

Is Democracy in Decline?

*To the extent that it is,
what can be done to preserve it?*

Democracy is a pathetic belief in the collective wisdom of individual ignorance. No one in this world . . . has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the great masses of the plain people. Nor has anyone ever lost public office thereby.

As democracy is perfected, the office of president represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.

— [H.L. Mencken](#)

Lest We Forget

Fascism denies that the majority, through the mere fact of being a majority, can rule human societies; it denies that this majority can rule by means of a periodical consultation; it affirms the irremediable, fruitful and beneficent inequality of men, who cannot be levelled by such a mechanical and extrinsic fact as universal suffrage.

...The chief epithet of democracy is *all*, a word which has completely filled the nineteenth century. The time has come to say: the few and the *elite*. Democracy is on its last legs in every country in the world; in some of them, as in Russia, it was murdered; in others it is falling prey to increasingly obvious decadence. It may be that in the nineteenth century, capitalism needed democracy; today it has no such need. The war was revolutionary in the sense that it liquidated – in rivers of blood – the century of democracy, the century of majority, of numbers, of quantity.

[Fascism] believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism. . .War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it ...[The Fascist] looks on life as duty, ascent, conquest...

Benito Mussolini

Has another backlash begun in the 21st Century? There is some disturbing evidence.

1. The persistence of authoritarianism in China, Russia, the former Soviet Republics, the Middle East, much of Africa, some of Latin America, and Asia (now including the Philippines). These examples of “the Guardian State” (a la Plato’s Republic) are said to be far preferable to the anarchy, instability, and civil war that has followed the overthrow of dictators like Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi.

2. The rise of xenophobic nationalism and authoritarian political movements in Europe, notably in Holland, France, Germany, Austria, Poland, and Hungary. Economic distress led to fascism and communism. Could it now lead to another rejection of democracy?

3. Lower voter turnout. Colombia’s historic peace accord recently failed a referendum by .03% of the vote. Those who voted Yes accounted for just over 19 percent of the electorate; those who voted No also accounted for just over 19 percent; those who did not come out to vote are over 60 percent of Colombians. Some who voted against did so as a protest against gay rights. In the U.S. only 57.5% of eligible voters turned out for the presidential election in 2012; fewer vote in midterm and state and local elections.

4. The distrust of government and politicians evident in the current U.S. election campaign – coupled with a willingness on the part of millions to entrust the presidency --for the first time -- to someone who has never held public office or military command and is aptly described as unstable, impulsive, a textbook narcissist, and a pathological liar – in the belief that what is needed is a “strong leader” who can somehow “make the country great again.”

FIGURE 1—“ESSENTIAL” TO LIVE IN A COUNTRY THAT IS GOVERNED DEMOCRATICALLY, BY AGE COHORT (DECADE OF BIRTH)

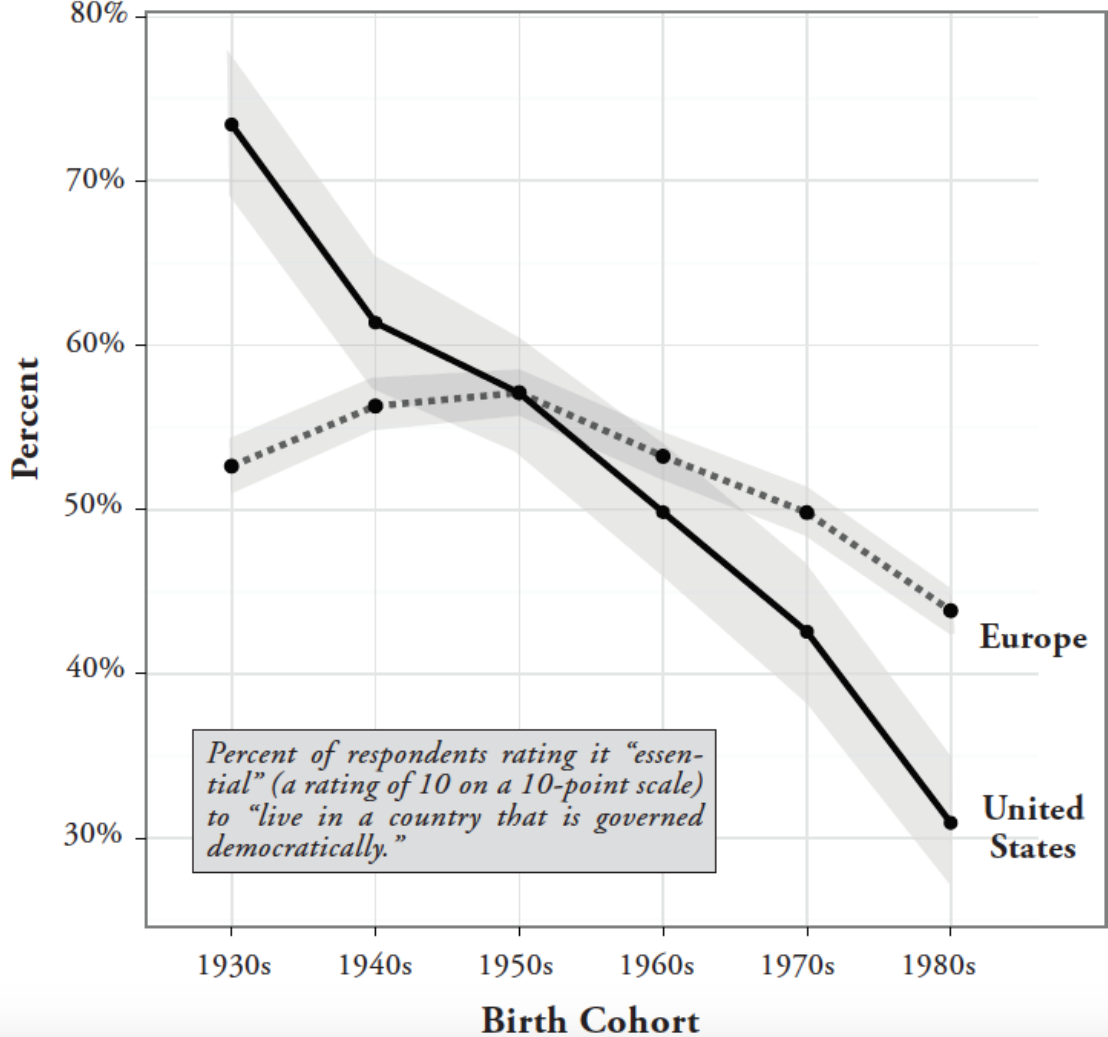


FIGURE 2—“HAVING A DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEM” IS A “BAD” OR “VERY BAD” WAY TO “RUN THIS COUNTRY”

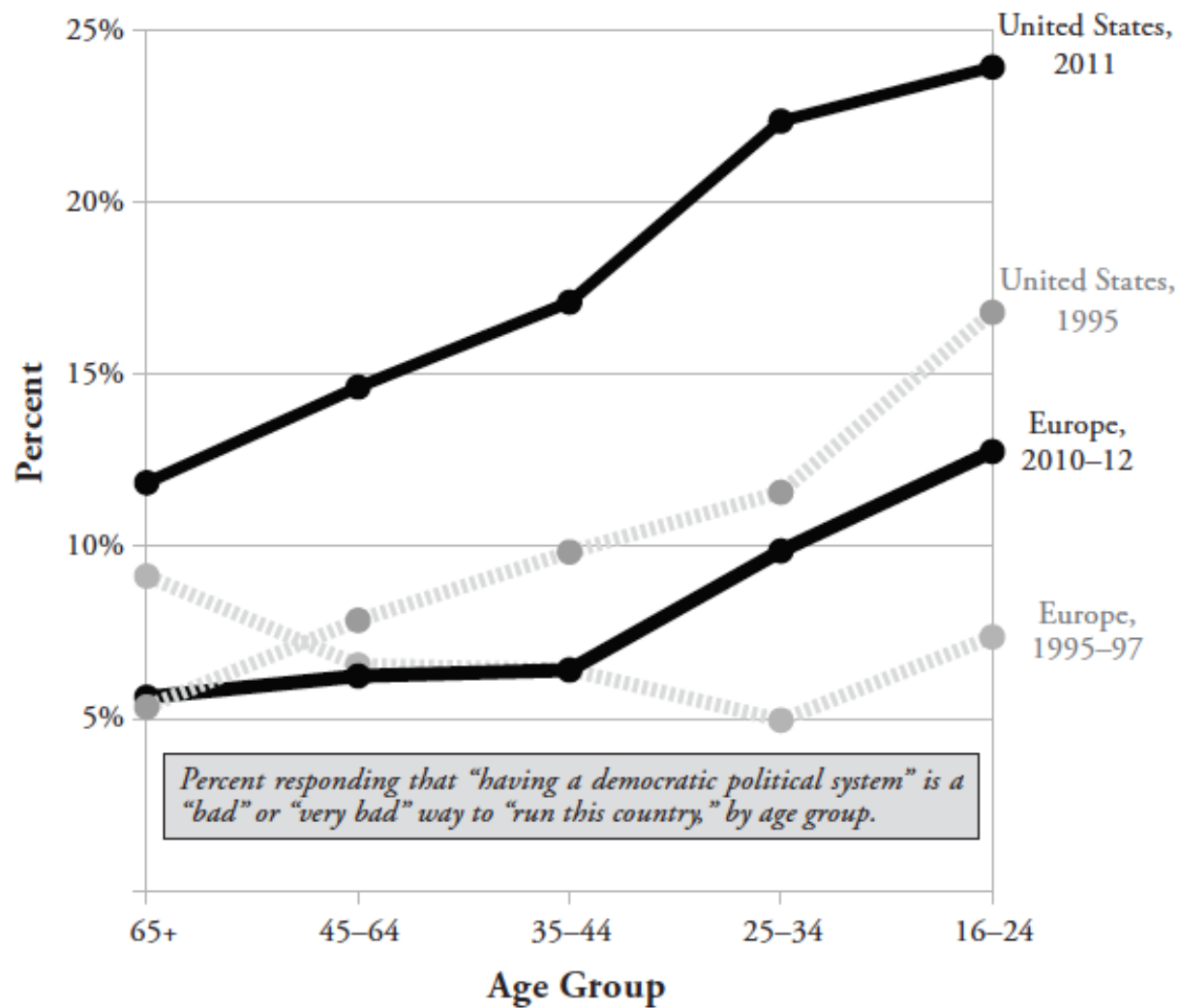


FIGURE 4—SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIANISM BY INCOME IN THE U.S.

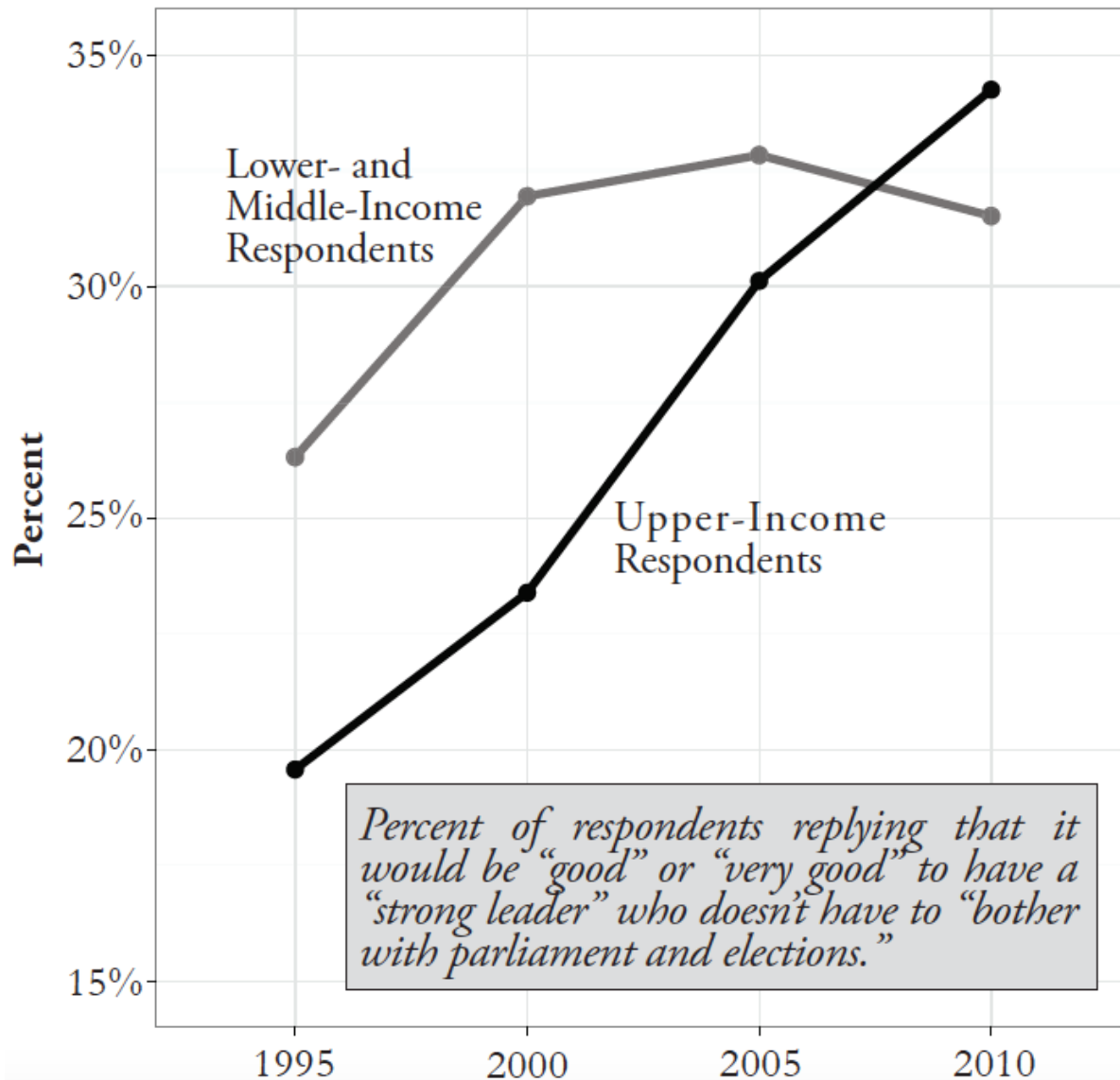
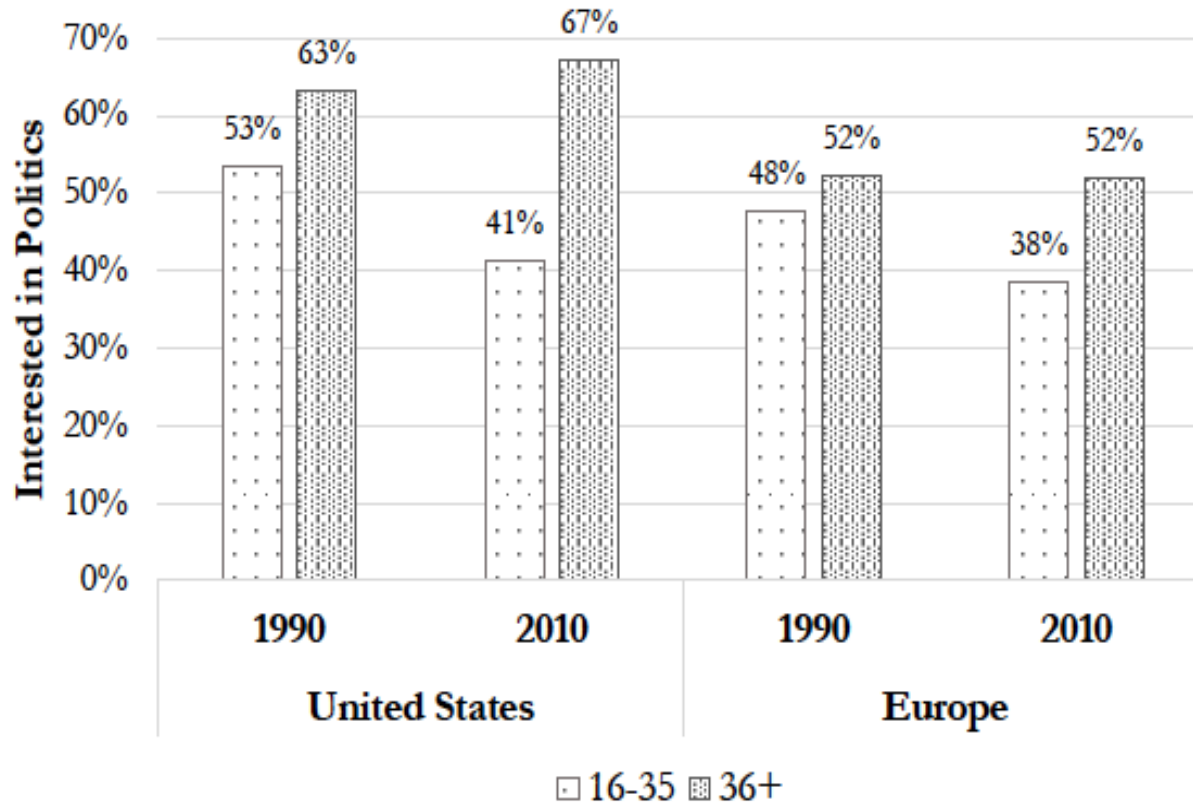


FIGURE 3—THE WIDENING “POLITICAL APATHY GAP”



Hans-Hermann Hoppe

DEMOCRACY

The God That Failed

**The Economics and Politics of
Monarchy, Democracy, and Natural Order**

DAVID HARSANYI

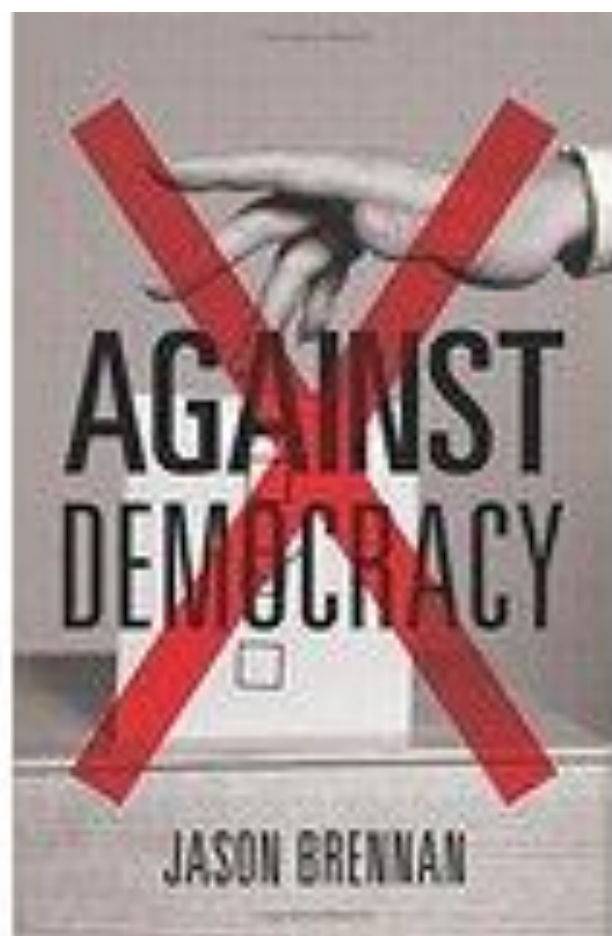
AUTHOR OF OBAMA'S FOUR HORSEMEN

THE PEOPLE
HAVE SPOKEN
(and they are wrong)

THE CASE AGAINST
DEMOCRACY



Harsanyi, senior editor at The Federalist and author of the book *The People Have Spoken (And They Are Wrong): The Case Against Democracy*, is one of the most forthright voices. In a May 2016 op-ed in the *Washington Post*, he [called](#) for “weeding out millions of irresponsible voters who can’t be bothered to learn the rudimentary workings of the Constitution, or their preferred candidate’s proposals or even their history.” That way, he said, “we may be able to mitigate the recklessness of the electorate.”



We have been studying Washington politics for more than 40 years, and have never seen them this dysfunctional. In our past writings, we have criticized both parties when we believed it was warranted. Today, however, we have no choice but to acknowledge that the core of the problem lies with the Republican Party.

The GOP has become an insurgent outlier in American politics. It is ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition.

Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein

Until recently, democracy appeared to be on the rise throughout the world.

The defeat of the Axis powers, the implosion of the Soviet Union, and the successes of liberal democracy produced a global wave of democratization.

“In the second half of the 20th century, democracies had taken root in the most difficult circumstances possible—in **Germany**, which had been traumatised by Nazism, in **India**, which had the world’s largest population of poor people, and, in the 1990s, in **South Africa**, which had been disfigured by apartheid. Decolonialisation created a host of new democracies in Africa and Asia, and autocratic regimes gave way to democracy in **Greece** (1974), **Spain** (1975), **Argentina** (1983), **Brazil** (1985) and **Chile** (1989). The collapse of the Soviet Union created many fledgling democracies in central Europe. By 2000 Freedom House, an American think-tank, classified **120 countries, or 63% of the world total, as democracies.**”

The Economist

Modern Comparative Government: the Differences are Real and Significant

Democracy/Republic

Authoritarian

Totalitarian

1. Presidential,
Parliamentary

Dynastic, Dictator, Oligarchy

Dictator

2. Autonomy or Liberty

Subjection

Subjection

3. Independent
judiciary

Controlled judiciary

Controlled
judiciary

4. Separation of State
and civil society

Some separation

Integration

5. Multi-party system

One-party dominant

One party

6. Civilian Control of
Military

Garrison State

Garrison State

7. Accountable Police

Secret Police

Secret Police

8. Regulated Market

Mixed State/Market

Command Economy

9. Church/State Separation

Varies

State- controlled religion;
theocracy

10. Free, competitive media

Controlled press

Controlled Media;
Self-censorship

What is the rationale for democracy?

“All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.”

Thomas Jefferson

The underlying assumptions:

All human adults have enough rational capacity to understand the need for reciprocal obligations and to protect their values and interests by cooperating with others.

Once free of dependency, they expect to govern themselves. They want to be citizens, not subjects.

Universal autonomy is therefore the underlying moral principle of democracy.

What is its history?

Popular government appeared first in Europe, in ancient Greece, from about the 6th century BC to the fall of Athens (4th century BC), then in Rome (6th century BC to 1st Century AD). It was direct, not representative, and not linked to federalism. It was replaced by kingship from then until modern times (the 18th century onward).

It was revived in late medieval times in the Swiss communes and Italian and German cities. Revolts against monarchy in England (1640s), North America (1776), and France (1789) led to experiments with republican government. At first suffrage was limited to male property owners. As it was extended these and other countries became democratic republics using representation and sometimes federalism.

What does democracy mean in theory and practice?

Etymologically, rule by the mass of the people (the *demos*): “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (Lincoln).

The moral or normative principle: autonomy – in three forms: 1) communal (Athens); 2) plural (Rome; modern consensual); individual (liberal). Modern democracy is a variable compound.

All modern democracies have:

- 1) universal adult suffrage.
- 2) majority rule plus protection of basic individual rights by an independent judiciary.
- 3) representative government in free, fair, frequent elections.
- 4) non-partisan civil service.
- 5) separation of the public sector and civil society.

They vary in governmental structure (presidential-congressional; parliamentary, majoritarian/consensual), electoral systems (first-past-the-post, PR, alternative vote, rank-order voting, etc.). Many also adopt federalism to minimize centralization of authority.

Their economic systems all combine reliance on the market under governmental regulation with provisions for basic welfare (the safety net).

What are its virtues or benefits?

Notably:

it allows for peaceful succession in office, removing justification for conspiracy, coups, and revolutions;

it promotes peaceful relations among states (“mature democracies do not make war against one another);

and allows for and promotes individual liberty, cultural diversity, and civic engagement.

What are its vices or weaknesses?

* It puts a premium on rationality, civic awareness, and willingness to shoulder the burdens of citizenship by studying complex economic and scientific issues. It is vulnerable to obdurate factionalism, corruption (via campaign financing, etc.), and gridlock. When turnout is low, as it often is, passionate minorities prevail over moderate majorities.

*In an age increasingly shaped by mass media and social media, voters are more susceptible to demagoguery and political mass marketing, the blurring of the distinction between information and entertainment, selective news channeling that reinforces bias, the unchecked circulation of lies and half-truths, and populist appeals to prejudices, fears, and frustrations. (Would a tabloid and TV entertainment celebrity like Trump have become a political leader in earlier times? Would a Ventura, a Schwarzenegger, a Berlusconi?)

*By allowing for economic inequality, it may generate extremes of wealth and poverty which undermine the size and strength of the middle class on which democracy has traditionally depended, and the belief in fairness and equal opportunity which supports the implicit social contract.

THE STRUCTURE OF INEQUALITY

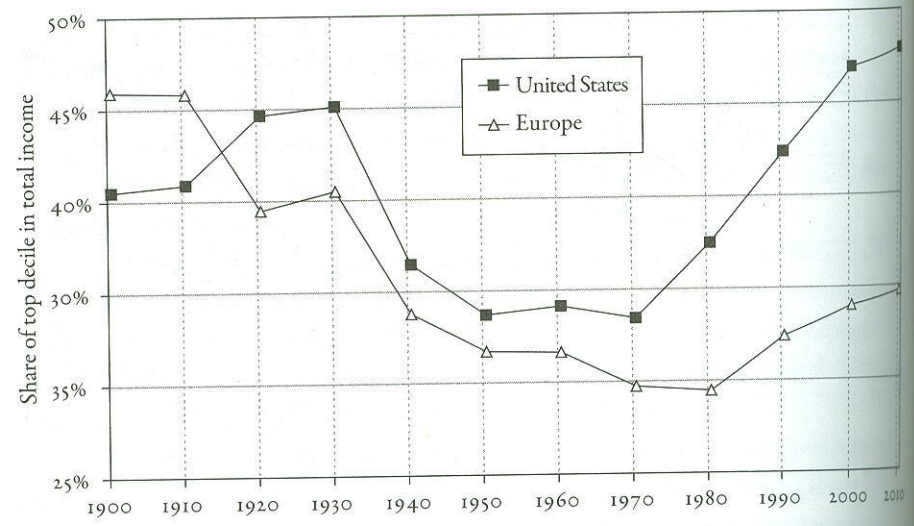
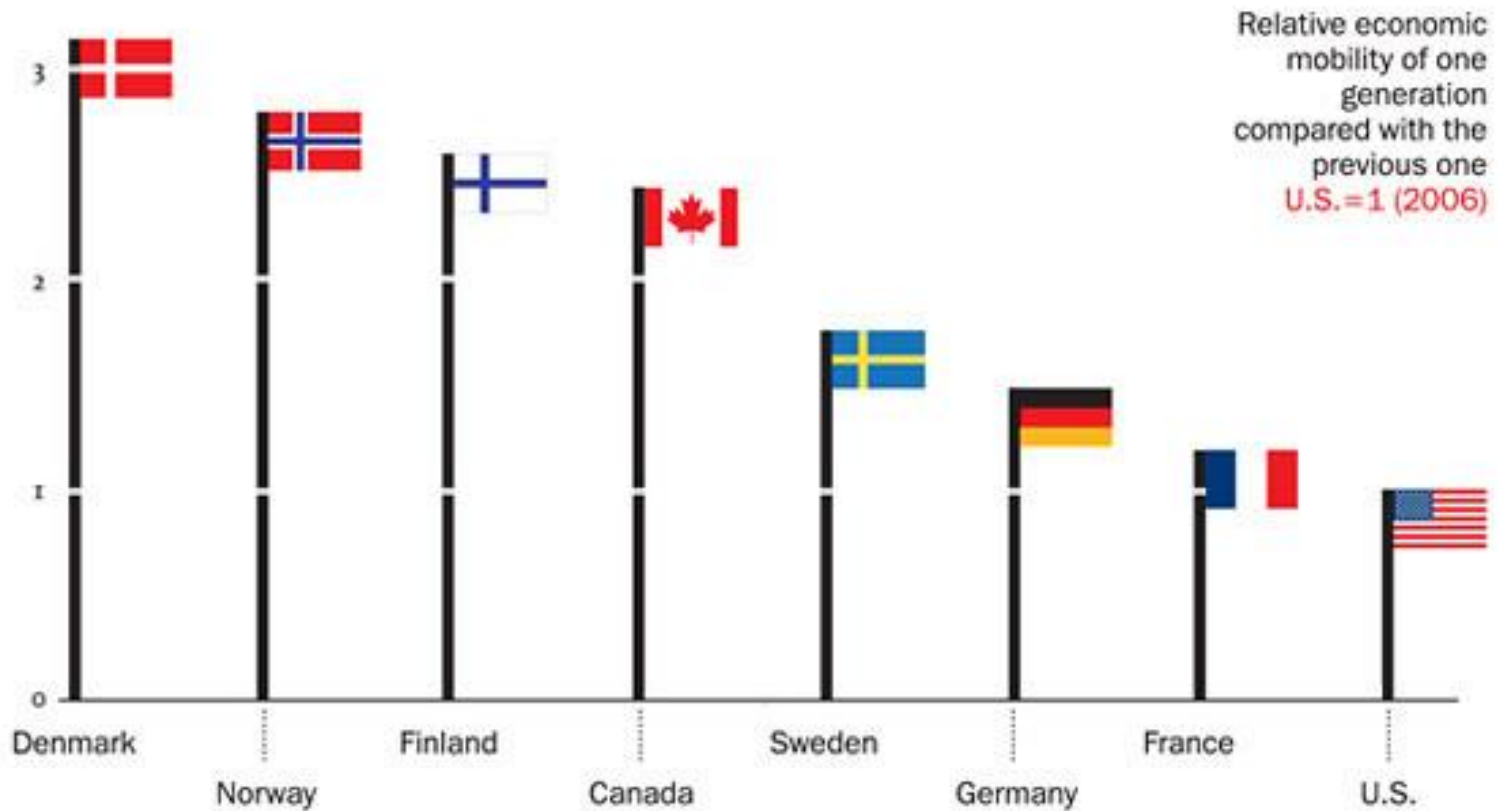


FIGURE 9.8. Income inequality in Europe versus the United States, 1900–2010
The top decile income share was higher in Europe than in the United States in 1900–1910; it is a lot higher in the United States in 2000–2010.
Sources and series: see piketty.pse.ens.fr/capital21c.

Why We're Falling Behind

The U.S. trails other Western industrialized nations in many of the key areas that influence a person's prospects for economic mobility



More fundamentally, a capitalism shaped by the few and unaccountable to the many is a threat to all. Economies are more successful when we close the gap between rich and poor and growth is broadly based. A world in which 1% of humanity controls as much wealth as the other 99% will never be stable. Gaps between rich and poor are not new but just as the child in a slum can see the skyscraper nearby, technology allows anyone with a smartphone to see how the most privileged live. Expectations rise faster than governments can deliver and a pervasive sense of injustice undermines peoples' faith in the system. Without trust, capitalism and markets cannot continue to deliver the gains they have delivered in the past centuries.

Barack Obama in *The Economist*

(October 2016)

Questionable voting reforms that have been suggested:

1. Rank-Order Voting in all elections (Howard Dean)
2. Proportional representation in congressional elections with multi-member districts.
3. Mandatory voting.

Reforms

To Decrease the chances of another low-plurality candidate being nominated, adopt 1) Approval Voting or 2) Rank-Order (Australian) Voting or 3) Proportional voting in Primaries

In Approval Voting, electors vote for as many candidates as they like. The winner is the one with the most votes.

In Rank-Order Voting, voters rank candidates. If no candidate gets 50%, the candidate with least votes is eliminated and his or her supporters' second choices are taken into account and so on until one candidate gets 50%. In other words, there is an "instant runoff."

In Proportional Voting in primaries, candidates get a proportion of the state's votes that accords with their share of the numerical vote.

Why Plurality Voting is a Bad Idea in Primaries

“Plurality Voting “ is a very poor electoral method with which to run a primary election with 17 candidates, the number of candidates the Republicans had at the start of the primary season. That is because it allows a candidate in a large field of candidates (or even one with just several candidates) to win an election with a relatively low plurality of votes. And if this result follows in state after state, it can produce a victorious candidate who has only minority support in his own party, because most voters have voted in favor of someone else.

“Worse yet, if the victorious candidate has intense support among that minority but very thin support among other voters—in other words, if he is the second or third choice of relatively few voters—he will have great difficulty winning the general election. In a significant way, such a candidate will not be the most popular candidate who contested in that primary, because in a large field with only one winner, the most popular candidate—the one with widespread support—can only be discerned by surfacing second and third, and maybe even fourth, preferences among the voters.”

Donald L. Horowitz

Rank-Order (instant Run-off) Voting

It's as easy as 1-2-3. Voters have the option to rank the candidates from first to last, and any candidate with a majority of first choices wins, just as in any other election. But if no candidate has a majority, you hold an "instant runoff" tally in order to compare the top two candidates head to head.

Candidates in last place are eliminated, and their backers' votes are counted for their next choice. When it's down to two, the winner earns a majority of the vote.

Howard Dean

**Number the boxes
from 1 to 8 in the
order of your choice.**

2 SURNAME, Given names
INDEPENDENT

3 SURNAME, Given names
PARTY

7 SURNAME, Given names
PARTY

4 SURNAME, Given names
PARTY

7 SURNAME, Given names
PARTY

5 SURNAME, Given names
PARTY

6 SURNAME, Given names

Other Reforms that Could Strengthen American Democracy

1. End filibuster in Senate (or its rampant misuse) and the “Hastert Rule” in the House.
2. End deadlocks over Supreme Court appointments by legislating judicial term limits (perhaps 18 years).
3. Penal reform; de-criminalization of drug use; regulation of firearms.
4. Election campaigns: 1) limit contributions and expenditures, either by constitutional amendment or judicial interpretation and more experimentation with voluntary public financing; 2) abolish the electoral college, either by constitutional amendment or by multi-state compacts to assure majority rule; 3) end election of judges; 4) shorten campaigns by creating a system of regional primaries in a condensed time period; 5) abolish primary caucuses; 6) end gerrymandering by establishing independent districting commissions; 7) make voting easier, not harder; 8) outlaw TV ads by candidates or supporters, instead provide qualified candidates with free time for presentations and debates.
5. Reform education to support: 1) pre-school for all; free tuition at public colleges; 2) voluntary public service for high school graduates to pay for graduate and vocational education.
6. Reform immigration policy to tighten employment controls, prevent visa abuse, encourage admission of high-skilled workers, and provide a path for illegal immigrants either to citizenship or officially recognized non-citizen residency.
7. Promote equal opportunity and modify economic inequality by subsidizing child care, raising the minimum wage, tax reform, profit-sharing, reducing the gap between executive and worker salaries.
8. Teach political history and civics in K-12 schools.
9. Promote much better understanding of science policy issues.