

## **Democracy:** The United State of America, a Constitutional Republic

In our system of government where power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or through their elected representatives. As a constitutional republic, our government combines both republicanism (rule by law, not by monarch or dictator) and constitutionalism (government power is limited by a constitution.)

### **Key Characteristics:**

- Free and fair elections
- Respect for human rights
- Rule of law
- Citizen participation

### **Core Principles:**

- Popular Sovereignty: The ultimate source of political power resides in the people.
- Majority Rule: Decisions are usually made by the majority, but with safeguards to protect minority rights.
- Rule of Law: Everyone, including the government, is subject to and accountable under the law.
- Equality: All citizens are equal before the law and have equal opportunities.
- Accountability and Transparency: Government actions are transparent and officials are accountable to the people
- Individual Rights and Freedoms: Democracies protect fundamental rights.

### **Key Features:**

- Free and fair elections
- Multi-party system
- Separation of powers (the 3 branches of government)
- Independent judiciary
- Active citizen participation
- Respect for human rights
- Freedom of the press
- Tolerance and inclusion

### **How to Lose a Democracy:**

- Electoral Manipulation, which can include voter suppression, gerrymandering, and attempts to undermine election results.
- Executive over-reach, in which leaders try to expand their power at the expense of other branches such as the legislature and/or judiciary.
- Weakening the Judiciary, by undermining the independence and impartiality of the courts.
- Suppression of Dissent, by attacks on the media, civil society organizations, and political opponents.

- Spread of Misinformation, by the use of propaganda, disinformation (lies), and/or conspiracy theories, which is a particular danger in our era during which social media is relied on as a main source of information.
- Political Polarization, when societies become deeply divided along partisan lines.
- Erosion of Civic Engagement, when there is a decline in participation in the democratic process.
- Loss of Faith in Institutions, when citizens lose faith in the ability of institutions to represent their interests.
- Populist Leaders, who exploit popular discontent and offer simplistic solutions.
- Legalistic Autocrats, who use legal and constitutional mechanisms to consolidate power and eliminate democratic constraints.
- Deceptive Processes, which unlike a traditional coup, democratic erosion happens gradually while leaders maintain a veneer of legality while dismantling democratic institutions.
- Confusion and Uncertainty, because of the incremental process of dismantling, it makes it more difficult to recognize the danger before it is too late.

Some Present Examples of Rights guaranteed by the Constitution:

- Birthright citizenship guaranteed by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment is under assault. (Executive Order 14160).
- A person's Green Card, Student Visa, or Temporary Protection Status can be revoked without due process. (Executive Orders 14161, 14163, 14159)
- Public and peaceful demonstrations are not being protected by the 1st Amendment. (Federalizing the California National Guard in Los Angeles)
- Attacking democratic institutions, such as the press, the courts/judges, and not complying with court orders.
- Violations of Constitutional protections. (4<sup>th</sup> Amendment regarding illegal search and seizures, 6<sup>th</sup> Amendment regarding the right to speedy trial and other elements of due process (sending immigrants to Cecot without due process), and 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment regarding cruel and unusual punishment-the deportation of immigrants to other countries or imprisonment in a swamp).

**Halting the conversion of Democracy into a form of authoritarianism requires vigilance, strong institutions, and a commitment by all citizens to democratic norms and values.**

(Source: AI Overview-Google)