

In Search of a “Healthy” American Democracy

The Role of Elected Officials

How should elected officials act when in office?

- ✓ Accessibility
- ✓ Responsive
- ✓ Representative (reflects the community)
- ✓ Committed
- ✓ Unbiased (“Disinterestedness”)

Potential problems:

- ✓ Unqualified (representatives and political appointees)
- ✓ Inaccessible, unresponsive, unaccountable
- ✓ Development of an entrenched political class
- ✓ Influence of \$
- ✓ Class, Race, and/or Gender Privilege
- ✓ Undue power of incumbency
- ✓ Political expediency of fear-mongering
- ✓ Political expediency of *binarism*

The Role of the Electorate and Elections

What are the hallmarks of a healthy democracy within the context of elections?

- ✓ High percentage of registration
- ✓ High rate of voting
- ✓ No artificial barriers to voting
- ✓ Informed electorate

Potential Problems:

- ✓ Voting driven by animus, ignorance, fear
- ✓ Apathy
- ✓ Groups marginalized from process
- ✓ Gerrymandering
- ✓ Special/Individual Interests vs. Common Good
- ✓ Cultural warfare
- ✓ False Equivalency

The Role of “Daily” Democracy

To what extent should a democratic approach and ideology be made present in the spaces and places of daily life?

- ✓ School
- ✓ Work (e.g. – organized labor)
- ✓ Community/Civic Organizations
- ✓ Spiritual Life
- ✓ Law Enforcement
- ✓ Political Discourse

Potential Problems:

- ✓ Tribalism
- ✓ Unequal schools and neighborhoods
- ✓ Death of Civic Organizations
- ✓ Transiency
- ✓ Distance and mistrust between police and community

The Role of Political Parties

Is there a place for political parties within a healthy democracy? If so, how should they act?

- ✓ What is purpose of political parties?
- ✓ Why only two?
- ✓ How can more voices be heard?
- ✓ Impact of closed primaries?

Potential Problems:

- ✓ Blind allegiance
- ✓ Race to the extremes
- ✓ Silencing other voices/perspectives
- ✓ Rigged system

The Role of Media

To what extent is a free press a necessary component of American democracy?

- ✓ Source of Information
- ✓ Check on Political Corruption

Potential Problems:

- ✓ Biased press
- ✓ Ineffective press
- ✓ Over-emphasis of entertainment (over news)
- ✓ Loss of trust in free press

The Role of the American System of Governance

How does America's constitutional framework support healthy democracy?

- ✓ Federalism (what is the right balance?)
- ✓ Balance of Powers/Checks & Balances
- ✓ Judicial Review

Potential Problems:

- ✓ Unbalanced notion of federalism
- ✓ Inconsistent federal enforcement
- ✓ Uncritical devotion to states' rights and local control
- ✓ Politicized court system
- ✓ Inability of unwillingness to check other branches

The Question of Reform vs. Stability

How should the American democracy encourage reform while maintaining stability?

- ✓ Can grassroots movements make a difference?
- ✓ Pace of reform
- ✓ Root and branch vs. Piecemeal change

Potential problems:

- ✓ Grassroots habitually seem as malcontents
- ✓ Uncritical view of change (i.e. – shake it up no matter what the costs)
- ✓ Inaccurate claims of past “glory days”

The Big 3

How can the American democracy reflect and protect core American values such as liberty, justice, and equality?

- ✓ Individual rights vs. group rights
- ✓ Competing Individual rights
- ✓ Social justice (e.g. – carceral state)
- ✓ Economic justice (Are capitalism and democracy compatible? Inseparable? Strange partners?)