

# Democracy Matters 9

## **Lesson Seventeen: Listen for dangerous words.**

Be alert to the use of words like “extremism” and “terrorism”. Be alive to the dangers inherent in terms like “exception” and “state of emergency”. “States of exception,” in which normal rules are suspended, can easily be turned into permanent “states of emergency” if the public is not vigilant. Do not accept the treacherous use of patriotic vocabulary.

Whenever a government official suggests that you must surrender freedom for safety, be on your guard. These are rarely mutually exclusive ideas, and in a democracy such as ours, wherever possible, it is the government’s job to increase both simultaneously.

## **Lesson Eighteen: Be calm in the event of emergencies.**

Much of modern politics centers on managing people’s fear. If and when some kind of terrible incident arises, bear in mind that history teaches us things can change very quickly and often not for the better. A sudden disaster may give rise to voices calling for the end of checks and balances, the dissolution of opposition parties, the suspension of freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, etc. Do not fall for it.

We have seen other countries lose their democracies when their citizens, understandably overcome by fear and grief, allowed these feelings to enable the destruction of their institutions. If we want to hold on to ours, this will mean pushing through our feelings to recognize and resist others’ attempts to exploit them, from the moment of the attack, precisely when it seems most difficult to do so.

(Adapted from Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Vintage Digital, 2017.)