

DEMOCRACY: TODAY, YESTERDAY, & TOMORROW

DEMOCRACY TODAY (WHAT RESEARCH RECOGNIZES)

The dictionary defines democracy as a system of government upheld by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives. It also indicates that most of its members control or provide legitimate power to an organization or group. The Greek word “demos” means “people,” and “kratos” means “power.” The meaning, then, refers to a way of governing people according to the will or decisions of the governed people.

A major question is, why is democracy good? The answer revolves around greater economic resilience and opportunities for all citizens, representing a more “just” society with more positive outcomes for citizens.

The Economist Democracy Index (EDI) is a quantitative and comparative assessment concerned with democratic rights and democratic institutions, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, part of a UK-based weekly private newspaper company called The Economist. The EDI is based on measuring 60 indicators (not stated in this article) grouped into five numeric/numbered categories:

1. Electoral process and pluralism
2. Civil liberties
3. Functioning of government
4. Political participation
5. Political culture

The 167 countries and territories assessed regarding democratic rights and democratic institutions are ranked annually and determined to be one of the following four democracies or regime country types. The last ranking was 2023.

1. Full Democracies: Civil liberties and political freedoms are enforced. Twenty-four countries (14.4%) ranked as Full Democracies, which were represented in 2023 to be 7.8% of the world population.
2. Flawed Democracies: Elections are fair and free, and basic civil liberties are honored. Fifty countries (29.9%) ranked as Flawed Democracies, representing in 2023 to be 37.6% of the world population.
3. Hybrid Regimes: Regular electoral frauds preventing fairness and supporting widespread corruption exist. Thirty-four countries (20.4%) ranked as Hybrid Regimes in 2023. Thirty-four countries (20.4%) ranked as Hybrid Regimes, representing in 2023 to be 15.2% of the world population.
4. Authoritarian Regimes: Infringes and abuses of civil liberties are commonplace, elections are unfair, media is owned or controlled by groups, and suppression of government criticism is commonplace. Fifty-nine countries (35.3%) ranked as Authoritarian Regimes, representing in 2023 to be 39.4% of the world population.

The categories also consider voting wait times, registration procedures, and state gerrymandering.

Many countries have shown a decline in democracy over the past few years. In North America (Canada and the United States), Canada is listed as a Full Democracy—but North America is not listed as a Full Democracy. In contrast, the United States is listed as a Flawed Democracy, showing a decline in the democracy score by 13 points since 2017, hence a decline in the existence of a democratic society.

The Economist Group, which performed the Economist Democratic Index (EDI) and considers the United States to meet the criteria of a *flawed democracy*, reported that democracy in the United States is on a decline due to inadequate checks on executive power and the concern regarding the fairness and freedom of elections within the United States.

DEMOCRACY YESTERDAY (INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE ON OUR DEMOCRACY)

The history of Indian culture reveals the “democracy” of the noble indigenous nations.

Greetings and helping each other dress for their ceremonies, dancing, chanting, food preparation and consumption, and different tribal awards continue today as in the past. There is a blending of tribal and white-man cultures, looks/appearances, behaviors, Indian values, world cultures, and last names from around the world. The tribal festivities have been free from specific regulations yet democratic and orderly in their tribal ways. Indian democracy occurred and is reported to have continued to abound in the Indian culture even as the Europeans moved into North America.

To an outsider (non-Indian), the spontaneity and powwows of yesterday and today might appear out of order and chaotic. Indian time schedules often do not meet the usual expectations, and it seems no one is in control at times. There is no “master of ceremonies,” and no one makes demands of anybody. However, there is an essence of great respect for everyone as they participate in their general living and celebration processes. The result is a collective respect for the whole group’s mentality, with no single voice of direction or expected behaviors. Historically, the Indians operated in a society without strong leadership and coercive political institutions. Even during the historical movement/encroachment into Northern America by Europeans, the culture of the native tribes of America remained flourishing, stable, and ultra-functioning, representing democratic-like native societies.

Upon the new European settlements in the U.S., Europeans were amazed by the Indians’ personal liberty, freedom from rulers, and lack of social classes based on property ownership. With such a sense of freedom from community rule, the Indian nations were observed to thrive and were a happy people. It then became obvious to the European countries that there was the possibility of living in social harmony, prosperity, and democracy without the rule of a king!

Personal freedom, as exhibited by the American Indians, became the topic of literary works that demonstrated little interest in wealth. Brazil, especially, was noted in many writings as the ideal

place where Indians were “still governed by natural laws and very little corruption” and living better than “civilized Europeans.”

A Huron American Indian philosopher shared his Indian philosophy: “We are born free and united brothers, each as much a great lord as the other, while you are all the slaves of one sole man. I am the master of my body, and I dispose of myself, I do what I wish, I am the first and the last of my Nation...subject only to the Great Spirit.”

The Hurons, as an example of an Indian nation, were known to live without social classes and a government separate from their own kinship or private property system. As the impinging European immigrants witnessed, their society was orderly without formal government.

So it was, as an example of a historical democracy, that the Hurons (and other native tribes of the Americas) lived without any “rulers or rulings.” They found within themselves a way/manner to live in an orderly society without a formal government. Still, they gave us an example of the Greek word *anarchy*, using the word in the literal sense known as “no ruler, no authority, or other controlling systems.”

The history, evidence, and recording of an orderly Indian society within the Americas reflected (without proclamations of a stated governing democracy) the very essence and existence of a democracy.

DEMOCRACY TOMORROW AS A RESULT OF LEADERSHIP

Intellectually, the history of early American Indian Tribes and the cooperative and successful functioning of their democratic society gives us evidence of the possibility of societal behaviors of basic democracy today. However, many of us have historical beginnings in systems of democratic rules, regulations, and rewards for specific behaviors. While it is wise and helpful to realize that such harmonious self-proclaimed behavior is/has been possible as evidenced in historical Indian Culture, it is also realistic that much of our upbringing comes from European influence of being ruled and needing rules and regulations to govern societal behaviors and someone or a group who is in control. There is still and probably will continue to be, a need for guiding concepts intended to help reach established community goals, objectives toward expected goals, and a set philosophy that enhances general societal goodness. Therefore, we will continue to attempt to emulate through our efforts of practicing the rituals of democracy to stabilize societal happenings we have known through history to be represented by the democratic society of the American Indian.

Our continued future behavior of leadership (currently) requires leadership qualities of establishing, governing, and rewarding positive work, neighborly behaviors, and outcomes. Through the history of Indian democratic behaviors, we can learn how to maintain a democratic society. Our very democratic salvation, perhaps, is choosing now our leaders through a democratic process through freedom of speech and voting for the person who sets an overt example of democratic leadership.

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1. Indian-Givers (How Native Americans Transformed the World) --A book by Jack Weatherford.
2. The Economist Democracy Index (EDI) -- An article from the Economist Group, which publishes the weekly British newspaper, The Economist.