



Democracy

Meaning

When Abraham Lincoln gave us that famous definition—

“Government of the people, for the people, and by the people”—

it sounded simple, but each phrase carries layers.

- **Government of the people** – That’s true for all governments. Whether it’s the Junta in Myanmar or the Republic of France, every government *claims* to be made of people. So by itself, it doesn’t say much.
- **Government for the people** – This could be benevolent despotism. Think of regimes in **China** or **North Korea**. The rulers *claim* they work for people’s welfare, but without the people’s consent, it’s incomplete.
- **Government by the people** – This is the crux. It’s where democracy comes alive. Literally, it means **direct democracy**—like Switzerland, where citizens vote on referendums. But in practice, most countries rely on **representative democracy**—India, the U.S.—where leaders are chosen through elections.

Now, what makes modern democracy **essential**?

- **Universal Adult Franchise (UAF)** – the dignity of “one person, one vote.”
- **Free flow of information** – media, open debates, free speech.
- **Elections & majority approval** – periodic accountability.
- **Minority accommodation** – because democracy is not just about 51% dominating 49%.

The **faith in democracy** is based on a deep conviction:

There are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary

people.

But here’s the irony—ordinary people are also fallible. They can be swayed by emotions, misled by a **demagogue**, or carried away by populism.

This creates a tension: sometimes, **rule of the mediocre** dominates. How do societies deal with this?

By pushing towards **meritocracy**—where **occupational hierarchy** is based on **qualification, competence, and character**, not age, caste, gender, or race.

That’s why people like **Raghuram Rajan** (economist) or **Manmohan Singh** (technocrat-turned-PM) symbolize democracy blending with meritocracy.

And yet, the grand conclusion still stands tall:

All ills of democracy can only be cured by more democracy.

Not less. Not authoritarian shortcuts. But **deeper democracy**—more participation, more accountability, more transparency.

That’s the living spirit of democracy: messy at times, fragile at times, but still the best system humanity has invented to respect both equality and dignity.

Expansion of Democracy

When we talk about the **Expansion of Democracy**, we can’t escape **Samuel P. Huntington**. He gave us the famous idea of **waves of democracy**—just like waves in the ocean, democracy has advanced, then sometimes receded.

First Wave – It began way back in the **17th century** in the **West**. Think of the **U.S., France, and Britain**. They pioneered democratic practices. But it didn’t last forever. In the **interwar period**, countries like **Germany and Portugal** fell back into authoritarianism—this



was the **reverse wave**.

Second Wave – After the **Second World War**, democracy spread again in the **West** and in many **former colonies**. But once more, there was a setback. In much of the **Third World**, democracy collapsed—except in **India**, which proudly remained the exception.

Third Wave – The big moment came in the **late 1980s** with the **collapse of the USSR**. Suddenly, democracy swept across **Eastern Europe**, becoming “almost universal.” But there was one major puzzle—**Arab exceptionalism**, meaning democracy did not take root in much of the Arab world.

Fourth Wave – That puzzle seemed to be solved with the **Arab Spring in 2010**, starting in **Tunisia**. People rose against dictators with hope for freedom. But what followed was the **Arab Summer**—a harsh reality check, with **foreign states and non-state actors** meddling. Instead of flourishing democracies, many countries sank into civil wars or authoritarian comebacks.

And here comes the **criticism**—many argue that the so-called “waves” are not just about people’s aspirations, but often a **Western discourse**. Democratisation, they say, is sometimes just a cover for controlling **resources** through **clientelist regimes**—leaders loyal not to their people, but to foreign powers.

So what’s the big takeaway? Democracy has indeed expanded in **waves**, but it’s never been a smooth journey. Each advance meets a **reverse wave**, shaped by history, geopolitics, and culture. The story of democracy is not finished—it’s still being written.

Classical Notion

When we trace democracy back to its **ancient roots**, we begin in **Greece**. There, democracy

meant the **equal participation of all “free men”** in the affairs of the polis. Decisions were made through **free discussion**, always under the umbrella of **respect for law and established procedures**.

But the Greeks themselves were divided about it. **Plato** warned that people lacked the **education** and wisdom needed to govern, which could easily lead to chaos. **Aristotle** went further—he said democracy is nothing but the **rule of the mediocre**, guided by **self-interest**. Instead, he suggested a better balance: the **mixed constitution**, which combined the wisdom of aristocracy with the inclusiveness of democracy, giving us what he called **polity**.

This idea of **mixed constitutions** carried forward—**Cicero** in Rome and later **Saint Augustine** in Christian thought both argued that rulers must be **subordinate to virtue or law**.

Fast forward to the **modern period**, thinkers like **Machiavelli** and **Montesquieu** debated **pure forms of government**, but it was **Hobbes** and **Locke** who gave democracy its real push through **social contract theory**. They argued: political legitimacy doesn’t come from **dictators** or the **divine right of kings**, but from the **consent of the people**. The state, they said, is nothing mystical—it’s an **artificial mechanical creation of men**, and its **authority rests in the individual**.

Then comes **Rousseau**, who takes it a step further. He insists on **popular sovereignty**—that true democracy must reflect the **general will**, making the state a product of the people’s collective choice.

Later, **A.V. Dicey** distilled democracy into a simple definition: it is **government where majority opinion determines legislation**. **James Bryce** added another dimension—democracy is not just about governance, it’s about **self-**



education of the people through active participation.

And so, from **ancient Athens to modern times**, democracy evolved into what we now know as **liberal democracy**, built on the foundation of **representative democracy**.

The journey shows us that democracy was never static—it has been a constant negotiation between **freedom and order, participation and competence, majority and minority**.

Liberal Democracy

Evolution

In the beginning, **property** was the ticket to political participation — only landowners or the wealthy had a voice. But with **industrialisation**, workers who powered the economy demanded the **vote**. The ruling elites realized that if they didn't include the workers, their very **system would collapse**. This struggle eventually opened the door to what we now call **Universal Adult Franchise (UAF)**.

So today, **liberal democracy** stands as a blend of **free market economy + UAF** — linking political participation with economic freedom.

Principles

At its core, liberal democracy runs on **government by consent** — and this operates at **two levels**:

1. **Representatives** agreeing on behalf of the people.
2. The **public**, informed through **mass media**, keeping a constant watch.

The heart of the system is **public accountability**.

- **John Locke** pictured the government as a **trustee** — a *night watchman*, whose job was to safeguard **natural rights** (life, liberty,

property).

- **Rousseau**, in contrast, pushed for **general will** and even **direct democracy**, emphasizing that sovereignty rests with the people.

Other principles grew out of this:

- **Majority rule** — with faith in the **wisdom of majority**.
- **Minority rights** — so that the majority doesn't crush the minority.
- **Constitutional government** — ensuring not rule of men, but **rule of law**.

Mechanism

How does all this work in practice?

- **Multi-party competition** → giving citizens real **alternatives**.
- **Political offices open to all** → no monopoly by a race, class, or gender.
- **Periodic elections under UAF** → every adult's vote counts equally.
- **Civil liberties protected** → freedom of speech, press, association, etc.
- **Independent judiciary** → guardian of the constitution.
- **Separation of powers** → executive, legislature, and judiciary keep each other in check.
- **Merit-based appointments** → dismantling privilege and nepotism.

So, when you put it all together — **Liberal Democracy** is not just voting every few years. It is a **living system** that balances **freedom with accountability, majority with minority, and law with justice**. It evolved out of struggle, adapts with time, and survives only as long as **people remain vigilant**.



Representative Democracy

Types

Representative democracy is not one-size-fits-all. It can be organized in **two types—territorial and functional**.

Territorial Representation

Here, the society is divided into **constituencies of equal population**.

- **Advantage?** It's simple, convenient, and people feel connected—they know their representative personally.
- **Disadvantage?** Local issues can take **undue prominence**, overshadowing broader national concerns.

Functional Representation

Instead of geography, society is divided on the basis of **occupations and functions**.

- For instance, **industrial workers** would elect someone to represent their industrial policy interests.
- This idea has its roots in **Guild Socialism** of **G.D.H. Cole**, who believed different groups should directly represent their professional or economic functions.
- However, a darker variant of this emerged in **corporatism under fascist regimes**, where class conflict was suppressed and **democratic elections were bypassed**.

Theories

Reactionary Theory – Hobbes

Hobbes believed in **unlimited representation** and **absolute sovereignty**. Why? Because he thought politicians had **superior knowledge and wisdom**, making them the best custodians of public interest.

In short: Trust the rulers completely, don't question them.

Conservative Theory – Edmund Burke

Burke wanted **public control** but **without direct public participation**.

- He argued: ordinary people are often swayed by passions.
- Solution? Let **elites govern**, but if they fail, they can be **replaced by another elite**.
- Parliament, for Burke, was not to serve narrow local demands, but to act as an **assembly of the nation**.
- A balance between accountability and elite wisdom.

Enlightened Model – J.S. Mill

Mill wanted representatives with both **understanding and experience**.

- He gave them **freedom and flexibility** to act, instead of being tied down to voters' wishes.
- Representatives should lead, not just follow.

Liberal Theory – John Locke

Locke believed in the **wisdom of the masses**.

- For him, representatives were nothing but **agents or messengers** of the people.
- Their legitimacy came from carrying forward the **consent of the governed**.
- Here, the people are the masters, not the rulers.

Radical Theory – Rousseau

Rousseau took it further: he didn't like representatives at all!

- For him, sovereignty belongs to the **people directly**.
- His model was **direct democracy**—citizens themselves making laws, embodying the



general will.

- “No one can represent my will better than me.”

So, you see, theories of representation are like a spectrum:

- **Hobbes** → **Absolute rulers**
- **Burke** → **Elite guardians**
- **Mill** → **Enlightened leaders**
- **Locke** → **Agents of the people**
- **Rousseau** → **Direct rule by the people themselves**

Contemporary Theories

Traditional Theories of Democracy

Traditionally, when philosophers spoke of democracy, they were mostly concerned with two things:

- **Form of government** – Who rules? How are rulers chosen?
- **Ethical justification** – Is democracy morally superior? Does it promote liberty, equality, justice?

In other words, they gave us the **ideal blueprints** and **normative arguments** about why democracy is good.

Contemporary Theories of Democracy

Now, move to the **modern world**. Here, democracy is not studied only in theory, but in practice.

- **Nature of democracy** becomes central:
 - How does democracy *actually* work?
 - What is the role of power, class, gender, culture, media?
- Instead of abstract ideals, contemporary thinkers bring in **sociological findings**.
 - For example: voting patterns, elite dominance, participation of marginalized

groups, technology's influence.

- Alongside, they bring in **ethical critiques**.
 - Does democracy live up to its promise of equality?
 - Does it empower or manipulate citizens?
 - Is it just a façade for elite control?

So, the shift is this:

- **Traditional theories** = “What should democracy be?”
- **Contemporary theories** = “What is democracy in reality, given society, economy, and power structures?”

This is why theories like **elitist theory**, **pluralist theory**, **participatory democracy**, **deliberative democracy**, **radical democracy** emerged — they dig into the **real functioning** and the **hidden challenges** of democracy.

Elitist Theory

The Core Idea

At its heart, the **Elitist Theory** says: *democracy is not really about the people ruling themselves*. Instead, it's about a **minority of elites** — those with superior influence in religion, the state, economy, or society — who actually make the decisions.

Why? Because, according to this view, the **masses** (the majority) lack the qualities of leadership. They feel safer following than taking responsibility themselves.

Key Dimensions

1. **Decisions are taken by leadership.**
 - It's not the masses but the elite leaders who make real decisions.
2. **Free competition among leaders.**
 - Democracy survives when elites compete with each other for power.
3. **People choose from competing elites.**



→ Citizens don't shape policies directly; they just *select* which elite group will lead them.

Major Thinkers

- **Vilfredo Pareto** → **Circulation of Elites**

He said society is never free from elites. Old elites decline, and new ones replace them — but it's always the rule of few. The masses *fear responsibility* and prefer to follow.

- **Robert Michels** → **Iron Law of Oligarchy**

In any large organization — political party, union, government — leadership inevitably concentrates in the hands of a few. Democracy cannot escape this “rule of the few.”

- **Joseph A. Schumpeter**

He reframed democracy: it is not about the people *making* laws, but about the people's ability to **appoint and dismiss lawmakers**. A practical, minimalist definition.

- **Raymond Aron**

He drew a sharp contrast:

- In **liberal democracy**, elites are divided, they compete, and thus create checks and balances.
- In **Soviet democracy**, elites are unified, so power is concentrated and unchecked.

- **Giovanni Sartori**

He issued a warning: *Self-government is a delusion*. The real danger is not elite leadership itself, but when **leadership disappears** — because then, the masses can be manipulated by an **anti-democratic counter-elite**.

The Essence

Elitist theory forces us to rethink democracy. Instead of the romantic idea of “rule of the people,” it shows us democracy as **rule of elites, checked by competition, accountability, and circulation**.

So the people do matter — but mainly as a **force to select, reject, and balance elites**, not as day-to-day rulers.

Pluralist Theory

Now, imagine democracy not as a single ruler, not even as a handful of elites—but as a **game of groups**. That's exactly how the **pluralist theory** looks at it.

Society, according to this view, is **differentiated**. Which means, no single centre of power dominates. Instead, you have a variety of **groups**—cultural, economic, occupational—each holding some degree of **influence**, each with its own **values, sources, and methods** of pushing for their interests.

The American political scientist **A.F. Bentley** beautifully described democracy as nothing but a **political game played by groups**. Politics, in this sense, is not the story of great men, or elites at the top, but the constant **push and pull among groups**.

Later, **Robert Dahl** sharpened this into his famous concept of **polyarchy**—literally, “rule by many.” Here, democracy is not pure majority rule, but a system with **several centres of power**, where no one group can completely dominate the others.

Think of the **policy-making process** in such a society. It is **highly decentralised**, almost like a marketplace. Policies emerge not from some sacred will of the people, nor from elites sitting in an ivory tower, but from **bargaining, negotiation, and compromise among relatively autonomous groups**.

But here comes the catch—who usually wins in this bargaining game? Often, it's the **more organised and vocal groups**. For instance,



producers—business lobbies, industry associations—tend to outweigh **consumers**, who are scattered and less vocal.

So the pluralist picture tells us: democracy is **not about elites** alone, it's not about a monolithic state, it's about the **balance of groups**, each checking, bargaining, and competing with others.

In short, **pluralism** makes democracy look like a **chorus of voices**—sometimes harmonious, often noisy, but never the monopoly of one.

Participatory Democracy

Now, when we talk about **participatory democracy**, we are raising the bar. Here, the **basic principle** is simple yet radical: the **ultimate authority of governance lies with the people** themselves.

But what does **participation** mean here? Of course, it includes the **conventional forms** we know well—**voting, contesting for public office, and campaigning**. But it goes far beyond that. Real participation is also about **community projects**—say, a local **cleanliness drive** where citizens take charge of their neighbourhoods. It's also about **acts of opposition**—**public protests and peaceful demonstrations** that remind the state who truly holds sovereignty.

Now, here's an important critique. The great political theorist **C.B. Macpherson** attacked what he called the **Schumpeter-Dahl axis**—that is, Joseph Schumpeter's minimal model of democracy (just competition among elites) and Dahl's pluralism. Macpherson said this was a **distorted view**—reducing democracy to nothing more than an **equilibrium of competitive elites**. He argued democracy should be seen not as a mere mechanism, but as a **humanist aspiration**—a way for human beings to flourish through participation.

This idea is not new—it goes back deep into history. Think of **Aristotle**, who called man a **zoon politikon**—a political animal, fulfilled only through active participation. Or **Hannah Arendt**, who celebrated the **public realm** as the very space where freedom is realised.

Closer home, **M.N. Roy** dreamed of a **radical democracy**, built on **people's committees** and grassroots participation. And **Gandhi**, with his beautiful vision of **oceanic circles of power**, saw each village as a self-sufficient unit, radiating strength outward while still connected to the whole.

Even **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** laid the foundation with his doctrine of **popular sovereignty**—the idea that sovereignty **originates in and remains with the people**, even when they move from the **state of nature to civil society**.

So, participatory democracy reminds us: democracy is not a spectator sport. It is not just watching from the stands every five years with a vote. It is the **daily practice of freedom**, where people actively shape, contest, and nurture their collective life.

When we ask *how can participatory democracy actually be achieved?*—the answer lies in one powerful word: **decentralisation**.

Instead of decisions flowing only from the top, they must be **taken by the local community** itself. Think of our very own **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI)**—villages making decisions for their own development, rather than waiting for a distant bureaucracy. That's participation in action.

Another tool is the **referendum**—direct consultation with the people. Look at the **African Union (AU)**, where on any **constitutional amendment, a referendum is a must**. That means the people themselves—not just representatives



—decide the most fundamental changes.

But why justify this model of democracy? The answer lies in **three important views**:

1. **Instrumental view** → Participation is not symbolic; it actually **promotes the interests of participants**. People safeguard their own welfare when they have a voice.
2. **Development/Educational view** → Participation itself is transformative. It **enhances general, moral, and political awareness**. People learn citizenship by practising it.
3. **Communitarian view** → Participation is not just about "me"; it is about **contributing to the common good**. It forges a community spirit, where responsibility is shared.

So, participatory democracy is not utopian—it is practical. Through **decentralisation, referendums**, and these **three justifications**, it reminds us that democracy is strongest not when a few govern in the name of many, but when the **many govern themselves, for themselves, and with themselves**.

Now, you've seen how **elitist theory** in the West says that a small group always ends up holding power. But what happens when this idea travels to **socialist countries**?

Here, it took the form of the **vanguard of the proletariat**. Lenin argued that workers by themselves might achieve only "trade union consciousness." They needed a **vanguard party**—a small, disciplined elite—to lead the revolution and the state. So yes, power was still in the hands of a few, but in theory, they represented the working class.

Naturally, this created a **gap between leaders and followers**. How do you bridge it? Different socialist countries tried different methods:

- **Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution** in China → Here, Mao turned directly to the people. He launched massive **mass campaigns**, urging students, workers, and peasants to challenge entrenched bureaucrats and keep the revolutionary spirit alive. It was chaotic, but the goal was to stop elites from becoming too distant.
- **The USSR** → They attempted something different: **democratic decentralisation**. This meant empowering lower-level councils (soviets) so that governance did not remain concentrated only at the top. It was meant to spread decision-making closer to the masses.

So notice the paradox: Even in **socialist states**, elitism persisted in the form of the **vanguard of the proletariat**. But through experiments like **Mao's mass campaigns** and **Soviet decentralisation**, there was always an effort to prevent leaders from drifting too far from the very people they claimed to represent.

Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy is fascinating because it tries to **reconcile two different models** of democracy that often pull in opposite directions.

First, think of **democracy as popular will**. This means that people must **perceive themselves as ruling**, not just being ruled over. How? Through **elections, citizen charters**, and mechanisms that make them feel they are the sovereign authority. It's about making governance responsive to the will of the people, not the **arbitrary will of officials**.

Second, we have **democracy as a bulwark of personal freedom**. Here the emphasis shifts: democracy isn't just about majority rule; it's about protecting **freedom of thought and expression**. This side says decision-making must emerge from people exercising those freedoms.



That's why we rely on **institutions like judicial review and separation of powers**—to make sure freedom is not crushed, even by the majority.

Now here's the beauty: **deliberative democracy** tries to hold these two together. It says democracy is not complete if it's just **popular will** (that could turn into majoritarianism). Nor is it enough if it's just about **freedom** (that could become too elitist or legalistic). The real essence lies in **deliberation**—reasoned discussion among free and equal citizens—so that when decisions are made, people see them as both an **expression of their will** and a **protection of their freedom**.

So, in short: deliberative democracy = **popular will + personal freedom, reconciled through dialogue, elections, charters, and constitutional checks**.

Now, remember: **deliberative democracy** is not about everyone **fighting for their self-interest**. That would just be bargaining or power play. Instead, it is about **persuading each other**, through **argument**, to arrive at **reasonable solutions** that appeal to our **shared value system**. That's the higher ideal.

But here comes the problem: in practice, **deliberative chambers such as parliament have declined**. Debates often turn into shouting matches, scripted party lines, or even pure obstruction. And alongside that, the **public sphere**—the space where citizens engage in reasoned debate—has also weakened under media noise, populism, and polarization.

This is where **Jürgen Habermas** enters the stage with his visionary idea. He dreamt of a **public sphere** structured by what he called the **ideal speech situation**. Imagine a space where:

- there is **no force except argument**,
- **all have an equal right to speak**,

- and **ideas are honest and natural**, not manipulated.

This is what he saw as the true foundation of democracy—an arena where communication is genuine.

Habermas's idea of **communicative action** takes it even further: communication is not just about transmitting information. It's about building **mutual understanding**, ensuring **accountability**, and creating decisions that people can accept because they feel they were part of the reasoning, not just subjected to it.

So in essence: deliberative democracy, through Habermas's lens, is the dream of a politics where arguments, not power, rule the day. A democracy where persuasion, not coercion, shapes our collective choices.

Think of **John Rawls** first. He says democracy must be rooted in **public reasoning**. Why? Because only when decisions are justified through **reason** can they form the basis of a **well-ordered society** — one where people accept outcomes, not because they always get what they want, but because they see the decision as **reasonable and fair**. That's the condition for true democratic legitimacy.

Now enter **Amartya Sen**. He makes it very concrete. He says: when an issue becomes part of **public debate** — say **health** or **hunger** — the **government takes it seriously**. Why? Because no state can ignore issues once they're in the spotlight of collective discussion. For Sen, **public reasoning is power** — it's what drives accountability and action.

But this idea of deliberation is not new. Earlier thinkers also saw its value:

- **Aristotle** — believed humans are **political animals**, whose very nature is fulfilled through **deliberation in the polis**.



- **J.S. Mill** — championed **discussion and debate** as essential for **truth-seeking** and for protecting liberty.
- **Hannah Arendt** — stressed that politics is about **acting together in public**, where speech and deliberation give meaning to democratic life.

So you see, from Aristotle's **polis**, to Mill's **marketplace of ideas**, to Arendt's **public action**, and finally to Rawls's and Sen's modern frameworks — all point to the same heartbeat of democracy: **deliberation and reasoning**.

In short: Democracy lives not just in voting booths or parliaments, but in the ongoing **conversation of citizens**. That's what makes it legitimate, accountable, and human.

Radical Democracy

Radical Democracy is not content with just the old ways of defining democracy. It wants to **expand the scope** of democracy. How? By recognising and possibly **combining both procedural and substantive features**.

- **Procedural features** → elections, institutions, rules.
- **Substantive features** → justice, equality, participation in real life.

Radical democracy says: democracy is incomplete if we stop at procedures. We must go deeper into people's lived experience.

McPherson's theory

Now, let's bring in **McPherson's theory**. His approach is **exhaustive**. He is a **critical liberal**, but not in the narrow individualistic sense. He adds an **egalitarian perspective**. In other words, he respects liberal values but insists they must be tied to **equality** — otherwise democracy will remain shallow.

And here comes the idea of **creative freedom**. Not just freedom *from* interference, but freedom *to do what we want to do*. It is tied to the **fulfilment of self-appointed goals** — the ability to actually live a meaningful life of our own choosing. Here, **Amartya Sen's idea of development as freedom** becomes very relevant. Development is not just GDP — it is about enhancing people's **capabilities** to realise their chosen goals.

But McPherson also reminds us: we cannot ignore **power**. Power operates in two dimensions:

- **Extractive power** — coercive, dominating, forcing people into submission.
- **Development power** — nurturing, linked to **creative freedom**, expanding people's capacities.

So, Radical Democracy pushes us to ask: can democracy move from just preventing coercion (**extractive power**) to actively enabling **development power**? Can it combine **procedures** with **substance** to truly empower individuals?

Radical Democracy is about deepening democracy — making it not just about votes, but about **freedom, equality, and empowerment** in the fullest sense.

Now, many of us grow up thinking: **Western liberal democracy** is *the* model of democracy — the gold standard. But **McPherson** challenges this. He says: wait a minute, **Western liberal democracy can't claim monopoly** over what counts as democracy.

Why? Because democracy, he argues, has **least to do with procedure** — elections, periodic voting, institutional formalities. Instead, it has **more to do with the substantive dimension** — the **empowerment of the masses**. Unless people are actually empowered, elections are just rituals.

This means: **equally valid models of democracy**



may exist outside the West, as long as they fulfil certain conditions of empowerment and participation.

Let's see how he applies this:

- **Liberal democracy** → It is good, but it must carry **more human touch**. It cannot remain mechanical, serving only formal liberties. It must deepen its sensitivity to inequality and human dignity.
- **Socialist democracy** → It holds promise of equality, but only if it ensures **intra-party democracy** and opens up the **bureaucratic system**, so it doesn't get trapped in authoritarian rigidity.
- **Third world one-party dominant systems** → These, too, can claim legitimacy if they are backed by genuine **mass support** and not mere coercion. In other words, popular participation, not just Western approval, defines their democratic character.

So, McPherson liberates the concept of democracy from being West-centric. He tells us: democracy is not a single recipe; it's a **family of models**, all valid if they genuinely empower people.

Ideal own model

Picture an **egalitarian society**. What does that mean? It means a society where equality is not just written in the constitution, but lived in the everyday lives of people. No hierarchy that crushes dignity. No barriers that block opportunities.

Now, in such a society, **no one should have extractive power**. Extractive power is coercive, dominating, exploitative — when some people or institutions pull resources, energy, or freedom out of others. In our model, that must vanish.

Instead, everyone should have **maximum**

opportunities to realise creative freedom. And what is creative freedom? It's not just freedom *from* oppression, but freedom *to* do what we truly want — to pursue self-appointed goals, to express talents, to innovate, to live with dignity. Think of Amartya Sen's vision of **development as freedom** — here, democracy means expanding real capabilities of individuals.

So, in this **ideal model of democracy**:

- No domination, no coercion → **extractive power disappears**.
- Maximum empowerment, maximum flourishing → **creative freedom blooms**.
- True **egalitarian society** → not equal poverty, but equal opportunity for self-realisation.

In short, this model combines the **egalitarian spirit** with the **humanist vision of creative freedom**. Democracy here is not just a system of votes, but a system of **lives fully lived**.

Norman Barry's evaluation

McPherson gives us a beautiful **ideal** of democracy: an egalitarian society, no **extractive power**, maximum **creative freedom**. It's inspiring. But Norman Barry reminds us — wait a second — **evaluation** of the liberal system cannot be done by measuring it against a perfect, almost utopian **ideal version**. That would be unfair.

Instead, Barry insists we must compare liberal democracy with **existing realities**. Why? Because McPherson's dream model, though appealing, is **very difficult to realise** in a world of **prevailing scarcity** — limited resources, competing interests, and inequalities.

Yet, Barry is not dismissing McPherson outright. He says — yes, the **ideal** may be difficult, but that doesn't mean we give up. What's needed is a constant effort to balance, to **meet the conflicting**



demands on all fronts as far as possible.

So, in simple words:

- McPherson inspires with a **vision**.
- Barry grounds us with **realism**.
- True progress lies in striving — pushing liberal democracy to carry more **human touch**, even if the **ideal** can never be fully reached.

This is the classic tension in political theory — **idealism vs realism**. McPherson gives us the star to steer by, Barry reminds us to keep our feet on the ground.

Democracy and Development

Lee thesis

Lee Kwan Yew advanced the Lee thesis, arguing that India represents unrealised potential due to populist policies. For him, liberal democracy is a western obsession. Instead, Asian values emphasise communitarianism, discipline, and solidarity. He prefers semi-authoritarian, guided democracies.

When we talk about **Democracy and Development**, the name that jumps out is **Lee Kwan Yew** — Singapore's founding leader. He advanced what is called the **Lee thesis**.

According to him, countries like **India** represent **unrealised potential**. Why? Because, in his view, India's **populist policies** — giving in too much to electoral promises and short-term appeasement — have slowed down genuine **development**.

Now here's the punchline of the **Lee thesis**:

- **Liberal democracy**, with its obsession over elections, free press, and individual rights, is — according to Lee — a **Western obsession**.
- Instead, Asian societies, he argued, are rooted in **Asian values: communitarianism** (community over individual), **discipline**

(strict work ethic and governance), and **solidarity** (social unity and cohesion).

From this standpoint, Lee preferred **semi-authoritarian, guided democracies** — systems where leaders could focus on long-term **developmental goals** without being derailed by constant populist pressures.

So, in essence, the **Lee thesis** challenges the Western assumption that only **liberal democracy** can deliver development. For Lee, Asian models — built on **discipline and solidarity** — can achieve rapid economic growth, even if they compromise some liberal freedoms.

Amartya Sen

Now, after hearing **Lee Kwan Yew**, you might think: "So, do we have to sacrifice democracy for development?"

That's where **Amartya Sen** steps in with a resounding **NO**.

Sen says, first of all, **development itself should be democratised**. It should not be for a privileged few — it must **reach all**. Development, for Sen, is not just about GDP growth or shiny skyscrapers. It is about **developing capabilities** — the freedom of people to live the kind of life they value.

Yes, he acknowledges the achievements of **Chinese development**. But, he stresses, it has nothing to do with the **form of government**. It is more about the **political will of leaders** and the way they invest in people's health, education, and opportunities.

Now comes Sen's most famous insight:

- **Democracy is preferable in crisis situations**. Why? Because democracy has a **free press** and scope for **corrective action**.
- He gives examples: After independence, **India** never saw **major famines**, because the press



would raise alarms and the government would be forced to act.

- Contrast this with **China**, which suffered devastating **famines** and even man-made disasters like **Chernobyl-type accidents** in closed systems where information was suppressed.

Finally, Sen makes a deeply **human** point: **democracy has intrinsic value**. It's not just a tool for growth. It **upholds human dignity**. The **poor** will never trade their dignity for bread alone. They won't **bargain away their rights** for the promise of economic development.

So, in Sen's vision, democracy and development are not in conflict. Instead, true development is possible **only when it is democratic**, because then it respects both **capabilities and dignity**.

Democracy and Globalisation

When we think about **globalisation**, the first instinct is: "Is it good or bad for democracy?" The truth is, it's a **double-edged sword** — it both **strengthens** and **weakens** democracy.

Strengthening democracy

On one side, **democracy is strengthened in the era of globalisation**. Why? Because democracy has become **almost universal**.

- Wherever you look, even authoritarian states feel pressured to justify themselves in the **language of democracy**.
- **Democratic consciousness** is reinforced by the global spread of **human rights (HRs)**, the rise of a **global society**, and powerful **civil society activism**.

Think of campaigns like climate justice, anti-apartheid, or women's rights. These movements transcend borders and create a **shared democratic ethos**. In short,

globalisation gives democracy a **universal legitimacy**.

Weakening democracy

But — here comes the other side. At the same time, **democracy is weakened by globalisation**. How?

- First, look at **global governance**. Institutions like the **IMF, WTO, World Bank** operate at a transnational level but suffer from a massive **democratic deficit**. Decisions that affect millions are taken by a handful of powerful states or technocrats. Where is the accountability?
- Second, the rise of **neoliberal ideas** weakens democracy by undermining **social and economic rights**. For example, trade liberalisation under the **WTO** often prioritises market efficiency over welfare, eroding the democratic commitment to equality and justice.

So, the big picture is this:

- **Globalisation strengthens democracy** by spreading democratic consciousness, HRs, and civil society networks.
- **But it weakens democracy** by creating structures of power beyond the reach of citizens, and by imposing **neoliberal economics** that hollow out social rights.

That's why we call globalisation and democracy a **contradictory pair** — pushing each other forward, but also pulling each other back.

Reforms toward cosmopolitan democracy – David Held

Imagine you're looking at the world today. Globalisation has tied us together, but **democracy** is still stuck inside national borders. Decisions on war, trade, finance, climate — they're being made



at a global level, yet our **democratic voice** hardly reaches there.

This is exactly the problem **David Held** diagnoses. And his answer? **Reforms toward cosmopolitan democracy** — democracy that transcends the nation-state.

Immediately – UNSC reforms

Held says the first urgent step is **reforming the UN Security Council (UNSC)**. Why? Because today's UNSC reflects **1945 power realities**, not the **21st century global society**. Without reform, it lacks **legitimacy**.

Short term – creation of regional parliaments

Next, in the **short term**, Held proposes the **creation of regional parliaments**.

Think: European Parliament, African Union Parliament, maybe one day an Asian Parliament. These act as **intermediary layers of democracy**, connecting citizens to decisions that are regional but have global effects.

Long run – world government

Looking into the **long run**, Held dares to imagine something radical: a **world government**. Not in the sense of a rigid superstate, but a **democratically accountable global authority** that can handle truly global problems — climate change, nuclear disarmament, pandemics.

Additionally – IMF and World Bank reforms

Alongside this, Held stresses the need for **transparency and accountability** in financial institutions like the **IMF and World Bank (WB)**. Right now, they reflect the power of the few; cosmopolitan democracy would make them answerable to the many.

Finally – globalisation and localisation together

And here's a beautiful balance: Held says **globalisation and localisation should move together**.

- **Globalisation** needs **democratic regulation at the top**.
- **Localisation** ensures that cultures, communities, and grassroots voices are not drowned out.

In short, David Held gives us a **roadmap**:

- **Immediately**: UNSC reforms
- **Short term**: Regional parliaments
- **Long run**: World government
- **Additionally**: IMF & WB accountability
- **Finally**: Balance globalisation with localisation

He reminds us: if democracy is to survive in the age of globalisation, it must become **cosmopolitan**.

**PYQ**

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