

Democracy, as these readings show, is a delicate thing. Its recurring weakness is its susceptibility to the unequal influence of individuals and groups in unequal societies. Democratic values are often simplified to the adage: one-person, one-vote. But this forgets an important requisite of democratic society, the equal consideration and redress of every citizen's troubles, ideas, and preferences. Market societies, whose intrinsic functions create and exacerbate inequality, produce societies that violate this last premise, as the first set of readings illustrate.

That America's political institutions are unduly influenced by the wealthy is undeniable. Through an ever-expanding world of lobbyists, political action committees, and campaign contributions, the political power of capital has reached a height not seen since the early twentieth century, despite recent legislative attempts to buck the trend. As research shows, mentioned in the APSA's "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality," money does not buy specific votes, but it grants access to political elites, in turn providing an opportunity to set the national political agenda.

The power of money has been multiplied still by the exponential growth in the cost of political campaigns and the shifting forms of political engagement. Citizens are more and more likely to donate money to campaigns when they are involved, instead of the traditional donation of time and energy, a trend which benefits the rich – who, as one author points out, may still have the same number of hours in a day as the rest of us – but can afford to give political contributions on an unrivaled scale. Simultaneously, the slow decline of the labor movement and other organizations that typically represented interests

other than those of business, and the relative ascension, in terms civic engagement, of religious institutions, has undermined what restraints on elite power once existed.

But electoral analysis alone does not reveal the full scope of economic elites' power in liberal democracy. As the next set of readings detail, capital's preferences commonly take precedent over the public good. The auto industry's ruthless efforts are partly responsible for the suburbanization of America and the crippling of its use of public transportation, a trend that has contributed to a decline in civic engagement (as a later reading shows) and has accelerated environmental destruction and, perhaps, led to a series of imperial oil wars. The cries for help of entrenched capital in the face of market realities has probably led to more regulation than "public interest" ever has, another reading suggests. Broadly, economic elites have succeeded in setting the scope of government action – the sphere of public input – narrowing it such as to prevent it from significantly interfering in their activities, or ensuring that when it does the intervention is on their terms.

Worse still for democracy is the increasing threat of economic globalization, as the final readings note. One obvious manifestation of this danger is the appearance and growing importance of the World Trade Organization and other institutions that police international commerce, whose judicial and legislative decisions are far removed from any democratic accountability, public input, or even popular understanding. More fundamentally, the breathtaking mobility of capital in the global age significantly reduces the power of democracies to counter the negative effects of the market. Capital's world search for lower taxes and cheaper labor strain the ability of the state to tax, as has been witnessed by the increasing pressure on national governments to reduce taxes, or increase

subsidies and other forms of corporate welfare. What redistributive forces do manage to survive are constrained in a world where the nation-state itself may be obsolete.

Given these attacks, a logical question might be: can democracy exist without markets? That it has not yet does not mean it ever will, but it gives no reason for optimism. Alternatively, can markets effect on democracy be sufficiently checked, and, if so, how? Is the current crisis of democracy a necessary result of all market societies, or only late capitalism as we know it? Might we be able to alter the basic structure of society such as to restore democratic principles without abolishing the decentralizing and efficient tendencies of markets? These questions are no abstractions; they are essential to a world where government's role is dwindling before the power of global capital. If democracy is to survive, something very basic must change. What that change is and how it takes shape are the essence of thinking about the good society.