

## Why democracy?

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People fought for the right to democratic equal representation in this country from the 17th century onwards, and I still think it is the basis of a sound, well-governed society. But we have to eliminate the flaws to make sure that's what we get.

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This is the transcript:

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Why democracy? I ask the question because I have been challenged on my blog of late as to why I will not consider alternatives to democracy when it is very clear that politics is at present failing us. If that's the case, someone has argued, why am I still trying to look for a solution within the framework determined by the ballot box and everything that follows from it?

I happen to be a democrat. I'm with Winston Churchill on this one. He once said democracy is the worst system of government we've got, except for all the others that we've tried. And I believe he's right.

Democracy is not a perfect answer to the way in which we should select a government. But presuming that we do want government, and I think it is necessary to ensure that we have public services, law and order, the provision of the common good for the benefit of everybody, redistribution of income and wealth, and so much else on which our well-being is dependent, then we must have a mechanism to ensure that we have the best possible means of control of that government.

And Winston Churchill was right in saying we've tried other systems. Let's be honest. We've been through barbarism. It was a long time ago.

We've been through feudalism. That wasn't so long ago.

We've been through democracy with a decidedly limited franchise. That existed until 1928 because it was only then that all women got the vote.

So, we have tried other systems. And I'm not pretending that democracy is perfect. It is very obvious that it is far from that in some places, like the USA, and it's far from that in the UK because we have a ridiculous first-past-the-post system when we should have proportional representation. But it's better than anything else. And I do believe that people have a right to have a say in government.

Now, those who are suggesting I should think about other systems are putting forward things like citizens' assemblies as an alternative. Or systems like rotation, where people are required to serve in government as an MP, or as a councillor, or whatever else, rather as a jury system is selected. You are pulled at random from society to fulfil your social duty to govern for a period of time.

I'm sorry, but I don't think that will work. Jury duty for a week or two, and occasionally for longer periods, is something that is just about possible to manage, with the state providing support where necessary to those who have to do it.

But to demand that people make themselves available to serve in government for short or long periods, or to sit in citizens assemblies and so on, is not reasonable. Some people would not wish to go near such things. It would be an intolerable burden on them to have to work in such an environment. They would suffer enormous stress as a result. That is an unreasonable demand. They are just not suited to the requirement that they must make weighty decisions, even alongside others.

And why should we expect them to? Why is it that we should, in fact, demand that they give up their careers for a period of time? Whatever they might be, or their caring responsibilities, or whatever else it might be.

No, I think we have to have a system where people are able to put themselves forward. And I'm also worried, by the way, about the fact that if we did have systems where people had to put themselves forward, but there wasn't a genuine selection process

through the ballot box, that we would end up with something which was quasi-feudal again, where those with wealth would become the people who would take the positions of power.

So we need a democracy and an electoral system, and a structure that ensures that everyone has access to being in politics if that is what they wish, and they can persuade people to select them, but we need one where there are appropriate checks and balances.

Now, I don't think we have got those checks and balances at present.

We have got a concept of the royal prerogative. The Prime Minister can do whatever they like as a consequence. That is wholly inappropriate inside a democracy.

We have this system of whipping inside the House of Commons that means that those people who we elect to represent us don't represent us. They represent their party instead. And that, I think, is wrong.

The States, by the way, has got that right. In the USA, both in the Congress and Senate, the whipping system is much weaker. It is quite common for party members to vote against their colleagues. And there is no penalty in most cases as a consequence.

And we also have this problem with first-past-the-post, which clearly rewards the two-party system quite unfairly, as we have seen with regard to the under-representation of many parties in Parliament at present, including, and I've got to admit it, Reform, although I would rather pick the example of the Greens. Both should be represented more because there are people in our society who want them to be their voice.

So, we have a very inadequate democracy. But do I think there is anything better? No, I don't think there is.

I am a democrat. I'll stand by that. I want to reform democracy. I am not interested in replacing it with anything else. And those who want to claim that that is what I should be doing, I'm sorry, you're going to be deeply disappointed. I'm not tolerating that viewpoint.

People fought for the right for equal representation in this country. It's been a demand from the 17th century onwards, and I still think it is the basis of a sound, well-governed society. But we have to eliminate the flaws to make sure that's what we get.