

LAW AND DEMOCRACY WEEK

Course n°1: Introduction and Definition of Democracy (Gregory Tardi)



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In this introductory session, there will be examination of the concept of democracy and discussion of what renders a system of government democratic, as opposed to authoritarian or dictatorial.

The idea of democracy is often cited as a justification by governments for any policy or program they wish to adopt. Alternatively, democracy is used as a way of having popular approval supersede general principles and specific rules in governing. Although there are various definitions of democracy, both these examples constitute misuses of the term. In fact, democracy is best characterized as a system of government and as a method of governing that combines freedom of choice on the part of the citizenry and the electorate as to the general direction of public society, the legitimacy of public authorities, the equality of citizens, and the conduct of government according to the rule of law.

Thus, while democracy has specific meanings in politics, in law and in public administration, the essence of the concept is that democratic government and governing require a combination of these characteristics, in equilibrium. Where any of the characteristics is absent, the system risks becoming undemocratic. Most significantly, where the rule of law is absent, democracy is at serious risk.

In the modern world, these general characteristics of democracy are translated into specific institutions, policies and practices, which will be enumerated and discussed.