

MORE THAN
VOTING



DEMYSTIFYING
DEMOCRACY

How democratic is your democracy?

Your community is trying to decide where to build a new park.

SCENARIO 1A: A community leader talks to each of the others, gathering their thoughts. After their conversations, the leader decides to build the park in a quiet, central location.

SCENARIO 1B: After talking to the community members, the leader decides to build the park right outside their own home on the outskirts of the community!

The community leader failed to prioritize the needs of the community above their own. Luckily, **democratic processes** can provide transparency to reveal this failure.

SCENARIO 1B (cont): Finding the decision suspect, the rest of the community members call a vote, do you support the proposed spot for the park?



The community's trust broken, they appoint someone else to make decisions. This also acts as a preventative measure for other leaders who might choose to abuse the community's trust.

Here, voting is a **democratic process** that reveals untrustworthy actors. However, it's still the responsibility of the community to hold those untrustworthy actors accountable.

Your community is trying to decide whether to build a thoroughfare. The chosen location is in the vicinity of a popular park.

SCENARIO 2A: A vote is held.

Yes		8
No		7

The road wins narrowly, but the community is divided between the necessity of the thoroughfare and the danger to parkgoers.

SCENARIO 2B: A community leader talks to each community member, gathering their thoughts. Afterwards, the leader decides to build the road but in a new location further from the park.

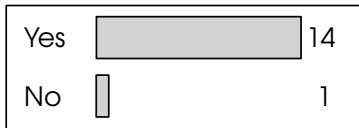
SCENARIO 2A shows that voting isn't a cure-all. Despite having a **democratic process**, the **outcome** leaves many of the community unhappy. Even those who voted for the chosen outcome may still have misgivings or concerns that remain unaddressed.

SCENARIO 2B did not involve a **democratic process**, but the **outcome** addressed the concerns of the community, and better saw to the needs of the people.

Both **outcome** and **process** are important parts of evaluating our decision making for democracy.

There's a fire in the community hall. You all (somewhat frivolously) hold a vote on what to do.

Should we pour water on the fire?



SCENARIO 3A: Since the situation is somewhat urgent, you ignore the holdout and throw water on the fire.

Unfortunately, the holdout was the one person who knew the fire was actually a grease fire. The fire spreads!

Even though everyone wanted to put out the fire, they were missing critical information they needed to make the right decision.

SCENARIO 3B: Despite the time-sensitivity, you convene and discuss the outcome of the vote. In the deliberation, it becomes obvious that water is the wrong solution, and you smother the fire instead.

If people are going to participate in decision making, they need **access to information** and **time for deliberation** so they can make good decisions.

Sometimes it makes sense to delegate to experts to make decisions on the community's behalf, but the community still needs to hold those experts accountable (see Scenario 1), so fostering knowledge and setting aside time for deliberation are critical to making democracy work.

Democracy means **rule by the people**.

Though these examples set up (mildly contrived) situations modulating **process, outcomes, and information**, the common thread is that for democracy to work, the people need the time and resources to participate.



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