

# wp OPINIONS

## *Democracy is up to the job*

By Jennifer Rubin  
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The [Post's editorial page editor Fred Hiatt](#) asks if “democracy is still up to the job.” He answers in the affirmative, listing advancement of gay rights, the Republican primary and robust civil society as evidence.

I will add a few, naturally from the perspective of the center-right.

The most dramatic expression of democracy in decades has been, of course, the Tea Party. Despite efforts on the left to paint it as the brainchild of brother billionaires and as racist, to boot, it was, in fact, the closest thing to a true grass-roots movement since the anti-tax effort in California in the 1970s. In fact, this is the only grass-roots movement in American history in defense of limited government. A nationwide peaceful political movement in reaction to perceived oversteps by a new president surely is evidence that Americans care about their government and will engage in political action to shape it.

The Tea Party's clarion call was to restrict the power of the federal government. That entailed reducing the debt and spending, reforming entitlements, defending “King Dollar” (against the Fed), and an originalist interpretation of the Constitution. It was the Cato Institute's dream come true. Whether you agree with its aims or not, there is no doubt that the Tea Party energized ordinary citizens, spawned a crop of candidates who had never sought public office and moved the GOP to the right on fiscal issues.

Democracy was also at work in the 2010 elections. Certainly any free and fair election including millions of voters is worth celebrating. But this election in particular displayed two essential features of American democracy.

First, the voters sent a message to President Obama to correct course. In many voters' eyes, Obama had raced too far left and needed to be held accountable. Reining in pols who have taken their “mandate” as a license to enact an extreme agenda is, thankfully, a healthy feature of American democracy. But so is the rejection of unfit, extreme and downright goofy candidates, as the Republicans learned in the Delaware, Colorado, Alaska and Nevada Senate races. That was evidence that sound judgment and moderation remain integral to American democracy.

We also saw America's brand of democracy — *constitutional* democracy — at work over and over again in the Supreme Court. Whether it was Justice Anthony Kennedy articulating the principles of the First Amendment in *Citizens United* or Justice Antonin Scalia explaining the origins of the Second Amendment in *Heller* or the entire country debating the meaning of the Commerce Clause, we see that our Constitution, which provides both for democratic governance and protection of minority rights, is alive and well. Dictatorial regimes often have “constitutions” as well, but these are imposters that have no meaning in the lives of the people living under tyranny. Here in the United States, the Constitution and popular reverence for it restrain government and protect liberty.

But the greatest sign of democracy's resilience is not to be found in legislatures, courtrooms or even voting booths. Rather, it is the presence of thousands and thousands of men and women willing to give their lives for the world's greatest democracy. After all, democracy does not survive on its own. It must be defended, here at home and, when necessary, overseas. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, more than [6,400](#) brave men and women have given their lives for our democracy and the security of this nation's citizens, and thousands more have sustained life-altering injuries. These magnificent Americans have paid the highest tribute to American democracy: It is worth dying for.