certain values – to encourage free elections, to keep promises, and not least to uphold the will of the people – anything short of these is, by definition, not a democracy. These rights are built into the founding documents of the United States; moreover, each of the 46 Presidents has taken an Oath to "preserve, protect, and defend" the Constitution of the United States, inherently democracy, yet we find ourselves at a time where more than half of Americans believe democracy is under attack.² The Tyranny of the Minority addresses the fundamental problems enabling this attack, among which are some of the processes the U.S. holds closest to heart; processes that, in the 248 years since its founding, the United States has embraced, even worshipped. Over a much longer period, some of the strongest democracies around the world have endured similar threats – the French, Argentine, Hungarians, Polish – though none have survived to be quite the same as before. We find ourselves at a pivotal point in history: will the world's longest standing democracy flourish, or will it die?

The electoral college and the two-party system have long been subjects of heated debate. The electoral college is a process designed by the founding fathers to eliminate the threat of majority rule. The Founders thought that electing the President of the Free World by a pure popular vote would inherently pave the path to forgetting about the minority. In a way, they were right; history has shown that democracies without this protection, such as Argentina and France, get shuffled into conflict within their own societies. Moreover, in the Founders' defense, the electoral college was designed and implemented at a time where the popular vote *would* likely ensure the same fate for the States due to clear political and social divisions within states, but that time is over. Politics were simpler even just decades ago. There has historically been two major parties in the United States, and this practice has allowed the Republic to flourish. However, American society is becoming more polarized than any other European democracy, and this polarization is fueled by the existence of just two major political parties.³ In such a society with two major political parties, citizens are forced to choose sides depending on the "most important" issues to them. In the United States, these issues range from ideology, e.g. abortion and the separation of Church and State, from practical policy, such as gun regulation and national security. These are *all* important issues for the functioning of a successful democracy and the ability to protect and preserve its' values, but in an atmosphere where the people are forced to choose only a few

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Gettysburg-Address>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/15/politics/cnn-poll-most-americans-democracy-under-attack/index.html>

³ <https://www.brown.edu/news/2020-01-21/polarization>

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issues to base their entire political identity around, such a democracy cannot possibly survive. The electoral college effectively nullifies the popular vote, allowing an unpopular candidate, who would have lost a truly democratic election, to win the Presidency. As was particularly evident in the 2016 and 2020 elections, as well as the Republican primaries in the first weeks of 2024, the electoral college, or more so the underlying process, allows candidates to win before all citizens have even voted – this happened in the Iowa 2024 primaries, where the race was called for former president Trump before half the state had the chance to cast their ballots. Moreover, the electoral college not only protects majority rule, but it also enables minority rule. Presidential elections are often determined by a small number of states, i.e. “swing states,” because these are the only states where individual votes actually matter. In states like Massachusetts, Maine, or Colorado, the result will likely always be blue simply due to the majority of voters in those states siding with the Democratic party. By effectively eliminating the votes of these non-swing states, the electoral college is not only antidemocratic, but it allows an election to be decided by a very small subset of the population that happen to live in the right state to have their voice heard, even if that voice does not align with the majority of the population.

The average ages of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate are 58.3 and 63.9 respectively. In context, this means that the average member of congress has lived through is three generations and is two generations older than the youngest eligible voter. The climate surrounding the (likely, though assumed) 2024 U.S. Presidential nominees is arguably even more distressing – the sitting president would be 86 at the end of a second term, his contender 81. With respect to engagement and connection, age is much more than just a number. The two to three generations between the U.S. president and the youngest American voter discourages younger people from engaging in politics; experience is important, but there is a limit to when relatability must come first. If voters do not feel heard or do not think they are adequately represented, why would they vote? Society has drastically changed in the past 65 years, which is approximately the age gap between sitting President Biden and the youngest voter and is the “accepted” age of retirement in the United States. Discouraging young voters and failing to represent their views causes distrust, limits engagement, and overrepresents older generations that do not hold majority views in society. This concept plagues all three branches of the U.S. government, though perhaps most evidently the judicial branch. Supreme Court Justices serve for life, setting a barrier between the justices and the public, especially in their ideologies and values. The Court should be objective – though this is sometimes questionable in practice – but at the same time, the Court should uphold the values of the nation and the people that the laws apply to. As new generations are born, the country and its political climate change, and the courts must adapt to uphold the new values of society. The role of the courts in being objective versus political is up for debate, but it remains clear that the current U.S. Supreme Court does not accurately represent the values of the majority population.

On the surface, solving the issue of minority rule seems straightforward – just embrace true democracy – but there is a reason no true democracy has never survived. It is simply not possible to cater to the wants and needs of all individuals, and unfortunately, not all individuals are willing to negotiate or compromise. A democratic republic has worked for the United States for the past 200 years, but we are at a time where American democracy must undergo changes to survive. There must be a more democratic process to elect representatives to powerful offices, especially the President. The

electoral college is not democratic, and it enables the most powerful leader in the world to be elected without the majority of the public's support. How a truly democratic process is implemented is arbitrary, but it is clear that the electoral college does not uphold democratic values in a polarized society. This issue extends to the two-party system; two political parties cannot possibly represent the diversity of opinions in an inherently diverse society. There must be more than two parties for voters to choose electable representatives with shared values and decrease the country's polarization to promote compromise and change. Furthermore, the multi-generational gap between leaders and the range of eligible voters is a major issue. There must be limits to how long Justices can serve on the highest Court to ensure that these justices are in touch with the current social and political climate of the Nation and will uphold the values that the public desires. Additionally, elected leaders, i.e. members of congress and the president, must be aware of the society which they serve; in a world where technology is advancing faster than ever, the most feasible way to achieve this is by implementing age limits. In a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, policy must be created, enforced, and scrutinized by leaders that understand the current society and adequately represent the culture of the Nation, not partisan politicians past the average citizen's age of retirement.

In short, the U.S. political system is designed to combat majority rule, though it does so almost too well. Democracy requires compromise, the ability to listen and reason, and *by definition* aims to cater to the wants and needs of the majority. In the U.S., the democratic system attempts to counteract the understandable fear of majority rule, but in doing so, the system enables minority rule. The greatest underlying reason for this flaw is the system itself – a democratic republic acting as a true democracy. In the modern era, where polarization is at an all-time high, the principles of *true democracy* must be upheld, starting with the system itself. Electing the leader of the free world with an inherently undemocratic process based on dividing the population into subsets based on geographical location does not come close to accurately representing the electorate, nor does allowing judges to serve for life on the highest court. Voters feel underrepresented, and rightfully so. Eliminating majority rule is important for a true democracy in the same way as free elections, but there is a limit to how much the views of the majority can be suppressed. True democracies attempt to cater to the public *as a whole* with no citizen left out – the United States is not a true democracy. Albeit protecting against majority rule, the current U.S. system does not embrace *true* democratic values. The Founders could not have predicted the current political climate, and they certainly did not intend to enable minorities to rule. They wanted to be inclusive – a fundamental value upon which the United States, and democracy, is built – but there is a point at which inclusion of few promotes exclusion of many. That is where the United States finds itself today.