

PYQ Vault

Previous-year questions, decoded for Mains.

560

questions

50

days

10

years of PYQs

DAY 6

Democracy · 11 questions

Every question carries a Flow Snapshot — and a handwritten model answer on the channel. No PYQ will be unfamiliar.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 15 marks

Explicate the feature of representative democracy.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** elected delegation replaces direct rule → practical form for large modern states
- R2** second-best to direct democracy, yet most workable → rests on consent and trust

Body flow

Locke: consent/trust → **Mill**: ideal modern form → defining feature = delegated decision-making by elected reps → checked by free elections + accountability → rule of law + rights (speech, assembly, religion) → **Montesquieu**: separation of powers/checks → **Tocqueville**: associations + pluralism keep participation alive → two models: trusteeship + **Burke's** enlightened representation

Counter-view

same delegation → elite capture, weak accountability between elections, underrepresentation

Conclusion routes

- R1** features make delegated rule both workable and accountable
- R2** limits met through transparency, inclusivity, stronger accountability

Representative democracy is the system in which citizens elect representatives to make laws & policies on their behalf. It is the practical form democracy takes in large, complex modern states, where direct assembly of all citizen is impossible.

Though often called the second best form after direct democracy, it remains the most workable way of applying democratic principles.

John Locke grounds it in consent and trust: representatives hold authority as a trust and must act for the public good. J S Mill, in *Considerations on Representative Government*, treats it as the ideal form of modern democratic government.

Its defining feature is delegated decision-making by elected representatives, held in check by regular, free and fair elections and continuous accountability to the electorate.

Montesquieu's separation of powers prevents tyranny through checks & balances, while Tocqueville shows that voluntary associations keep participation alive between elections.

Representation itself follows two models: Locke's trusteeship model and Edmund Burke's enlightened representation, where members exercise independent judgment on national questions rather than merely serving factional interests.

The same delegation, however, invites elite capture, weak accountability between elections and underrepresentation of marginalised groups - limits that transparency, inclusivity and stronger accountability must address.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

Deliberative democracy does not have its salience without participation and participatory democracy does not have its credence without deliberations. Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** not rival models → two halves of one legitimacy → participation = demos, deliberation = logos
- R2** statement marks the exact failure point → each collapses without the other → breadth needs depth, depth needs breadth

Body flow

participatory democracy = active citizen beyond the ballot → **Pateman**: participation revives civic life, counters alienation → but headcount alone turns populist → loses credence → deliberative democracy fills the gap: quality of reasoning → **Habermas**: communicative action, better argument over power → reasoned debate gives participation its credence → but narrow expert deliberation = elite discourse → loses salience → each completes the other: inclusion makes deliberation authoritative, reason makes participation credible → **Barber**'s strong democracy = participation + debate → **Rousseau**: sovereign people who must continuously deliberate

Counter-view

fusion is a demand, not a guarantee → **Fraser**: single public sphere reproduces inequality, needs counter-publics → skilled speakers form an epistemic elite → mobilisation can still capture participation

Conclusion routes

- R1** statement holds → deliberation alone = elite talk, no salience → participation alone = populist noise, no credence
- R2** **Fishkin**'s deliberative polling / citizen assemblies fuse wide participation + evidence-based reason → legitimacy needs demos and logos together

The participatory and deliberative democracy are not rivals, one prizes the breadth and the other depth. They are better seen as two halves of a single democratic legitimacy: participation supplies the *demos*, deliberation the *logos*.

Participatory democracy places the active citizen at the centre, taking democracy beyond the ballot to continuous self-government. According to Carole Pateman, participation revitalises civic engagement and counters alienation, as people develop the very capacities in demand.

But numbers alone do not make a verdict wise. Participation reduced to headcount or mobilisation turns emotional and populist, and there it loses its credence - a crowd's decision weight only when it is reasoned.

Deliberative democracy answers this gap. According to Habermas deliberation works through communicative action, where agreement rests on the better argument, not power. Such reasoning is what lends participation its credence.

But deliberation confined to a narrow expert circle becomes elite discourse, cut off from the people it claims to speak for, and so loses its salience.

The two complete each other. Benjamin Barber suggests, joining active participation with open public debate. Rousseau saw it earlier: the people stay sovereign, yet must continuously deliberate on policy. The two were never meant to stand apart.

The union is a demand, not a guarantee. Nancy Fraser shows that a single public sphere can reproduce inequality, as dominant voices crowd out the marginalised, who then need their own counter-publics.

Fishkin's deliberative polling and citizen assemblies provides the solution, fusing wider, randomly chosen participation with evidence-based reasoning. Democratic legitimacy needs the demos and the logos together.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 15 marks

Critically examine Macpherson's view on democracy.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** **Macpherson** defends democracy as human development, not electoral procedure → modern theory has lost classical democracy's moral purpose
- R2** strength = restoring democracy's moral core → open question = is his remedy realisable

Body flow

empirical school attacked (**Schumpeter** → elites for votes / **Dahl** → group competition) → both reduce democracy to a market-equilibrium system → procedure, not emancipation; humanist aspiration weakened → classical moral foundation recalled (developmental process + emancipation) → liberal democracy's self-image rejected (no liberal monopoly, not the perfect form) → property franchise, workers' rights only after socialist pressure → liberalism historically undemocratic → communist / Third World systems may also qualify → core distinction: extractive vs developmental power → capitalism gives the propertied class both, workers keep minimal developmental power, lose creative freedom → ideal democracy: maximise developmental power, remove extractive power → three spheres: constitutional + socialist production + equality values → democracy not built on institutions alone

Counter-view

Norman Barry: the ideal is idealistic, hard to realise under scarcity → abolishing extractive power assumes conditions that rarely hold

Conclusion routes

- R1** his worth lies in retrieval — democracy recovered as creative freedom and human development
- R2** judged by feasibility the prescription falls short, but the moral recovery of democracy is his real contribution

CB Macpherson offers one of the strongest defences of democracy as human development rather than electoral procedures. He argues that modern democratic theory has lost the moral purpose of classical democracy. His strength lies in restoring that purpose, the real question is whether his remedy can be realised.

Schumpeter reduces democracy to competition among elites for votes and Robert Dahl's pluralism to competition among groups. In *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval*, Macpherson argues that both treat democracy as a market-equilibrium system. Democracy then becomes a procedure, not emancipation and its humanist aspiration is weakened.

He is equally critical of liberal democracy's self-image. In *The Real World of Democracy*, he denies that liberalism has a monopoly over democracy or that it is democracy's perfect form. Liberalism has thus often been historically undemocratic and communist or 3rd world systems may also qualify where they enjoy genuine mass support and reduce suffering.

The diagnostic core is his distinction between extractive and developmental power. Extractive power coaxes others and draws benefit from them, reducing their capacity; developmental power enhances one's own capacities and allows creative work without compulsion.

His ideal democracy follows from this. It maximises developmental power, removes extractive power and works across the legal-political economic and cultural spheres; constitutional structures, a socialist mode of production and values of human equality together. Democracy for him, cannot rest on institutions alone.

The weakness lies here. Norman Barry finds this ideal hard to realise under scarcity, since abolishing extractive power assumes conditions that rarely hold. Macpherson's lasting worth is not the feasibility of his prescription but his recovery of democracy as creative freedom and human development.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

Comment on the Deliberative democracy in 150 words.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** legitimacy from quality of reasoning, not counting of votes → voice over choice, debate over voting
- R2** democracy as reasoned judgement among free, equal citizens → laws valid only through free deliberation

Body flow

reject **Bentham's** aggregate democracy (sums preferences → majoritarianism) → **Aristotle**: collective deliberation beats isolated experts → **Habermas**: communicative action, better argument over power → **Cohen**: deliberation as legitimacy + handling moral disagreement → **Rawls**: public reason, reasons others can accept → qualitative participation → substantive democracy, informed citizens

Counter-view

power inequalities + dominant speech styles exclude weaker groups → time-consuming → fails to address real power relations

Conclusion routes

- R1** reason, not numbers, makes democracy substantive
- R2** promise holds only if inequality and exclusion are overcome

Deliberative democracy locates legitimacy not in the counting of votes but in the quality of reasoning behind a decision. It critiques voting-centric democracy, giving priority to voice over mere choice and to debate over voting.

Laws are legitimate only when they emerge from free and reasoned deliberation among equal citizens who give and respond to reasons.

This sets it apart from Bentham's aggregate democracy, which merely adds up preferences and may produce majoritarianism. Aristotle had already held that ordinary people deliberating together reach better decisions than isolated experts. Habermas, argues through communicative action that agreement should rest on the better argument, not on power.

Joshua Cohen treats deliberation as the source of legitimacy and the best way to handle moral disagreement. John Rawls asks citizens to justify decisions through public reason others can reasonably accept.

Critics note that power inequalities and dominant speech styles can exclude weaker groups, that deliberation is time-consuming and that it often fails to address real power relations. Its promise holds only when inequality & exclusion are overcome.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

Representative democracy....means the people as body must be able to control the general direction of government policy (J.S.MILL) Comment

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** Mill separates controlling the direction from running the government → representative democracy as the device for popular control of direction
- R2** a whole people cannot govern directly → so they must command the direction → representation secures that command

Body flow

Mill / Considerations → ideal form for a modern state → large society cannot decide directly → suffrage + elected representatives set broad direction, skilled hands execute → two tests of good government (virtue + intelligence; using people's capacities) → control cannot stop at the ballot → local participation as "schools of political capacity" → expertise still needed → popular control of direction + expert conduct of detail → elections + accountability keep that control real

Counter-view

Schumpeter: only a contest for votes, no real control of policy → **Rousseau**: sovereignty cannot be represented, surrender forfeits command → **Pateman & Barber**: representation thins involvement, accountability fades between elections

Conclusion routes

- R1** Mill's line is a test, not just a description → representation is democratic only while the people steer the direction
- R2** control captured by a powerful few → representation survives in form, lost in substance

Mill's scheme proposes that the people are not asked to run the government themselves; they are asked to control where it is headed. Representative democracy is the institutional answer to that demand.

Mill, in *Considerations on Representative Government*, treats representative government as the ideal form for a modern state. Through universal suffrage and election the people as a body fix the broad direction of policy, while skilled hands carry out the detailed work.

Mill judges any government by two tests: whether it improves the virtue and intelligence of its people and whether it uses their capacities for the common good.

For Mill, control cannot stop at the ballot box. People must gain confidence in self-government and local participation trains them for the larger task - democratic institutions act as "schools of political capacity". But he never hands government to the crowd.

Whether representation truly secures such control is debated. Schumpeter reduces democracy to a competitive struggle for the people's vote; on his reading people choose their rulers but do not control policy, which weakens the idea that representation enforces the popular will. Rousseau says that sovereignty cannot be represented and a people that surrenders power to representatives loses genuine command over its affairs.

Mill's words therefore set a test as much as a description. Representative democracy holds only so far as the people actually steer the direction of policy; once that control passes to a powerful few, representation survives in form but not in substance.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 15 marks

"Free and fair deliberation is key to the foundation of democracy." Explain.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- (R1) democracy ≠ counting votes → foundation is citizens reasoning together → legitimacy from free + fair deliberation among equals
- (R2) political equality + equal moral worth → diversity of opinion as strength needing tolerance → deliberation, not aggregation, grounds legitimacy

Body flow

deliberation vs voting → **Bessette** revives term as deliberation declines, vs **Bentham**'s aggregate democracy (majoritarianism, individual pleasure) → produces informed opinions, citizens revise preferences → voice over choice, debate over voting → "free": expression, association, dissent → **Mill** (silencing = assuming infallibility) → reasons surface, not the loudest voice → "fair": equal standing, non-coercive → **Habermas** ideal speech (force of better argument, not power) → **Rawls** reasons others can accept → fair framework → **Cohen** pluralism as source of legitimacy

Counter-view

ideal hard to realise → power inequalities distort, dominant styles exclude weaker groups → **Fraser** (single public sphere silences subaltern voices)

Conclusion routes

- (R1) free = openness, fair = equality → reasoned self-rule, not a headcount
- (R2) **Sen**: "government by discussion" → deliberation turns power into legitimate collective judgement

Democracy is often reduced to counting votes, but its real foundation lies in how citizens reason together before they decide.

The claim here is that legitimacy flows not from the mere aggregation of preferences but from free and fair deliberation among equals.

The argument begins by separating deliberation from simple voting. Joseph Bessette gave the idea significance when deliberation was in decline, distinguishing it from Jeremy Bentham's aggregate democracy, which can lead to majoritarianism and the pursuit of individual pleasure. Deliberation instead produces reasonable, well informed opinions and lets citizens revise their preferences in light of reasons and evidence.

Free deliberation depends on freedom of expression, association and dissent. As J. Mill put it "All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility." Open argument lets the strongest reasons surface rather than the loudest voice.

Habermas's ideal speech situation requires that acceptance rest on the force of the better argument, not on power. Rawls asks citizens to argue from reasons others can reasonably accept, securing a fair political framework, while Joshua Cohen treats respect for pluralism as the source of legitimacy.

The ideal, however, is hard to realise. Power inequalities distort discussion and dominant speaking styles can exclude weaker groups.

Free deliberation supplies openness and fair deliberation supplies equality; together they make democracy a reasoned form of self-rule rather than a headcount.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 15 marks

Elitist theory of democracy denies the possibility of democracy as rule of the people. Elucidate

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** classical democracy promises government of/by the people → elitist theory denies it is possible → power always rests with a small organised minority
- R2** people may vote but do not rule → democracy reduced to competition among elites, not self-government

Body flow

classical denial: **Mosca** (society split into rulers and ruled) → **Pareto** (power always with a few; elites and counter-elites only replace one another; democracy unrealistic) → **Michels** (Iron Law of Oligarchy; even democratic parties turn bureaucratic and leader-dominated) → democratic elitism: **Schumpeter** (democracy as a method; competitive struggle for the people's vote; people only choose rulers) → **Sartori** (self-governing people a delusion; leadership the core) → **Mills** (power elite of corporate, military and presidential insiders decides national events)

Counter-view

Mannheim and **Aron** (governed can still remove leaders; competing elites allow circulation and compromise) → pluralist and deliberative critics (civil society, media, public reasoning restrain elites)

Conclusion routes

- R1** even softened, people choose rulers rather than govern → denial holds in the full sense of self-rule
- R2** democracy survives only as a method of selecting and removing elites, not as rule of the people

classical democracy promises government of the people, by the people. Elitist theory denies that this is possible. It argues that power always rests with a small, organised minority, whatever the form of government.

The classical elite theorists establish this denial. Mosca, holds that "In all societies two classes of people appear, a class that is ruled." Pareto sees power as permanently held by a few, with elites and counter-elites only replacing one another, making democracy unrealistic. Robert Michels pushes it furthest through his "Iron Law of Oligarchy". He who says organisation, says oligarchy. Even democratic parties become bureaucratic and leader-dominated, while the masses stay passive.

Joseph Schumpeter redefines democracy as a method, arrangement in which leaders acquire power through a competitive struggle for the people's vote. Sartori agrees that a self-governing people is a delusion and treats leadership as the core of democracy.

C. Wright Mills extends the argument to modern industrial democracies, where corporate chiefs, senior generals & presidential insiders form a power elite: "Insofar as national events are decided, the power elite are those who decide them."

However Karl Mannheim and Raymond Aron note that the governed can still remove leaders and that competing elites permit circulation and compromise; pluralist & deliberative critics add that civil society, media and public reasoning restrain elites. Even so, the people choose rulers rather than govern.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 20 marks

Success of contemporary democracies lies in the State limiting its own power. Explain.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** democracy authorises power through consent → but contemporary success needs that power held within limits → **Locke**: government protects rights, bound by law, "where law ends, tyranny begins"
- R2** restraint, not the mandate alone, is the real test → self-limitation = the harder half of democracy

Body flow

authorise vs restrain (democracy authorises / constitutionalism restrains, both needed) → **Zakaria**: constitutionalism distinct, elections outrunning restraint → oppressive majority → **Madison**: oblige government to control itself → rule of law: government under law, minorities/dissenters protected → **Diamond**: "steel frame" against elected autocrats → separation of powers (**Montesquieu**): branches limit each other → pluralism (**Dahl**): power dispersed across press, opposition, civil society

Counter-view

self-limitation ≠ self-weakening → **Bartels**: backsliding is elite-driven loosening of self-limits → **Holmes**: restraining arbitrary power raises state capacity → **Ambedkar**: political democracy must rest on social & economic democracy → limit arbitrary power, not positive purpose

Conclusion routes

- R1** state binds itself by law, divides authority, accepts plural checks → majorities rule without tyranny
- R2** limited power and effective power are not opposites → the democracies that endure are those that restrain themselves

Democracy authorises power through consent, but in its contemporary form it works only when that power is held within limits. John Locke fixed this logic early: government exists to protect natural rights, and its power must stay bound by law, for "wherever law ends, tyranny begins".

According to Fareed Zakaria, constitutional liberalism is historically distinct from democracy, and where elections outrun restraint the majority can turn oppressive. James Madison says, "you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."

Larry Diamond calls the rule of law "the steel frame that keeps elected rulers from becoming elected autocrats."

Montesquieu separated the legislative, executive and judicial functions so each limits the other & prevents concentration. Robert Dahl added a social check: when power is dispersed across associations, a free press, the opposition & civil society, arbitrary rule is restrained from outside the state as well.

According to Larry Bartels, backsliding is usually elite driven, the state loosening limits on itself rather than answering popular demand. B.R. Ambedkar insisted that political democracy must rest on social and economic democracy.

Contemporary democracy therefore succeeds when the state binds itself by law, divides its own authority and accepts plural checks, so majorities may rule without becoming tyranny. Limited power and effective power are not opposites.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 15 marks

Deliberative democracy seeks to promote democratic decision making about public issues among the citizens. Discuss

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 legitimacy of public decisions rests on reasoned discussion, not vote-counting → **Bessette's** term set against **Bentham's** aggregate democracy → majoritarian drift

R2 question points to a manner of deciding → common concerns settled by citizens giving and weighing reasons

Body flow

coercion-free dialogue as the core mechanism → **Habermas**: communicative action, better argument not power, ideal speech → **Rawls**: public reason, reasons others can accept → **Cohen**: reasons accessible to all → legitimacy + moral disagreement → quantity to quality → **Gutmann & Thompson**: mutually acceptable reasons → **Sen**: government by discussion checks unchecked power, curbs majoritarianism → deliberative devices (mini-publics, assemblies, polling) carry the ideal into practice

Counter-view

assumes reasonable, roughly equal citizens → power inequality distorts discussion → dominant speech styles → epistemic elite → **Fraser**: a single public sphere reproduces inequality → counter-publics for the marginalised

Conclusion routes

R1 deliberation makes democracy substantive → voice over choice, debate over voting

R2 promise to improve public decisions holds only where inclusion is real → exclusion actively addressed

Deliberative democracy treats the legitimacy of a public decision as resting on reasoned discussion among citizens, not on the mere counting of votes. Joseph Ben-El-Mechaieq, who introduced the term, set it against Jeremy Bentham's aggregate democracy, where decisions only add up individual preferences and may slide into majoritarianism.

Habermas holds through communicative action that an outcome gains acceptance by the force of the better argument, not by power of numbers. John Rawls adds public reason and for Joshua Cohen, such reasons must be accessible to all, which makes deliberation the source of legitimacy and a way to handle moral disagreement.

Gutmann and Thompson see free and equal citizens justifying decisions through mutually acceptable reasons. Democracy as government by discussion checks the calamities of unchecked power and curbs majoritarian excess.

However, the model assumes reasonable, roughly equal citizens. Power inequalities distort discussion, and dominant speaking styles can turn skilled speakers into an epistemic elite. Nancy Fraser shows that a single public sphere may reproduce inequality, so marginalised groups need their own counter-publics.

Deliberative democracy thus makes democracy substantive—giving priority to voice over choice, debate over voting. Its promise to improve public decision-making holds only where inclusion is real.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 10 marks

Explain briefly the elite theory of democracy.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 core claim: power always with an organised minority → so democracy = contest among elites, not rule of the people
- R2 contrast: classical democracy promises government of the people → elite theory denies it → rule belongs to organised minorities

Body flow

elite/mass division grounded in classical theory → **Mosca** (class that rules vs class that is ruled; minority always at the helm) → **Pareto** (circulation of elites; rule stays with the few) → **Michels** (Iron Law; "organisation = oligarchy"; even democratic parties oligarchise) → **Schumpeter** (democratic elitism; democracy = competitive method for votes; people only choose/replace rulers) → **Lasswell** (who governs; politics = who gets what; elites capture values — income, respect, safety)

Counter-view

denies democracy as rule of the people / citizens reduced to voters between elites → pluralist reply: many power centres fragment elites and keep them responsive

Conclusion routes

- R1 elite theory remains a strong reminder: organised minorities shape every political order
- R2 elite theory makes democracy procedural — selecting and replacing rulers, not self-government

Elite theory argues that political power always rests with a small, organised minority, whatever the formal type of government. Society divides into an elite that rules and masses who are ruled, so democracy is not rule of the people but a contest among elites for power.

Mosca held that every society contains a class that rules and class that is ruled, with a minority always at the helm. Vilfredo Pareto added the circulation of elites - governing elites and counter-elites replace one another, but rule never leaves the few. Robert Michels went furthest with his Iron Law of Oligarchy: "He who says organisation, says oligarchy."

Joseph Schumpeter turned this into democratic elitism, defining the democratic method as an arrangement in which leaders compete for the people's votes. People do not govern; they only choose and replace rulers.

Critics object that this denies democracy as rule of the people and reduces citizens to voters choosing between elites. Pluralists reply that several competing power centres fragment elites and keep them responsive. Even so, elite theory remains a strong reminder that organised minorities shape every political order.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 20 marks

The foundational base of western democracy has been shaped by Locke's ideas of constitutionalism, freedom and property. Elucidate.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** **Locke** = foundational thinker of liberal democracy → three ideas (freedom + property + constitutionalism) joined into one design for legitimate government
- R2** western democracy = power both authorised by people and limited by law → both trace back to **Locke**

Body flow

state of nature: freedom + equality within natural law, not licence, vs **Hobbes** → natural rights (life, liberty, property) prior to government → consent as the only legitimacy, will of people not hereditary command → social contract → community → institutions by majority → taxation by consent/representatives → [property] "lives, liberty and estates" under the general name property → not material alone, inalienable rights → government's purpose = protect property → right of resistance → [constitutionalism] power bound by law, "wherever law ends, tyranny begins" → government as trust → separation of powers + rule of law → liberal constitutionalism → synthesis: constitutionalism restrains, democracy authorises, liberal democracy needs both

Counter-view

constitutional liberalism historically distinct from democracy (**Zakaria**) → their union an achievement, not automatic → without constitutional limits majority may oppress; without democracy limits stay elitist

Conclusion routes

- R1** western democracy inherits **Locke's** union of freedom, property, consent, representation, constitutional restraint
- R2** government the people authorise and the law restrains — power both authorised and limited

John Locke is the foundational thinker of modern liberal democracy. Western democracy grew not from one idea but from the way Locke joined three of them – freedom, property and constitutionalism – into a single design for legitimate government.

Locke begins with the state of nature, a condition of freedom and equality within the bounds of natural law. It is not a state of license, and it differs from the insecurity Thomas Hobbes described.

From this Locke draws his central democratic claim: authority is legitimate only when it rests on consent. The state must reflect the will of the people, not hereditary command.

Through the social contract, individuals form a community, create institutions by majority and accept taxation only by consent, directly or through representatives.

Property gives this government its purpose. Locke uses the term broadly – “lives, liberty & estates” gathered under name of property.

Government is created to protect this property, so a state that attacks it loses its reason to exist. The right of resistance follows: people may overthrow a ruler who violates the rights he was trusted to guard.

Constitutionalism is the third pillar, limiting the very power that consent creates. Power must be bound by law, for "Wherever law ends, tyranny begins". Locke treats government as a trust, separates legislative, executive & judicial functions, and places the rule of law above the ruler. This is the core of liberal constitutionalism.

The ideas finally combine. Constitutionalism restrains power while democracy authorises it and liberal democracy needs both: without limits the majority may turn oppressive; without democracy those limits stay elitist.

Fareed Zakaria argues that constitutional liberalism is historically distinct from democracy, which made their union in the west an achievement, not an accident.

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