Democratic utopianism: still searching for the truest meaning of democracy

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ABSTRACT

The objects of this research are: first, to explore the concept of democracy and its different meanings. Second, to highlight the shortcomings of living in a democratic country. Third, to explore the political leverage and potential dangers posed by members of elite democracy on the masses. Fourth, to warn political leaders of the setback of relying on a system of government that is nonexistent or practiced in its truest form. The researcher investigated the following: Divergent meanings and interpretations of democracy identified some shortcomings associated with democracy and the dangers of the powerful elite who are political leaders imposed on citizens. The main results of the research: first, there is no single country in the world that can rightfully hold claim to practicing democracy in its truest form. Second, democracy is an ideal system of government we all aspired to have, and third, the elite class has manipulated democratic processes to ensure their perpetual dominance over the masses. Fourth, democracy needs to be instituted properly and effectively for the benefit of citizens. The area of practical use of the research: all citizens living in a country where democracy is practiced, political leaders, political party members, students, workers, and public office holders, employees of regional and global organizations.

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Introduction

Democracy is, perhaps, the greatest invention of ancient Greece. Its meaning quite literally represents ‘power to the people’ or ‘people’s rule’. Over the years democracy has become the mantra of several societies globally. Even despots, autocratic, military leaders often styled themselves as democratic leaders of the people. Democracy is about a collective decision-making process, by which decisions are made for groups and are meant to be binding on all the members of the group. One can safely argue that there is democracy in families, voluntary organizations, economic firms, as well as states and transnational and global organizations. Lijphart(1999) states that democracy exists whenever those who are free and are not well-off, being in the majority, are in sovereign control of the government, an oligarchy when the control lies with the rich and better-born, these being few. Although there is no single agreed definition of democracy and a concept of governance. The researcher with discuss a few arguments on democracy as follows:

Democracy as the ‘rule by the people; democracy implies both popular participation and government in the public interest and can take a wide variety of forms (Heywood, 2013). Joseph Schumpeter (2003) in his groundbreaking book titled ‘Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy’ defined democracy as a political method, and a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political—legislative, and administrative—decisions and hence incapable of being an end, irrespective of what decisions it will produce under given historical conditions. And this must be the starting point of any attempt at defining it. Whatever the distinctive trait of the democrat. Heywood (2013) argued that the classical theory of democracy attributed to the electorate an altogether unrealistic degree of initiative which practically amounted to ignoring leadership. The purpose of a democratic method is not to select representatives who carry out the will of the people but to choose individuals who govern on their behalf. He juxtaposes that Propositions about the
working of democracy are meaningless without reference to given times, places, and situations and so, of course, are anti-democratic arguments (Schumpeter, 2003). While (Medaris, 2015) noted a tendential movement of capitalism and socialism toward the elite theory of democracy.

Democracy is one of the most common types of government in the modern world. Over half of the world's countries employ a democratic system; however, world leaders do not agree on exactly what democracy means. A society that is built on democratic ideals recognizes the necessity of a governmental system. The system is approved of in some formal manner by the citizens. A working democracy balances the needs of the people with order and representative control. An alternative way of justifying democracy based on equality is to ground democracy in public equality. Public equality is a principle of equality that ensures that people can see that they are being treated as equals (Anderson, 2006). This view arises from three main ideas. First, there is the basic egalitarian idea that people’s interests ought to be equally advanced, or at least that they ought to have equal opportunities to advance them. Second, human beings generally have highly fallible and biased understandings of their own and other people’s interests. Third, people have a fundamental interest in being able to see that they are being treated as equals (Valentini, 2013; Viehoff, 2014). A true democracy upholds the basic human rights of its citizens as outlined in its laws, agreements, or constitution. These rights include freedom of religion, freedom of speech, equal protection under the law, the right to a fair trial, and a right to privacy without unwarranted intrusion by the government.

The object of the research is to explore the true meaning of democracy and identify its shortcomings with the hope of finding some solutions to it.

**Literature Review**

In this section of the study, the author chronologically presented democracy. First, explaining the Elite theory; Athenian democracy; identified the shortcomings of Athenian democracy; Socrates and Plato’s critiques of democracy; contemporary critiques of democracy; Types of democracy; and explored countries differently approaches to democracy.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

**The Elite Theory**

Democratic elitism accepts the main premise of elite theory: ‘no societies are governed by the people, by a majority; all societies, including societies, called democratically, are ruled by a minority and that it also recognizes that democratic principle is nothing but a formula that allows the ruling class to legitimise its power (Burnham, 1943). In a nutshell, the classical elite theory involves the following items:

i. The primary object of every elite or ruling class is to preserve power and privilege.

ii. The rule of the elite is based upon (not-necessarily explicit) force and fraud.

iii. The social structure is sustained by a political formula that typically correlates with a generally accepted religion, ideology, or myth.

iv. Every elite has two opposing tendencies: (a) an aristocratic tendency, by which the elite seeks to preserve the ruling position of its members and to prevent others from entering its ranks; (b) a democratic tendency by which it new elements force their way into the elite from below or (ii) the ruling class opens ranks and absorbs new elements from below.

v. In the long run, the democratic tendency always prevails. Consequently, no social structure is permanent, and no stable utopia is possible.

vi. When the aristocratic tendency prevails, rapid shifts occur in the composition and structure of elites (e.g., social revolutions).

**Athenian Democracy**

In the year 507 B.C., the Athenian leader Cleisthenes introduced a system of political reforms that he called demokratia, or “rule by the people” (from demos, “the people,” and kratos, or “power”). It was the first known democracy in the world. This system was comprised of three separate institutions: the ekklesia, a sovereign governing body that wrote laws and dictated foreign policy; the boule, a council of representatives from the ten Athenian tribes and the dikasteria, the popular courts in which citizens argued cases before a group of lottery-selected jurors (Hatziz, 2016).

**Ekklesia**

Any member of the demos—any one of those 40,000 adult male citizens—was welcome to attend the meetings of the ekklesia, which were held 40 times per year in a hillside auditorium west of the Acropolis called the Pnyx. Ostracism, in which a citizen could be expelled from the Athenian city-state for 10 years, was among the powers of the ekklesia.) The group made decisions by a simple majority vote.

**The Boule**

The second important institution was the boule, or Council of Five Hundred. The boule was a group of 500 men, 50 from each of ten Athenian tribes, who served on the Council for one year. Unlike the ekklesia, the boule met every day and did most of the hands-on
work of governance. Its main function was to decide what matters would come before the ekklesia. In this way, the 500 members of the boule dictated how the entire democracy would work. Positions on the boule were chosen by lot and not by election. Historians argue that the selection to the boule was not always just a matter of chance. They note that wealthy and influential people—and their relatives—served on the Council much more frequently than would be likely in a truly random (Ober, 1991).

**The Dikasteria**

The third important institution was the popular courts or dikasteria. Every day, more than 500 jurors were chosen by lot from a pool of male citizens older than 30. There were no police in Athens, so it was the demos themselves who brought court cases, argued for the prosecution and the defense, and delivered verdicts and sentences by majority rule. (There were also no rules about what kinds of cases could be prosecuted or what could and could not be said at trial, and so Athenian citizens frequently used the dikasteria to punish or embarrass their enemies.

**Shortcomings of the Athenian Democracy**

For example, in Athens in the middle of the 4th century, there were about 100,000 citizens (Athenian citizenship was limited to men and women whose parents had also been Athenian citizens), about 10,000 metoikoi, or “resident foreigners,” and 150,000 slaves. Out of all those people, only male citizens who were older than 18 were a part of the demos, meaning only about 40,000 people could participate in the democratic process. The researcher argues that in a situation where about 60,000 inhabitants of Athens are disqualified from participation, this cannot be democracy in the truest meaning of it. Gender inequality was endemic to Athenian institutions. Unfortunately, women had no voice or representation during the Classical Period of Greece (Ober, 1991).

**Socrates’s critique of democracy**

Socrates’s charge against democracy was based on his fundamental belief that people are not equal. Socrates was strongly opposed to equality and stressed the belief that some men were worth more than others. The researcher concurs with the line arguments presented to us by Socrates then and now as reflected in our today’s society. Our constitutional framework provides us with a false sense of security that every citizen is equal before the law. We do know that all human beings are not equal, a misleading hypothesis. Our social class, family, economic status, age, sex, and education determines our place in society. We live in a society where we are often judged by the amount of wealth we can amass or possess at our disposal, how we got rich overnight does not always come under scrutiny. Materialism in some instances, the value of the house we live in and the model of the car we drive puts our social status into perspective. There is one law for the haves and another law for the have-nots. Socrates described the perfect city as a three-tiered system of rulers, guardians, and artisans; all of whom know their place inside and outside of politics. The rulers create the constitution, and everyone else is expected to live by it. Discordantly, democracy is based on the ideas of equality, individuality, tolerance, and freedom.

**The Death of Socrates**

In 399 BC, Socrates was put on trial by a small group of fellow citizens acting as democratic citizens—prosecutors. He was accused of corrupting the youths of Athens and introducing new gods, neglecting those of the city, which existed as an object of civic patriotism. Socrates was convicted, imprisoned, and executed by the state. The researcher argues that though Socrates was unlawfully murdered by the state his philosophy and ideas resonate with some academics of today who still view democracy as a government that fosters tyrants and abuse of power through majority rule. In the history of mankind, we have seen how majority rule led to Adolf Hitler’s led to the Holocaust. Hitler was a product of the democratic majority. The researcher argues that within a democratic dispensation, the rights of minorities are trampled upon to satisfy the needs of the majority. History tells us that racism, xenophobia, and homophobia victims are vulnerable people at the receiving end of populist majority injustices.

**Plato’s critique of democracy**

Plato’s argument is that democracy does not place a premium on wisdom and knowledge-seeking as an inherent good because it prioritized wealth and property accumulation as the highest good. He argued that democracy embraces total freedom which Plato calls ‘anarchy’ which crowds out the ruler’s responsibilities of virtuous governance. According to Plato, democracy is the worst form of government since no measure guarantees a rightfully elected leader that has the extolling virtues to serve the interest of the hoi polio. Plato through the lenses of his critical analysis of democracy, further argued that democracy violates the proper order of society by creating artificial equality. Democracy makes it possible for a mediocre buffoon to be at the helm of affairs. Opportunities are given to people without the requisite qualifications and skills to ascend to the leadership of the government (Mounk, 2018). No matter how ignorant a person may be, they still could find themselves playing a significant role in public affairs. Democracy produces dictators, tyrants, and demagogues, full of promises but less delivery of these promises.

Both Plato and Socrates agreed that all people were born with knowledge but that not all people were in touch with the knowledge they possessed and that with much support all men should be able to strive and realize their full potential. Democracy when tested has been found to undermine the expertise necessary to properly govern societies. Elected officials commit unethical things to solicit votes making it possible for incompetent people to stay in power by buying the votes of the masses (Zakaras, 2018). Nepotism becomes the other of the day facilitated that those who have the economic power become rulers of society not based on merit,
qualification, or merit. Plato argued that when this happens, democracy as the government of the people becomes corrupted by extreme inequality and collapses or degenerates into a tyrannical rule.

According to Plato, philosophers are best suited to rule and become effective kings. A true philosopher is someone that is in love with knowledge and the search for true reality. Those who seek reality are those best qualified to guide as they have the greatest knowledge at their disposal. The philosopher’s love for wisdom and knowledge transcends the possibility of the love of falsehoods, physical pleasures, meanness, and cowardice. Plato authored the Republic which he used effectively to convey his damning critique of democracy that renders it conducive to mass ignorance, hysteria, and ultimately tyranny. The excitability and emotion of people and mass mobilization of support make democracy becomes an act of hysteria that produces inconsistency over time (Nodding, 2013).

Types of Democracy

Liberal democracy

Liberal democracy is generally understood to be a system of government in which people consent to their rulers, and rulers, in turn, are constitutionally restrained to respect individual rights. The state guarantees the protection of citizens. In a liberal democracy, elections are held on a regular basis and citizens could elect new people to government posts. Citizens are guaranteed that these elections will be fair and everyone who is eligible to vote will have that opportunity. John Locke (1632-1704) the English philosopher was a major proponent of liberal democracy. He argued that legitimate government arises only from consent and the right to consent, in turn, stems from a fact of nature. Locke argued that no one is all-wise or all-powerful and that human reason is influenced by passion. Within a liberal democracy, the doctrine of separation of powers is evident. Baron des Montesquieu (1689-1755) in his popular essay “Spirits of law” explained that all three arms of government: executive, judiciary, and legislature function independently of each other to avoid tyranny and abuse of power by any of the arms of government. Locke argued that legitimate sovereign power only exists because of a social compact between the people and in form of their representatives in parliament and the monarch. Locke’s doctrine found expression in the American Declaration of Independence (1776), reinstated by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) who wrote “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Dahl, 1989).

Characteristics of liberal democracy

i. Participation of adults during elections and holding the right to vote and be voted for.
ii. Full participation in periodic open and secret ballot elections.
iii. Freedom of expression, speech, religion and to join any political association of their choice without interference.
iv. Effective guarantee of individual and minority rights.
v. Equal treatment before the law.
vi. A cooperative, consensual socio-economic relationship between individuals and groups.

Critique of liberal democracy

A bunch of elitist groups representing not the people but the interests of the ruling class.

The researcher invites citizens to pause for once and reflect on how they have been hoodwinked and bamboozled for centuries in pursuit of democracy that does not exist. The social background of the Present and past presidents of the United States of America speaks volumes and this is also associated with both the past and present Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom. Most of these leaders are born into elitist ruling-class families, who are schooled in exclusive schools for the few, and reside in very upper-class suburbs for the mega-rich. They are either products of the IVY League universities in the US or products of the Oxbridge citadel of higher learning. 15 Presidents of the United States were products of the Ivy League Schools. The breakdown of these presidents is as follows (Jenco, 2009; Francis, 2009; and Simmons, 1999):

iii. Bill Clinton (Yale Law School Class of 1973).
iv. George H.W Bush (Yale University Class of 1948).
v. Gerald Ford (Yale Law School Class of 1941).
vi. John F Kennedy (Harvard University Class of 1940).
vi. Franklin D Roosevelt (Harvard University Class of 1903 and Columbia Law School Class of 1907).
x. Theodore Roosevelt (Harvard University Class of 1880).
xi. Rutherford B. Hayes (Harvard Law School Class of 1845)
xii. William Henry Harrison (University of Pennsylvania Class of 1791).
xiii. John Quincy Adams (Harvard University Class of 1787).
Another example is out of 57 UK Prime Ministers to date, 30 were educated at the University of Oxford, fourteen were educated at the University of Cambridge. 8 Prime Ministers have no formal university education.

The American form of government is the federal government is an indirect democracy where voters elect representatives to speak on behalf of them relating to decisions involving the government. Indirect democracy is also practiced in most states and municipalities. According to the U.S. Department of State, the democratic style of government – adopted by the United States in 1776 – has six basic characteristics: established popular sovereignty, majority rule, individual rights, free and open elections, citizen involvement, and open compromise. While countries like Switzerland are an example of a direct democracies where citizens have more power at many levels of government.

**Representative /Parliamentary democracy**

The United States is a representative democracy. This means the government is elected by citizens through electoral processes. Government officials are voted for by citizens participating in discharging their civic duties to vote and be voted for. To become US President or vice president, you must be a natural-born United States citizen. Only American citizens can serve on the jury. Federal and State laws are enacted to protect citizens. A parliamentary system may be either bicameral, with two chambers of parliament (or houses), or unicameral, with just one parliamentary chamber. A bicameral parliament usually consists of a directly elected lower house with the power to determine the executive government, and an upper house which may be appointed or elected through a different mechanism from the lower house. Some of the US Federal powers include the following:

i. To print money
ii. To declare war
iii. To create an army
iv. To make treaties

State Powers are:

i. Providing schooling and education
ii. Provide protection (Police)
iii. Provide safety (fire department)
iv. Issue driver’s license
v. Approve zoning and land use.
vi. The Governor oversees the executive branch of the state (Kolokotronis, 2021).

**The oldest Democracies by number of years of existence** (Keane, 2009)

i. United States – 219 years
ii. Switzerland-171 years
iii. New Zealand-162 years
iv. Canada-152
v. United Kingdom-134
vi. Luxembourgorg-129
vii. Belgium-125
viii. Netherlands-122
ix. Norway-119
x. Australia-118

Pluralist Democracy

Pluralist democracy is a model of democracy in which no one group dominates politics and organized groups compete with one another to influence policy. Pluralist democracy is a form of democracy where governments make decisions because of the interaction between groups and organizations that have different ideas and contrasting arguments. Pluralist democracy means a multitude of groups, not the people, can govern, direct, lead, and manage societies as an ethic of respect for diversity (Lanzaro, 2016).

Constitutional Democracy is the antithesis of arbitrary rule. It is democracy characterized by the following:

i. Popular sovereignty: The people are the ultimate source of the authority of the government which derives its right to govern from their consent.

ii. Majority rule and minority rights: Although "the majority rules," the fundamental rights of individuals in the minority are protected.

iii. Limited government: The powers of government are limited by law and a written or unwritten constitution which those in power obey.

iv. Institutional and procedural limitations on powers: There are certain institutional and procedural devices that limit the powers of government.

Participatory democracy is a model of democracy in which citizens have the power to decide directly on policy and politicians are responsible for implementing those policy decisions. In a participatory form of government, all the people of the concerned nation who are eligible and are of age can participate in all decision-making processes that might affect the whole country. Participatory democracies are more commonly referred to as direct democracies. This name confers to the fact that all citizens of the nation are considered eligible to voice their opinions in matters of the national governing body. Participatory democracy gives the citizens a chance to decide on the issues persisting in individual areas and focus on them instead of having a single law followed by all. Kolokotronis, (2018) argues that participatory democracy is not just about having a voice within a democratic dispensation but it also about sharing that accumulated power equitably amongst all citizens. It is about cooperative power and mutual aid. And it’s about relentlessly but delicately democratizing collectivities, whether it is a neighborhood group or large trans-local working-class organizations (Cognitive, 1990).

Elite democracy is a model of democracy in which a small number of people, usually those who are wealthy and well-educated, influence the political decision-making process. The alumni become the preparatory home to groom future leaders. This is an exclusive club based on social status, family background, and economic power (Francis, 2009; Simmons, 1999).

Contemporary critique of democracy

Democrats tend to reorient the focus of politics away from classical meaning of democracy from the people it was originally designed to serve. It becomes a frustrating process when people who are supposed to participate in democratic processes are the same people denied access to it (Jenco, 2009). The government as an institution does not have the right to command its citizens unlawfully and arbitrarily even when some of its actions may be deemed justifiable (Simmons, 1999).

Coglanese (1990) argued that one fundamental criticism often leveled against democracy is that in practice it can lead to unjust outcomes, especially when a majority deprives a minority of its substantive rights or interests. According to Robert Dahl (1989) highlighted some of the dangers of democracy. He argued that the democratic process can be and has been used by majorities to deny others a variety of substantive rights and interests. These include those fundamental rights and interests that are integral and necessary to democracy, as well as other interests - like economic equality or efficiency - that are valued on independent grounds and it becomes inevitable that, in the real world, democratic processes will on occasion lead to the denial of some persons fundamental rights or interests.

John Dewey (2001) highlighted some of the shortcomings of democracy as follows: first, that no government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything, but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few. Second, that political knowledge, in a democracy, could only come about through conversation among and between citizens. The only reality that matters is the reality that citizens collectively construct. Third, that American democracy should be reconstructed so that government would be by the people and not just for the people. Fourth, some democracies are also prone to disorder and corruption, but these are ineluctable features of any political system comprised of selfish and flawed human beings. The author argues that because will live in societies where money rules the world, worst candidates are elected to offices because they have the economic power to buy votes from citizens. This arrangement cannot be said to be democracy in its truest meaning.
The author argues that citizens who sell their votes for money do not have the moral duty to hold their political representatives accountable because their position has been compromised. The author argues that in some countries, political parties sponsor ex-convicts to become president of countries. It is very difficult to promote democracy in any country where corruption thrives unabated.

From a theoretical and philosophical point of view, democracy is far from perfect. Democracy is a reality that must be achieved but is not possible. Politics belongs and is controlled by the ruling class in most countries of the world. According to (Benoist, 2011), provided us with a list of some of the criticisms levied against democracy in practice as follows:

i. The transformation of popular sovereignty into despotism of the majority
ii. Representation problem of minority votes
iii. Voting trading
iv. Political apathy and political ignorance
v. Political participation is limited to voting
vi. Domination of interest groups
vii. Depoliticization
viii. Political nearsightedness
ix. The dictatorship of the leader and the personalization of power
x. Militarism or military tutelage

The above listed shortcomings of democracy are consistent with other researchers who have previously highlighted the dangers of democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018; and Noddings, 2013).

**Research and Methodology**

The researcher consulted existing literature on democracy, gathering secondary data as the basis knowledge informing the research. Previous works related to the research topic were read and grouped into relevant headings as it relates to the topic. The author conducted an extensive review of literature relying on the following secondary data by looking at the concept of democracy from a chronological standpoint: Athenian democracy, the United Kingdom’s parliamentary system of government, the United States of America’s Federal system of government, and the Republic of South Africa modern democracy.

**Findings and Discussions**

The authors’ understanding of democracy is that it incorporates the set of principles and concepts about freedom into its implementation of governance. But in addition to all this, Democracy also includes laws, regulations, procedures, and practices that are changed and implemented for long and testing times of history. It is also important to note that in the preamble to ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, the ideals decided for Democracy are - ‘Recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.’

The author is not stating that democracy as a form of government is a bad thing but is stating that there is no single country in the world that holds claim to democracy in its truest sense. It is an ideal all countries, leaders, and politicians aspire to be associated with. Is there any country that can factually hold the claim that all citizens are treated equally? How is the freedom of citizens when the prison population is soaring and crime spiraling out of control in some countries of the world. The author argues that most countries that claim to be champions of democracy in the world are hypocritical when it comes to how they execute their foreign policies. The United States of America is a good case in point. We have heard in recent times the use of the word “Regime Change”, this is beyond the comprehension of the removal and killing of both Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Libya President Moammar Ghaddafi. Both incidents are violations of international law and are war crimes that never made it to the Hague in the Netherlands for trial. The researcher is of the opinion that promoters of regime change who embarked on an illegal war should be arrested and face trial regardless of their country of origin. They have no respect for the sovereignty of other countries, no respect for international law, and do not recognize the United Nations treaty which they signed to promote world peace.

It is scary to think of it that elected governments can be removed by another country whilst the UN is gone on sabbatical leave and watching from the sidelines. The use of capital punishment by the United State government to exterminate its own citizens is a stark contrast to the ethos of democracy. Between 2018-2022, the United State government executed a total number of 87 citizens (Jenco, 2009). A state is supposed to protect the life of its citizens, guarantee the freedom of its citizens, protect them from any harm, and is now responsible for taking the lives of its citizens. The author is advocating that capital punishment should be abolished in the United States, it is barbaric and inhumane for the United States to continue to kill its own citizens. The killing of citizens is not characteristic of a democratic country. In the US, most states carry out executions with a three-drug lethal injection process. First, is the administration of an anesthetic or sedative, followed by a second drug to paralyse the inmate and a third drug – typically potassium chloride -to stop the prisoner’s heart. The author is not advocating that criminals who commit the serious crime of murder should not be punished. They should be sentenced to life imprisonment, not the death penalty. There is no dignity in any state that promotes the killing of its citizens. The researcher argues by relying on the American Declaration of Independence “All men are born free and equal, in dignity in rights… Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes”. In some countries,
especially those operating under a Westminster system, such as the United Kingdom, Denmark, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand, the prime minister has the de jure power to call an election, at will. In Spain, the prime minister is the only person with the de jure power to call an election, granted by Article 115 of the Constitution.

Next, the researcher looks at the American patriarchal society. Despite 219 years of democracy, no woman has ever been allowed by men to become president of the United States. Women have lockout of the White House. Where is the equality, justice, and fairness in this kind of sexual injustice that has gone on for over two centuries? The researcher cannot find any logical explanation for this discrimination and prejudice against women. One can safely draw one conclusion that women are denied access to government leadership by men. The researcher invites the reader to look closely at the United States current government. At the start of the 117th Congress on January 3, 2021, there were 26 women serving in the United States Senate. The highest number of women to have served in US history. 17 are democrats and 9 are Republicans.

In 2022, there are currently 24 women in the Senate out of 100 seats. Of the 24 women currently serving, 2 identify as Asian American, 1 identify as Latina, and 21 identify as White. Not a single black woman in Senate. In the history of the US Senate, in 1922, Rebecca Latimer Felton (Democrat – GA) was the first woman appointed to Senate but only served for one day. Some of the requirements to become appointed as US Senators are:

i. 30 years of age
ii. Citizen of the United States for 9 years
iii. When elected, be a resident of the state from which he or she is chosen?
iv. Term of office is 6 years (Dewey, 2001).

The author takes the reader into confidence in exploring the US claim to democracy, currently only 10 women, some of them first in their state’s history sit at the governor’s desk. 6 belong to the Democratic party and 3 are Republican and 1 woman serving as the governor of a US territory. Basically, most governors of the 59 states in America are predominately men (Stone, 2019). This cannot be said to be representative democracy where elected representatives do not represent the demographics of the country. The United States must set its own house in order, and practice what they preach before embarking on regime changes all over the world. It is even more embarrassing when the total number of women in the United States is taken into perspective. Women are 164.8 million and men are 159.9 million. Women are about 4.1 million more than men but remain underrepresented in the United States of America’s democratic institutions (Noddings, 2013). From the researcher analogy above, the unanswered question remains how democratic is the United States? In the United Kingdom, the history of democracy is slightly different from the United States.

**History of parliamentary sovereignty**

The unelected Monarch is the head of State who becomes the head of elected representatives in parliament. After the Treaty of Union in 1707, Acts of Parliament passed in the Parliament of England and the Parliament of Scotland created a new Kingdom of Great Britain and dissolved both parliaments, replacing them with a new Parliament of Great Britain based in the former home of the English parliament. The Parliament of Great Britain later became the Parliament of the United Kingdom in 1801 when the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was formed through the Acts of Union 1800. Today the United Kingdom aspires to be a model for democracy, and its Parliament is one of the oldest representative assemblies in the world. Yet this evolution to a representative government was a slow one. The United Kingdom was a monarchy for a long time after the Anglo-Saxon king Athelstan formed the first monarchy there in 927. After the 1066 invasion of the Normans and the coronation of William the Conqueror, a new Anglo-Norman ruling class of lords arose and established feudalism, a common political system in medieval Europe. In fiefdoms, vassals were beholden to lords—providing military service and taxes—whereas lords provided vassals with land and protection. Throughout the Middle Ages, various dynastic lines of English monarchs—most notably the houses of Plantagenet, Tudor, and Stuart—ruled the UK from the top of this feudal hierarchy. Relations between the monarchy and the nobility were not always smooth. In 1215, tensions between King John and a rebellious faction of barons led to his signing of the Magna Carta, a royal charter protecting both church and baron rights against exploitation by the king and his government. This agreement compelled the king to consult with a Great Council of barons on tax matters, granting more powers to the nobility. In 1969, the UK passed the People’s Representation Act which extended the franchise to men and women over the age of 18. This ensured that the voices of those who hadn't been heard historically—women and those without property or wealth—could be heard. This was the culmination of a democratization process that began in 1832 with the First Reform Act. Today the representative body of Parliament acts as the head of government whereas the monarchy acts as head of state in a more symbolic manner. The researcher presents a list of the basic duties of the British Parliament as follows:

i. Pass legislation
ii. Perform checks on the functioning of government
iii. Debate domestic and international political issues
iv. Monitor and appropriate government spending

The British monarch is also a part of the Parliament. They open and close parliaments and summon new ones. However, they have absolutely no power to affect legislation. The British monarchy is the oldest form of government in the United Kingdom. The current monarch is Charles III, who became king in 2022 after his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, the longest-reigning monarch in British
history, passed away. Charles is part of the Windsor house, which has ruled since 1910. The British monarch works alongside Parliament and has not held absolute power over the country and its provinces since 1215. The monarch cannot make any decisions independently; however, the monarch rules according to the constitution. They work very closely with ministers as figureheads of the Church of England. As head of state, the role of the King is strictly constitutional and representational, a part of English culture for over a thousand years. Despite his high-status role as the King of England, King Charles III holds no real governmental power. The monarch shares power with the Prime Minister. The monarch must act on their advice and is mainly guided or censured on legislation. The elected Parliament must have the King’s approval on legislation. Nonetheless, his role is necessary regardless of his inability to make unilaterally political or executive decisions himself.

Advantages of Parliament system of government

Below are the advantages of merits of a parliamentary or cabinet system of government:

i. It reduces friction, creates friendship, and promotes co-operation between the two arms of government: Parliamentary system of government is advantageous because it creates a friendly relationship between the executive and legislative arm of the government. This is so because the two arms of the government are not separated.

ii. Faster and quicker decision making: When the legislative and executive arms of the government in a parliamentary system of government are joint together, it is usually faster and quicker for decisions to be made. The fusion of powers makes parliamentary approval of the policies and programmes of government fast, thereby helping quick decision and implementation of government policies and programmes.

iii. It requires less personnel and less cost: Unlike a presidential system where all the arms of government are separated and occupied by different set of people, the fusion of the legislature and the executive in a parliamentary system of government means that less personnel and cost are required to run a cabinet system of government. Conversely, it is right to say that parliamentary system of government is less expensive than a presidential system.

The parliamentary system of government also promotes good governance because the individual and collective responsibility of the executive to the parliament will make all members of the cabinet work hard for the successful administration of the country. It also ensures accountability and transparency.

Below are the disadvantages or demerits of a parliament or cabinet system of government:

i. Members of the parliament will become too powerful, arrogant, and likely to abuse power: While the parliamentary system may seem to always promote good governance, it will also make members of the parliament become too powerful, arrogant and this might also lead to the abuse of political powers. In other words, members of the parliament in a parliamentary system of government are Supreme and unquestionable.

ii. The Prime Minister is loyal to his party: In a parliamentary system of government, the prime minister is usually loyal to his party and not the people because he is directly elected as he becomes Prime Minister by virtue of being the leader of his party. Thus, he will tend to be loyal to his party and not his people.

iii. Uncertainty and instability in government: No doubt, in a parliamentary system of government, there is always the uncertainty about the tenure of office of the prime minister as the parliament can give a “vote of no confidence” to dismiss him at any time. This may lead to crisis, segregation, or instability in governance.

iv. Overload of the functions of the cabinet: The fusion of the legislative and executive functions in the members of the cabinet may overburden the members of the cabinet with double functions and some ministers may not cope well. It can also lead to the ineffectiveness of the government because the fusion of powers and functions of the legislative and executive arms of government will be too much for only the cabinet to handle.

v. Lack of specialization leading to inefficiency: Lastly, while it is true that the parliamentary system requires fewer personnel to handle both legislative and executive functions, it is important to note that a minister may lack specialization in the art of governance in one arm of government, thus leading to inefficiency in such regard (Keane, 2009). Next, the author provided some recommendations to improve democratic governance.

Conclusions

For centuries citizens of the world have believed that a perfect system of government of the people, by the people, and for the people does exist in several countries. An ideal system of government that promotes liberty, freedom, and equality of all citizens. Over the years, we have found out that democracy in its truest form may not have been practiced in any country on the planet. Democracy as we have it today is not democracy in its truest meaning. Power does not belong to the people but few members of the elitist group in society. Citizens perform their civic voting duties but do not actually have much say on the policies of the government after they have been elected. Elected politicians make decisions in our parliaments without consulting citizens who have voted them into their respective offices. This cannot be said to be democratic. World despotic leaders have also hijacked the use of democracy to hide their dictatorial and oppressive rule. To the extent that global citizens are left more confused as to what democracy means. Citizens have been hoodwinked, bamboozled to believe that people rule in the United States, the United Kingdom, and a host of other countries. But with a closer look at these countries, one can find out that they are not truly democratic. The researcher opined that when
democracy is practiced properly it will bring about human stability, development, and safer communities where all citizens respect human rights and the rule of law. It is the lack of democracy that can be held responsible for so many conflicts in the world today. The researcher continues to search for democracy in its truest form and manifestations.

The author recommends the following:

i. **Universality of democracy:** The establishment of a democratic process must make effective participation and voting equality available to all adults who are subject to the binding collective decisions of society. A democracy must also provide citizens with opportunities for understanding civic issues, as well as allow them to have control over the matters that reach the decision-making agenda.

ii. **Political participation by the public in a democracy fosters the desirable qualities of “independence, self-reliance, and public-spirituedness”,** and it provides opportunities for individuals to develop their full capacities. Finally, because participation in collective decision making is open to all, democracy - more than any other alternative - gives citizens the opportunity to satisfy other important social, cultural, and economic interests (Coglianese, 1990).

iii. **Education:** Citizens must be educated and become familiar with democracy, political parties, and their voting rights. The government must protect citizens’ voting rights all the time.

iv. **Patriarchy:** For democracy to work successfully, the social challenges of patriarchy must be dealt with first by all citizens. The role of women needs to be more clearly defined not limited to a care giver supporting role. Women should be treated equally like men and allowed to aspire to any job, businesses of their choices.

v. **Corruption:** Corruption is cancerous because it eats deep into the fabric of society, it hinders development. Corruption is a hallmark of a failed state. A corrupt state cannot be said to be democratic as greediness and unlawful quest for riches become the order of the day (Som, 2013; Yesufu, 2017).

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