

# DEMOCRACY FOR IDEALISTS

## ABSTRACT

Recent observers—investigative journalists, political scientists, legal scholars—file dismayed, and predictably dismaying, reports of many ills afflicting democracy. Or, perhaps I should say, more precisely, and with characteristic American self-absorption: afflicting those parts of the complex ideal of democracy, as they operate in the United States, that have to do with elections and referenda, and with their influence on what government does. For the most part, I accept that things are as reported. And for the most part, I share the dismay. What I want to understand better is why I am dismayed, and why anyone should be. Presumably, the ills are ills because they compromise, or reflect the compromise of, certain values. The question is what these values are.

I try to articulate and assess different possible answers. I don't reach any tidy conclusion. At least not unless you count the following as tidy (or a conclusion): that the values are a diverse lot, and that having canvassed them, I find myself, with respect to at least some of the ills, less sure whether, or why, they are ills than my initial, reflexive dismay led me to expect.