

Republic or Democracy: What ARE We?



by Cal Elliott,
CLRW Associate Member,
Retired communication consultant
and corporate publications writer,
editor and manager

“

*...and to the republic,
for which it stands...”*

an important clause from our pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. It's right there in the Pledge: **we are a republic.**

Then, why is so much said about us being a democracy? We profess and defend our democratic way of life. We have fought wars to defend, instill and protect democracy around the world. We hear and read in the papers, magazines, school texts and online that we are a democratic nation. We espouse democratic principles and ideas. **So, what gives?** Why don't we defend, espouse, instill or protect republican ideas and principles?

Let's try the dictionary for some help. Here's what Merriam Webster has to say: "**Republic** –

1

a government having a chief of state who is not a monarch and who in modern times is usually a president;

2

a government in which supreme power resides in a body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by elected officers and representatives responsible to them and governing according to law; and

3

a political unit (such as a nation) having such a form of government."

Okay. That sounds like us. Then why so much prattle about us being a democracy? Back to the dictionary:

"**Democracy** –

1

government by the people, especially rule of the majority;

2

a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections;

3

a political unit that has a democratic government;

4

the common people especially when constituting the source of political authority;and

5

the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges."

Well, that sounds pretty much like us, too. There are some key differences, though. They reside in republic in items 1 and 2, and in democracy in items 1 and 2.

The key difference between a democracy and a republic lies in the **limits placed on government by the law**, which has implications for minority rights. Both forms of government tend to use a representational system – i.e., citizens vote to elect politicians to represent their interests and form the government.

In a **republic, a constitution or charter of rights protects certain inalienable rights that cannot be taken away by the government**, even if it has been elected by a majority of voters.

In a "**pure democracy**," the majority is not restrained in this way and **can impose its will on the minority.**

Most modern nations – including the United States – are democratic republics with a constitution, which can be amended by a popularly elected government. It is a laborious process.

Democracy Republic Philosophy

In a **democracy**, the community of people are considered to hold power over how they are governed. Kings and tyrants are seen as threats to the innate rights of the people. As such, all eligible citizens get **equal say** in decisions.

Republics are in opposition to rulership by a single person. All eligible citizens get **equal say in decisions through elected representatives**. Unalienable rights of individuals are protected by law to safeguard against a majority abusing the minority.

Definition Rule by majority

In a **democracy**, an individual, and any group of individuals composing any minority, have **no protection against the power of the majority**. In variations, people may also elect representatives.

A **republic** is similar to a representative democracy except it has a written constitution of basic rights that **protect the minority from being completely unrepresented or abused by the majority.**

That's it! If you want more (and there is MUCH more), check the sources below:

*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

[https://www.diffen.com/difference/Democracy vs Republic](https://www.diffen.com/difference/Democracy%20vs%20Republic) Perspectives on the Constitution: A

Republic, If You Can Keep It

<https://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-a-republic-if-you-can-keep-it>