

TED TALK: DEMOCRACY AND THE PANDEMIC

TED TALK DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR AMERICAN SPACES

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FILM INFORMATION

Year Release: 2020

Duration: 15 minutes

English Level: Intermediate

Speaker: Joshua Seth Kleinfeld

Themes: Democracy, COVID-19

TED Talk Link

Democracy and the Pandemic

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TED TALK CONTEXT

In this thoughtful talk, Professor Joshua Kleinfeld looks at how the pandemic has tested the world's democracies. While democratic governments have traditionally delivered prosperity, security, and stability, for many countries COVID-19 has created a need to temporarily limit some freedoms and made citizens question whether their government can address the biggest problems they face. Professor Kleinfeld believes that while democracies are being challenged, they are the best form of government to overcome these challenges.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Joshua Kleinfeld is a full professor with tenure at Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law and in Northwestern's philosophy department. He has been a visiting professor at both Harvard and Stanford Law Schools. He has also practiced law in Northwestern's Juvenile Criminal Defense Clinic and holds a JD degree from Yale Law School.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of STATE
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

KEY VOCABULARY

Democracy – a form of government in which people choose their leaders or decide legislation by voting.

Individual rights – the rights of citizens to pursue their lives and goals without interference. The right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" is an example of individual rights as stated in the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

The Berlin Wall – was built by the Soviet controlled communist government of East Germany during the Cold War to prevent its population from fleeing to West Berlin, controlled by the democratic allies. The Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was considered the beginning of the end of communism in Eastern and Central Europe.

Authoritarianism – a form of government characterized by a strong central power to preserve the status quo, limiting the rule of law, power sharing, and democratic voting.

PRESIDENT BIDEN TO HOST DEMOCRACY SUMMIT

[Secretary Blinken: Making Democracy Deliver for the Americas \(Video\)](#)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *The pandemic led to some individual freedoms - like the freedom of assembly- to be restricted temporarily to reduce the spread of COVID-19 . Did this happen where you live? How did people react?*
- *Can you think of other situations when an individual's freedoms must be limited in some way for the benefit of the larger society?*
- *Professor Kleinfeld discusses the fall of the Berlin Wall - and how that event ultimately led to millions of people being freed from communist governments. Have you ever lived under an authoritarian form of government? What do most people in your community think about democracy? In what ways are democracies under pressure in today's world?*
- *Democracy can be 'messy,' in the sense that people have different views and debates on issues, and at times it is difficult to find consensus on how to use resources to solve problems. Do you think this is good? Why?*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Share America: Democracy Summit \(video\)](#)
- [Annenberg: Understanding Democracy - a pocket guide](#)