

# Radical Democracy

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## Definition:

Radical democracy is the concept that the current situation in most countries that claim to be democratic are, in fact, not really governments of the people. Radical democrats believe that the system must include a popular takeover of power based on truly collaborative and collective public will, income equality and wealth distribution (Turner, 2015). Lummis has also described radical democracy as “when people act together spontaneously, joined by the trust they place in one another (116).”

## Historical Roots:

Radical democracy means more than just participating or voting to be a part of the system. Beginning as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, progressives like Mary Parker Follett argued for governmental and communal reform based on radical theories of deeply collaborative arrangements between citizens and their government. In the 1960s, Sheldon Wolin, Carole Pateman, and Jacques Rancière began to build a literature questioning what level of participation actually means in a democracy. Social movements like Occupy Wall Street, youth movements, and climate justice all seek to reimagine how civil society operates in a democratic system.

## Significance to Civic/Political Engagement:

In the last several decades, citizens have felt more and more excluded from their local power structures. Whether through voter suppression, rising income inequality, the flow of campaign contributions from large corporations and unions into the political process, democracy feels like an elite spectator sport. Radical democracy, as envisioned, would right-side these inequities and produce better societies.

## Further Scholarly Resources:

### Scholarly Articles:

- Fung, A. & Cohen, J. (2004). “Radical Democracy.” *Swiss Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 4.
- Turner, J. (2015). The Constitution of Radical Democracy. *Polity*, 47(4), 558–565.
- Stout, M. (2010). Back to the Future: Toward a Political Economy of Love and Abundance. *Administration & Society*, 42(1), 3–37.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399710363681>
- Vick, J. (2015). Participatory versus radical democracy in the 21st century: Carole Pateman, Jacques Rancière, and Sheldon Wolin. *New Political Science*, 37(2), 204–223.

*Books:*

- *The New State* by Mark Parker Follett. (1918)
- *The Paris Commune: A Revolution in Democracy* by Donny Gluckstein. (Haymarket Books, 2011).
- *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* by Sheldon Wolin. (Little, Brown and Company, 1960).
- *Radical Democracy* by C. Douglas Lummis. (Cornell University Press, 1996).

*Websites:*

- Radical Democracy Conference at The New School for Social Research (NYC)  
<https://www.radicaldemocracy.org/>

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