

WIZARDS

PROTECT

DEMOCRACY

In Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Voldemort told Harry, "there is no good and evil, there is only power...and those too weak to seek it." This is a mindset that we have seen permeating politics around the world as democratic countries vote into office those with little regard for legal restraints on their power and the rights of individuals. Almost [one third of people around the world](#) live in declining democracies. [Protect Democracy](#), an organization that wants to prevent the United States' democracy from declining into a more authoritarian form of government, has identified six key areas that demonstrate the decline of democracy in a country. The **six key areas** that demonstrate the decline of democracy can be complicated—that's the nature of politics—but if you're a fan of Harry Potter you're probably more familiar with them than you think.

Like Dumbledore's Army and the Order of the Phoenix, it's important for wizards fighting for good to fight for democracy and understand the threats against it.

Let's break it down:



CATEGORY 1: POLITICIZING INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS

Democracies are constructed to withstand the winds of any political rule or administration in order to ensure a more fair and just administration of the law. When democratic institutions become politicized -- that is, subservient to a particular ruler or party's personal whims rather than to the law -- people can no longer trust that the government is operating freely or fairly.



In the wizarding world, the Auror Office serves as law enforcement to protect the community, but during Voldemort's takeover of the Ministry, the Auror Office becomes corrupted. Rather than protecting the wizarding world from those who practice the Dark Arts, Aurors became part of the Ministry's efforts to protect its own power.

In the United States, we are seeing the politicizing of independent institutions. One example is through [attacks](#) on the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), which includes the FBI and federal prosecutors. The DOJ is tasked with the fair enforcement of federal law and administration of justice throughout the United States, and it's essential that DOJ leaders remain objective and nonpartisan. There have also been a number of [attacks on the federal civil service](#) or non-political public servants who rise through the ranks of government based on a merit system.



THINK ABOUT IT:

- ⚡ In what ways has law enforcement always been unfair to some people? (If you're not sure, take a look at the [Japanese American Incarceration](#), [inventing black and white](#), the [Native American genocide](#), and [police brutality](#).)
- ⚡ How does the politicization of the Department of Justice make that even worse?
- ⚡ How can you push back on attacks on independent institutions? (Not sure? Check out [Nobody is Above the Law](#).)

CATEGORY 2: SPREADING DISINFORMATION

Democracies rely on accurate information to be provided by the government so that people can hold power accountable. If people don't know what's happening, or worse, are purposefully being told lies, they can't hold people in power accountable for their actions.



When Voldemort gained full control of the Ministry they began putting out anti-muggle-born propaganda, but even before then his supporters spread misinformation and lies. People like Fudge and Umbridge consistently discredited Harry and Dumbledore's stories and character, leading well-meaning people like Seamus Finnigan to not put their support behind the cause.



In the United States, there is a lot of information that only the government has access to, or for which the government is considered the most trustworthy source for information. But in the last couple of years, we have seen the President make many [false statements](#) and the government put out [inaccurate reports](#). The Trump administration has said itself that [it has no information to support Trump's claims](#) that most people who've committed terrorism post-9/11 come from outside the country and [no information supporting the White House's claims](#) that it's the law to separate families at the border.



THINK ABOUT IT:

- ⚡ What does it mean for information to be true? What kinds of sources do you believe need to be included before something can be called a fact?
- ⚡ Can you remember a time when information from the government shaped your opinion about what you believe or policies you support?
- ⚡ How would your ability to understand and advocate for what our government should do change if you had less faith in information from the government?
- ⚡ What can you do to make sure the information you read or hear is true?
(Not sure? Check out the [News Literacy Project](#).)

CATEGORY 3: EXECUTIVE POWER GRABS

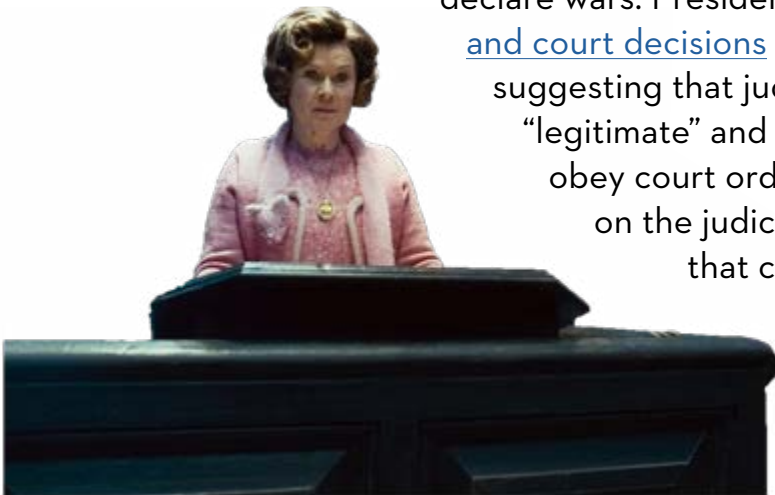
United States democracy relies on a system of checks and balances to divide power between different branches of government. This means that even the political leader of the executive branch can't make all of the decisions; other branches are required to provide checks and balances. This prevents one branch from becoming too powerful, and limits the potential for abuses of power.

Here's a prime example of how damaging executive power grabs can be: Dolores Umbridge. Sends a shiver down your spine, doesn't it? You may recall that Umbridge is appointed Defense Against the Dark Arts professor at Hogwarts by the government without the school's permission. She makes changes to the curriculum and institutes harsh forms of punishment. Later as the High Inquisitor and then as Headmistress, Umbridge strips away the rights of students and professors alike and is able to do this by her word alone.



Unsurprisingly, Umbridge moves on to run the Muggle-Born Registration Commission. The commission holds "trials" for muggle-borns to "prove" they are actually magical. Like pretty much every trial in the wizarding world, they do not assume the accused are innocent until proven guilty, guarantee any rights (including a trial by a jury of peers) to those accused, or even guarantee the accused representation.

In the United States, several presidents have engaged in military action [without explicit Congressional approval](#) despite the Constitution stating only Congress can declare wars. President Trump has also [attacked judges and court decisions](#) that he does not like, including by suggesting that judges who rule against him are not "legitimate" and that he and his friends don't have to obey court orders that they don't like. His attacks on the judiciary have gone so far as to suggest that certain courts should be [shut down](#) for not agreeing with him, prompting Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts to [speak up](#) in the courts' defense.



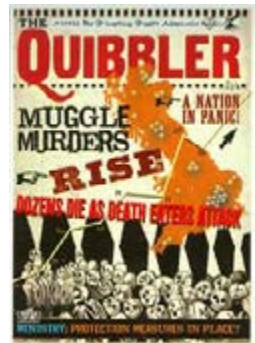
THINK ABOUT IT:

- ⚡ Why is it important that the executive branch's decisions are checked by other branches of government?
- ⚡ Why is it important that people believe judges are neutral?
- ⚡ Why does it matter that people have rights when they're being accused of a crime?
- ⚡ How can you advocate for other branches of government to provide a check on the President? *(Not sure? Check out this [guide](#) on engaging your Member of Congress.)*

CATEGORY 4: QUASHING DISSENT

The ability to disagree with the government is central to the idea that in a democracy the government is run by the people and for the people. The ability to disagree with those in power allows us to organize to create change.

When Voldemort first returns, the Ministry puts pressure on the *Daily Prophet* to actively discredit Harry and Dumbledore. This means that the government is actively working to attack those who critique them. Later it gets even worse when the *Daily Prophet* becomes a vehicle for anti-muggle-born propaganda out of fear of Voldemort and the Ministry, and dissenting journalists like Xenophilius Lovegood are silenced by threats of violence to him and his daughter.



In the United States, President Trump removed the security clearances of [a former intelligence official who publicly criticized him](#) and often uses his bully pulpit to attack people who disagree with him. We see President Trump referring to the news media as [“fake news”](#) and the [“enemy of the people”](#) when he disagrees with the coverage. Presidents Trump and Obama both tried to [ban journalists from attending press](#) events because they did not like their publications’ coverage, and President Trump has used his rallies to [incite anger and disgust toward journalists and our free press](#). We have also seen private companies, like the NFL, institute (and then freeze) [policies](#) in response to those who raised their voices in dissent in ways President Trump disagreed with, like [Colin Kaepernick](#). Executive retaliation against the press has become so extreme that PEN America, an organization representing writers and literary professionals, has filed a [lawsuit](#) against the President for using the powers of the federal government in violation of the First Amendment.

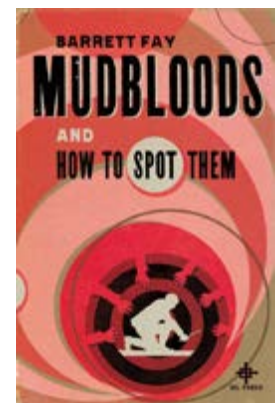
THINK ABOUT IT:

- ⚡ How have civil disobedience and critiques of the government helped the United States improve throughout history? *(Not sure? Consider what you've learned about the Civil Rights era. What other examples might there be?)*
- ⚡ Historically, how has the United States government used its power to silence dissent by some people?
- ⚡ How might President Trump calling media outlets he disagrees with “fake news” or the “enemy of the people” impact their reporting?
- ⚡ How can you support dissenters? *(Not sure? Check out [PEN America](#).)*

CATEGORY 5: DELEGITIMIZING MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

One of the most common ways that authoritarians undermine democracy is by creating division in a society—by creating an “us” and a “them.” Often, this involves blaming marginalized communities (meaning communities with less societal power or who’ve been historically oppressed—if you’d like to learn more, take a look at the [Social Justice section of Wizard Activist School](#)) for broader problems so that they are no longer considered part of the “us.”

In Harry Potter there was always bigotry towards people who came from non-magical families (muggle-borns). With the rise of Voldemort, it is heightened when the Muggle-born Registration Commission tells muggle-borns that they are not true wizards or witches, confiscates their wands, and separates them from their families for “unlawfully” possessing wands in the first place. These acts are preceded by an increase and casualness in using slurs to describe those from muggle-born families (i.e., “mudbloods”). This language normalizes the “othering” and dehumanizing of those people and makes it easier to justify later acts of bigotry.



In the United States, a central part of President Trump’s campaign for presidency involved using racist and racialized narratives, including describing Mexicans as [rapists](#) as part of his announcement that he was running for office. During the campaign, he threatened to institute a “[Muslim ban](#)” and create a [registry](#) of Muslims. Since taking office, President Trump has issued an [executive order](#) known as the “travel ban” or “Muslim ban” to prevent visitors from Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States.

Additionally, the [number of denaturalization cases](#) (cases where people who received their citizenship after coming to this country are having it taken away) filed under President Trump is nearly double the annual rate under previous presidents. The administration has created a denaturalization task force, so we expect this number to go up even further. He has also used language describing immigrants of color as “animals.” This language has become common in his [tweets](#) and in his [speeches](#). Research has actually [shown](#) that hate crimes have increased due to Trump’s anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant tweets, and in California alone, hate crimes against Latinos have risen more than 50% since 2016. In 2016, reported hate crime totals in the thirty-eight largest cities in the country rose 12%.

THINK ABOUT IT:

- ⚡ Try writing down a list of positive category words you hear used for people (i.e. “neighbor”). Now, make a list of negative category words you hear used for people (i.e. “illegal”). How do the words that we use to describe people help us feel closer to them or more distant from them?
- ⚡ How is the response to criticism or protest from marginalized communities different from that of other groups?
- ⚡ How does language or stories that make us afraid of people who are different from us change our willingness to support policies that remove people’s citizenship status?
- ⚡ How can you support marginalized communities against hate groups and hate speech? *(Not sure? Check out this [guide](#) on disrupting white nationalists.)*

CATEGORY 6: CORRUPTING ELECTIONS

The most fundamental feature of a democracy is the ability of the people to choose their own leaders. This happens through free and fair elections, which require that there are no artificial barriers to voting and voters can trust that their vote will be accurately counted.

In Harry Potter, while there is a government, there are no term limits. Furthermore, while the Ministry is obligated to hold a public election every seven years, in certain circumstances ministers have been appointed without a public vote (i.e. Scrimgeour). This means that there are times leaders are not chosen by the people that they represent. Also, the lack of term limits means that it is easier for a minister to consolidate power into the Ministry over time, moving towards a form of government that is more like a dictatorship.



In the United States, we have gradually expanded who is allowed to vote throughout our history. One large group of people who are not allowed to vote in many states is people who have been [convicted of felony crimes](#). We also continue to see efforts to [intimidate voters](#) to prevent them from voting, as well as barriers to voting such as [identification requirements](#) and the [short or inconvenient voting hours and long lines](#). We also know that in the 2016 election the Russian government successfully hacked into the election systems of [several state governments](#) and attempted to influence the election through the [information it spread](#).



THINK ABOUT IT:

- ⚡ Do you think the return of Voldemort and the Ministry response would have been different if all Ministry officials were elected? Why?
- ⚡ Why is it so important that you get to decide who represents you in government?
- ⚡ Do you think there is a tension between making sure elections are free with limited barriers to voting and making them secure so they are not impacted by foreign governments?
- ⚡ How can you help reduce barriers for everyone to be able to vote?
(Not sure? Check out [Spread the Vote.](#))

CALL TO ACTION:

After thinking about all of this, you may be feeling like there's nothing you can do—but that's not true! In fact, that's just what people like Voldemort and his Death Eaters want you to think. Now's the time to join Dumbledore's Army and become a dissenter—fight back!

What are you going to do to protect democracy? Let us know with #WizardsProtectDemocracy, or share your action pledge directly with Fandom Forward and Protect Democracy using the form below.

[SUBMIT YOUR ACTION PLEDGE HERE](#)

