



# Comparative Politics

Understanding different  
political systems



# Ways to classify states

Democratic or non-democratic?

Also can study a state's internal organization, since democracies vary greatly, as do non-democratic regimes

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# Democracies

- Tremendous growth in numbers in 20<sup>th</sup> c. Three waves of growth:
  - End of WWI
  - End of WWII
  - 1970s through 1990s
- Now 121 electoral democracies out of about 190 nation-states & 18 territories, according to Freedom House.



# Democracies not uniform

## Key Differences:

- \* Presidential vs. Parliamentary government
- \* Ideologies (classical liberalism vs. democratic socialism)
- \* Economic systems (capitalist vs. socialist)
- \* Types of rights protected
- \* Types of electoral systems

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## Democracies Share:

- A government based on the decisions of the majority, either directly or indirectly.
- The people and government are connected both thru the process (how decisions are made) and the outcome (what decisions are made).



## Ideas of Pericles (495-429 BC)

### Characteristics of democracies:

- \* Rule by the people
- \* Equality under the law
- \* Pluralism: respect for diverse viewpoints
- \* Idea of a private domain
- \* High enough standard of living to secure people's happiness

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## People & government connected

- Through free & fair elections
- Through access to government officials
- Through the types of policies enacted.



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People & government connected

Democracy means both:

PROCEDURES – how  
decisions are made, and

SUBSTANCE – what decisions  
are made (that is, a check on  
what even a majority can do).





# U.S. Framers & Democracy

Fear of majority tyranny led to certain choices to limit democracy:

1. Representative and not direct
2. Constitutional limits on majority choices
  - \*Written constitution & rule of law
  - \*Civil liberties protected in Bill of Rights
  - \*Judicial review of actions of Congress & President



# Five Dimensions to Examine

1.) Participation: how people select their government officials & express policy preferences.

- Franchise: who votes?
- Effect: what issues are subject to popular vote?



## Five Dimensions to Examine

- 1.) Participation: how people select their government officials & express policy preferences.
- On these issues, how does U.S. compare with Germany?



## U.S. compared with Switzerland

- Who votes? Expansion of Voting Rights
  - U.S. not fully democratic until 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women in 1920; African-Americans in 1965; people between 18 & 21 in 1971. No bilingual ballots until 1982.



## U.S. compared with USSR

- Who votes? Expansion of Voting Rights
  - Totalitarian Russia? Women in 1917; national minorities in 1917 and 1922.



## U.S. voting turnout

- Low turnout of electorate complicates our ability to claim strong participation element.
- Average turnout of 50% in presidential & 40% in midterm.
  - 1996: 49%
  - 2000: 54.3%
  - 2004: 59.6% highest since 1968



## U.S. compared with modern Russia

- Effect of voting on important issues
  - U.S. has no national referendum or initiatives
  - RF uses both. Citizens can review statutes & treaties.



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## 2.) Pluralism

How does government advance tolerance for different ideas? Democracies are composed of people of diverse viewpoints & backgrounds. How are they accommodated? How are their interests represented?

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# Religious toleration

In U.S., both Constitution & 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment's Establishment Clause restrict government involvement in religion. Framers' intended to permit diverse religious views to coexist in a democratic framework.



# Religious toleration

In Germany, Basic Law guarantees religious liberty. Government imposes “church tax” to support recognized religions.

Intent is to strengthen civil society. Some faiths not recognized or subsidized (Islam); others refuse state aid (Baptists & Methodists); and others discriminated against (Church of Scientology).



### 3.) Developmentalism

How does government ensure people can develop their full potential?

Political socialization: process by which citizens learn basic political values & beliefs, which enables them to act in the political system. Occurs in every political society.

Sources: family, friends, political leaders, schools, interest groups.



## U.S. compared with Argentina

- In U.S., explicit socialization through school programs like Character Counts & student dress codes.
- Do they increase democratic awareness?
- Supporters argue they do because they stress positive values & reject gang values.

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## 4.) Protection

How does a government ensure democratic values are protected? How does it balance the need for liberty with counter pressures for order & security?

Compare U.S. & Britain.



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## U.S. and Britain compared

- U.S. has written constitution and Bill of Rights, and judicial review to enforce them.
- Britain has no written constitution or judicial review but has long tradition of rights & legal practices.



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# Challenges for democracies

- Democracies never guarantee provide absolute protection from government control. No rights are absolute.
- Wartime fears may drive majorities to pass laws that restrict – and even criminalize – unpopular minorities.



## U.S. rights during wartime

- Espionage Act of 1917.
- Japanese-Americans' internment during WWII.
- Patriot Act & other post 9/11 antiterrorism measures.

Courts often defer to executive & legislative branches during crises.



## British protections

- Britain relies on long-time practices & norms to protect rights, as well as documents dating to the Magna Carta in 1215.
- Also relies on the House of Commons – the people – to protect rights.

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## U.S. and Britain compared

- Does one type of system better protect citizens' rights during national crises, when popular passions and fears tend to drive national policy?



## 5.) Performance

How well does government serve its citizens' material needs?

We can compare democracies in terms of socio-economic factors.

Text compares U.S. & India on performance measure.

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# U.S. compared with India

Factors include technological & industrial development, natural resources, population size & other variables.

## Population

|       |               |
|-------|---------------|
| U.S.  | 295,734,134   |
| India | 1,080,264,388 |

U.S. ahead on many measures.



# U.S. compared with India

## Per capita income

U.S.        \$40,100

India       \$ 3,100

## Literacy rate above age 15

U.S.        97%

India       59.5%

Men: 70% & Women: 48%





## U.S. compared with India

### Infant mortality rate

U.S. 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births

India 56.3 deaths per 1,000 live births

### Life expectancy (at birth)

U.S. 77.7 years

India 64.4 years

Yet India's performance has much improved since 1947.



## U.S. compared with India

In fact, other measures show strong performance. For example, India has 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest growing major economy in the world, faster than U.S.

### GDP Growth

|       |      |
|-------|------|
| U.S.  | 3.3% |
| India | 8.1% |



## U.S. compared with India

Also both countries have significant poor populations. In U.S., top 1% of households own 38% of country's wealth, & top 20% own 83% of wealth.

### Population below poverty

|       |     |
|-------|-----|
| U.S.  | 12% |
| India | 25% |

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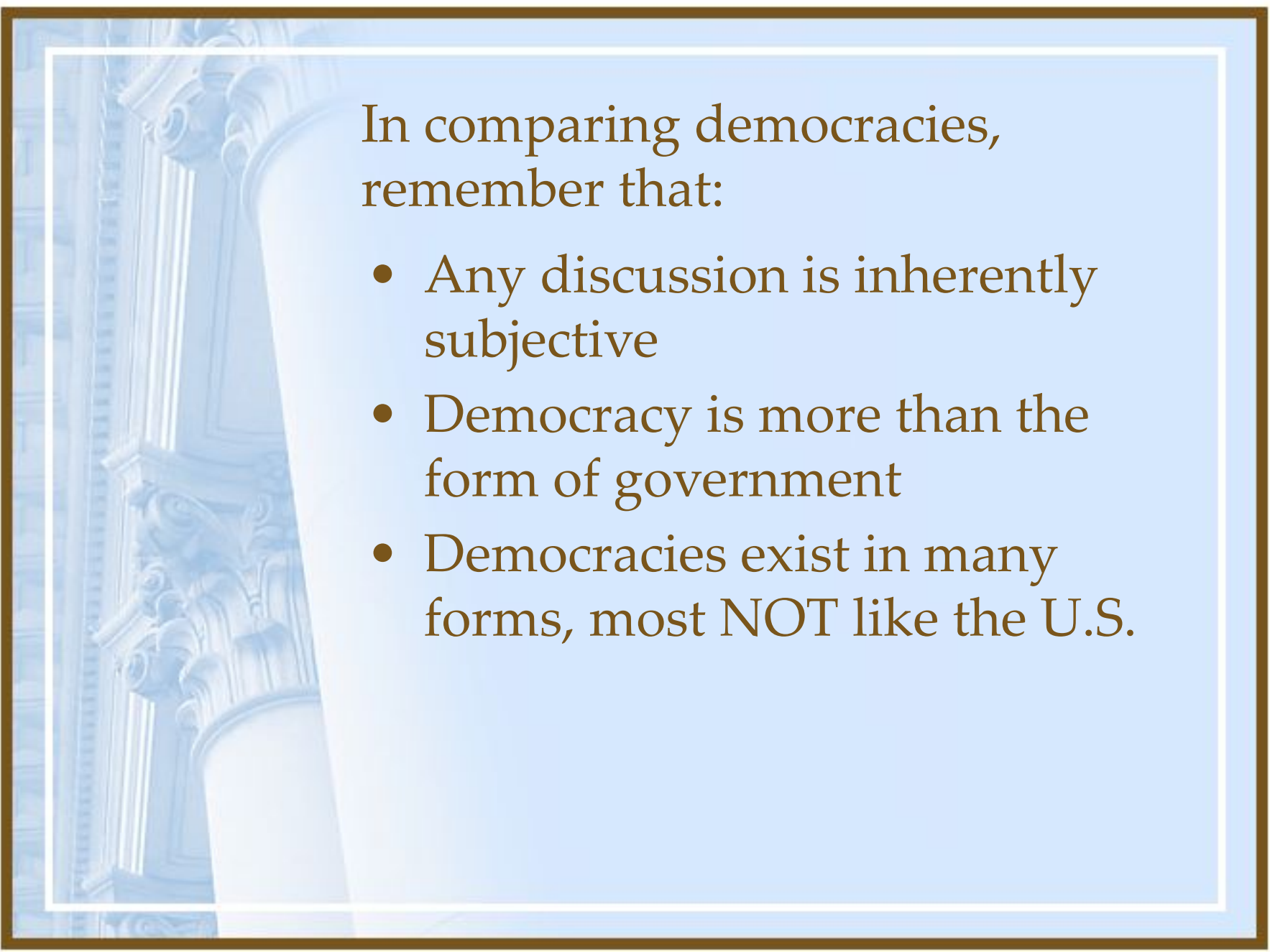
## Indian economic changes

- Since independence, a government-centered approach to economic policy (railroads, aviation, energy, etc.).
- Recently, however, some experiments with privatization & foreign investment.
- Also family planning policies to control population growth.

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## Why the spread of democracy?

- Fatigue with authoritarian governments
- International pressure favoring democracy
- Changing popular expectations
- Emergence of human rights law

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In comparing democracies,  
remember that:

- Any discussion is inherently subjective
- Democracy is more than the form of government
- Democracies exist in many forms, most NOT like the U.S.