

ARE WE A REPUBLIC OR A DEMOCRACY?

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We often hear the claim that our nation is a democracy. That wasn't the vision of the founders. They saw democracy as another form of tyranny. If we've become a democracy, I guarantee you that the founders would be deeply disappointed by our betrayal of their vision. The founders intended, and laid out the ground rules, for our nation to be a republic.

The word democracy appears nowhere in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution -- two most fundamental documents of our nation. Instead of a democracy, the Constitution's Article IV, Section 4, guarantees "to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government." Moreover, let's ask ourselves: Does our pledge of allegiance to the flag say to "the democracy for which it stands," or does it say to "the republic for which it stands"? Or do we sing "The Battle Hymn of the Democracy" or "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"?

So what's the difference between republican and democratic forms of government? John Adams captured the essence of the difference when he said, "You have rights antecedent to all earthly governments; rights that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws; rights derived from the Great Legislator of the Universe." Nothing in our Constitution suggests that government is a grantor of rights. Instead, government is a protector of rights.

In recognition that it's Congress that poses the greatest threat to our liberties, the framers used negative phrases against Congress throughout the Constitution such as: shall not abridge, infringe, deny, disparage, and shall not be violated, nor be denied. In a republican form of government, there is rule of law. All citizens, including government officials, are accountable to the same laws. Government power is limited and decentralized through a system of checks and balances. Government intervenes in civil society to protect its citizens against force and fraud but does not intervene in the cases of peaceable, voluntary exchange.

Contrast the framers' vision of a republic with that of a democracy. In a democracy, the majority rules either directly or through its elected representatives. As in a monarchy, the law is whatever the government determines it to be. Laws do not represent reason. They represent power. The restraint is upon the individual instead of government. Unlike that envisioned under a republican form of government, rights are seen as privileges and permissions that are granted by government and can be rescinded by government.

How about a few quotations demonstrating the disdain our founders held for democracy? James Madison, [Federalist Paper No. 10](#): In a pure democracy, "there is nothing to check the inducement to sacrifice the weaker party or the obnoxious individual." At the 1787 Constitutional Convention, Edmund Randolph said, "... that in tracing these evils to their origin every man had found it in the turbulence and follies of democracy." John Adams said, "Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There was never a democracy yet that did not commit suicide." Chief Justice John Marshall observed, "Between a balanced republic and a democracy, the difference is like that between order and chaos." In a word or two, the founders knew that a democracy would lead to the same kind of tyranny the colonies suffered under King George III.

The framers gave us a Constitution that is replete with undemocratic mechanisms. One that has come in for recent criticism and calls for its elimination is the Electoral College. In their wisdom, the framers gave us the Electoral College so that in presidential elections large, heavily populated states couldn't democratically run roughshod over small, sparsely populated states.

Here's my question. Do Americans share the republican values laid out by our founders, and is it simply a matter of our being unschooled about the differences between a republic and a democracy? Or is it a matter of preference and we now want the kind of tyranny feared by the founders where Congress can do anything it can muster a majority vote to do? I fear it's the latter.