

1<sup>st</sup> Place

9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Student Essay Contest | Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum

### The Benefits and Challenges of a Non-Violent, Democratic Society: Overcoming Obstacles for a Better Future

A non-violent, democratic society is one that prioritizes the values of equality, freedom, and justice. In such a society, the needs of all individuals are taken into account, and everyone has a say in the decision-making processes. The benefits of democracy are numerous, including greater social stability, economic prosperity, and the promotion of individual rights.

Perhaps one of the most significant benefits of a democratic society is the social stability that comes with an equal distribution of importance in the community. A non-violent society is built on the principle that all individuals have equal rights and opportunities, which pushes forward a sense of fairness and justice. When people feel that their voices are heard, they are less likely to turn to violence as a means of achieving their goals. Moreover, a democratic society provides a system of checks and balances that ensure the fair distribution of power and resources. This balance of power can prevent the rise of authoritarianism, as Nicole Hemmer describes it in the interview. "You are going to be a political prisoner. You're going to be silenced. You're going to be jailed. That feeds into a politics of violence." With the government having too much power over the common people, peace could not exist as democracy would only function in a form of mockery rather than as the back pillar of our society. Thus, it is important that individuals are allowed to participate in the democratic process of shaping our government to avoid creating widespread conflict.

Another incredibly beneficial aspect of a non-violent, democratic society would be the prosperity stemming from equality and trust. By encouraging people to be an active part of the government we allow for equal opportunities for each and every individual within our society. A structure like that enhances the ability of people to shape the legislature based on their needs. Given that anyone would be able to make an impact on the way the country is ruled, the community would stop suffering from unfair laws that only benefit certain subgroups. Instead of the rich and powerful having complete power, now everybody would be allowed to benefit from the government. This, in turn, promotes economic growth and development. When individuals are able to participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the economy, they are more likely to feel invested in their society and work to improve it whilst also improving their personal socio-economic position.

Lastly, a society that supports democracy nurtures the protection of individual rights. In a democratic society, the rights of all individuals are protected and valued. This includes the right to free

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speech, the right to privacy, and the right to participate in political processes. These liberties are essential for creating a society in which all individuals can thrive and reach their full potential as well as lead the country to prosperity.

However, despite the supposedly flawless system that a strictly democratic society is portrayed to be, there are some obstacles that are unavoidable. One of the biggest challenges is the rise of populism and nationalism. These ideologies often promote the exclusion of certain groups and the suppression of dissenting voices. This can lead to the erosion of democratic values and create a swing effect that would push people to the opposite side of the political spectrum. This would lead to the rise of authoritarianism which would have an opposite effect than desired. When individuals become more entrenched in their views and less willing to compromise, it can be difficult to find common ground and reach consensus. This can lead to gridlock and an inability to address important issues.

To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to promote dialogue and engagement between different social and demographic groups. This includes creating opportunities for individuals to engage in civil discourse and work together to find solutions to common problems. It is also imperative to promote education and media literacy to counter the spread of false information and disinformation. Yet, most importantly, the key to achieving a truly democratic and non-violent society would be finding common ground between the government and the people and allowing for mutual trust and the share of power.

In conclusion, a non-violent, democratic society offers numerous benefits, including social stability, economic prosperity, and the promotion of individual rights. However, such a society also faces significant challenges, including the rise of populism and the increasing polarization of political views. To overcome these challenges, it is essential to promote dialogue, engagement, and the development of strong, sense of equality amongst people. Only by working together can we create a society that values equality, freedom, and justice for all.