

## Freedom and Democracy are not the Same

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What is the relationship between freedom and democracy? We often use these terms interchangeably equating liberty with democracy. We then compound the error by insisting that democracy automatically produces freedom, and that, thanks to democracy, government coercion is no longer a threat to liberty because we get to vote on who will coerce us.

We tend to forget that the United States was born as a republic, not a democracy and that the Constitution was designed to advance liberty, not democracy. The Framers of the Constitution sought to protect individual rights from encroachment by government and from fellow citizens. The Constitution's intent was to govern the government, not the people. As Alexander Hamilton explained: "We are now forming a republican form of government. Real Liberty is not found in the extremes of democracy, but in moderate government."

I suspect most of us are surprised to learn that the word "democracy" was deliberately avoided by the Framers, and does not appear in the Declaration of Independence or in the Constitution. The Founding Fathers were deeply concerned with the problems inherent in a tyranny of the majority and went to great lengths to design a federal government not based on the will of the majority. To the Framers, the purpose of government was to secure for citizens John Locke's trilogy of rights to life, liberty, and property.

I suspect also, that most of us are surprised to learn how, in the fog of World War I, we began to break with the letter and spirit of the Constitution suspending property rights with wide-scale nationalizations and more. The Sedition Act of 1918 blatantly undermined the Bill of Rights by criminalizing anti-government expressions. The Sedition Act forbade the use of "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language" about the United States government. Those convicted under the Act generally received sentences of imprisonment of 5 to 20 years. In those turbulent years, radical political activist and novelist Upton Sinclair and others were actually arrested for reading in public the Bill of Rights. Reportedly, the arresting officer proclaimed: "We'll have none of that Constitution stuff."

But it was during Franklin Roosevelt's presidency that the concepts of freedom and democracy were corrupted beyond recognition in American politics. Roosevelt introduced the aberrant argument that freedom hinges on government. In this view of democracy, as long as government responds to the people, it does not matter how much the government restricts freedoms; the people are free. In his second inaugural address, President Roosevelt proudly proclaimed: "In these last four years, we have made the exercise of all power more democratic; for we have

begun to bring private autocratic powers into their proper subordination to the public's government."

Contrast Roosevelt's understanding of the role of government with Thomas Jefferson's: "A wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities."

There is indeed a connection between freedom and democracy, but they are not one and the same. The Human Freedom Index 2016 -a collaborative report of the Cato Institute and other organizations- documents a strong 0.77 correlation in the complex relationship between freedom and democracy. The report offers scholars a rich empirical environment of 159 territories to examine if there is a relationship of causation or support between the two variables, and if that relationship is strengthened or weakened over time.

The United States is still a democracy, but its human freedom ranking has declined to number 16 in economic freedoms and an embarrassing 28<sup>th</sup> position in personal freedoms. Hong Kong, a territory that has never experienced democracy, ranks number 1 in economic freedoms and 19 in personal freedoms.

When democratic governance abuses majority rule as a replacement for personal choice, individual freedom is subverted. We have to learn not to confuse the self-government of democratic majority rule, with the self-government of our own lives.