

Saving Democracy

Unintended Consequences

- *Discovering the Freedom Flaw* -

by

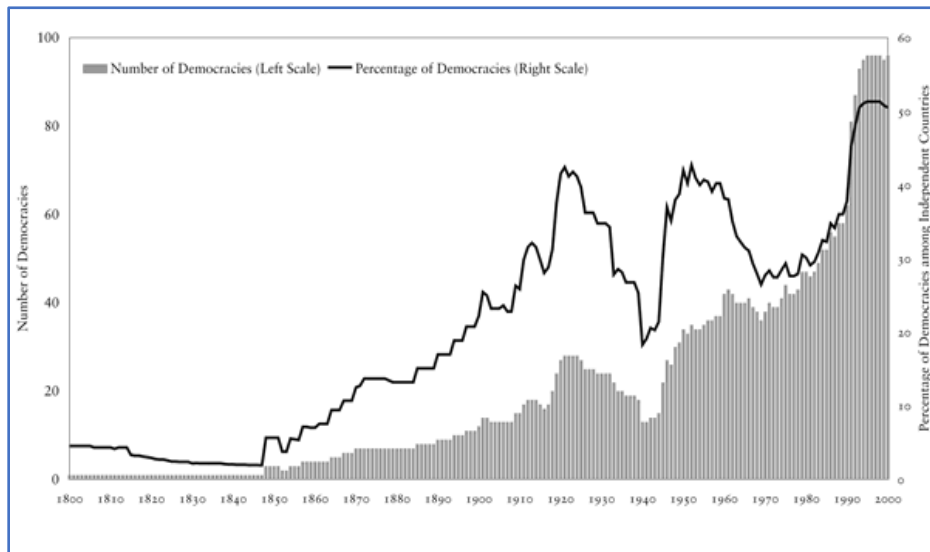
Adam Smith

What is Democracy?

Wikipedia summarized definition:

Democracy is a **form of government** in which **political power** is vested in the **people** of a state. Features of democracy include **freedom of assembly**, **association**, **personal property**, **freedom of religion** and **speech**, **citizenship**, **consent of the governed**, **voting rights**, freedom from unwarranted governmental **deprivation** of the **right to life and liberty**, and **minority rights**. Today, the dominant form of democracy is **Representative Democracy**, where citizens elect **government** officials to govern on their behalf. The powers of the majority are exercised within the framework of a representative democracy, but a **constitution** and **supreme court** limit the majority and protect the **minority**.

The chart below surprises many in that it conveys that democracy is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before the mid-1800s virtually all countries were autocratic. This was well after the Magna Carta, the French and American revolutions and further research reveals why.



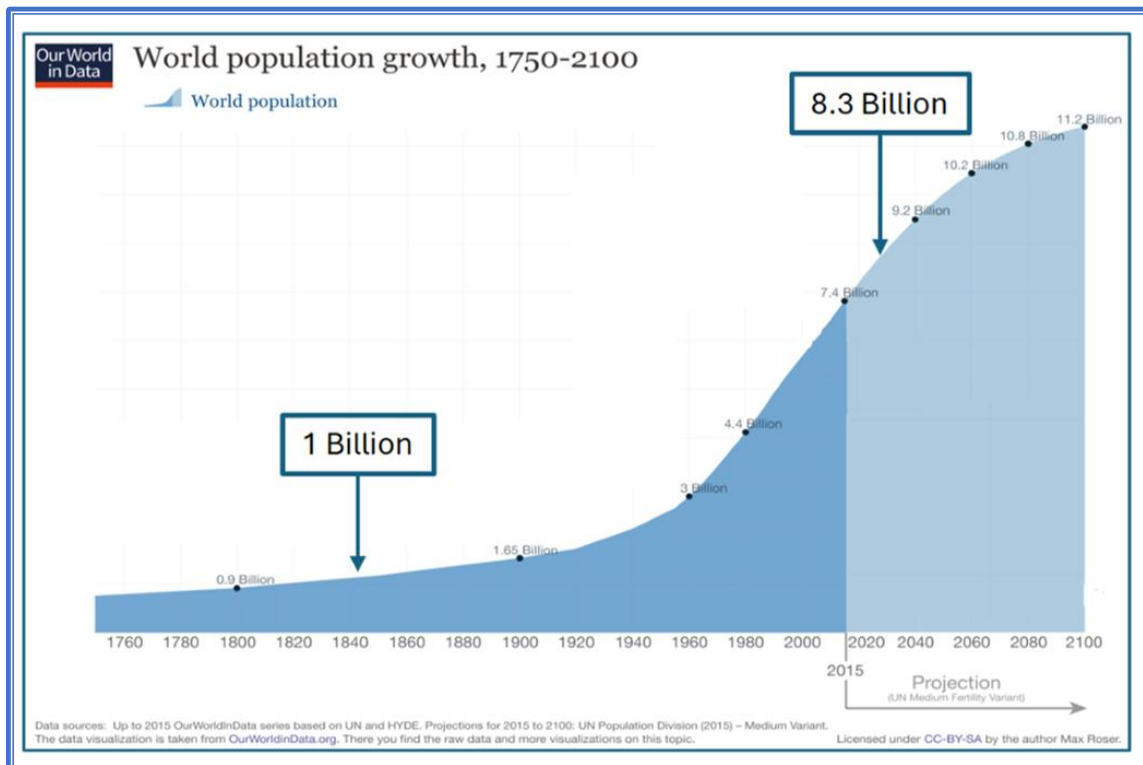
The universal suffrage movement spanned a period from the late 1600's to the mid 1800's. Its mission was to expand the right to vote to all men over the age of 21 and it was gradually adopted. Before this, many countries held general elections but those that had the right to vote were typically wealthy individuals. Until manhood suffrage was adopted, the fact that such a small percentage of the population voted, meant the results could hardly be interpreted as representing the 'Will of the People.' To put this in perspective, the USA adopted manhood suffrage in 1865, so it did not qualify as a democracy for the first century of its existence.

The Manhood Suffrage Movement had six specific and important objectives of which two were:

- The right to vote by all men over the age of 21.
- A system of voting that was by secret ballot to protect the voter.

The chart also surprises many in that there are at least two periods where significant downturns in democracy are evident. It appears that the first of those downturns coincided with the 2nd World War and the second one aligns with conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. Perhaps the downward curve in the last 20 years suggests another period of global conflict is developing.

Overall, the establishment of democracy is a relatively steep curve that has seen this form of government grow from ~0% to ~50% of existing nations in only ~150 years. During that timeframe, the population of the earth grew from ~1.0 billion to ~8.5 billion. Lots of other factors influence this significant change but this macro perspective is worth noting.



Democracy is typically referenced as a “form of government” but if you notice, not one of the G20 has the word democracy in its description of their system of government although most of them would describe their country as a democracy.

G20 Countries by Government Type

Country	System of Government
Argentina	Federal Presidential Republic
Australia	Federal Constitutional Monarchy (parliamentary)
Brazil	Federal Presidential Republic
Canada	Federal Constitutional Monarchy (parliamentary)
China	Single-Party Socialist Republic
France	Unitary Semi-Presidential Republic
Germany	Federal Parliamentary Republic
India	Federal Parliamentary Republic
Indonesia	Unitary Presidential Republic
Italy	Unitary Parliamentary Republic
Japan	Constitutional Monarchy (parliamentary)
South Korea	Unitary Presidential Republic
Mexico	Federal Presidential Republic
Russia	Federal Semi-Presidential Republic
Saudi Arabia	Absolute Monarchy
South Africa	Unitary Parliamentary Republic
Türkiye	Unitary Presidential Republic
United Kingdom	Constitutional Monarchy (parliamentary)
United States	Federal Constitutional Republic (presidential)

This is an indicator that perhaps democracy is more of a characteristic of the governmental procedure than a system of government. The democratic process could be viewed as a decision-making method whereby significant actions are decided by voting.

Representative Democracy is a ‘**process**’ in which **political power** is vested in the **people** of a state. The objective is to discern “**the will of the people**” on significant issues related to the governance of the state. Decisions are made by voting, and the will of the people is determined by the majority of votes on the issue being considered.

The voting would include:

- The General Elections of Representatives by the people to elect officials to govern on their behalf.
- Voting on Proposed Legislation and Laws by the people’s representatives.
- Voting on any consequential decision by the governing body.
 - i.e. committee meetings, confirmations, hearings, supreme court decisions, etc.

This distinction is important because it highlights that the fundamental act of voting is the core element of democracy. If, as the title of this article suggests, our objective is Saving Democracy, we should take a close look at this critical factor. Luckily science has much to offer in this regard and the field of Group Dynamics has studied the voting process extensively. It is this foundational activity that has been overlooked. That has hidden some unintended consequences from us and a fatal flaw in the current-day aspects of voting in democratic governments.

The Voting Process:

The field of Group Dynamics has studied the voting process extensively. The most consequential element of these studies is related to whether the vote is by secret ballot or open ballot. The evidence is clear that the difference between these two methods is important. A simple question to my helpful AI to see if there was a difference yielded the following: (I've summarized)

Short answer:

Yes — there is strong empirical and theoretical evidence that *secret ballots* and *open (recorded) ballots* can produce different outcomes, because secrecy changes incentives, social pressures, and the ability of others to monitor or punish a voter's choice.

The **secret ballot reduces coercion, vote buying, and social pressure**, while **open ballots enable them**. When voters believe others can observe or infer their choices, their behavior changes — sometimes dramatically.

✦ 1. Historical and comparative evidence

Across many countries, the introduction of the secret ballot in the late 19th and early 20th centuries **reduced vote buying and coercion**, which in turn changed election outcomes.

- When ballots were public, political machines could verify whether a voter complied with a purchased or coerced vote.
- After secrecy was introduced, these machines lost enforcement power, and their vote shares dropped.

This is one of the most well-documented findings in political science.

✦ 4. Mechanisms that cause different outcomes

Open ballots can change results through:

- **Social pressure**
- Voters may fear judgment from family, employers, unions, religious groups, or community leaders.
- **Coercion**
If a vote can be verified, coercion becomes enforceable.
- **Vote buying**
Open ballots allow buyers to confirm compliance; secret ballots break this link.
- **Group conformity**
People often align with their group when their choice is visible.
- **Reduced honesty**
Secret ballots allow voters to express true preferences without fear of retaliation.

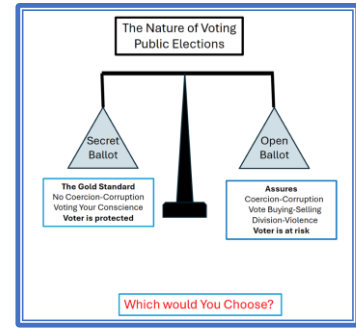
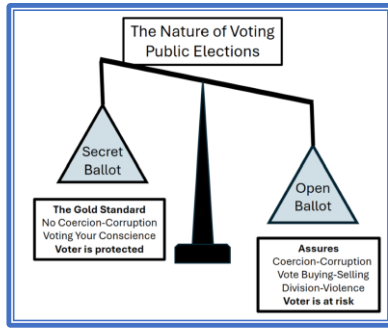
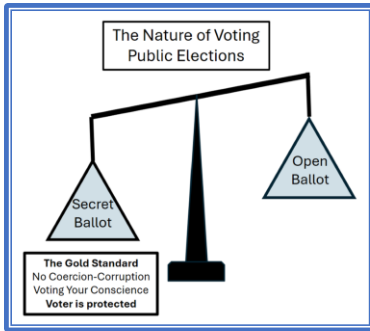
These mechanisms are well-supported in political behavior research.

It is apparent that voting is the critical aspect of democracy, but group dynamics, political science and behavioural research have all established a major difference as to whether that voting is secret or open. (recorded)

Open ballot assures that coercion, corruption, vote-buying/selling, division and violence will all occur. It enables any person or group that would use such tactics to their advantage. It enables the wealthy, the powerful, the special interest groups, and those with the resources to corrupt and control the outcome. This behaviour is nonpartisan. It is an aspect of human nature. Humans will almost always act in their own self-interest. It is not a negative perspective; it is simply the nature of us all.

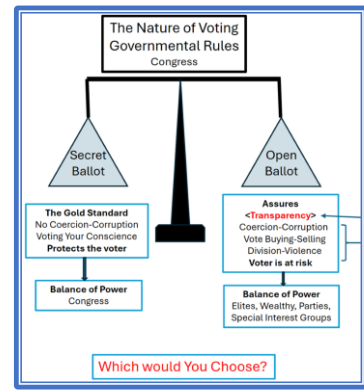
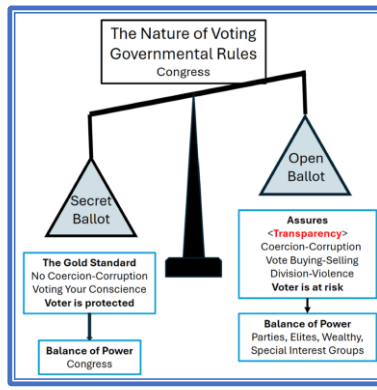
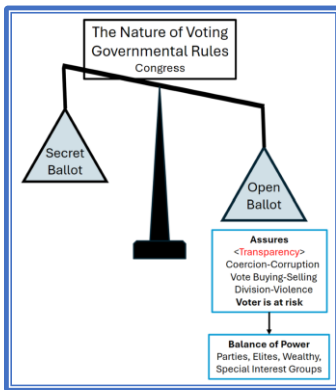
Secret Ballot vs Open Ballot in Public Elections

- I'm going to compare, with some graphics, the secret ballot vs the open ballot process in public elections that we all are familiar with.



Secret Ballot vs Open Ballot in Governmental Systems

- Now let's look at the same issue as it relates to voting in Congress. Remember that the Congressional Reorganization Act of 1970 required that all votes in Congress be recorded (open) balloting. Before that, few votes were recorded.



Cognitive Dissonance:

When I consider why this concept of the Freedom Flow and the solution of requiring Secret Ballot in Congress is dismissed out of hand by the media, influencers, academics and the public, I revert to the social sciences.

Cognitive Dissonance is the psychological discomfort experienced when a person holds conflicting beliefs.

In this case:

- Most people believe that Secret Ballot:
 - Is appropriate in public elections.
 - It protects the voters from coercion by others
 - It prevents corruption in the voting process.

- Most people believe that Open Ballot:
 - Is appropriate for governmental voting.
 - It provides transparency to the public as to how their elected officials vote.

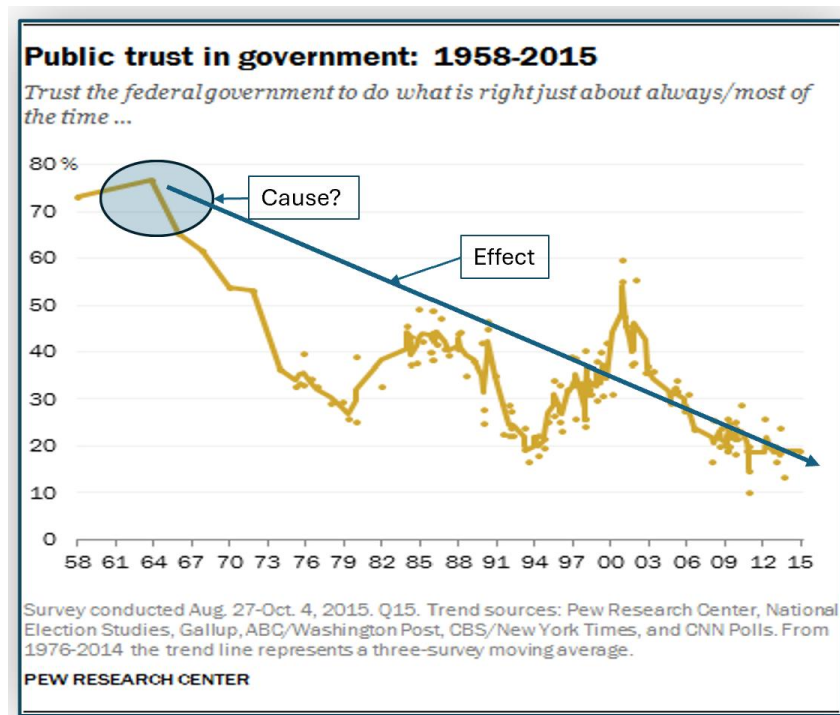
Unfortunately, the Open Ballot system has some serious negative characteristics that far outweigh the benefit of transparency. Coercion, corruption, vote buying/selling, divisiveness and violence are inherent in a recorded voting system. We see this everyday. Individuals rarely review the voting records but every special interest group and lobbyists do. They have a direct impact on who gets financial support in elections, who gets removed from the party. It is vote buying and corruption in action.

The panacea of transparency that was enacted in 1970 had serious unintended consequences.

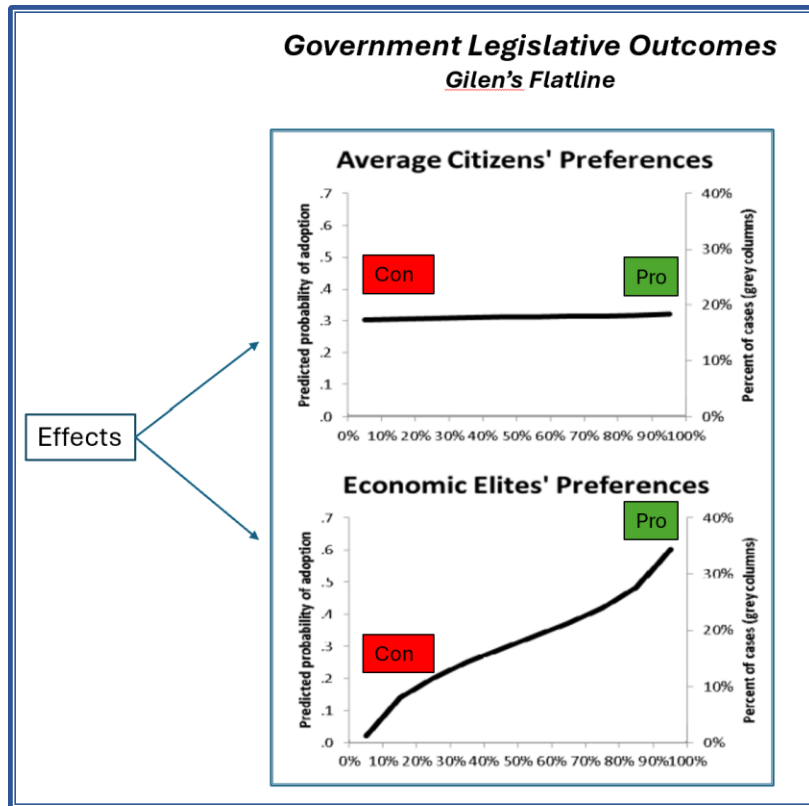
In searching for someone who was looking into the voting element, I came across an organization named the 'Congressional Research Institute' (<https://congressionalresearch.org>) It appeared to be only a few professors at Harvard that made up the group. They had also been puzzled, as I was, about the growing sense of division, conflict and legislation that didn't seem consistent with historical norms.

It was encouraging to finally find someone who was promoting a similar concept from a different perspective. Whereas my approach was broadly focused about the benefits of the secret ballot process being adopted at the governmental level for all governments; this organization was totally focused on the US Congress and had approached that specific dilemma more scientifically.

They had evidence of a significant change and a credible indication of when it occurred, so they went looking for the cause. This long-term survey from the Pew Research Center measured public trust in government over a long time period. It identified an era of consistency where trust had been in the 70% to 90% range for decades. The effects were proof that something had changed; the direction was consistent and headed toward zero. They went looking for the cause.



They found it! Guess what their conclusion revealed? It was all about the voting process. I was in touch with their leader for quite a few months. Now I had a specific action that reinforced what had previously been a general hypothesis based on well-understood principles.



This 2014 research by a Princeton professor, Martin Gilen, analyzed 1,779 legislative actions by Congress and sorted the data into two groups:

- The average citizen's preferences.
- The economically Elite citizen's preferences.

Conclusions:

- The average citizens have little or no influence on legislation.
- The Elite citizens (often referred to as the one percenters) have substantial impact on legislation.

It appeared something had regressed to that period before the mid 1800's where the rich and powerful were running the government and the will of the people had somehow gotten lost in the mix.

When these Harvard scientists went looking for the cause they identified it very specifically. They identified two aspects of the Congressional Reorganization Act of 1970 as the cause. This legislation was enacted to address the public unrest that was evident in the 1960's. This period included the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, assassinations of JFK, MLK Jr., RFK, political scandals, public protests, etc.

The panacea that was widely supported was the concept of **transparency**.

Much of the act was beneficial but there were two changes that had **Unintended Consequences**:

1. The Act required all voting in the Congress to be by recorded vote.
 - a. Previously, the yea and nay system was in place and recorded votes were rare. It was not totally a secret ballot system, but it was much closer to that than the new mandate.
2. The Act required all committee meetings, where legislation was created, to be open to the public.
 - a. Previously, these meetings were closed so that legislators could discuss, negotiate, compromise and arrive at reasonable bills to put forward. The public was not allowed in, and the lobbyists were kept in the lobby.
 - b. The lobbyists generally represent special interest groups, corporations, PAC's, parties and individuals with specific interests at stake. Generally, one could describe them as the 'one percenters.' They had huge resources and represented a major part of campaign contributions.

The Congressional Research Institute initiated a program to inform the media, influencers and the public about their findings. They produced a very informative YouTube video entitled, '[The Cardboard Box Reform](#)' that I hoped would really gather support but it seemed to fall on deaf ears. I think they took out a full page add in a major newspaper (Washington Post I think) but that too didn't seem to establish an organized movement. I followed their efforts but after a few years, it became apparent that their mission wasn't working.

- This partial list illustrates the situation we all see:
 - Public elections are secret ballot voting and reflect the will of the people.
 - The outcomes are always very close on significant issues.
 - Congressional elections are recorded ballot voting. We typically see ~100% of republicans vote the same and likewise for the Democrats. This is a strong signal that **something is wrong**.
 - When we see a republican or democrat vote contrary to their party's position, they are often stripped of status, primaried in the next election which costs them their job, subjected to ridicule, public harassment and sometimes violence.
Something is wrong.
- Divisiveness is commonplace and cooperation has been lost. Extremism grows and simple courtesy has disappeared. **Something is wrong.**

Democracy vs Authoritarianism

- This shift has been progressing for several decades, but the current situation has elevated concern to unprecedented levels. As I write this, country-wide protests are evident. This 'No Kings' movement has been growing, and the rhetoric continually highlights the 'Threat to Democracy.'

The No Kings movement has several official websites offering event information, activism resources, and training for participants.



Official Websites

1. No Kings Official Site – <https://www.nokings.org/>

- Huge numbers of Americans are concerned about where their democracy is headed.
- ***I emphasize at this point something important.*** My efforts and the mission of The Association to Improve Government are non-partisan. It is easy to look at the current situation and point the finger at the regime in power. I remind you that this problem began with changes that occurred in 1970. Those changes enabled the elite and this shift toward authoritarianism began. The current problems are simply the inevitable outcome and unintended consequences of a law that was truly aimed at **forming a more perfect union**. Authoritarian inclination has been enabled and has been growing since that time

The Bigger Picture



Clearly, the secret ballot's power to protect the voter and allow them to vote their conscience is a critical element of democracy and assures the will of the people is identified.

Unfortunately, this vital aspect of democracy has been denied our representatives and by logical deduction, has denied it to the voters that elected them. We wonder why elected officials seem to follow the party line so completely. If you understand that their status, job and very life are at stake should they not vote as required, perhaps you can see their plight.

Coercion, corruption and the **unintended consequences** of a 1970 Act have implanted the **Freedom Flaw** into the Rules of Congress.

It has altered the balance of power and handed it to the elites. Control by the elites is clearly leading us toward an authoritarian state.

The voters have elected representatives to convey their will in the governing process. This Freedom Flaw is a roadblock to ensuring the will of the people drives the government. We need to fix it, or we will soon be subjects in an authoritarian regime. This is most apparent in the USA today, but all modern democracies have adopted the same flaw in their governmental system so that slight downturn in the number of nations classified as democracies with continue to drop.

The solution should be obvious but, very few realize the cause and understand why transparency is not always positive.

Many of us are at an age where this shift to an authoritarian world will not be consequential but future generations will face a very different society.

The miracle of democracy began in the mid 1800's. It has enhanced the life of every human being on the planet. Power seeking individuals have recognized the Freedom Flaw as a 'loophole' that allows them to increase their wealth and power. They are on the cusp of derailing the Great Experiment and the world will follow quickly.

It may already be too late but there is hope. There are signs of resistance, and I hope we can turn the tide before it completes this inevitable outcome.

I have no idea how movements of this nature develop, overcome and thrive but I'm hoping my writings and The Association to Improve Government might be a small factor in the effort.



Hopefully, this focus on the power and effect of the secret ballot will highlight why this concept provides the Cause, Effect and the Solution to the dilemma we face today.

To accomplish this, it will take a movement with substantial public debate and participation.

We need you to get involved and here's how you can help:

- Pass this article on to all your contacts that you feel would have an interest.
- Join the [Association to Improve Government](#). It's free and your identity is protected.
- Write letters to editors, your representatives and press for public debate.
- Expose this concept on social media and expand the reach in any way you can.
- Make the effort to **Change Your World** and **Save Democracy**.

