

Too Much Democracy  
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Our country was designed as a republic, meaning representative government, not a democracy. The few democracies in world history never survived for long. Athens, which invented the system of public voting of all eligible citizens, was soon weakened by some very foolish ventures that seemed popular at the time. Renaissance Venice suffered the same fate, as did Renaissance Poland. Too many cooks, it seems, spoil the broth.

Our founders created a limited Republic, requiring the voters to be responsible citizens (owners of land and business), and they limited participants and Representatives to being male and white. There was an inherent understanding that such representatives and leaders would be men of good character. Knowing how high this bar was, the impeachment plank was inserted in the Constitution to protect the Republic from the occasional leader of bad character.

Fifty years later, the system changed. The voters were no longer responsible citizens; they were only required to be male and white, and they could vote, drunk or sober. They ushered in thirty years of corrupt governance, thanks to President Andrew Jackson, whose own bad character intimidated the representatives from using the impeachment process. His high crimes and misdemeanors were to defy the Supreme Court order that he cease his genocide against the peaceful Cherokee people, who took their illegal expulsion from their farmlands to the court. Half of that tribe died during their expulsion.

President Lincoln brought the next enlargement of voters: the emancipation of Black slaves and the enfranchisement of all adult Black males. For this addition to work, which it initially did, the white voters in the Southern states, with the help of another President of bad character, Andrew Johnson, enacted laws to disenfranchise Black voters and representatives. Jim Crow laws were enacted that required a century of unremitting work to remove, a task undertaken by a president of good character, Lyndon Johnson. His action then provoked another resistance movement, the defection from Democrat to Republican in the south.

The Southern Republicans are once more attempting to impede the voting rights of Black, young, and older Democrats through gerrymandering districts, moving and closing voting venues, and when possible, impeding the census process. If they cannot win by numbers, they are attempting to reduce the opposition vote.

Despite these setbacks, we are inevitably enlarging the mandate to vote. In the 1920s, women finally joined the voting rolls, and later in the century, citizens under 21 (18-year-olds) were added.

Another change to the voting system has now threatened to damage the Republic beyond repair. The party system began with the elections of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Citizens willing and able to serve as party officials formerly did the vetting of candidates for all offices, from cities and states to country. These "party professionals" knew all candidates and had the opportunity to assess their abilities and characters. The more democratic system of primary elections has once again removed the possibility of identifying bad character of candidates.

Rather than having vetted representatives hold hearings and make informed decisions, we now hold referendums and the initiative system, in which completely uninformed voters are influenced by paid publicity and, at times, conspiracy theories. Most issues that we are now expected to vote on are beyond our knowledge. Even some judges run for office rather than have vetting by the professional Bar associations.

So far, our republic has limped along, thanks to investigative journalists who were identified at our nation's beginning as the most important check on abuse of power. Voters today are willing to accept leaders of demonstrably bad character, ignoring the norms of behavior that otherwise protected us. Even impeachment did not help remove a lawless president.

We are now on the verge of losing our Republic. The assumption that a president or vice president will be of good character no longer protects us. Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Donald Trump demonstrated bad character, and only one of them resigned (Nixon) to avoid removal.

Not even norms or shaming deters our current president. Can our republic survive too much democracy?

Next time, how we can save our republic.

686 words.

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