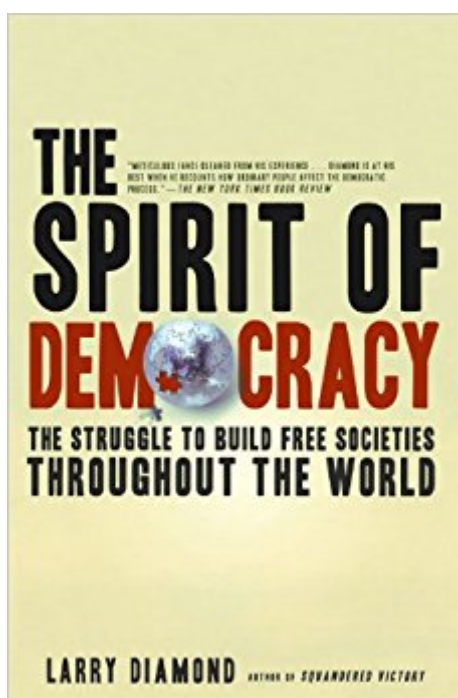


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The Spirit Of Democracy: The Struggle To Build Free Societies Throughout The World



Synopsis

"Meticulous . . . [Diamond] gleaned that . . . the fate of democracy was not driven by events but by the passion of individual people." •The New York Times Book Review
In 1974, nearly three-quarters of all countries were dictatorships; today, more than half are democracies. Yet recent efforts to promote democracy have stumbled, and many democratic governments are faltering. In this sweeping vision for advancing freedom around the world, renowned social scientist Larry Diamond examines how and why democracy progresses. He demonstrates that the desire for democracy runs deep, even in very poor countries, and that seemingly entrenched regimes like Iran and China could become democracies within a generation. He also dissects the causes of the "democratic recession" in critical states, including the crime-infested oligarchy in Russia and the strong-armed populism of Venezuela. To spur a renewed democratic boom Diamond urges the United States to vigorously support good governance and free civic organizations. Only then will the spirit of democracy be secured.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Political scientist Diamond (*Squandered Victory*), a leader in the field of democracy studies, provides a broad, authoritative survey of international trends and evolving academic thinking concerning the development and maintenance of democracies worldwide. Looking broadly at internal and external factors driving democratic movements, as well as the forces that sustain them once in place, Diamond argues democracy is not a Western anomaly, but a universal value.

Diamond, who served as senior advisor to the Iraqi Coalition Provisional Authority, has witnessed democracy-building efforts at close range. The promotion of democracy in authoritarian regimes through either peaceful pressure or international interventions, Diamond believes, is rarely effective unless supported by outside assistance designed to strengthen internal civil societies. Democracy by force, he intones, has the poorest track record of all, and urges the U.S. and other established democracies to clean up their own houses, reasoning that "It does little good to promote freedom abroad while it gradually slips away at home." Being generally sanguine about the nature and influence of democracies, however, Diamond tends to downplay how they might also serve to maintain exploitative social and economic relations, amongst other political complications, but there's much to glean in this optimistic and carefully supported account. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

• Meticulous | hopeful | The Spirit of Democracy takes on the world [and] offers well-grounded support to anyone who has questioned the long-held theory that the richer the country, the greater the chances of sustaining democracy. • The New York Times Book Review • Diamond is eloquent in arguing that despite the recent blunders of American democracy promoters, there is still a role for the international community in helping societies that are struggling to be free. • Foreign Affairs • Diamond strenuously argues against the cynical idea that certain religions, cultures, or societies are incompatible with democracy, pointing to the progress of the past three decades as evidence that democracy is indeed a universal aspiration. • The Chronicle Review • The Spirit of Democracy is a worthwhile corrective to America's post-Iraq pessimism about the future of democratic ideals throughout the world. • Francis Fukuyama, author of America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy • Diamond offers a path forward, full of his customary wisdom, tough-mindedness, and passion. With friends like him, the spirit of democracy will rise again. • Peter Beinart, senior fellow, Council on Foreign Relations, and author of The Good Fight • No one has thought harder or more broadly about the past and future of democracy than Larry Diamond. A passionate treatment, infused with optimism and eminently readable, The Spirit of Democracy is a must for anyone who cares about the toughest challenge of balancing national values and national interests. • Jessica Tuchman Mathews, president, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace • Ambitious [and] authoritative | Truly interesting. • McClatchy-Tribune Regional News • A thoroughly researched and informative account | intelligently composed [and] sure to provoke discussion | Highly recommended. •

•The Midwest Book Review•Passionate | a refreshingly evenhanded overview of democracy's global prospects | [Diamond's] view | is wide-ranging and carefully considered, making this an especially effective work. • Kirkus Reviews

Lucid, non-technical and informative, the book is comprehensive in scope as well. It covers all important issues relating to the building of genuine democratic governments throughout the world. I am particularly impressed by Diamond's efforts to distinguish between real and pseudo-democracies and also his rebuttal against counter-democratic arguments. In my view, democracy is not omnipotent, however, it is the only form of government to offer the best protection of liberty. After all, democracy is hard to build and it is even harder to work well and consolidate. In Diamond's words, 'For democracies to endure, their leaders and citizens must internalize the spirit of democracy.' (P.294) Faith in democracy matters most.

Although the author brings to bear a knowledge magisterial in its breadth, based on literally decades spent in the study and promotion of democracy, many chapters collapse under the sheer weight of their ponderous lists and country-specific minutiae. Consequently, I often found myself at a loss when trying to identify the main arguments of each chapter. I found the tightest argument in the final chapter. In it, Diamond argues that the growing flaws and increasing dysfunction of American democracy lessen its normative influence around the globe, which he sees as one of the keys to sustaining the third wave of democratization. This chapter would be well supplemented by a brief discussion of Lawrence Lessig's work on institutional corruption, which it predates by a couple of years. Perhaps that might make it into a revised edition.

The Spirit of Democracy by Larry Diamond is a great book for those who are looking for insight into the often debated question of if democracy is a universal desire throughout the world. There are often discussions of democracy versus more controlled governmental systems, and the current state of democracy in the world. Diamond goes deeply into the configuration of a democracy, demonstrating that it is not only elections, it is also a set of institutions that work together to guarantee a level playing field politically and certain freedoms, especially of minorities and of speech. The book is peppered with practical examples of successes and failures, with interesting analysis on the reasons. For those who engage in discussions about the future of societies and whether democracy is a universal value (Diamond certainly thinks so) and if so, how to spread it, this book is a great reference point.

Gives you a better understanding of democracy from different perspectives and contexts. One size does not fit all or the Western idea of democracy is not necessarily the ideal.

Some interesting perspectives and statistics, but, overall, a painfully repetitious book. Could have been a third the length and delivered the same lessons.

This is a comprehensive presentation of how democracy has fared throughout the world. Given the Arab Spring and the struggles of people under authoritarian rule, the book provides useful information as to how democracy can fail and what steps might be taken to help ensure the successful establishment of democratic institutions.

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