IS AMERICA A DEMOCRACY OR…? *(PART 2)*



"The United States IS a Republic, NOT a Democracy!" Here are TWO reasons why.

- There is no mention ANYWHERE in the Constitution or Declaration of Independence of the word: DEMOCRACY OR DEMOCRAT.
- In the Pledge of Allegiance, Americans are asked specifically to honor our Republic, the Flag, and NOT a Democratic nation with Democratic principles.

Remember, the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution to be rid of the overbearing strong-hold of the British system. The Founding Fathers felt that each individual Colony should have separate Republican forms of the government and do away with the monarchy that held the British together. So, Independence was therefore created.

One would think that should be the answer, and the end of this debate: A Republic, with each Colony, soon to become STATES; and NOT a Democracy, run by a single monarch.

However, it still remains somewhat fuzzy to many.

So, for those "doubting Thomases" here's additional support, sources and arguments you can reference.

Definition of a Republic - After all, the word "republic" — deriving from the Latin phrase res publica, or "the people's concern" — suggests a measure of popular involvement in government. And the authors of the Constitution were radically republican, at least for their age, believing that the only legitimate form of government was one in which public authority derived entirely from the people, through a representative form of government.

Federalist 10 - Another factual answer is in Federalist 10: James Madison argued in Federalist 10 that representative government would force down the excesses of public opinion. He also reckoned that a vast nation, including all manner of factions, would keep any one group from amounting to a numerical majority and tyrannizing the rest.

US vs British System - I think there is a difference between democracy and republicanism, although it is easily overlooked. These ideas surely have some overlap with the notion of democracy, which is perhaps evident on a quick comparison of the United States and the British system of government. The sovereignty of Great Britain's House of Commons seems much more democratic than our complicated array of competing power centers, yet at the same time, the English have a hereditary monarch who has the prestige to influence public opinion in ways that no citizen of our nation can.

Separation of Powers - Our system is republican in that the Founders understood that the public is the only legitimate sovereign of government. But it is not wholly democratic, in that they feared the abuse of that authority by the people and designed an instrument of government intended to keep temporary, imprudent, and intemperate outbursts of public opinion from dominating the body politic.

Their primary method of doing this was the separation of power across three branches of government. The public retains control over each branch, but the link between the people and each branch is conditioned by different factors.

The House remains the most sensitive to public opinion, with representatives directly elected by the people to two-year terms. The President and Senate were originally intended to be less sensitive, with longer terms and mediating institutions (the Electoral College and state legislatures, respectively). Now, they are much closer to the public — with the Electoral College having become a trivial or seemingly unimportant pass-through for state polls, surveys and ballots, and the Senate being directly elected by the people since the ratification of the 17th Amendment in 1913.

The courts were to be the most immune of the branches to public opinion on a day-to-day basis, but, importantly, their composition and jurisdiction were to be determined by Congress and the President. And as an additional protection, a federal system was created whereby the national government possessed only enumerated powers, with the remainder of governing authority being explicitly retained by the states through the 10th Amendment.

This is a republican system of government, because there is no point at which a self-appointed or hereditary sovereign can hope to retain power against durable public opposition. Everything flows, ultimately, from the people. But "ultimately" is the key

word in that sentence. The people rule, but often not directly. The system is republican, but not entirely democratic.

Advantages of Republic vs Democracy - This system provides obvious advantages. Most of the Founders agreed that the people were capable of governing themselves without the aid of a class of nobles. But they also knew that the people can screw things up. By acting unjustly, they can trample on the rights of a minority or overlook the national interest. Indeed, the Founders experienced this on an almost daily basis in the 1780s, as the state governments legislated imprudently and even maliciously, even though, by the standards of the time, they were extremely sensitive to shifts in public opinion.

One of the chief complaints of progressives around the turn of the last century (and continuing today) was that this system inhibits the capacity of the people to exert the already-existing national will. Maybe this complicated system of checks and balances made sense in 1787, so the argument goes, when America was a bunch of diverse, isolated communities with few points of contact. But the America of 1912 was a singular people with an identifiable national interest. Dividing up public sovereignty and dispersing it out to these diverse agents only keeps the people from actually ruling.

But take a look at the United States of today and ask yourself whether you really believe that. Are we not in fact more divided than we ever have been in our lifetimes? Mutual hostility and antagonism are greater now than at any point in the last 50 years.

What if We Switched to a Democracy - What would happen if we did away with the various institutions of our republic that progressives argue are anti-democratic and allowed a simple majority to do whatever it pleased? My wager: A narrow, fleeting majority — dominated by ideological die-hards of one side or the other — would use its temporary hold on power to really stick it to the detested minority. Those in the majority would do so under the false claim that they were simply advancing the national interest. And my guess, furthermore, is that they would do so in a way designed to create a permanent hold on power for themselves in government. *(Think of a majority of Democrats giving blanket citizenship to the 20-40 million illegal immigrants in our country whom they believe will ALWAYS vote for Democrats!)*

But we do not live under that kind of threat - YET. Instead, our system generally promotes gridlock. We often bemoan this as a fault, but it is in fact our system's greatest virtue. Our government is designed to slow down the decision-making processes so that the people can debate, deliberate, and ultimately come to a conclusion that truly works to the benefit of the whole nation, and does not trample on the rights of some political minority. In the absence of that kind of broad consensus, our government does nothing!

Indeed, I think one of the main reasons people disdain our system of government, and often crave more democracy, is that our Constitution has done such a fantastic job of reducing the threat created by overbearing and frankly dangerous majorities. Instead, it

forces a bare numerical majority to continue to bargain with other factions and sustain public sentiment on its side across numerous elections. That slows down the process and often makes for ugly moments in our civil discourse, but it also increases the chances that the final products of public policy will be broadly in keeping with the public interest.

The Senate - Yet what, it may be asked, about the Senate? It is one thing to appreciate that the separation of powers, and the creation of multiple institutions of government, is a prudent trade-off between the immediacy of democratic action and the slow pace of republican deliberation. But the Senate is another matter entirely.

In full fairness: James Madison, the so-called father of the Constitution and perhaps the greatest architect of American republicanism, originally disdained the Senate. He staunchly opposed equal apportionment in the upper branch of the legislature, for he feared that it would bring the same kind of irresponsibility that he had witnessed as a member of the Congress of the Confederation in the 1780s.

Madison thought it integral to republicanism that the legislature takes in a diversity of viewpoints and believed that equal apportionment in the Senate would contradict that purpose by squashing local differences within states.

He also thought that the small states were being needlessly paranoid. The main lines of division between factions in society were not, he believed, between large and small states but between different economic groups, such as the slave-owning agricultural class of the South and the merchants of the North.

But the small states demanded equal apportionment as the *sine qua non* for their participation in government. Connecticut and Delaware both had deeply nationalistic delegations in attendance, but they would never have accepted a system of government that robbed them of an equal voice in the upper chamber. So, the final deal included a Senate equally divided among the states, a House that guaranteed each state at least one seat, and an Electoral College that guaranteed at least three votes per state.

From a certain perspective, we can dismiss this as an accident of history — an accidental product of the British kings who passively ruled over America before the Revolution and abided the creation of separate colonies governed under different systems with often wildly divergent forms of law. Those differences persisted into the 1780s and fed a mutual suspicion that coexisted with a sense of national brotherhood. Delaware knew that it needed Pennsylvania but also feared that Pennsylvania would never be a good steward of its interests. From this we might conclude that we are bound by paranoid fears that are now 258 years old, and counting.

Yet we might also appreciate the durability of such anxieties and acknowledge the virtue of the Senate as a kind of institutional reassurance. The American population in the 21st century is densest along the coasts and in the Sun Belt, leaving vast stretches of the interior of the continent lightly peopled. Suppose we were to do away with the

Senate, along with the guarantee that each state gets at least one House member and at least three electoral votes. In other words, suppose we eliminated all of the antidemocratic carve-outs for small states. The people in the interior of the country would effectively have no say in the affairs of state even as the federal government continued to retain vast control over their lives — and did so despite the fact that its legislators did not share their socio-economic circumstances. Is this a situation that would be sustainable in the long run? Patriotism goes only so far, after all. Sooner or later, love of country disappears if one becomes convinced that the country does not love one back.

I think the undemocratic aspect of the Senate is a prudent compromise for the sake of national cohesion. And a country as vast as ours, with so many different groups of people spread over so much territory, cannot take cohesion for granted. Geographical concerns should be especially prominent when one thinks about national unity — a distant government that seems totally unsympathetic to people's concerns is one against which they can easily rebel, as was exhibited in 1776. It is better, in my judgment, to include these people in government, finding ways to meld their interests with those of the larger population centers, than to leave them forever on the outside looking in.

Indeed, one could even argue that the Senate has, in the intervening centuries, acquired a Madisonian justification. In the 1780s, the United States was overwhelmingly agricultural, rural, and Protestant, such that the main cleavages, as Madison noted at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, were not really between large and small states. But does the same hold true in 2024? I think not.

The small states, particularly the sparsely populated ones of the Great Plains, represent a distinct set of cultural, economic, and even religious interests that make them different from the larger states of the South and the coasts. And if we consider the purpose of republican government to be distinct from that of democratic government in that it offers special protections for the rights of minorities and demands a broader understanding of the public interest, then it is good that North Dakota and Idaho are there to remind California and New York that the national interest cannot be understood solely by driving up and down State Route 1 on the Pacific Coast or mingling with those who had occasion to see Hamilton with the original Broadway cast.

Separation of Powers and the Senate - With both the separation of powers and the antidemocratic nature of the Senate, we must ask what the real trade-off is between democracy and republicanism…

- Our various antidemocratic mechanisms may temporarily impede the implementation of measures that are good for the entire nation.
- They help stop the implementation of measures that are bad for it, since a bare majority will usually struggle to implement its will at the expense of the rest of the nation.

- The separation of powers only slows the deliberations of public councils, and the Senate gives the small states the ability to halt the unfair and overburdensome initiatives of the larger states.

Advantages of Republic over Democracy Still Relevant TODAY!

Is this not a price worth paying to stop factious, narrow-minded, or hasty majorities from running roughshod over the rights of their neighbors or the good of the whole? I think so. Small-r republicans can gladly concede that our antidemocratic institutions make it harder to enact good laws, BUT the payoff is that it is even harder to enact bad ones.

Conclusion

"The United States IS a Republic, NOT a democracy!"