THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY
(rev 30 May 2011 by Blair Henry)

The fundamental stated principles of the American democracy have grown over the years from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the 27 Amendments, and various court decisions interpreting the Constitution.

For the purposes of We the People, most of the principles fall under one or more of the following:

1. **Accountability** - We the People, *not the President or the Congress*, are ultimately accountable for making the decisions that guide our nation.

2. **The Common Good** – Major decisions, such as amending the constitution, shall be based on what is shared and beneficial for all (or almost all) members of the American community.

3. **Liberty** – The freedom to speak and act in a way that does not injure or interfere with the liberty of another.

4. **Equality** – Everyone is equal before the law, has equal access to power, exercises equal control over the matters that affect their interests, and has an equal and fair opportunity to be heard.

5. **Justice** – Includes the concepts of fairness, moral rightness, and sanctions for violations.

A larger list of principles can be found below.

However, nearly all of the things people associate with a democracy were not included in the Constitution. Almost all of them—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the right of women to vote, etc.—were *added later by way of amending the Constitution*.

The Declaration of Independence said "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Over the years, the nation has begun to specify what some of those other "certain unalienable rights" are including the right to vote and the right to personal privacy, etc.

Finally, the US federal government has gone before the global community and declared the following principles as also a part of democracy:

6. **Transparency in Government**
7. **Honesty and Truth in Government**
8. **Minority Rights** - Honoring the will of the majority while zealously protecting the fundamental rights of individuals and minority groups
9. **Fair Elections** - Authentic competition in elections
10. **The Values of Tolerance, Cooperation, and Compromise**

Endnotes follow.

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1 Declaration of Independence (1776)

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations,
pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

2 The Common Good
The Common Good refers here to something that is shared and beneficial for all (or most) members of a given community. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_good In the U.S. Constitution this is generally embodied in: “We the People in Order establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

3 Justice

4 Some of the Key Principles the American Democracy Was Built Upon

The Declaration of Independence (1776)
1. Government by the people
2. Equality
3. Divine unalienable rights—among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
4. Right to overthrow the government if it fails to protect these rights.
“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

U.S. Constitution (1787)
1. Justice
2. Common Defense
3. General Welfare
4. Secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity
5. Separation of Powers between governments
“We the People in Order establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”
Article I – Creates Congress
Article II – Creates Presidency
Article III – Create Judicial Branch
Article IV – Relationship between Federal and State Governments
Article V – Amendments
Article VI – Federal Government Assumes Debts; Treaties
Article VII – Nine of Thirteen States Necessary to Ratify Constitution
http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/freedom/constitution/text.html

5 Other Key Principles Added Later by Amending the Constitution
Freedom of the Press 1st Amendment
Right to Bear Arms 2nd Amendment
Freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures 4th Amendment
Right to grand jury 5th Amendment
http://WeThePeople.FutureNetwork.tv/
| Freedom from double jeopardy | 5th Amendment  |
| Freedom against self-incrimination | 5th Amendment  |
| No taking of property without just compensation | 5th Amendment  |
| Right to Fair Trial | 6th Amendment  |
| Right to a Jury Trial | 7th Amendment  |
| Prohibition Against Cruel and Unusual Punishment | 8th Amendment  |
| States Rights | 10th Amendment  |
| Repeal of Slavery | 13th Amendment  |
| Right to Due Process of Law | 14th Amendment  |
| Right of Blacks to Vote | 15th Amendment  |
| Right of Women to Vote | 19th Amendment  |
| Right of People in Washington DC to Vote | 23rd Amendment  |
| Right to Vote at Age 18 | 24th Amendment  |

6 **Statement by the United States Delegation to the United Nations (2010)**


“...The United States is pleased to participate in this panel on the Right to Truth and to make this statement in support of the work on the right to truth by this panel. ... Respect for the right to truth serves to advance respect for the rule of law, transparency, honesty, accountability, justice, and good governance – all key principles underlying a democratic society. One of the core tenets guiding our participation as a member of the Human Rights Council is fidelity to the truth. We see the right to truth as closely linked to the right to seek, receive, and impart information under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (freedom of expression). We also observe, as recognized in the Council and Commission resolutions on the right to truth, that the right to truth may be characterized differently in certain legal systems, such as our own, as the right to be informed, freedom of information, or the right to know. ... In conclusion, we underscore that the right to the truth is inextricably linked to the promotion of democratic ideals, human rights, and justice. ...”


7 **Principles of Democracy**

U.S. State Department publication

[www.america.gov/publications/books/principles-of-democracy.html](http://www.america.gov/publications/books/principles-of-democracy.html)