



A DCI Deliberation Guide

Defensive Democracy:

How can we best protect democratic values and institutions from internal and external threats?

Format for Deliberation

Before the Deliberation

- I. Read this Deliberation Guide (required)

During the Deliberation

- I. Setting Expectations (5 min.)
- II. Getting to Know Each Other (10 min.)
- III. Discussing Forms of Governance (20 min.)
- IV. Assessing Democracy in the U.S. (25 min.)
- V. *Break (5 mins)*
- VI. Justifying Defensive Democracy (15 min.)
- VII. Implementing Defensive Democracy (30 min.)
- VIII. Reflections (10 min.)

Background

Introduction

Is democracy under threat globally? Freedom House reports that, for the 18th consecutive year, global freedom (defined by measures of political rights and civil liberties) declined in 2023.¹ According to Larry Diamond, since 2006, there has been no net expansion in the number of nations with free and fair elections and a decrease in the average level of freedom worldwide.² Citizens' feelings about democracy have also shifted over this time period. Global dissatisfaction with democracy in developed countries is at an all-time high.³ According to Pew Research, a median of 59% of individuals across 24 nations with representative democracies are dissatisfied

¹ Yana Gorokhovskaia and Cathryn Grothe. [“The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict.”](#) Freedom House. 2024.

² Larry Diamond. [“Facing Up to the Democratic Recession.”](#) Journal of Democracy. 2015.

³ Fred Lewsey. [“Global Dissatisfaction with Democracy at a Record High.”](#) Centre for the Future of Democracy. 2020.

with the functioning of democracy.⁴ In the United States (US), only 28% of adults are satisfied with how democracy is working.⁵ The decline of democratic institutions and the erosion of faith in democracy, combined with individuals seeking to subvert democratic norms, protections, and institutions is an enduring feature of our time – what, if anything, should be done about this?

In light of these trends, many have called for increased **defensive democracy** measures to safeguard nations, including the US, from democratic backsliding.⁶ Defensive democracy efforts include laws, court rulings, and legislation that limit some of the freedoms and rights guaranteed in a democratic society in order to protect the state and its democratic institutions and qualities.⁷ These domestic measures are mainly developed to prevent erosion from within but are sometimes utilized in response to external threats. This contrasts with other methods of democratic defense and promotion that occur on the international stage, such as nations around the world supporting Ukraine following Russia's invasion, or the US's attempts to build a democratic society in Iraq following the ousting of the Ba'athist regime in 2003. One way to view this difference is by understanding that defensive democracy is primarily in the realm of domestic politics, not foreign affairs.

Yet are these defensive democracy methods worth the associated tradeoffs and the restrictions on particular rights and liberties that they sometimes require? Is democracy worth protecting in the first place? If yes, how do we best do so? What are we willing to give up to protect democracy, if anything? If not, what alternative forms of governance are better prepared to address the challenges of our modern world? What does history teach us about these questions generally and the project to defend democracy specifically?

These are just some of the questions that currently animate the public and scholarly discourse around defensive democracy. This deliberation guide aims to aid participants in engaging with these questions and to foster a deliberative discussion that makes headway toward answering the practical, ethical, and political questions about defensive democracy. It is written with the awareness that readers of this guide (and participants in associated deliberations) may come from countries that are classified as having either democratic or non-democratic regimes. They may also be supportive of either type of regime regardless of where they live or come from.

Democracy and Its Alternatives

Before continuing, it will be helpful to define both democracy and some of its alternatives. Additionally, this section will outline common arguments made in favor of and against democracy and various undemocratic regimes.

⁴ Richard Wike et al. [“Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, but People Around the World Are Critical of How It’s Working.”](#) Pew Research Center. 2024.

⁵ Jeffrey M. Jones. [“Record Low in U.S. Satisfied With Way Democracy Is Working.”](#) Gallup News. 2024.

⁶ Michael Signer. [“America Does Have a Way to Save Itself.”](#) The Atlantic. 2023.

⁷ [“Defensive Democracy.”](#) Wikipedia. 2024.

While *democracy* is a complex and contested concept, it is generally characterized at its most basic level as a system of government in which citizens exercise power by voting. In a pure democracy, the people directly deliberate and decide on legislation. Countries that consider themselves democratic today generally utilize a representative form of government in which citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf. Technically speaking, they are democratic republics (or republican democracies), but for the purposes of this guide, we will refer to them as democracies.

An additional distinction between liberal and illiberal democracies may also be helpful. Understood broadly, a *liberal democracy* is a type of state in which citizens have their fundamental rights constitutionally recognized and protected by the institutions of that state. Liberal democracies typically not only have free and fair elections that are competitive between multiple political parties but also a balance of powers between the branches of government and protections of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property.⁸ *Illiberal democracies*, in contrast, may have elections but they are often not very competitive, power may be concentrated in the executive, and the government does not generally protect individual rights. In this guide, when we refer to democracy we will be referring to the concept of liberal democracy.

Arguments in favor of democracy

Proponents of democracy assert that it is the best form of government because it provides a mechanism for citizens to have a say in their governance, ensuring that leaders are accountable and that policies reflect the will of the people.⁹ As Winston Churchill famously remarked, "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others that have been tried." Some of the most common arguments in favor of democracy are listed here:

- **Political Equality:** Democracy is based on the principle that all citizens have an equal say in decisions affecting their lives, enhancing the dignity of individuals by recognizing their capacity for self-governance.¹⁰
- **Freedom of Expression:** Democracies protect freedom of speech, allowing citizens to express their opinions and criticize the government without fear of retribution.¹¹
- **Better Decision-Making:** Democracies improve decision-making quality through consultation and discussion that involves a broad range of perspectives.¹²
- **Conflict Resolution:** Democratic processes provide peaceful methods for resolving conflicts within society.¹³

⁸ Sara Copic. "[DCI Challenge for Democracy Deliberation Guide.](#)" Deliberative Citizenship Initiative. 2023; "[Liberal Democracy.](#)" Wikipedia. 2023; "[Global Issues: Democracy.](#)" United Nations. 2023.

⁹ Alexandra Mork. "[Why Democracy Is the Best We've Got.](#)" Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. 2019.

¹⁰ Josiah Ober. "[Democracy's Dignity.](#)" The American Political Science Review. 2012.

¹¹ Ingrid Cruz. "[Democracy Is The Best Form Of Government: Arguments For and Against.](#)" World Atlas. 2020.

¹² "[How is Democracy Better than Other Forms of Government?.](#)" Vedantu. 2024.

¹³ Ibid.

- **Human Development:** Democratic governments often foster higher levels of human development, including better health and education outcomes, compared to undemocratic regimes.¹⁴

Arguments against democracy

Despite its advantages, democracy has many critics. A Pew Research Center poll recently revealed that a median of 31% of citizens across 24 high and middle-income countries are supportive of authoritarian leadership systems.¹⁵ It is important to note that only about 45% of the current global population lives under democratic rule, although that number varies based on different understandings of which nations qualify as democracies.¹⁶ Some of the most common arguments against democratic governance are listed here:

- **Ineffective Leadership:** Democracy can lead to the election of charismatic leaders who lack the necessary qualifications to govern effectively.¹⁷
- **Risk of Tyranny:** Philosophers like Plato have warned that democracy can devolve into tyranny if demagogues manipulate public opinion.¹⁸
- **Uninformed Electorate:** A lack of citizen expertise on the functions and needs of the government can lead to the election of leaders who work against the interests of the state and undermine its ability to perform its duties.¹⁹
- **Inefficiency:** Decision-making in democracies can be slow and cumbersome due to the need for extensive debate and consensus-building.²⁰

Alternatives to democracy

Undemocratic regimes can take a variety of forms. Most commonly, these regimes are referred to as *authoritarian* and *illiberal*. Much like democracy, these are contested and nuanced terms, but broadly refer to a system of government where political pluralism is rejected, the status quo is preserved through a strong central authority, and the rule of law is applied irregularly.²¹ Some of the most common types of governments that may serve as alternatives to democracy and include elements of authoritarian rule include the following:

- **Monarchy:** Rule by a single person, usually hereditary. Monarchies can provide stable and continuous leadership but might lack accountability mechanisms.

¹⁴ [“How Is Democracy Better than Other Forms of Government?”](#) Encyclopaedia Britannica. accessed July 2024.

¹⁵ Laura Silver and Janell Fetterolf. [“Who Likes Authoritarianism, and How Do They Want to Change Their Government?”](#) Pew Research Center. 2024.

¹⁶ [“Democracy Index 2023: Age of Conflict.”](#) Economist Intelligence Unit. 2024.

¹⁷ Ingrid Cruz. [“Democracy Is The Best Form Of Government: Arguments For and Against.”](#) World Atlas. 2020.

¹⁸ Lawrence Torcello. [“Why Tyranny Could Be the Inevitable Outcome of Democracy.”](#) The Conversation. 2019.

¹⁹ Sean Illing. [“Epistocracy: A Political Theorist’s Case for Letting Only the Informed Vote.”](#) Vox. 2018.

²⁰ Christopher Harper. [“‘Game out’ Decision Making.”](#) Atlantic Council. 2020.

²¹ [“Authoritarianism.”](#) Wikipedia. 2024.

- **Oligarchy:** Governance by a small group of people. While oligarchies can be efficient, they can result in power being concentrated among the elite, leading to inequality and corruption.
- **Autocracy:** Government with a single leader holding absolute power. Autocracies can be decisive but are liable to suppress dissent and violate human rights in order to maintain control.²²
- **Technocracy:** Governance by experts or technocrats. Proponents argue it leads to more competent and effective administration, but it may lack legitimacy and accountability.²³

Arguments for alternatives

The most common arguments made in favor of these regimes purport two main advantages that they have over democracies:

- **Efficiency:** The concentration of power and lack of checks and balances allows undemocratic regimes to implement policies more swiftly and decisively than democracies.²⁴
- **Expertise:** It is easier to ensure that knowledgeable and skilled individuals make decisions, potentially leading to better governance outcomes for citizens and the state.²⁵

Arguments against alternatives

Critics of illiberal rule broadly criticize two main elements of these regimes:

- **Lack of Accountability:** Undemocratic systems often lack mechanisms for holding leaders accountable, increasing the risk of abuse of power and self-serving governance.²⁶
- **Suppression of Freedoms:** Autocracies and other undemocratic regimes frequently curtail freedoms of speech, assembly, and press, leading to human rights violations and the quiet suffering of citizens.²⁷

²² “Human rights” has many different definitions, but it may be useful to reference the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1945. This document declares that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” and that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms” set forth in the Declaration’s 30 articles, including the right to life, liberty, and security of person.

²³ Ingrid Cruz. [“Democracy Is the Best Form Of Government: Arguments For and Against.”](#) World Atlas. 2020.

²⁴ Alexandra Mork. [“Why Democracy Is the Best We’ve Got.”](#) Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. 2019.

²⁵ B. Guy Peters. [“Governing in a Time of Global Crises: The Good, the Bad, and the Merely Normal.”](#) Global Public Policy and Governance. 2021.

²⁶ Alexandra Mork. [“Why Democracy Is the Best We’ve Got.”](#) Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. 2019.

²⁷ Ibid.

Threats to Democracy

Before discussing specific defensive democracy measures, it is important to understand the mechanisms through which democracy can come under threat and erode. The United Nations (U.N.) has identified 10 features of democracy that are most important to protect, and threats to democracy generally can be thought of as working against these democratic tenets:²⁸

- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Freedom of association
- Freedom of expression and opinion
- Access to power and its exercise in accordance with the rule of law
- The holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people
- A pluralistic system of political parties and organizations
- The separation of powers
- The independence of the judiciary
- Transparency and accountability in public administration
- Free, independent, and pluralistic media

Broadly, these threats to democracy fall into five main categories, each of which is explored in detail below.

Individuals and groups

Historically, the downfall of democracies has occurred through violent coups and the forceful overthrow of representative governments. Yet modern threats to democracy also come from within, with individuals gaining power through democratic institutions and processes only to then erode them once in power, all while maintaining a veneer of democracy.²⁹ For instance, elections might occur but not be free or fair, or the judiciary might remain independent but be made ineffective. Famous dictators, such as Adolf Hitler, have demonstrated how democracies can facilitate the rise of leaders with authoritarian tendencies who exploit democratic features to consolidate power. Elected as Chancellor in 1933, Hitler quickly moved to consolidate power by manipulating democratic institutions, leading to the establishment of a totalitarian regime. Hitler's regime eradicated freedom of expression, association, and a pluralistic system of political parties, fundamentally undermining the rule of law and human rights.

According to Douglas Farah, Venezuela's recent leaders, Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, demonstrate the power of charismatic legitimacy in supporting a regime with undemocratic features. Following his election to office, Chávez used his charismatic appeal and electoral success to weaken checks and balances, centralize power, and suppress dissent to support his .

²⁸ ["Global Issues: Democracy."](#) United Nations. 2023.

²⁹ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. [How Democracies Die](#). Viking. 2018.

anti-imperialist and socialist agenda.³⁰ Farah documents how he seized control of Venezuela's vast oil reserves to enrich himself, his allies, and regional criminal organizations such as Columbia's FARC.³¹ His administration dismantled the separation of powers by packing the judiciary with judges loyal to him and undermining the independence of electoral institutions, leading to periodic elections that were neither free nor fair. According to work by Rendon and Kohan, these trends have continued under Maduro, with the regime engaging in widespread electoral fraud, human rights abuses, and stifling freedom of expression and the media.³²

Institutions

Institutions that are often the face of the world's democracies can sometimes transform into forces that undermine democratic principles. Examples of these include the military, powerful corporations, the wealthy class, and political parties. In Pakistan, the military has historically wielded significant political power, often at the expense of democratic institutions. The belief of many in the military that it is the guardian of the nation's security has led to frequent military interventions in politics.³³ Critics claim that these interventions have resulted in the suppression of free and fair elections, the manipulation of political parties, and the curtailment of freedom of expression through media crackdowns.³⁴

In Russia, oligarchs exert substantial influence over the political and economic landscape.³⁵ David Hoffman and others have argued that the power of these oligarchs undermines democracy by fostering corruption, reducing transparency and accountability in public administration, and limiting political pluralism.³⁶ Commentators have also expressed concerns about the threats that far-right political parties, such as France's National Rally (Rassemblement National), pose to democracy. These parties often leverage populist rhetoric and nationalist sentiments to gain support, particularly among younger voters disillusioned with traditional politics.³⁷ Their critics claim that these parties, which have gained attention in Europe in particular, do not respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, promote xenophobic and exclusionary policies, and undermine freedom of association and expression.³⁸

Others have expressed similar concerns about far-left political parties, such as Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front, Cuba's Communist Party, Bolivia's Movement for Socialism,

³⁰ McIlroy, Jim and Chris Kerr. [Venezuela: Chavez Calls for 'Socialism or Death.'](#) Socialist Viewpoint.

³¹ Douglas Farah. ["The Maduro Regime's Illicit Activities: A Threat to Democracy in Venezuela and Security in Latin America."](#) Atlantic Council. 2020.

³² Moises Rendon and Arianna Kohan. ["Identifying and Responding to Criminal Threats from Venezuela."](#) Center for Strategic & International Studies. 2019.

³³ Sania Muneer and Saroj Kumar Aryal. ["Cause and Effect: The Factors That Make Pakistan's Military a Political Force."](#) Observer Research Foundation. 2024.

³⁴ James Schwemlein. ["The Military Disrupts Pakistan's Democracy Once Again."](#) Carnegie Endowment. 2023.

³⁵ Stanislav Markus. ["Meet Russia's Oligarchs, a Group of Men Who Won't Be Toppling Putin Anytime Soon."](#) Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. 2022.

³⁶ David Hoffman. ["Russian Oligarchs."](#) Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2024.

³⁷ ["Europe Swings to the Right — Led by France."](#) Politico. 2024.

³⁸ Robin Wilson and Paul Hainsworth. ["Far-Right Parties and Discourse in Europe: A Challenge for our Times."](#) European Network Against Racism. 2012.

and Peru's Free Peru Party. Critics of these parties and their leaders argue that they threaten their citizens with repression, exile, arrest, and death for expressing any opposition to them, have repeatedly attempted to consolidate their power in opposition to the will of their people, and use their popularity to weaken institutional checks and balances and bypass other democratic norms.³⁹

Policies

Policies that undermine democratic principles can take various forms, from restrictive voting laws to regulations that curtail the independence of the press and judiciary. These policies can significantly erode the fundamental components of democracy, such as respect for human rights, freedom of expression, and the rule of law. In Hungary, for example, the government under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has implemented policies that severely restrict media freedom and weaken judicial independence.⁴⁰ Independent journalists face surveillance, threats, and limited access to information that critics claim has created a climate of fear and reduced the public's access to unbiased news.⁴¹ If true, this erosion of media freedom compromises the democratic principles of transparency, accountability, and a free, independent, and pluralistic media. Others have raised concerns that judicial reforms have undermined the independence of the judiciary and that the courts are no longer impartial arbiters of the law but tools for political gain.⁴²

In Turkey, critics assert that the government has implemented policies that suppress voter turnout and manipulate electoral outcomes. These policies include restrictive voter ID laws, purges of voter rolls, limitations on the participation of opposition parties, and a new law that criminalizes the spread of "disinformation."⁴³ Additionally, the government has used emergency decrees to dismiss thousands of public employees, including those in electoral bodies.⁴⁴ While opponents argue such actions undermine the holding of periodic free and fair elections and the expression of the will of the people,⁴⁵ President Erdogan has defended them as necessary to fight terrorism and respond to the 2016 coup attempt by a faction within the military.⁴⁶

Culture/norms

Norm and cultural shifts can significantly threaten democracy by changing public attitudes and behaviors toward democratic principles. These shifts include declining trust in democratic institutions, increasing polarization and hyper-partisanship, and politically motivated violence.

³⁹ Adam Golob. "[Nicaragua's new dictatorship: Impacts of authoritarian rule on the health sector and civil society.](#)" Social Sciences and Humanities Open.; Freedom House. "[Freedom in the World 2024: Bolivia.](#)" Simeon Tegel. [Peru's Democracy is Dying](#), 2024.

⁴⁰ "[Hungary: Media Curbs Harm Rule of Law.](#)" Human Rights Watch. 2024.

⁴¹ Gabriel Gomez and Sven Leunig. "[Fidesz, Liberal Democracy and the Fundamental Law in Hungary.](#)" Zeitschrift Für Politikwissenschaft. 2021.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Başak Bozkurt. "[The Impact of Turkey's Recent Amendments to the Electoral Laws on Fundamental Freedoms and Electoral Integrity.](#)" Freedom House. 2024.

⁴⁴ "[Türkiye: Years of Emergency Decrees Still Impact Rights and Freedoms.](#)" OMCT. 2022.

⁴⁵ Nate Schenckkan and Aykut Garipoglu. "[Turkey's Elections Won't Be Free or Fair.](#)" Foreign Policy. 2023.

⁴⁶ Mark Lowen. "[Turkey Post-Coup Purges Convulse Society.](#)" BBC News. 2016.

Global public opinion polls reveal a growing dissatisfaction with how democracy functions. The previously mentioned data that shows 59% of individuals across 24 democratic nations are dissatisfied with democracy highlights a disconnect between democratic ideals and their practical implementation. This dissatisfaction is often driven by economic performance, perceived inequities, and a belief that elected officials do not care about ordinary citizens' concerns.⁴⁷

Such sentiments weaken commitment to democratic governance and open the door to nondemocratic alternatives, including rule by experts or the military, especially in times of crisis.⁴⁸ These attitudes erode key components of democracy, such as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as people may become more willing to accept restrictive measures they believe will lead to better governance.⁴⁹ They also reflect increasing mistrust in democratic institutions worldwide. When trust in institutions erodes, the principles of transparency, accountability, and the rule of law are undermined. Citizens are less likely to engage in democratic processes, and political leaders may exploit this disengagement to consolidate power and reduce oversight.⁵⁰

Political polarization and hyper-partisanship have also intensified in many democracies, leading to extreme divisions within societies.⁵¹ High levels of partisan hostility result in a lack of willingness to compromise, as partisans view opposing parties as fundamentally different, immoral, and a threat to the nation. This hostility persists even though research shows that we tend to underestimate the extent to which members of the opposing party support democratic principles, perceive more polarization than what actually exists, and overestimate partisans' support for political violence.⁵²

This polarization undermines the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, as it becomes challenging to find common ground or work collaboratively on policy issues. Extreme partisanship and polarization can also lead to efforts to manipulate electoral processes, disenfranchise voters, and question the legitimacy of election outcomes.⁵³ It can also catalyze politically motivated violence and threats that lead to the further erosion of democratic norms. Some point to the insurrection on January 6th, 2021 at the United States Capitol as an example

⁴⁷ Richard Wike et al. [“Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, but People Around the World Are Critical of How It’s Working.”](#) Pew Research Center. 2024.

⁴⁸ Richard Wike and Janell Fetterolf. [“Global Public Opinion in an Era of Democratic Anxiety.”](#) Pew Research Center. 2021.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Fred Lewsey. [“Global Dissatisfaction with Democracy at a Record High.”](#) Centre for the Future of Democracy. 2020.

⁵¹ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. [How Democracies Die](#). Viking. 2018.

⁵² Michael H. Pasek et al. [“Misperceptions About Out-Partisans’ Democratic Values May Erode Democracy.”](#) Scientific Reports. 2022; Matthew S. Levendusky and Neil Malhotra. [“\(Mis\)perceptions of Partisan Polarization in the American Public.”](#) Public Opinion Quarterly. 2016; Joseph S. Mernyk, et al. [“Correcting Inaccurate Metaperceptions Reduces Americans’ Support for Partisan Violence.”](#) Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. 2022.

⁵³ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. [How Democracies Die](#). Viking. 2018.

of how extreme polarization and political sectarianism can lead to violent actions against democratic institutions.⁵⁴ Others reference the attacks on police stations in Minneapolis and Seattle, a federal courthouse in Portland, the State Capitols in Virginia and Colorado, and the White House that were associated with the protests following the murder of George Floyd in 2020.⁵⁵ While many have pointed out the differences between the two examples,⁵⁶ concern about them reflects a shared sense that such political violence undermines the rule of law, threatens the safety of public officials and citizens, and leads to a climate of fear and intimidation.

External actors

Lastly, democratic values and practices can come under threat from external actors. While these threats can take shape in the way of military intervention (e.g., Russia's invasion of Ukraine), they can also occur in more disguised ways. Defensive democracy measures are better suited to counter these non-military threats than military responses. These threats often stem from foreign actors leveraging modern technology and economic initiatives to undermine democratic principles. China and Russia are often accused of being at the forefront of these efforts.⁵⁷

For example, some argue that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a tool used to exert influence globally, particularly in countries with weak governance structures. The BRI involves significant investments in infrastructure projects across Asia, Africa, and Europe, often accompanied by digital infrastructure developments through the Digital Silk Road.⁵⁸ While China remains adamant that this is not a tool to gain political control, many worry about the capacity of the Chinese state to promote governance models that prioritize state control over transparency and accountability via the BRI.⁵⁹

As another example of an external actor representing a threat to democracy, Russia has been accused of interfering in multiple US elections.⁶⁰ For instance, the FBI, Robert Mueller, and the bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee all found evidence that Russian entities attempted to hack the US's election infrastructure and spread disinformation on social media to favor Donald

⁵⁴ Michelle Goldberg. [“The Authors of ‘How Democracies Die’ Overestimated the Republicans.”](#) The New York Times. 2023.

⁵⁵ Quinta Jurecic and Benjamin Wittes. [“Nothing Can Justify the Attack on Portland,”](#) The Atlantic, 2020; Katherine Peters, [“Weekend of Violent Protests Leaves Trail of Damage for Feds,”](#) Government Executive, 2020; [Over 300 People Facing Federal Charges For Crimes Committed During Nationwide Demonstrations](#), US Department of Justice, 2020; Russell Haythorn. [State Capitol damage estimated at \\$1.1M as crews clean graffiti, replace windows after summer chaos](#), 2020.

⁵⁶ Kiara Brantley-Jones. [False equivalency between Black Lives Matter and Capitol siege: Experts, advocates](#). 2021.

⁵⁷ [“The Authoritarian Nexus – How Russia and China Undermine Democracy Worldwide.”](#) International Republican Institute. 2024.

⁵⁸ [“China's Approach to Global Governance.”](#) Council on Foreign Relations. 2024.

⁵⁹ Jianfu Chen. [“Tension and Rivalry: The ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative, Global Governance, and International Law.”](#) The Chinese Journal of Comparative Law. 2020.

⁶⁰ Katie Bo Lillis. [China, Russia, Iran and Cuba all tried to meddle in 2022 US congressional elections, intelligence assessment finds](#). CNN. 2023.

Trump over Hillary Clinton in 2016.⁶¹ The motivation for these actions was purportedly not only to compromise the core democratic tenet of free and fair elections but also to undermine public confidence in democratic institutions.

Defensive Democracy in Action

Many democratic nations go to great lengths to protect themselves from these threats. While relevant, we do not technically classify some of these measures as defensive democracy measures. For example, Finland has implemented comprehensive civic education programs in schools to foster critical thinking, democratic values, and active citizenship among students.⁶² Sweden has enshrined robust protections for press freedom in its constitution.⁶³ Canada's Elections Act sets out strict regulations to ensure fair and transparent electoral processes, including measures to prevent election fraud and ensure equal access to voting.⁶⁴

Defensive democracy, instead, entails a restriction of some freedoms and rights in service of protecting a nation's democracy. The fundamental philosophical issue with defensive democracy is connected to the paradox of tolerance as articulated by philosopher Karl Popper. The paradox of tolerance highlights the dilemma that a tolerant society must face: if it is unlimitedly tolerant, it can be taken over by the intolerant, leading to the destruction of tolerance itself.⁶⁵ Similarly, a democratic society that guarantees complete freedom is prone to be taken over by undemocratic interests, ultimately eroding democracy through the mechanisms explored in the previous section.

This vulnerability suggests to proponents of defensive democracy that it is necessary to preserve the core values and structures of a democratic and tolerant society. Popper himself acknowledged that suppression of intolerant philosophies would be "most unwise...as long as we can counter them by rational argument and keep them in check by public opinion." But when the intolerant do not engage in such deliberative processes, Popper and other supporters of defensive democracy asserts that certain restrictions are essential to protect the greater good and prevent the erosion of democratic principles and practices.⁶⁶

Broadly, defensive democracy measures can be divided into two categories, proactive measures and reactive measures. Proactive measures include some election security laws and anti-corruption legislation, the pre-emptive banning of anti-democratic parties, and hate speech laws. Reactive measures include the impeachment of elected leaders, the suspension of political

⁶¹ ["Jury Indicts 12 Russian Intelligence Officers for Hacking Offenses Related to the 2016 Election."](#) Office of Public Affairs. 2018; Senate Intelligence Committee. ["Senate Intel Committee Releases Bipartisan Report on Russia's Use of Social Media,"](#) 2019; Barbara McQuaid and Joyce Vance. ["These 11 Mueller Report Myths Just Won't Die. Here's Why They're Wrong."](#) Time. 2019.

⁶² ["Active Citizenship."](#) Finnish National Agency for Education. Accessed 2024.

⁶³ ["The Swedish Press Act: 250 Years of Freedom of the Press."](#) Government Offices of Sweden. 2016.

⁶⁴ ["Election Integrity and Security."](#) Elections Canada. 2024.

⁶⁵ ["Paradox of Tolerance."](#) Wikipedia. 2024.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

parties, the declaration of martial law, the disqualification of candidates, and interventions by the judiciary.

Proactive measures

Democratic nations worldwide have taken varying degrees of proactive defensive democracy measures. For example, Germany has implemented several measures to protect its democratic system, most notably through the establishment of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV). The BfV is a domestic intelligence agency tasked with monitoring and countering activities that pose a threat to the constitutional order, including extremism, terrorism, and espionage.⁶⁷ Another element of Germany's proactive efforts is its legal framework to ban political parties that threaten democracy. The Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) has the authority to outlaw parties deemed anti-democratic. In 1952, the court banned the Socialist Reich Party (a neo-Nazi group). In 2017, the court ruled against banning the National Democratic Party, despite acknowledging its anti-constitutional agenda, arguing that it lacked the potential to threaten German democracy.⁶⁸

France is known for its robust legal framework against hate speech, designed to proactively defend its democratic values. French law prohibits any form of hate speech, including speech that incites discrimination, hatred, or violence based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. The Gayssot Act (1990) specifically criminalizes Holocaust denial and other forms of hate speech.⁶⁹ The Law for Confidence in the Digital Economy (2004) imposes responsibilities on internet service providers and social media platforms to monitor and remove hate speech content.⁷⁰ France's proactive stance is further exemplified by the establishment of specialized units within the judiciary and police to tackle hate crimes, along with public awareness campaigns to promote tolerance and diversity.

Reactive measures

Governments sometimes are forced to react to emerging democratic threats. This is seen during times of conflict when martial law is invoked in the name of national security. For example, Thailand has experienced several military coups, with the most recent in 2014 leading to the imposition of martial law. The military justified its actions by citing the need to restore order amid political turmoil and violent protests.⁷¹ Martial law was a reactive measure that allowed the military to control the government, restrict civil liberties, and suppress dissent. While intended to stabilize the nation, it also raised concerns about the erosion of democratic norms and human rights.⁷² The Thai case illustrates the tension between maintaining order and upholding democratic principles in times of crisis.

⁶⁷ [“The German Domestic Intelligence Services.”](#) Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, Accessed 2024.

⁶⁸ Ben Knight. [“Court Rules against NPD Ban.”](#) DW. 2017.

⁶⁹ [“Gayssot Act.”](#) Wikipedia. 2024.

⁷⁰ [“Law on Confidence in the Digital Economy \(LEN\).”](#) Reporters Without Borders. 2004.

⁷¹ [“Thailand Crisis: Army Declares Martial Law.”](#) BBC News. 2014.

⁷² [“Thailand: Revoke Martial Law Undermining Rights.”](#) Human Rights Watch. 2014.

However, even in times of peace, governments sometimes must decide between protecting the freedoms they extend to their citizens and elected officials and maintaining the security of their state. For example, in 2016, Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff was impeached and removed from office. The impeachment process was driven by allegations of fiscal mismanagement and corruption.⁷³ The impeachment was a significant reactive measure taken by Brazil's legislative and judicial branches to address perceived corruption and restore confidence in the country's democratic institutions. The process was controversial and divided the nation, as some felt that Rousseff was unfairly targeted by her political opposition.⁷⁴

The banning of political parties can also be a reactive measure. Batasuna, a Basque nationalist party in Spain, was suspended in 2003 due to its alleged links to the terrorist organization Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). The Spanish government argued that Batasuna provided support to ETA, which had carried out a violent campaign for Basque independence. The suspension of Batasuna was a reactive measure intended to undermine the operational capacity of ETA and reduce violence. This move was upheld by the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled that the suspension did not violate democratic principles, as Batasuna's activities were considered a threat to democracy.⁷⁵

Arguments for and against defensive democracy

Support for defensive democracy may depend on the situation. Someone might be inclined to support defensive democracy measures, such as the banning of a political party, in one instance, but not supportive of the same measure in another. These positions are likely informed by their underlying beliefs about the tradeoffs between freedom and equality, political affiliation, viewpoints on the role of government, and opinions about democracy itself. However, there are some general principles and arguments that proponents and opponents of certain defensive democracy measures often use to justify their positions. The chart below provides a brief synopsis of these arguments. It is often easiest to understand these arguments within a specific context, which is why the next section is devoted to discussing defensive democracy within the context of the US.

Measure	Arguments For	Arguments Against
Banning Political Parties	Prevents anti-democratic groups from gaining power and undermining the democratic system.	Can be seen as a suppression of political pluralism and an infringement on free speech.
Impeachment of Leaders	Removes leaders who abuse power or engage in	May be politically motivated, leading to instability and

⁷³ [“Brazil President Dilma Rousseff Removed from Office by Senate.”](#) BBC News 2016.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Watts. [“Dilma Rousseff Impeachment: What You Need to Know.”](#) The Guardian, 2016.

⁷⁵ Thomas Ayres. [“Batasuna Banned: The Dissolution of Political Parties Under the European Convention of Human Rights.”](#) Boston College International and Comparative Law Review. 2004.

	corruption, thereby upholding democratic accountability.	eroding public trust in democratic institutions.
Suspension of Political Groups	Neutralizes groups that pose a direct threat to democratic stability and public safety.	Risks alienating supporters of the suspended group and can be perceived as undemocratic.
Constitutional Court Rulings	Ensures that laws and government actions comply with constitutional principles, protecting the rule of law.	Potentially politicizes the judiciary and may lead to judicial overreach, undermining the separation of powers.
Martial Law	Restores order during periods of extreme instability, protecting the nation from chaos.	Often involves the suspension of civil liberties and can lead to authoritarianism.
Disqualification of Candidates	Prevents individuals with anti-democratic agendas from gaining political office and undermining the democratic process.	May undermine democratic principles by restricting political competition and freedom of expression.

Defensive Democracy in the US

This guide has discussed examples of both threats to democracy and defensive democracy initiatives from nations around the world, with limited mention of the US thus far. The following section is devoted to discussing various arguments about the threats facing US democracy and the use of defensive democracy efforts to address them.

Threats to American Democracy

As noted above, perceived threats to democracy can be specific individuals, groups, institutions, policies, cultural norms, and external actors. In the US context, some believe that former President Donald Trump continues to pose a significant threat to US democracy.⁷⁶ They argue that his persistent claims that the 2020 election was stolen have undermined public trust in the electoral system and contributed to the events of January 6th, 2021, which led to numerous injuries to police officers, extensive damage to the US Capitol, and the shooting of one

⁷⁶ Michelle Goldberg. [“The Authors of ‘How Democracies Die’ Overestimated the Republicans.”](#) The New York Times. 2023.

rioter/insurrectionist by a Capitol Police Lieutenant defending the chamber of the US House of Representatives.⁷⁷ Concerns remain that Trump is planning to (and is likely to) incite more violence were he to lose the election in 2024.⁷⁸ His supporters, on the other hand, downplay January 6 as merely “a protest that got out of hand” and assert that his concerns about the 2020 election results are legitimate and not much different from complaints from Democrats about other election results.⁷⁹

Conversely, many supporters of Trump assert that rhetoric from Democratic Party leaders incited the assassination attempts on Trump in July and September 2024. According to this view, internal political violence spurred by erroneous comparisons of Trump to fascist and authoritarian leaders threatens American democracy.⁸⁰ Individuals on the right, including Trump himself, also perceive President Biden and Vice President Harris as threats to democracy, given their support for efforts by the federal government to censor social media companies’ content.⁸¹ Others, however, reject this concern, citing the Supreme Court’s 6-3 decision (written by Trump appointee Amy Coney Barrett) that rejected these censorship claims as “no more than conjecture,” lacking “specific causation findings,” and relying on “clearly erroneous” findings.⁸²

Another major concern is the perceived politicization of the Supreme Court. Some argue that recent rulings, such as those limiting reproductive rights and weakening voting rights protections, reflect a judicial overreach by a conservative majority that undermines democratic principles. Critics suggest that these decisions do not align with the majority public opinion and erode the legitimacy of the judiciary, while their defenders argue that the Court is actually protecting democratic values enshrined in the 10th Amendment, which require that “any powers that are not specifically given to the federal government, nor withheld from the states, are reserved to those respective states, or to the people at large.”⁸³

Others argue that the judicial system is being used to target political opponents unfairly. High-profile cases against conservative figures and claims of partisan bias in investigations have fueled this belief. This perspective is often linked to accusations that the Department of Justice

⁷⁷ US Attorney General’s Office (District of Columbia). “[24 Months Since the January 6 Attack on the Capitol](#).” 2023; Rich Schapiro, et al. “[Officer who shot Ashli Babbitt during Capitol riot breaks silence: ‘I saved countless lives.’](#)” NBC News, 2021.

⁷⁸ Peter Stone. “[Trump and allies plant seeds for ‘chaos and discord’ if he loses, experts warn](#).” The Guardian. 2024; “[Poll: Nearly Half \(49%\) of Americans Expect Violent Protests if Trump Loses](#).” Public Affairs Council. 2024.

⁷⁹ Celine Castronuovo. “[Tucker Carlson: Trump ‘recklessly encouraged’ Capitol rioters](#).” The Hill, 2021; Cathy Young. “[Yes, Democrats Have Called Some Elections Illegitimate. GOP Election Denialism Is Far Worse](#).” Cato Institute. 2022; Republican National Committee. “[Over 150 Examples of Democrats Denying Election Results](#).” 2022.

⁸⁰ James Oliphant and Gram Slattery. “[Assassination Attempt on Trump Escalates US Political Tensions Ahead of Election](#).” Biz News. 2024.

⁸¹ The Guardian. 2024; “[Mace Calls on Biden-Harris Administration to Provide Transparency on Current Censorship Efforts to Interfere in the 2024 Election](#).” US House Committee on Oversight and Accountability. 2024.

⁸² Kat Duffy. “[The Supreme Court Was Right on *Murthy v. Missouri*](#).” Council on Foreign Relations; [US Supreme Court. *Murthy, Surgeon General, et al. v. Missouri et al.*](#) 2024.

⁸³ Freyja Quinn. “[The Growing Politicization of the US Supreme Court](#).” Eagleton Political Journal. 2024: [US Constitution](#). Congress.gov.

and other institutions are being manipulated – “weaponized” – to suppress dissenting political voices.⁸⁴ Likewise, concerns have been raised about efforts by the Trump administration to target political opponents of the former president while he was in office.⁸⁵

Immigration policy remains a contentious issue, as some believe that current immigration policies threaten national security, strain public resources, and undermine American democracy.⁸⁶ The introduction of new asylum rules have led to concerns about border security and the economic impact of increased migration. Critics have suggested that these changes have led to more undocumented immigrants illegally casting votes in elections, while others have asserted that there is no data to support this claim.⁸⁷ These issues are seen as part of a broader failure to enforce immigration laws effectively, leading to calls for more stringent measures.⁸⁸

The extreme polarization of American politics is a major concern across the spectrum. Hyperpartisanship has led to legislative gridlock, making it difficult to address critical issues effectively. This environment fosters an “us versus them” mentality, reducing opportunities for compromise and cooperation. Some argue that the current two-party system is incapable of addressing the needs of a diverse populace, leading to ineffective governance and a lack of innovative solutions to pressing problems.⁸⁹

Others focus on the role of social media in shaping public opinion and spreading misinformation as a significant threat to democracy in America. In this view, the “attention economy” incentivizes sensationalism and polarizing content, often at the expense of factual reporting and constructive dialogue. This dynamic contributes to a more fragmented and less informed electorate, exacerbating democratic vulnerabilities.⁹⁰

Defensive Democracy Measures Currently in Place

Section 3 in the 14th Amendment is a constitutional measure aimed at preventing individuals who have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the United States from holding public

⁸⁴ Jack Wheatley. [“Right-Wing Media Figures Lash out, Call for Retribution Following News of Steve Bannon Going to Prison.”](#) Media Matters for America. 2024; Robert Tait. [“Trump, without evidence, blames Biden and Harris for assassination attempt.”](#) The Guardian. 2024; John Yoo. [“Trump’s Trial Has Already Damaged the Office of the Presidency.”](#) National Review. 2024; Karen Friedman Agnifilo and Norman Eisen. [“We Finally Know the Case Against Trump, and It Is Strong.”](#) New York Times. 2024.

⁸⁵ Michael Schmidt and Matthew Cullen. [“Here Are Cases of Trump Rivals Who Were Subject to Investigation.”](#) New York Times. 2024.

⁸⁶ Claire Klobucista, Amelia Cheatham, and Diana Roy. [“The U.S. Immigration Debate.”](#) Council on Foreign Relations. 2024.

⁸⁷ Zachary Wolf. [“What the data actually shows about whether undocumented immigrants vote in US elections.”](#) CNN. 2024.

⁸⁸ John Gramlich. [“Migrant Encounters at the U.S.-Mexico Border Hit a Record High at the End of 2023.”](#) Pew Research Center. 2024.

⁸⁹ [“Breaking the Two-Party Duopoly: Empowering Political Reform and Expanding Voter Choice.”](#) GoodParty.org. 2023.

⁹⁰ Camille Oudinot. [“The Polarizing Force of the Attention Economy: How Digital Platforms Shape Thought and Politics.”](#) Medium. 2024.

office. This section was notably invoked in the case of Couy Griffin, a New Mexico county commissioner and founder of "Cowboys for Trump," who was removed from office after participating in the January 6th Capitol riot. Griffin's removal was seen as a precedent for applying the 14th Amendment to uphold democratic principles and prevent those who threaten democracy from holding positions of power.⁹¹

Anti-paramilitary laws are designed to address the threat posed by private militias and armed groups. These laws prohibit private military organizations from engaging in activities typically reserved for state-sanctioned military or law enforcement entities. Several states have enacted or strengthened these laws in response to the increased visibility and activity of armed groups, particularly those involved in political violence and intimidation. Supporters view these measures as crucial for maintaining public order and protecting democratic processes from coercion and violence.⁹²

Sedition and insurrection laws provide the legal framework to prosecute individuals and groups who actively seek to overthrow or undermine the government. These laws have been applied in various cases, including the prosecution of participants in the January 6th Capitol riot. Charges of seditious conspiracy have successfully been brought against leaders and members of groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys in an effort to use existing legal tools to combat domestic extremism and protect democratic institutions.⁹³

In response to the threats posed by foreign interference in elections, the United States has implemented numerous election security measures, including efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation. These efforts include public awareness campaigns and agreements with social media platforms to identify and mitigate the spread of false information that could influence election outcomes.

What Additional Measures Should be Implemented?

As the United States faces multiple threats to its democratic institutions, some argue there is a need for additional measures to bolster democracy. Below are a few recommendations that have been proposed.

Election Security

Enhancing election security is a widely supported measure to safeguard democracy. Proposals include strengthening cybersecurity defenses for election infrastructure, improving voter verification processes, and ensuring transparency in vote counting. These measures aim to protect against both foreign interference and domestic fraud. Advocates argue that securing digital platforms and combating disinformation are critical in maintaining public trust in the

⁹¹ Sopan Deb. ["Supreme Court Lets Public Office Ban Stand for 'Cowboys for Trump' Founder."](#) The New York Times. 2024.

⁹² ["Following January 6th Anniversary, Congressman Raskin and Senator Markey Introduce Legislation to Stop Private Paramilitary Activity."](#) Congressman Jamie Raskin. 2024.

⁹³ Alanna Richer and Lindsay Whitehurst. ["What seditious conspiracy means in Proud Boys' Jan. 6 case."](#) Associated Press. 2023.

electoral process. While some support additional reforms like automatic voter registration and extended early voting periods to increase participation,⁹⁴ others emphasize the need for stricter voter ID laws to prevent fraud and ensure only eligible citizens vote.⁹⁵

The Judiciary

Judicial reforms are seen by some as essential to maintaining the integrity of democratic institutions. These reforms aim to reduce partisan influence on the judiciary. Some support expanding the Supreme Court or implementing term limits for justices.⁹⁶ Others argue for appointing judges who adhere to a strict interpretation of the Constitution, arguing this approach prevents judicial overreach and maintains legislative intent.⁹⁷ Depending on one's perspective, all of these approaches can be viewed as either efforts that will either support or undermine American democracy (making the Court more accountable vs. "stacking the Court" and consolidating the power of one political party or another).

Campaign Finance

Campaign finance reform is a contentious issue that many believe is a key area of defensive democracy. Some advocate for stricter regulations on campaign contributions to reduce the influence of wealthy donors and corporations in politics.⁹⁸ This includes measures to increase transparency and limit the amounts individuals and organizations can donate to political campaigns. Others argue that such regulations could infringe on free speech rights and limit individuals' ability to support the candidates and causes they believe in. They suggest that transparency, rather than limits, is the key to addressing concerns about undue influence.⁹⁹

Social Media and Free Speech

The role of social media in spreading misinformation and its impact on democracy is a significant concern. Some advocate for regulations to ensure platforms do not censor viewpoints and maintain a fair and open dialogue.¹⁰⁰ Others are concerned that governmental efforts to regulate disinformation will infringe both privacy and freedom of expression.¹⁰¹ Still others emphasize the need for platforms to take responsibility for preventing the spread of false information that can undermine democratic processes.¹⁰² Balancing free speech with the need to combat disinformation is a complex issue that reflects one of the larger challenges that this guide highlights – how best to protect democracy while respecting individual rights.

⁹⁴ ["Automatic Voter Registration, a Summary."](#) Brennan Center for Justice. 2019.

⁹⁵ ["Voter ID."](#) Voting Integrity Institute. 2020.

⁹⁶ Zach Klein. ["Three Compelling Arguments in Favor of Supreme Court Term Limits."](#) Fix the Court. 2023.

⁹⁷ Jonathan D. Keeler. ["Judicial Activism vs. Judicial Restraint: The Ongoing Debate."](#) Law and Guilt. 2024.

⁹⁸ Chisun Lee. ["How to Counter Big Money in Politics."](#) Brennan Center for Justice. 2023.

⁹⁹ Matt Nese. ["Campaign Disclosure, Privacy and Transparency."](#) Institute For Free Speech. 2011.

¹⁰⁰ John Samples. ["Why the Government Should Not Regulate Content Moderation of Social Media."](#) Cato Institute. 2019.

¹⁰¹ Deborah Fisher. ["Disinformation Governance Board."](#) Free Speech Center, Middle Tennessee State University. 2023.

¹⁰² Gabriel R. Sanchez and Keesha Middlemass. ["Misinformation Is Eroding the Public's Confidence in Democracy."](#) Brookings Institute. 2022.

Setting Expectations (5 min.)

In this section, we will review the “Expected Outcomes,” “Deliberative Dispositions,” and “Conversation Agreements” below.

Expected Outcomes of the Conversation

The purpose of this deliberation is to deepen our understanding of the problems afflicting democracy and the potential for defensive democracy measures to address some of those problems. Over the course of the deliberation, we will have the opportunity to listen to the perspectives of our fellow deliberators as well as share our own thoughts about the topic. Finally, we will have reflected on our conversation, our areas of agreement and disagreement, and what we have learned from our time together.

Deliberative Dispositions

The DCI has identified several “deliberative dispositions” as critical to the success of deliberative enterprises. When participants adopt these dispositions, they are much more likely to feel their deliberations are meaningful, respectful, and productive. Several of the Conversation Agreements recommended below directly reflect and reinforce these dispositions, which include a commitment to egalitarianism, open mindedness, empathy, charity, attentiveness, and anticipation, among others. A full list and description of these dispositions is available at <https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/>.

Conversation Agreements

In entering into this discussion, to the best of our ability, we each agree to:

1. Be authentic and respectful
2. Be an attentive and active listener
3. Be a purposeful and concise speaker
4. Approach fellow deliberators’ stories, experiences, and arguments with curiosity, not hostility
5. Assume the best - and not the worst - about the intentions and values of others, and avoid snap judgements
6. Demonstrate intellectual humility, recognizing that no one has all the answers, by asking questions and making space for others to do the same
7. Critique the idea we disagree with, not the person expressing it, and remember to practice empathy
8. Note areas of both agreement and disagreement
9. Respect the confidentiality of the discussion
10. Avoid speaking in absolutes (e.g., “All people think this,” or “No educated people hold that view”)

Getting to Know Each Other (10 min.)

In this section, we will take less than a minute to share our names and answer one of the questions below.

1. What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or country?
2. What would your best friend say about who you are?
3. What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

Discussing Forms of Governance (15 min.)

In this section, we will discuss the arguments for and against democracy and other forms of government. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer all the questions below.

- **What are the strongest arguments in favor of and against democratic governance?**
- **What are the strongest arguments in favor of and against other forms of governance?**

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Assessing Democracy in the U.S. (25 min.)

In this section, we will discuss the current state of democracy in the United States. This section might invoke responses that are reflective of personal political preferences and attitudes, so it is important that participants keep the conversation agreements and deliberative dispositions in mind as they navigate these questions. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer at least one of the questions below.

- **How do you personally feel about the state of democracy in the United States?**
- **What (could be an individual, group, policy, institution, norm, trend, or external actor) represents the greatest threat to American democracy right now?**
- **What (could be an individual, group, policy, institution, norm, trend, or external actor) gives you the most hope for the future of American democracy?**

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Break (5 mins)

Justifying Defensive Democracy (15 min.)

In this section, we will discuss the relevant criteria for implementing defensive democracy measures. Participants may find it helpful to draw on the examples posed in the guide to frame their answers. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer both of the questions below.

- **In what contexts and situations are defensive democracy measures justified?**
- **In what contexts and situations are defensive democracy measures NOT justified?**

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Implementing Defensive Democracy (30 min.)

In this section, we will discuss specific actions that can be taken in the name of defensive democracy. Participants should feel free to base their answers to these questions on the United States, another country, or as general guidelines/principles. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer at least one of the questions below.

- **What, if any, limitations should democracies place on freedom of speech in the name of defensive democracy?**
- **What, if any, limitations should democracies place on candidates and parties in the name of defensive democracy?**
- **What, if anything, should be done to combat growing anti-democratic sentiment nationally and globally?**
- **What, if anything, should be done to insulate democratic institutions from anti-democratic forces?**

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Reflections (10 min.)

While today's conversation is an important step in the journey, effectively managing the difficulties facing democracy is necessarily an ongoing effort. Please reflect on the insights from your discussion with your fellow participants today, and then answer one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group is welcome to continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

1. What was most meaningful or valuable to you during this deliberation?
2. Where are the areas of both agreement and disagreement in your group?
3. Have any new ways to think about this issue occurred to you as we have talked today? Any new ideas that might transcend our current way of conceiving of the problems and potential solutions?
4. Was there anything that was said or left out from the discussion that you think should be addressed with the group? Are there any perspectives missing from this conversation that you feel would be important to hear?
5. What did you hear that gives you hope for the future of conversations about defensive democracy?
6. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the deliberation you just had?

About This Guide

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The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI) is dedicated to the creation of opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The DCI regularly hosts facilitated deliberations on a wide range of topics and organizes training workshops for deliberation facilitators. To learn more about these opportunities, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org.

DCI Deliberation Guides

The DCI has launched this series of Deliberation Guides as a foundation for such conversations. They provide both important background information on the topics in question and a specific framework for engaging with these topics. The Guides are designed to be informative without being overwhelming and structured without being inflexible. They cover a range of topics and come in a variety of formats but share several common elements, including opportunities to commit to a shared set of Conversation Agreements, learn about diverse perspectives, and reflect together on the conversation and its yield. The DCI encourages conversations based on these guides to be moderated by a trained facilitator. After each conversation, the DCI also suggests that its associated Pathways Guide be distributed to the conversation's participants.

DCI Pathways Guides

For every Deliberation Guide, the DCI has also developed an associated Pathways Guide, which outlines opportunities for action that participants can consider that are related to the covered topic. These Pathways Guides reinforce the DCI's commitment to an action orientation, a key deliberative disposition. While dialogue and deliberation are themselves important contributors to a healthy democracy, they become even more valuable when they lead to individual or collective action on the key issues facing society. Such action can come in a range of forms and should be broadly understood. It might involve developing a better understanding of a topic, connecting with relevant local or national organizations, generating new approaches to an issue, or deciding to support a particular policy.

If you make use of this guide in a deliberation, please provide attribution to the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative and email dc@deliberativecitizenship.org to tell us about your event. To access more of our growing library of Deliberation Guides, Pathways Guides and other resources, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources.