

The Language of Liberty Series



The U.S. is Dangerously Close to Mass Democracy

By Bill Norton, CSG Administrative Staff

Were you happy to see the presidential election conclude on November 8th only to be disappointed in the escalation of hostility after the election? America has always prided itself in the ability to have a peaceful transition of control. Are we losing the ability to have that peaceful transition? If so, why? Perhaps it is because we are being conditioned and trained to believe our system is a pure democracy, so we are behaving as if it were true.

Some democratic principles are an important part of our Republic and must be preserved if we are to maintain a balanced, free government. But history has proven the road to mass democracy will lead to turmoil, contention, anarchy, and will necessarily result in a tyrannical oligarchy that will be difficult to reverse.

Let me explain. America's Framers sought a form of government that would eliminate the extremes of tyranny and anarchy. George Washington described this human struggle wherein *"there is a natural and necessary progression, from the extreme of anarchy to the extreme of Tyranny."* (Circular to the States, 8 June 1783) Thomas Jefferson hoped that *"the pendulum will rest finally in the middle."* (Letter to William Smith, 2 February 1788)

The Framers analyzed history to identify what forms of government would best promote liberty rather than tyranny or anarchy. They discovered no single form. They did, however, discover that parts of one added to pieces of another provided a solution and from these created a unique mixed form of government with "separation of powers" and "checks and balances".

Democracy is two wolves and a sheep voting on what is for dinner. Great for the wolves, bad for the sheep. It could be said that our Republic is two wolves and a sheep voting on what's for dinner, with a law that none of the three can be on the menu.

All societies are made up of warring factions and have been throughout history: rich against the poor, religion against religion, consumer against producer, etc. The Framers realized that the only way to have good government is to provide the best representation for each faction. The way to accomplish this is with a "mixed" form of government, which includes the most advantageous parts of a democracy, republic, oligarchy, and monarchy.

They knew that mass democracy would become the tyranny of the majority, which has proven to be just as incompatible with freedom as any tyrant on earth. John Adams said: *"While [democracy] lasts it is more bloody than either [aristocracy or monarchy] ... Remember Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes exhausts and murders itself. There never was a Democracy Yet, that did not commit suicide."* (Letter to John Taylor, 17 December 1814)

James Madison said in Federalist #10, *"...democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths."*

It is clear the Framers did NOT create a democracy, nor did they even consider it. Some democratic principles are good, and must be kept, but if we remove the safeguards against the tyranny of democracy, we will be left in ruins like every other democracy in history.

We are witnessing the tyranny of democracy being played out during this current transition of power. Refusal to accept the outcome of the election based on the popular vote, protests that lead to riots in the streets, boycotts, and calling for the elimination of the Electoral College, are just a few symptoms of being conditioned to believe our form of government is a pure democracy.

Voting is the most democratic part of our institutions. It gives the majority of the people direct control over political offices and to legislation through the referendum and initiative processes. But care must be taken to check the mob rule mentality that often accompanies democracy “actions”. We need a variety of voting methods to prevent mass democracy. The problems that come with the democratic action of voting are kept in check by the law, appointed positions, Electoral College, federalism, and legislative bodies.

In the recent presidential elections, wasn't each candidate promoted as the “savior of our nation”? The rallying cries on both sides declared that if their candidate did not win, America would not survive four more years. We act as if we are electing a king; then we get angry when they act like a king. This is completely predictable in a democratic election—and is exactly why we do NOT have a purely democratic method for electing the president. It is for this very reason the Framers wisely created the Electoral College.

The Electoral College was specifically designed to prevent two things:

- First, to keep the presidential office from becoming that of a “king”: a politically charged popularity contest in which the new president only caters to the majority that put them in office. Sound familiar?
- Second, to shore up the principle of Federalism, providing a unique structure in which our rights can be protected by one level of government if they are abused by another level of government. The Electoral College keeps the presidential election local rather than nationalizing it. If we do away with the Electoral College, the President would be elected by a few populous states and larger cities. The rest of us could just stay at home to await the outcome of New York and California's decision—hardly a true representation of the people of America.

One of the most dangerous things about democracy is the ability of the majority to vote away the natural rights of a few. This danger is safeguarded by law. We institute specific rules and laws that cannot be changed by a simple vote of the people. Laws must be filtered through multiple bodies representing various branches of government, for example, democracy in the House of Representatives, oligarchy in the Senate, monarchy in the President, oligarchy in the Courts, and finally back to democracy in the Jury. This process protects each of us from the tyrannies of mob rule, an elite class, or a monarch.

There is great wisdom in directly electing the House of Representatives every two years. That gives the people a house of their own to directly affect the Federal Government. But the House can be emotional and moved by every whim. To check that volatility we have the Senate, but we corrupted that check in 1913 with the [Seventeenth Amendment](#), the direct election of Senators. We turned BOTH houses into democracy. We are left with a self-serving Senate that neither represents the people nor the states. We must rethink the Seventeenth Amendment and return to appointing our Senators by state legislature, as originally designed.

Our legislative bodies protect us from a pure democracy by establishing fixed laws through a lengthy, deliberative process. We should, therefore, guard our legislative process from the tyranny of the majority.

Our system was based on a careful study of history, but we have abandoned some fundamental discoveries without an understanding of the history or purpose those principles had in the first place. Most of our meddling has been to either centralize or democratize the system. Ironically, the two represent a simultaneous move closer to tyranny and anarchy, the very extremes our original Republican system was built to avoid. If we are experiencing tyranny and anarchy, it is time to reset our system to its default.

Democracy is a temptation not easily refused. But too much of a good thing is not a good thing. Too much democracy is violent and destructive, as evidenced by the current political climate. We must keep the necessary guards in place to keep just the right amount of democracy, while protecting our freedoms from mob rule. We must abandon the road to mass democracy and return to simply keeping our republic as the Framers designed it.

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