

# **You Can't Test What Doesn't Exist: A Defense of Democracy**

By: Matthew J.H. Murphy  
Vincent Massey Collegiate, Winnipeg  
Supervising Teacher: Kathryn Slovinsky

The society in which we live generally assumes that democracy is the best form of government. However, over the past decade, anger has been at the forefront of democratic nations. Electorates are becoming more and more aware of the failure of democracy to bring about the equality, social and economic security, and political reform that it promises. This has caused many to question the effectiveness of democracy. But we shouldn't be so quick to judge a system that has not been fully realised. We do not know if democracy works because our democracies are so corrupted that they are not true democracies. Our political parties have become more concerned about retaining power than pushing change. Our democracies also have a tendency to elect bad leaders, who do not necessarily represent the people. As well, our electorates, who democracy relies completely on, are often short-sighted and fail to see what is good for the collective.

Instead of being focused on the good of the people, our political parties are driven by a desire to retain power. It has become extremely rare for a party member to vote against the wishes of his/her party. This may help to further the party's image of unity, but it does not help the country. In the recent vote on Bill C-30 (the bill on European trade negotiation), zero members of parliament (MPs) voted against the wishes of their leader<sup>1</sup>. A bill of such importance should not have unanimous support (or opposition) from within parties, but MPs ignored the wishes of their constituents in favour of the wishes of their party. In a similar manner, the opposition cares more about fighting the government and interrogating the Prime Minister (on

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<sup>1</sup> "Vote Details (42-1 Vote No. 190)." *Vote Details (42-1 Vote No. 190)*. Parliament of Canada, 7 Feb. 2017. Web. 16 Feb. 2017.

issues like his winter vacation<sup>2</sup>) than inspiring change. The opposition should focus on building solutions to issues that matter, instead of destroying the ruling party's image. Collaboration between parties would more closely approach true democracy than our current situation—democracy shouldn't be simply about fighting against something because the person presenting it is on the other side of the table. Good can come from hearing from all elected members; for example, socialized healthcare, one of the pillars of Canada, was first suggested by the opposition<sup>3</sup>. If governments have more collaboration between elected members and between parties, we would see a more productive and representative government.

The First Past the Post system is another example of how established democracies are not true democracies. First Past the Post means that to be elected a political party does not need to win the majority of votes, it just needs to beat the other parties. Countries are divided into ridings, whose votes are kept separate from those of other ridings. Parties get either a win or a loss for that riding, which renders uninfluential countless votes. This does not accurately represent the population, and allows governments to be formed without winning the popular vote. As witnessed in the recent American presidential election<sup>4</sup>, it is possible for the losing party to have won more votes. It seems outrageous to think that these governments are still considered to reflect the will of the people.

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<sup>2</sup> Minsky, Amy. "Justin Trudeau took an MP, party president to vacation on Aga Khan's private island." *Global News*. N.p., 11 Jan. 2017. Web. 16 Feb. 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Lovick, L.D. "Tommy Douglas." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. N.p., 30 July 2013. Web. 16 Feb. 2017.

<sup>4</sup> BBC News "US Election 2016 Results." BBC, n.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2017.

It is natural, according to Plato, for “A democratic society in its thirst for liberty [to] fall under the influence of bad leaders”<sup>5</sup>. These leaders are a result of a desire for change, a deep longing for upheaval within the government. They are what the people voted for, some would say, and likewise represent the people. However, this is not always the case. Democracy is meant to protect minority groups within a society by giving them a voice. However, sometimes leaders rise out of the “tyranny of the majority”. In this case, the powerful majority oppresses the minorities within their society, silencing them. True democracy calls for minorities to be properly represented. Our systems allow for a large portion of society to go unrepresented simply because they are not the majority. How is this any different than an oligarchy where the elite rule?

The corruption of democracy is not simply the fault of the government. It is, after all, the electorate's job to elect and support the government. However, the electorate is often unable to see past the present, ignoring the impact of actions and votes. When a campaigning party says it will lower taxes, we fail to see that this means our education and healthcare systems will suffer. When Britain put forth the Brexit referendum, their electorate failed to see the consequences of such drastic political change<sup>6</sup>. We can become so wrapped up in the politics of the moment that we make choices that are not necessarily in our interest. In the early 2000s the Canadian Alliance party suggested that Canadians should have a right to a referendum if sufficient number of citizens signed a petition. Out of context this seems like an amazing idea; it would have given Canadians the closest possible thing to true representation. However, instead of embracing the spirit of the idea, 370 000 Canadians mocked democracy by signing a petition to have the

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<sup>5</sup> Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Desmond Lee. London: Penguin Books, 2007. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Campbell, Alastair. "Political truths: Brexit Anger is growing, desire for Labour is rising, but not under Corbyn." *International Business Times UK*. N.p., 16 Oct. 2016. Web. 16 Feb. 2017.

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Alliance party leader change his name from Stockwell to Doris<sup>7</sup>, proving the idea unworkable.

Our democratic system cannot be considered a true democracy when the people who it hopes to represent act solely out of self-interest and fail to respect their role in the process.

We do not know if a true democracy will work; the flaws in our system have made it so that it has not been tested. Democracy has the potential to be the fairest, most representative, and least corrupt form of government. However, because of our departure from the principles of democracy, the world is starting to lose faith in this potential. If we do not change our course, we will continue to witness both political apathy and backlash against democratic values. Our governments should focus on reforms that will bring us closer to the ideals of democracy so that we might one day be able to answer the question “does democracy work?”.

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<sup>7</sup> CBC News. "Doris Day' petition hits the mark." CBC/Radio Canada, 16 Nov. 2000. Web. 16 Feb. 2017.