

# Democracy : The Hollow Facade without Human Rights

## Outline

### I. Introduction

**Thesis statement:** A true democracy requires the protection of fundamental human rights in order to function effectively, and prevent the erosion of individual liberties.

### II. Interdependence of democracy and human rights

### III. Democracy Eroded by Lack of Human Rights

- (a) Suppressing dissent
- (b) Fear and intimidation
- (c) Rise of authoritarianism
- (d) Weakened rule of law
- (e) Eroded accountability
- (f) Disenfranchisement of minorities
- (g) Corruption and abuse of power
- (h) Social fragmentation

### IV. Way forward

### V. Conclusion

## Essay

Imagine a house built on sand - that's democracy without the foundation of human rights. There is a close link between democracy and human rights. The respect of human rights strengthens democratic institutions and the rule of law. However, democracy is eroded by lack of human rights owing to following reasons; limitations on free speech silence dissent and weaken democratic process, human rights abuses create fear, hindering free and fair elections and the disregarding human rights facilitates the rise of authoritarian regime. The way forward lies in the strengthening of basic human rights in order to save democracy from erosion. In short, a true democracy requires the protection of fundamental human rights in order to function effectively and to prevent the erosion of individual liberties.

Democracy and human rights are two sides of

the same coin. A strong democracy relies on the protection of fundamental human rights like freedom of speech and assembly. This allows citizens to participate actively in the political process. For example, imagine a country holding elections, but citizens are afraid to criticize the candidates. This lack of free expression undermines the legitimacy of the entire process. Conversely, respect for human rights flourishes under a healthy democracy.

Democracy is the hollow facade without human rights because of certain reasons, suppressing dissent is one of them. The democratic process is weakened by the limitations on free speech. Take the example of Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of China that once enjoyed a vibrant democratic scene. However, the crackdown was launched against the pro-democrats after the pro-democracy protests erupted.

in 2019. This suppression of free speech and peaceful assembly effectively silenced critics and weakened the pillars of Hong Kong's democratic system. Hence, democracy cannot function effectively when the right to dissent is eroded.

Further, fear and intimidation act as corrosive agents to democracy. When citizens are afraid to express dissenting opinions or participate freely in the political process, a healthy exchange of ideas is stifled. This can be seen in situations where violence or threats of violence are used to silence critics, as with authoritarian regimes that crack down on protests. Additionally, fear mongering tactics, like spreading misinformation or using the media to demonize opposing viewpoints, can create an atmosphere where people are too afraid to engage in an open debate. This ultimately weakens democratic

institutions by reducing citizen participation and critical thinking, essential for a functioning democracy.

Similarly, the rise of authoritarianism acts like a virus on democracy, weakening its core from within. As depicted in George Orwell's chilling dystopia, "Nineteen Eighty-Four," "Big Brother's" constant surveillance and manipulation of information erode the public's ability to think critically and hold the government accountable, a critical pillar of a functioning democracy. Therefore, the rise of authoritarianism dismantles the very essence of democracy.

In addition, a weakened rule of law is the setback to democracy. When laws are inconsistently applied or become subject to the whims of those in power, as vividly portrayed in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart," citizens

lose faith in the system's ability to protect their rights and ensure fairness. This breakdown of trust creates an environment ripe for corruption and abuse of power, ultimately leading to a system where "a chick which knows that kings eat dung and forbids its children to scrape dung." (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*). In a healthy democracy, the rule of law acts as the impartial arbiter, ensuring everyone is subject to the same standards, a principle essential for a just and functioning society.

Besides, eroded accountability acts as a cancer on democracy, slowly eating away its legitimacy and effectiveness. This aligns with the concept of 'democratic decay' explored by Robert Dahl in his seminal work, "On Democracy." Dahl argues that democracies require a healthy balance between competition and participation. When accountability weakens, leaders become

less responsive to the needs of the people, and the system loses its legitimacy.

Furthermore, democracy's promise of equal representation can falter when minorities are exploited. In the United States for instance, historical redlining practice denied mortgage to black families in certain neighborhoods, concentrating poverty and limiting opportunities. This systemic discrimination continues to have ripple effects, creating economic disadvantages for minorities that can translate into lower voter turnout and political influence. This undermines the ideal of a level playing field in a democracy.

In the similar vein, corruption and abuse of power act as termites slowly eating away at the foundation of democracy. When leaders prioritize personal gain over the public

good, trust in institutions crumbles. For example, Animal Farm by George Orwell: this allegorical novella portrays the overthrow of a tyrannical farmer by the farm animals, who then establish their own seemingly democratic society. However, the pigs, the most intelligent animals, eventually manipulate the system for their own benefit, replicating the very system they fought against. This is how corruption and abuse of power undermine democracy.

Moreover, social fragmentation is a breeding ground for the erosion of democracy. When human rights violations occur, like the suppression of free speech or the targeting of specific ethnic groups, trust in institutions crumbles. This distrust divides communities along lines of identity. For instance, if a government cracks down on peaceful protests, it discourages open dialogue and creates a climate of fear. Similarly, if a religious minority



is discriminated against, they may feel alienated from the majority and less likely to engage in the democratic process. This social fragmentation weakens the very fabric of a democracy, which relies on a sense of shared purpose and trust in the rule of law.

However, ending human rights violations is crucial for strengthening democracy. One key approach is empowering civil society, by supporting independent media, human rights organizations, and fostering open dialogue. Citizens can hold government accountable and expose abuses. For example, strengthening freedom of information laws allows journalists to investigate corruption, while independent human rights groups can document and advocate against discriminatory practices. This empowers citizens to participate actively and ensures power does not concentrate in the

hands of a select few, a hallmark of a healthy democracy.

To conclude, democracy cannot thrive without the provision of the fundamental human rights. Human rights violations such as suppressing dissent, creating fear and intimidation, rising authoritarianism, weakening rule of law, eroding accountability, abusing power and causing social fragmentation are the death knell to democracy. However, in order to get out of this quagmire, it is important to have a strong mechanism of accountability, rule of law, good governance, social inclusivity, and other fundamental rights. Democracy can only grow by ensuring basic human rights. In simple words, a true democracy requires the protection of basic human rights in order to function effectively and prevent the erosion of individual liberties.