

## Thinking about Democracy

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Read the following quotations and reflect on the advantage and disadvantage of living in a democratic society.

"Democracy is the worst system devised by the wit of man, except for all the others." - *Sir Winston Churchill*

"Shall we then judge a country by the majority, or by the minority? By the minority, surely." - *Ralph Waldo Emerson*



Churchill

"Democracy is deeply rooted in talk. It seems to prefer talk to force, deliberation to whim, good reasons to powerful arms, consensus to conflict, peace to war, co-operation to competition. But no sooner do we define democracy as "reasonable discussion" than someone reminds us that it can also mean the politics of conflict as well as the politics of co-operation; or that through the power of today's media, the government of public opinion we call democracy can enthrone whim rather than deliberation." - Patrick Watson and Benjamin Barber (2000), *The Struggle for Democracy*

"Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first... held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities. ... Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling, against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them..." - John Stuart Mill (1869), philosopher, *On Liberty*

"In an age of mass audiences it is the minorities who stand firm, and their loyalties are international." - Robert Weaver, in "Books," *Mass Media in Canada*, (1962), ed. John A. Irving.

"Visible minorities are, in fact, the invisible members of our society. Canada will be the ultimate loser if we do not take advantage of the skills and abilities which visible minority Canadians have to offer." - *Report of the Special Commission on the Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society*, March 1984.

"If you tell someone in Toronto that you think freedom and democracy are wonderful, they give you a strange look, as if you are raving about how nice oxygen is." - Jan Wong (1996), *Red China Blues*

"Democracy is not something you believe in or a place to hang your hat, but it's something you do. You participate. If you stop doing it, democracy crumbles." - Abbie Hoffman

"Canada is a country of minorities: the Anglophones are a minority put upon by the Americans, the francophones are put upon by the Anglophones; the aboriginal people are put upon by the anglophones and francophones and other cultural minorities are left out." - John Ralston Saul, as quoted in *The Globe and Mail*, 4 December 1991.

"Democracy is not a spectator sport." - Michael Moore

"Democracy recognizes that one person may be right and ninety-nine wrong. That is why freedom of speech is so sacred: the one person must always have the right to proclaim his or her right to proclaim *his* or *her* truth in the hope of persuading the ninety-nine to change their point of view." - Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Approaches to Politics*, 1970.

"A democracy is nothing more than mob rule, where fifty-one percent of the people may take away the rights of the other forty-nine." - Thomas Jefferson

"The minority is sometimes right; the majority always wrong." - George Bernard Shaw

"Democracy does not create strong ties between people. But it does make living together easier." - Alexis de Tocqueville

"A democrat need not believe that the majority will always reach a wise decision. He should however believe in the necessity of accepting the decision of the majority, be it wise or unwise, until such a time that the majority reaches another decision."  
- Bertrand Russell



Gandhi

"My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest shall have the same opportunities as the strongest." - Mahatma Gandhi

"Canada is the only country in the world in which the majority is the moral guarantor of the minority." - Laurier LaPierre, CTV discussion, 2 July 1993

"The art of governing has some parallels with the art of canoeing, with the movement of the water representing the people, their needs and wants. Sometimes you have to fight against the current. Sometimes you have to shoot the rapids, by going faster than the moving water or by back-paddling a bit until you find the most appropriate course between the rocks. Sometimes you get dumped. If you just want to administer things, you let the polls tell you where the river is and then you follow it wherever it goes. But drifting is not really governing."  
- Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *Against the Current*, 1996