

I. ROZPRAWY I ANALIZY

DOI: 10.17951/et.2023.35.261

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What does the Internet tell the linguist about American democracy?

Czego językoznawca może dowiedzieć się o amerykańskiej demokracji z Internetu?

Abstract: This article presents the results of a study of the cultural concept of DEMOCRACY in American English, mainly in its contemporary usage (20th and 21st centuries). It investigates data from online dictionaries and other sources on the semantics of the lexemes *democracy*, *democrat*, *democratic*, and their systemic characteristics, as well as data from an associative dictionary. Examples are taken from COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and COHA (Corpus of Historical American English).

The concept closest to DEMOCRACY is FREEDOM. However, in contrast to FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY is a non-personal concept and totally belongs to the socio-political system. This is what emerges from the use of the word *democracy* (and related words) in all discourse types.

Citizens of the United States generally value democracy highly as a political. Americans are proud of the level of democracy in their country, although this assessment may vary. In the linguistic worldview of US residents, the concept of DEMOCRACY is represented through oppositions: 1) positive/negative attitude towards democracy as a type of political system; 2) “good”/“bad” (“insufficient” or “excessive”) democracy; 3) ideal/real democracy. Currently, American society is highly polarized along party lines, and any contradiction “fits” into the conceptual grid of its two-party system associated with democratic (liberal) vs. republican (conservative) views.

Key words: cultural concept; linguistic worldview; Internet; DEMOCRACY; the USA

This article presents the results of a study of the cultural concept of DEMOCRACY in American English. The concepts of DEMOCRACY in the

linguistic worldviews¹ of the speakers of British and American English have much in common. However, comparing British and American English was not the goal of this paper – the data come from American English of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Important texts on democracy in the United States

The special status of American democracy in the world is well known: the number of works devoted to American democracy is endless, including the classics *Democracy in America* by Alexis Tocqueville (Tocqueville 2002; first edition 1835–1840) and *Democracy: An American Novel* by Henry Adams (Adams 2008; first edition 1880). There is, of course, a vast literature on the history of democracy in the US, such as Sean Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (Wilentz 2005).

Since the concept of DEMOCRACY is important for US citizens, there are special sites dedicated to rankings of publications about democracy, for example, <https://bookauthority.org/books/best-democracy-books>. In addition, the rating of publications is tracked on the websites of online bookstores. In particular, Sarah Kendzior's book *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Invention of Donald Trump and the Erosion of America* (Kendzior 2020), which will be discussed below, is featured on amazon.com as *Instant New York Times Bestseller, Washington Post Bestseller, USA Today Bestseller, Indie Bound Bestseller, Authors Round the South Bestseller, Midwest Indie Bestseller*, and has a rating of 4.8 out of the maximum 5.0.

An example of popular recent research is Pete Hegseth's book *American Crusade: Our Fight To Stay Free* (Hegseth 2020). Both this and other studies demonstrate that the ideas of struggle, war, and threats constantly accompany the concept of DEMOCRACY in the latest works. The need to fight for democracy is correlated with the need to overcome the split in society. The people of the United States are divided for a variety of reasons: economic, political, religious, racial, etc., writes David French (French 2020). Sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists often blame the media for social divisions. The negative role of the press is analyzed by Matt Taibbi (Taibbi 2021). According to the author, the mass media, nurturing hatred and discord, not only profit but also strengthen their positions. The role

¹ “The linguistic worldview is an interpretation of reality in language, which can be represented as a complex of judgments about the world” (Bartmin'skiy 2005: 88; see also Rudenka 2018). This and other terms used in cognitive ethnolinguistics (*cognitive definition, profiling*) are discussed, for example, in Bartmin'skiy (2005) or Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska (2020).

of propaganda on the Internet and social networks is usually also assessed negatively (see Benkler, Faris, Roberts 2018), which will be discussed below.

Social opposition is often realized in relation to the Democratic or Republican party; any belief is qualified as democratic or conservative, regardless of the partisan affiliation of the individual. The idea of a bipartisan, polarized America is foisted on society by party leaders and the media. Authors of contemporary socio-political studies insist on overcoming the bipolar bipartisan vision, as, for example, in Drutman (2020). A unique publication is Jordan Blashek and Christopher Haugh's *Union: A Democrat, a Republican, and a Search for Common Ground* (Blashek and Haugh 2020). The preface to the book, posted on amazon.com, says:

Two friends – a Democrat and a Republican – travel across America “on a deeply personal journey through the heart of a divided nation... to find growth, hope and fundamental strength in their own lives” (Bob Woodward) and the country they love, in good times and bad.

In the year before Donald Trump was elected president, Jordan Blashek, a Republican Marine, and Chris Haugh, a Democrat and son of a single mother from Berkeley, CA, formed an unlikely friendship... They decided to hit the road in search of reasons to strengthen their bond in an era of strife and partisanship. What follows is a three-year adventure story, across forty-four states and along 20,000 miles of road to find out exactly where the American experiment stands at the close of the second decade of the twenty-first century (<https://www.amazon.com/Union-Democrat-Republican-Search-Common/dp/0316423793>).

Among the most popular publications on democracy in recent years, there are many dealing with Donald Trump, such as Kendzior (2020) or Wehner (2019). Despite the general recognition that Trump's influence on democracy in the United States was sharply negative, his books are readily published by leading publishers, and he is among the opinion leaders on democracy.

Most politicians since the beginning of the United States have spoken of democracy; it was mentioned in every socially significant text. One of the earliest uses come in the speeches of Frances Wright, writer, feminist, utopian socialist, and social reformer:

Sparta, when she conceived her democracy, commenced with educational equality; when she aimed at the national union, she cemented that union in childhood at the public board, in the gymnasium, in the temple, in the common habits, common feelings, common duties, and common condition (Wright 1829: 31).

The study of the concept of DEMOCRACY in American English is complex not only due to the active use of the lexeme *democracy* in written and spoken English, but also due to the abundance of reference materials: various dictionaries (paper and electronic), thesauri, text corpora. This applies to

English in general and American English in particular. To give but one example, Figure 1 presents data on the frequency of the word *democracy* worldwide (Collins Online Dictionary).

Trends of

democracy

View usage for:



Figure 1. Frequency of English *democracy* on the Web

Systemic data

This article presents lexicographic data that shows the semantics of the lexemes *democracy*, *democrat*, *democratic* and their systemic characteristics. The main focus was placed on American dictionaries, but general English dictionaries (dictionaries of collocations, word-building dictionaries, etc.) were also used because they represent the vocabulary common to all variants of English and, accordingly, the conceptual structures of most English native speakers. The most well-known dictionaries, such as Oxford, or Cambridge, or, for example, Macmillan Collocations Dictionary, provide information on American usage whenever this is relevant. For the lexeme *democracy* and related words with the same root, these dictionaries do not record the differences between American and British English.

According to *The Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary* and *The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, *democracy* (plural *democracies*) has the following meanings:

1a: government by the people, *especially*, the rule of the majority: *representative democracy, the principles of democracy*

1b: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections

- 2a: a political unit that has a democratic government
 2b: [countable] a country which has this system of government: *Western democracies; I thought we were supposed to be living in a democracy*
 3 (capitalized): the principles and policies of the Democratic party in the U.S.: *from emancipation Republicanism to New Deal Democracy* – C. M. Roberts
 4: the common people especially when constituting the source of political authority
 5: the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges: *the fight for justice and democracy*

In *The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, *democracy* is synonymous with the nouns *republic*, *self-government*, and *self-rule*. Dictionaries offer different versions of synonyms and antonyms for *democracy*. *Webster Thesaurus* (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/democracy>) provides an extended list of synonyms: *sovereignty*, *autonomy*, *pure democracy*, *home rule*, *self-determination*, and antonyms *dictatorship*, *tyranny*, *monarchy*, *totalitarianism*, *despotism*, *monocracy*.

Derivatives of *democracy* are:

democrat

1. a person who believes in or supports democracy; 2. *Democrat* (abbreviation *D*, *Dem.*) a member or supporter of the Democratic Party

democratic

1. (of a country, state, system, etc.) controlled by representatives who are elected by the people of a country; connected with this system: *a democratic country, a democratic system, democratic government. They are aiming to make the institutions of the EU truly democratic. Exercise your democratic right to vote*
2. based on the principle that all members have an equal right to be involved in running an organization (*democratic participation, a democratic decision*)
3. based on the principle that all members of society are equal rather than divided by money or social class (*a democratic society, democratic reforms*)
4. *Democratic* (abbreviation *Dem.*, *D*) connected with the Democratic Party (*the Democratic senator from Oregon*)

democratically

1. by representatives who are elected by the people of a country; with all members having an equal right to be involved in running an organization, etc. (*The decision was made democratically*)

Internet-thesaurus provides other derivatives of *democracy*: *anti-democracy* (noun, plural) *anti-democracies*, (adjective) *non-democracy*, (noun, plural) *non-democracies*, *pre-democracy*, (noun, plural) *pre-democracies*, (adjective) *pro-democracy*, and derivatives of *democratic*: *democratize*, *democratization*, *undemocratic*, *anti-democratic*. *The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary* proposes only two collocations for the noun *democracy*: *pure democracy* and *social democracy*.

Compatibility of the noun *democracy* is listed in great detail in other English dictionaries, for example *Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary*:

ADJ.: American, genuine, true, political, constitutional, parliamentary, multi-party, Western

VERB + democracy: believe in / support (people who believe in true democracy), fight for / establish / restore (The military regime has promised to restore democracy soon)

PREP.: in a/the (We live in a multi-party democracy)

PHRASES: E-democracy / electronic democracy / digital democracy / Internet democracy, pro-democracy (a pro-democracy demonstration in the capital), the road to democracy (the need to overcome political apathy and advance on the road to democracy), the spread of democracy

The *Collins Online Dictionary* lists a number of frequent collocations with the word *democracy*, listed alphabetically: *direct democracy, electoral democracy, embrace democracy, establish democracy, established democracy, fledgling democracy, form of democracy, fragile democracy, functioning democracy, institution of democracy, modern democracy, multi-party democracy, popular democracy, promote democracy, representative democracy, respect democracy, restoration of democracy, restore democracy, return of democracy, socialist democracy, spread democracy, stable democracy, strengthen democracy, support democracy, triumph of democracy, undermine democracy, vibrant democracy.*

Among the set expressions, the most common model is *Adj + democracy*, as well as *democratic + Noun: democratic party, candidate, republican, leader, president*, etc. Numerous collocations with the word *democracy* additionally testify to its high usage.

Democracy and the Internet

I would like to pay special attention to the expressions *E-democracy, electronic democracy, digital democracy, and Internet democracy*. Obviously, the Internet has changed both the image of democracy in the worldview of the Americans (as well as elsewhere) and its state in the country. The impact of the Internet, in particular social networks, on democracy is being actively discussed, and above all in the US society – this is evidenced by specialized sites, such as E-Democracy.org. Here are two quotes from the forum at the site <http://forums.e-democracy.org/support/rules/full-rules/>:

Within the E-Democracy.org mission, each forum works to build community, public life, and democracy while maximizing total participation.

Many groups host forums that are very similar to those hosted by E-Democracy.org on their own sites, using similar or the same technology that we use... The mission of E-Democracy.org is expanded participation and stronger democracies and communities through the power of information and communication technologies and strategies, whether that be within or outside our network.

Another example of how the Internet is linked to all democratic processes is Charlton Mcllwain’s book *Black Software: The Internet & Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter* about the role of Black people in the development of the Internet and the role of the Internet in the fight against racism (Mcllwain 2019). But the influence of the Internet on the development of democracy is not always positive. This is evidenced by numerous publications in the press (e.g. *Foreign hacks attack our democracy, USA Today*, 18.12.2016), and more extensive studies, like the book by Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* (Benkler, Faris, Roberts 2018).

Social networks play a great role in the development of democracy, which is facilitated by the speed of dissemination of information, a huge audience, simple language, and communication techniques, as well as the use of special Internet features: visualization, embedded links, hypertext, etc. This point of view is supported by the Pew Research Center’s extensive research on the impact of social media on democracy, politics, and on society as a whole. The Pew Research Center’s final report was published on December 6, 2022 (Wike, Silver, Fetterolf et al. 2022). Its main finding are as follows (see also Figure 2):

1. Most members of the public say that social media has been good for democracy but has had important effects, both negative and positive, on politics and society.
2. More Americans see the negative political impact of the internet and social media, compared with other countries surveyed.
3. Social media is generally seen as effective in influencing politics and policies.
4. Social media is generally seen as a good thing for democracy – but not in the U.S.
5. Americans see more negative effects of the Internet and social media on society.
6. Large increase in social media use compared with a decade ago.
7. Social media use has grown sharply among older adults in the last decade.
8. Young adults see social media’s impact on democracy more positively than older adults in most countries.

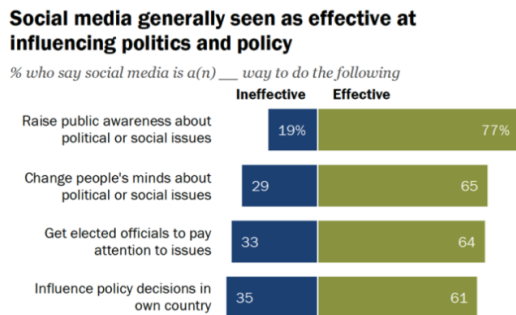


Figure 2. The effectiveness of social media at influencing politics and policy

The strong influence of social media on society is as Figure 3 (Wike, Silver, Fetterolf et al. 2022).

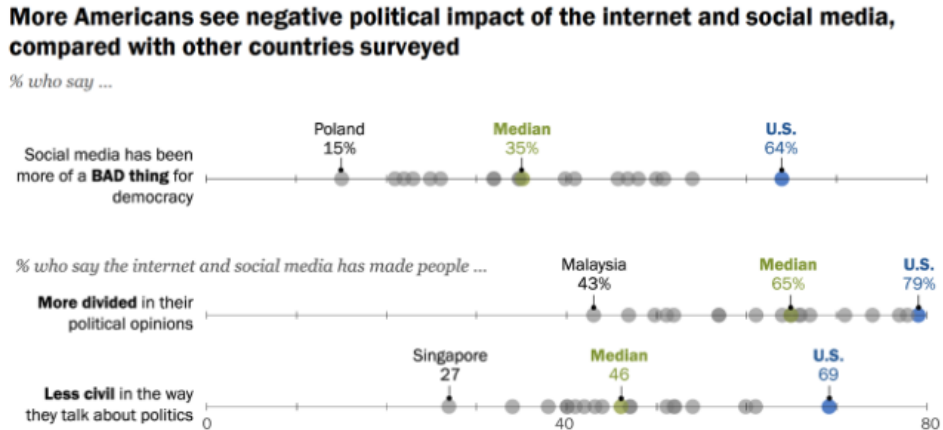


Figure 3. The political impact of the Internet and social media

Points 2, 4, 5 indicate that, of the respondents in 19 countries, Americans most often assess the impact of social media on democracy negatively: 64% negatively versus 34% positively. The problem of the negative impact of social networks on democracy was widely discussed, for example, in an open discussion “Is Social Media Good or Bad for Democracy?” that took place at <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/01/sunstein-democracy/>. In the opinion of many participants, the influence of social networks on the state of democracy and democratic values is negative. This is due to the unlimited possibilities for the dissemination of false information, manipulation, and lies (see Qanon,² Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal,³ etc.). Discussions and articles of this kind were very numerous, to name only Jon Berkeley’s article in *The Economist* (Berkeley 2017).

² “Qanon, a conspiracy theory originating in forum posts on the website 4chan in October 2017. Conspiracy adherents believed that U.S. Pres. Donald Trump was waging a secret war against a cabal of satanic cannibalistic pedophiles within Hollywood, the Democratic Party, and the so-called “deep state” within the United States government. With the aid of social media platforms, the theory expanded in content and geographic reach in subsequent years and resulted in legal protests as well as several violent criminal incidents” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/QAnon>).

³ “In the 2010s, personal data belonging to millions of Facebook users was collected without their consent by British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, predominantly to be used for political advertising” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook%E2%80%93Cambridge_Analytica_data_scandal).

Users of social networks tend to become accustomed to unverified information, do not treat it critically, and do not need to verify it; their interest in a topic or opinion result in the search engines actively “proposing” similar information and/or opinions, which makes the linguistic worldview of each particular user even more distorted. Political technologists actively use social networks for their own purposes, but the results are far from predictable. The gigantic amount of information, the speed of its dissemination, and the coverage of the audience lead to the phenomenon of the rule of the “invisible hand”: event B is provoked by event A, however, this is not a direct consequence, but only the realization of one of the possibilities.

The very nature of news content is changing: if the “event → information on the event and numerous comments” scheme worked before, now it is “numerous assumptions or fake information → event”. Modeling a possible future event on the Internet and mass discussion of it in social networks can change the future, i. e. provoke another event. Obviously, all these characteristics contradict the principles of democracy, when decisions are consciously and deliberately made by the majority of the population and are aimed at supporting universal human rights and values.

According to the report of the Pew Research Center, item 8 (Wike, Silver, Fetterolf et al. 2022), young generation of social media users see social media’s impact on democracy more positively than older adults. Figure 4 shows average data from 19 countries, but what is considered the most positive and the most negative is also important.

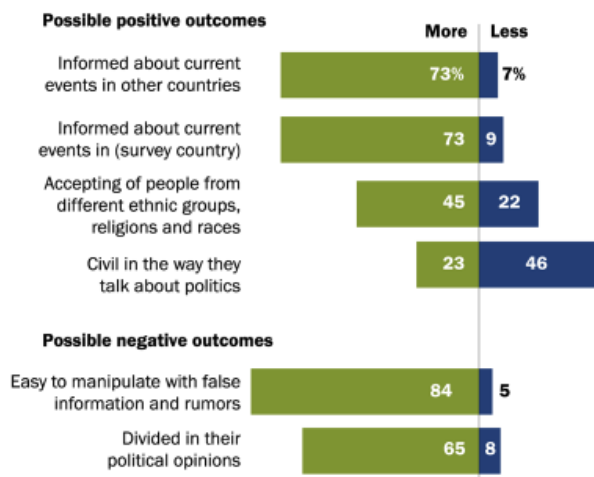


Figure 4. Positive and negative effects of social media

In countries with limited democracy or non-democratic ones, the information capabilities of the Internet can play a positive role as an alternative source of information, but sometimes it does not work (cf. what has been said above about the Internet and social media). In American and European scientific and journalistic publications, the negative impact of the Internet and social networks on democracy is discussed, but the positive aspects, such as E-democracy, availability of various kinds of information, the possibility of direct contact with the authorities, are omitted, because this is the usual norm, and the norm is not interesting and not discussed.

The collocation *American democracy* is recorded in collocation dictionaries (this means that it is frequent), but the Internet also contributes to its usage. When searched, open questions are first offered: *What is the American concept of democracy? What are the three ideals of American democracy? What are the five principles of American democracy?*, etc., with some answers suggested, such as:

Explore the five principles of popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism (<https://www.google.com/search?q=what+are+the+5+principles+of+american+democracy>).

Thus, it is very easy to obtain official US government information about American democracy on the Internet. This information is accessible, written in plain language, and intended for a wide audience.

Semantic network of the lexeme *democracy* in American English

On the Internet, the associative dictionary of American English *The University of South Florida word association, rhyme, and word fragment norms* presents results of an associative experiment. The experiment involved 146 informants, mainly students of the University of South Florida. The associations with Eng. *democracy* are *government* – 19 answers out of 146, *freedom* 16, *USA* 14, *republic* 13, *republican* 12, *politics* 9, *communism* 6, *vote* 4, *America* 4, *democrat* 4, *president* 3, *anarchy* 2, *majority* 2, *Russia* 2, *socialism* 2. Associations with the noun *democrat* are: *republican* 74, *Clinton* 16, *politics* 9, *president* 9, *politician* 3, and 2 responses each for *fair*, *liberal*, *republic*, *donkey* (the symbol of the US Democratic Party), *me* (Nelson, McEvoy, & Schreiber 1998). These associations indicate that the concepts of DEMOCRACY – DEMOCRAT are closely connected with the dichotomy of the two US parties: Democratic and Republican.

For the word *democracy* on the *Semantic Atlas* website (<http://www.atlas-semanticques.eu/?l=EN>), a semantic network can be built, which additionally represents the structure of its meaning (Figure 5).

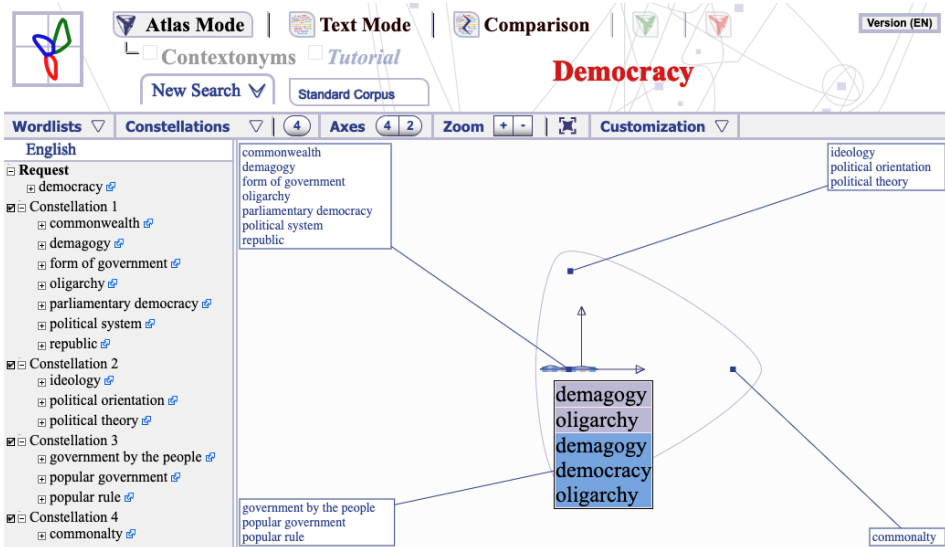


Figure 5. The semantic network of Eng. *democracy* (<http://www.atlas-semanticques.eu/?l=EN>)

The figure shows the most frequent contextonyms (in the terminology of the portal) of *democracy*, structured into 4 semantic nodes (Constellation 1-4). Each node can be expanded online – the first node is expanded in Figure 5. In fact, the nodes represent the conceptual aspects of democracy in the linguistic worldview of US residents: Constellation 1 – political aspect, Constellation 2 – ideological, Constellation 3 – socio-political, Constellation 4 – social.

The results of the associative experiment described by Douglas L. Nelson, Cathy L. McEvoy, & Thomas A. Schreiber (1998) show that the political component in the conceptual structure of DEMOCRACY is the strongest, and it necessarily manifests itself in relation to other aspects of life: social and ideological. In the conceptual structure of DEMOCRACY, there are no personal aspects: mental, everyday, or physical. Thus, DEMOCRACY completely belongs to the public sphere of life.

Democracy in US English corpora

Analysis of the meaning and compatibility of the lexemes *democracy*, *democratic*, and *democrat* is directly related to the analysis of corpus data.

The corpora of English (including the American variety of English) represent a very rich source of data. This article uses the corpora of the portal <https://www.english-corpora.org>, mainly COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and COHA (Corpus of Historical American English). A fully automated resource Sketch Engine (<https://app.sketchengine.eu/>) was used as an auxiliary source.

The COHA and COCA text corpora make it possible to assess the dynamics of the use of the lexeme *democracy* in American English from 1820 until 2010 (COHA). According to COHA, in 1820 the lexeme *democracy* was recorded in the corpus 30 times, in 1850 – 493 times, in 1900 – 614, in 1950 – 1,067, in 1980 – 1,112, and in 1990 – 1,137 times. The peak of the use of the word *democracy* falls in 1940: 1,874 times.

If we talk about stylistic distribution, then in the first decades after the appearance of *democracy*, it was used mainly in popular scientific magazines (marked MAG):

We shall be obliged, I think, to include the negroes in the great experiment of democracy (MAG: Contagion and the fever of the last season, *North American Review*, April 1820, 386–418).

By the beginning of the 20th century, the stylistic register of the word changed: *democracy* began to be increasingly used in fiction (FIC):

Better than the love of party is the love of honesty – and the Democracy of Jefferson can not thrive upon falsehood (FIC: Gholson, E. A., 1900, *The Voice of the People*, Glasgow).

His own country was in the midst of a century-long parabolic descent, a plutocratic democracy devolving into an authoritarian kleptocracy... (FIC: Moyer, J.D., *The Equationist*, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, 01.01.2018, Vol. 134, Issue 1–2).

By the middle of the 20th century, the lexeme *democracy* prevails in the media: on television and in the press, and by the beginning of the 21st century academic discourse (ACAD) begins to dominate. It is implemented mainly in specialized journals such as *Business and Economic Horizons*, *Cato Journal*, *Harvard Law Public Policy*, *Foreign Affairs* and others, e.g.:

... cultural “common sense”, patriarchal religion, and “malestream” democracy have been exclusive of women... (ACAD: *Exploring Chinese Feminist Theolog*, 01.01.2019).

In addition to academic discourse (ACAD), the noun *democracy* is often used in a conversational style (SPOK) and in blogs (BLOG):

Ancient Israel was a theocracy, not a democracy, and the Levitical laws have never applied to Christians (BLOG: <http://freethoughtblogs.com/blaghag/2012/08/conservative-pundit-wants-underground-railroad-to-kidnap-children-of-gay-parents/>).

The next position in terms of frequency in today’s American English is the press (see Rudenko 2019). In the American press, there are many contexts with the word *democracy*, it is actively debated, and the role of the press in the formation and maintenance of democracy is emphasized, e.g.: "Fake news threatens democracy, Obama says" (USA Today, 17.11.2016). The press can also express a very skeptical attitude towards democracy, in particular towards democracy in the United States:

American Democracy Was Never Designed to Be Democratic (Menand, L. *New Yorker*, August 15, 2022).

In a brief review of the literature on American democracy, it was said that this concept is associated with the concepts of struggle, threat, protection, etc. This is also true of corpus data:

Two years ago, the United States’ democratic system of government faced an unprecedented test when supporters of President Donald Trump sought to overturn his election defeat – some through extralegal schemes, others through a violent assault on the U.S. Capitol. Since that historic low point, American democracy has begun to function better, and its prospects have begun to improve (Carter, E. B, Carter, B. L., & Diamond, L. American Democracy Is Still in Danger. How to Protect It From Enemies Foreign and Domestic, *Foreign Affairs*, January 6, 2023).

The frequency of the word *democracy* in different styles and genres, according to COCA, is shown in Figure 6.

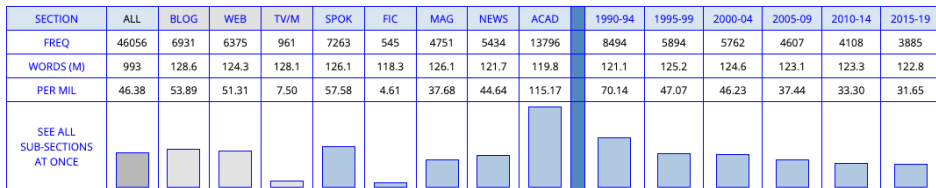


Figure 6. The frequency of the word *democracy* (source: COCA)

Data on the increase in the frequency of the noun *democracy* from 1900 to 1990 were given earlier; as it can be seen from Figure 6 that from 1990 to 2019 its use was declining.

Analysis of the frequency of the lexeme *democracy* in text corpora allows us to assess which of the meanings of the word is the most common. Despite the lack of semantic annotation in COHA and COCA, this is possible due to the fact that in the meaning of ‘country in which a democratic system of government operates’, the word is usually used in the plural (it is meaning 2 in *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, see above). According to Sketch Engine, the frequency of *democracies* is currently 92,795 (2.15 per million characters, i.e. 0.00022%), which is 15 times less than the frequency of

democracy – 1,470,805 (34.11 per million characters, 0.0034%). Thus, in the meaning of ‘government by the people, especially, rule of the majority’ (meaning 1 in *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, see above), the lexeme *democracy* is much more common in American English. The same information is confirmed by data from COHA (Figure 7). The corpus recorded a surge in the use of the word *democracies* in the 1940s when young democracies were born in post-war Europe, and, to a lesser extent, in the 1990s, when new countries appeared on the map after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The screenshot shows the COHA interface with search results for 'DEMOCRACIES' and 'DEMOCRACY'. The top navigation bar includes 'SEARCH', 'FREQUENCY', 'CONTEXT', and 'ACCOUNT'. Below the navigation bar, there are links for 'ON CLICK: CONTEXT', 'TRANSLATE (??)', 'ENTIRE PAGE', 'GOOGLE', 'IMAGE', 'PRON/VIDEO', and 'BOOK (HELP)'. The main table displays the frequency of the words across various years from 1820 to 2010.

HELP	①	★	ALL	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	
1	①	★	DEMOCRACIES	1445	7	48	11	26	18	9	12	36	29	58	50	165	263	112	73	69	120	164	81	94
HELP	①	★	ALL	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	
1	①	★	DEMOCRACY	16059	30	333	424	493	505	455	512	645	614	1094	1155	1286	1874	1067	851	654	1112	1137	950	868

Figure 7. The frequency of the forms *democracies* and *democracy* in COHA

In COCA, the most frequent collocations of the lexeme *democracy* are also noted: nouns – *freedom, transition, America, movement*, verbs – *promote, restore, undermine, defend*, adjectives – *American, liberal, political, Western*. They are different from the collocations in the *Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary* (ADJ.: *American, genuine, true, political, constitutional, parliamentary, multi-party, Western*; VERB + *democracy: believe in, support, fight for, establish, restore*), which is because the *Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary* is based mostly on British English.

The online database Sketch Engine determines for the modern lexeme *democrat* almost the same frequency as for *democracies* – 919.286, i.e. 21.32 per million characters (0.0021%).

In modern American English, *Democrat* is almost always used in the sense of member of the Democratic Party’:

... one effect of the Republican assault on elections – which takes the form, naturally, of the very thing Republicans accuse Democrats of doing: rigging the system – might be to open our eyes to how undemocratic our democracy is. Strictly speaking, American government has never been a government “by the people” (*Foreign Affairs*, January 6, 2023).

Out of a hundred random examples, only in seven cases is the word written with a lowercase letter, and only 3 examples from them name not a member of the Democratic Party, but a supporter of democratic views:

Benjamin Rush signed the Declaration of Independence and served in the Presidential administrations of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison – each of whom

came from a different political party. And of what party was Rush? I have been alternately called an aristocrat and a democrat. I am now neither. I am a Christocrat. I believe all power... will always fail of producing order and happiness in the hands of man (Kevin Craig for Congress – Christian Libertarian for Missouri’s 7th Congressional District. <http://kevincraig.us/>).

Unlike the lexeme *democracy*, the lexeme *democrat*, according to COHA, has been used in American English since 1830. According to Łozowski (2023), it appeared in British English at the same time, although *democracy* is recorded in British English from the 16th century, and its derivatives – from the beginning of the 17th century. In the 19th century, in American English *democrat* was also often used in the sense of ‘a member or supporter of the Democratic Party’, but less often than in the first meaning of ‘a person who believes in democracy or supports it’, while capitalization was used inconsistently with respect to the semantics. The earliest contexts are given below:

The parties of Mexico have been compared to the Federalists and Democrats of the United States. This comparison is in most respects as unfair as the others to which we have had occasion to refer. In some particulars only there may be detected a slight shade of resemblance. Federalist and Democrat, even with us, are words which convey no adequate idea of the opinions, which those who invented the names severally professed. Each party was in fact composed of individuals differing on many points, and often directly agreeing upon none. Mr. Madison was a Federalist in 1787, and without changing any one of his political opinions became a Democrat in 1798 (*Politics of Mexico*, *North American Review*, July 1830: 110–154).

What a succession of demons afterwards controlled the public affairs of France, who, deluding the infatuated people with the ceaseless, false and senseless outcry and jargon of liberty, equality, the rights of man, tyranny, priestcraft, aristocrat, democrat, citizen and patriot, never hesitated to violate every precept of religion, every moral duty, and every feeling of humanity, and carried their extravagance to the height of the most blasphemous impiety (Oliver, B. L., 1832, *The rights of an American citizen; with a commentary on State rights, and on the Constitution and policy of the United States*, Philadelphia: P.Nicklin & T. Johnson).

According to COHA and COCA, the frequency of the word *democrat* grows until the 1960s, then until the second half of the 1990s there is a decline, which again switched to growth in the 2000s (from 26.33 cases per million uses in 2000 to 35.89 in 2019).

In contrast to the lexeme *democracy*, in modern American English, the word *democrat* is most actively used in conversational style (SPOK):

John Dickerson: Democrats, you know this well, come to you and say, you’re not a Democrat. Why are you running in the Democratic primary?

Senator Bernie Sanders: Well, first of all, I am a member of the Democratic leadership. I’ve been in the Democratic caucus (SPOK: President Trump is back in Washington after

a speech in Miami where he focused on the crisis in Venezuela, *CBS News: CBS This Morning*, 2019, 19.02.19).

Just like the noun *democrat*, the adjective *democratic* in modern American English is actively used in a conversational style (SPOK) and – further – in the news (NEWS) and blogs (BLOG) (Figure 8), e.g.:

... the number one priority of the Republican Party during Obama's first term was to do whatever was necessary to undermine the success of Democratic proposals, policies, and programs – even at the detriment of the majority of the American people – so that Obama could be perceived by conservatives as a failure (BLOG: A LONG List of President Obama's Accomplishments – <http://www.addictinginfo.org/2012/09/01/a-long-list-of-president-obamas-accomplishments-with-citations/>).



Figure 8. *Democratic* in COCA

As the data in COHA and COCA show, the lexeme *democratic* has been used since 1820. Its frequency steadily increased until the middle of the 20th century, then declined since the late 1990s. Later its frequency fluctuates a little (≈ 500 cases per million word usages). Unlike *democrat*, it is more common not in the sense of ‘associated with the Democratic party’, but in the more general senses ‘controlled by representatives who are elected by the people of a country; connected with this system’ or ‘based on the principle that all members have an equal right to be involved in running an organization’): *democratic government*, *democratic person*, *democratic views*.

Conclusion.

What we can generalize about American democracy

Below is an attempt to determine the most important features of the cultural concept of DEMOCRACY in the linguistic worldview of Americans.

Democracy in American English is a political system, a type of government, the main principle of which is the predominant consideration of the opinion of the majority, “the power of the people”, and at the same time – according to the metonymic principle – the aggregate subject (country, community, party) with this type of government, i.e. the subject of democracy is a people, a country, less often a social group or class. Therefore, the noun *democracy* involves three regular semantic transfers. The first one is the systemic metonymy ‘a type of political system’ > ‘a country with such a political system’. In addition, two conceptual metaphors are realized in the semantics of the word. The regular cognitive metaphor DEMOCRACY IS A LIVING BEING is expressed in anthropomorphization of the lexeme *democracy*, see, for example, the title of the bestseller *How Democracies Die* (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). The second regular metaphor is a representation of democracy as a physical, material object: *fragile democracy*, *to present democracy*, etc.

If a more general concept in relation to DEMOCRACY is a (POLITICAL) SYSTEM, then at a lower level of generalization there are types of democracy (both in the sense of a system of government’ and in the sense of a country with a democratic type of government’, implemented, as a rule, in combinations “Adj + democracy”: *constitutional*, *parliamentary*, *multi-party*, *direct*, *socialist democracy*, etc.).

The concept of DEMOCRACY fully belongs to the socio-political sphere – this characteristic appears when the lexeme *democracy* is used in any of the types of discourse. DEMOCRACY is a non-personal concept, but a socio-political and axiological one. It belongs to the network of other important socio-political concepts (REPUBLIC, SELF-GOVERNMENT, SOVEREIGNTY) and values (EQUALITY, FREEDOM, JUSTICE, SUFFRAGE, GOODNESS, HUMAN RIGHTS), which represent its positive aspects, as well as PARTICIPATION OF THE MAJORITY IN GOVERNMENT, FREE ELECTIONS, BROAD OPPORTUNITIES, HUMANITY, LEGALITY.

In general, people in the US rate democracy highly as a type of political system and social structure: as a rule, Americans are characterized by pride in the level of democracy in their country, although this assessment may vary.

According to text data, democracy has not only positive, but also negative features: first of all, it is fragile, and secondly, it lacks economic stability. The informants repeatedly expressed the idea that democracy is not ideal but it is the best possible form of political organization.

In the mentality of US citizens, along with the opposition 1) a positive/negative attitude towards democracy (in particular, towards democracy in the USA), two other oppositions are present, as can be concluded from the analysis of texts and the results of the associative experiment:

2) “Good” vs. “bad” democracy. “Good” democracy leads to equality, a successful economy and prosperity, and “bad” democracy is insufficient or excessive (its level is assessed, although it would seem that democracy either exists or it does not, this is not a gradual concept). Insufficient democracy does not provide the necessary freedoms, and its excess leads to anarchy and arbitrariness, both potentially provoking distortions in social and economic development.

3) Ideal vs. real democracy: real – especially when it comes to the United States – can be fake, illusory.

The concept of DEMOCRACY in the linguistic worldview of the inhabitants of the United States is characterized by one more feature: it is being blurred. The blurring of the primary concept of DEMOCRACY as “the power of the people” is realized in very frequent expressions such as *democracy of Britain*, *democracy of Norway*, which are actually oxymorons, since both Great Britain and Norway are monarchies (*in forma sed non substantia*). The concept of DEMOCRACY has become wider, it is understood as the realization of human rights, as a package of social freedoms. Democracy as a political system must guarantee only three things: 1) universal and equal suffrage; 2) the rule of law and the equality of all before it; 3) three independent branches of government (legislative, executive and judicial ones). Today, however, democracy means much more. For example, why can a violation of the rights of sexual minorities be interpreted as an attack on democracy, although no one deprives their representatives of the right to vote? How are the principles of democracy (see above) and the free sale of weapons related? According to the associative experiment and corpora, the understanding of democracy in the American worldview is much broader than the original semantics of the word. Democracy is interpreted as a set of liberal rights and freedoms that are associated with the Western way of life.

The concepts of DEMOCRACY and FREEDOM are so close because democracy is blurring into liberal freedoms, and these freedoms themselves are constantly capturing new frontiers.

However, despite the closeness of the concepts of DEMOCRACY and FREEDOM in the linguistic worldview of US citizens, they have one significant difference: DEMOCRACY is an impersonal concept. Its structure lacks aspects related to the individual: psychological, physiological, etc. It cannot be said that this devalues democracy but makes it not as vital as freedom. This is easy to prove: Internet searches return zero results for *(to) die for democracy*, while for *(to) die for freedom* results there are 10 pages of links, including the title of a popular song, which became a classic (band “Labyrinth”, 1998).

Currently, US society is highly polarized along party lines (this has been particularly evident since the Trump presidency), and any social contradiction “fits” into the conceptual grid of a two-party system. This opposition is represented in publications and Internet portals (some of which are discussed above), in the results of the association experiment (also presented above), and in many texts of the COCA and COHA corpora. Problems of equality – gender, religious, ethnic, etc. – have been discussed in the United States since the emergence of the state. There are social groups in the USA that can be assigned a more particular type of discourse (anarchist, feminist, people’s rights, etc.), but in modern United States, they are included in the context of party confrontation. Depending on how each particular person answers questions about the free sale of weapons, gender equality, the rights of sexual minorities, about the boundaries of social diversity, she/he will be classified as a Democrat or Republican, even if they are not a member of one of the two parties and/or do not share all party views. The liberal-democratic and conservative-republican worldviews are two different value systems represented by the citizens of the United States.

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Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań konceptu *DEMOCRACY* w amerykańskiej odmianie języka angielskiego. Materiał stanowiła głównie współczesna wersja amerykańskiej odmiany angielskiego (XX i XXI w.). Wykorzystano dane ze słowników internetowych i innych źródeł dotyczące semantyki leksemów *democracy* ‘demokracja’, *democrat* ‘demokrata’, *democratic* ‘demokratyczny’ i ich charakterystyki systemowo-językowej, a także dane ze słownika asocjacyjnego. Przykłady pochodzą z COCA – Corpus of Contemporary American English i COHA – Corpus of Historical American English.

Konceptem najbliższym *DEMOCRACY* jest *FREEDOM* (WOLNOŚĆ). Różnią się one jednak zasadniczo: *DEMOCRACY* jest konceptem nieosobowym i całkowicie należy do podsystemu społeczno-politycznego. Ta cecha pojawia się podczas używania leksemu *democracy* we wszystkich typach dyskursu.

Obywatele Stanów Zjednoczonych na ogół wysoko cenią demokrację jako rodzaj systemu politycznego; z reguły Amerykanie są dumni z poziomu demokracji w swoim kraju, choć ocena ta może być różna. W językowym obrazie świata mieszkańców USA koncept *DEMOCRACY* jest reprezentowany w opozycjach: 1) pozytywny/negatywny stosunek do demokracji jako rodzaju systemu politycznego; 2) demokracja „dobra” lub „zła” („niewystarczająca” lub „nadmierna”); 3) demokracja idealna lub realna. Obecnie społeczeństwo amerykańskie jest silnie spolaryzowane wzdłuż linii partyjnych, a każda sprzeczność „pasuje” do konceptualnej siatki systemu dwupartyjnego: poglądy demokratyczne (liberalne) / republikańskie (konserwatywne).

Słowa kluczowe: koncept; językowy obraz świata; Internet; demokracja; *DEMOCRACY*; Stany Zjednoczone