

Module 1: Government Foundations

Topic 3 Content: Concepts of Democracy

Introduction



Demi Tracy: On today's episode, we have special guest, Connie Demcray. She will be exploring the concepts considered essential to an effective democratic government. Joining us now with *Concepts of Democracy*, is Connie Demcray.

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Concepts of Democracy



Connie Demcray: When the American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain in 1776, the task of establishing the government of America began. What would eventually take shape is a representative democracy, a system of government in which the people rule themselves through freely elected representatives. At the core of democracy are five essential concepts.

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Each Individual is Valued

Each Individual is Valued

- The people are both the rulers and the ruled in a democracy.
- They are the citizens of the government they create.
- American democracy is established on the belief that each individual has the right to live, the right to be free, and the right to own property.
- The government protects these natural rights.

Each Individual is Valued

Equality Before the Law

Majority Rule, Minority Rights

Compromise

Personal Freedoms

The infographic features a yellow header with the title 'Each Individual is Valued'. Below the header is a dark grey box containing a bulleted list of four points about democracy. At the bottom of this box are three white icons of human figures. To the right of the list is a vertical stack of five yellow-bordered boxes, each containing a democratic principle: 'Each Individual is Valued', 'Equality Before the Law', 'Majority Rule, Minority Rights', 'Compromise', and 'Personal Freedoms'.

Connie Demcray: The people are the most important part of a democracy, as they are both the rulers and the ruled. Their views, opinions, and perspectives are important, as they are the citizens of the government that they create. American democracy is established on the belief that all citizens are entitled to the right to live, to be free, and to own property. The government protects these natural rights for all of its citizens.

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Equality Before the Law

Equality Before the Law

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."
The Declaration of Independence

- Slavery was in direct conflict with the idea that all men are equal.
- Slavery was abolished by the **Thirteenth Amendment**, in 1865.
- The **Fourteenth Amendment** attempted to secure the rights of former slaves.
- These Amendments are examples of how a democracy works to ensure the equality of all its citizens.

Each Individual is Valued

Equality Before the Law

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Personal Freedoms

Connie Demcray: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."

This statement, contained in the *Declaration of Independence*, echoed the sentiments of John Locke, who also believed that all men were created equal. However, by 1776, slavery had endured in America for more than 150 years. How could American democracy declare the equality of men, yet enslave a race of people?

Slavery persisted in America until it was formally abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment, in 1865. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was a government effort to secure the rights of former slaves. The Amendment explained that former slaves were citizens, and entitled to all the rights and freedoms that citizens enjoy, including equal treatment by the law. The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments are two examples of how a democratic government works to ensure the equality of all of its citizens.


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Majority Rule, Minority Rights

Majority Rule, Minority Rights

- People rule themselves through the election of representatives.
- The candidate who receives a majority of the votes is elected.
- There is a **majority** of citizens who voted for the elected official.
- There is a **minority** of citizens who did not vote for the elected official.
- Minority views are still valued and protected by the Constitution.



Each Individual is Valued

Equality Before the Law

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Connie Demcray: In a representative democracy, the people rule themselves through the election of government officials. In an election, citizens vote for the candidate whose views are most aligned with their own. The candidate who receives a majority of the votes is elected, as he or she represents the perspective of the majority of the people.

In nearly every election, there is a majority of citizens who voted for the elected official, and there is a minority who did not vote for the elected official. Although the elected officials may not represent the views of the minority, their perspectives are still valued and their opinions are still important. Members of the minority are entitled to share their views openly, even though they may be in opposition to the majority.

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Compromise

Compromise

- U.S. government is comprised of many people and perspectives.
- In a compromise, each side makes a sacrifice to receive a gain.
- Without compromise, it can become impossible to arrive at a resolution.

Each Individual is Valued

Equality Before the Law

Majority Rule, Minority Rights

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Personal Freedoms

Connie Demcraay: American government is comprised of a group of individuals who represent the diverse perspectives of citizens. How does a group of people whose views are often in opposition, arrive at a common decision? The answer is compromise.

In a compromise, each side makes a sacrifice in order to receive a gain. Compromise leads to a decision that is acceptable to each side. Without compromise, it can become impossible to arrive at a resolution, and opposing sides can become deadlocked. This can result in severe consequences for citizens.

For example, in 2013, the members of Congress could not agree on how to appropriately fund an act of legislature. As a result, several governmental duties were suspended and the government entered what is known as a shutdown. Many government agencies were denied their funding, resulting in nearly one million federal employees being dismissed from their jobs, until an agreement could be reached. After 16 days, the opposing sides finally agreed on a compromise, and employees were able to return to their jobs.

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Personal Freedoms

Compromise

- Democracy values the freedom of the individual.
- Democracy cannot exist with total and absolute individual freedom.
- The government protects the freedom of the individual and society's well-being.



Each Individual is Valued

Equality Before the Law

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Next

Connie Demcray: Democracy values the individual, by ensuring equal treatment under the law, and protecting natural rights. However, democracy cannot persist in a society in which each individual has total and absolute freedom. Complete chaos would result. The government must create and enforce laws to protect the freedoms of the individual, and guard the well-being of society as a whole.

For example, licensed drivers have the freedom to drive on public roads and highways. However, they are required to abide by certain restrictions while driving. Drivers must maintain speeds within indicated limits. This helps to protect the life of the driver and other citizens on the road. Democratic governments must work to establish a balance between maintaining personal freedoms and protecting the rights of society at large.

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Concepts of Democracy Conclusion



Connie Demcra: Thank you for joining me for this episode of *Concepts of Democracy*, where we were able to take a look at the five essential principles at the foundation of an effective democracy:

- Each individual is valued.
- All people should be treated fairly, before the law.
- The majority rules, while respecting minority rights.
- Compromise is essential to decision-making.
- Personal freedoms are protected.

I'm Connie Demcra. Back to you, Glover and Demi.

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Ending of Episode



Demi Tracy: Thank you very much, Connie. Until next time, this is Demi Tracy with Glover Mint, wishing you a wonderful day.