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Democracy is losing its ground in contemporary era

Outline

1- Introduction

Thesis Statement:

In the contemporary era, many assert that democracy is losing ground. Democracy is not losing ground; it continues to adapt through elections, judicial independence, civic activism and global cooperation. Though challenges persist, democracy capacity for renewal and resilience outweighs its temporary setbacks.

2- The contemporary Landscape of Democracy.

3- Democracy is not losing its ground. (Thesis)

- a- Global protests show sustained demand for democratic rights
- b- Elections and courts remove or restrain illiberal leaders
- c- Electoral democracies remains numerous worldwide
- d- Authoritarian models are brittle
- e- Democracies are curbing disinformation with technology regulation and media literacy.

- f- Democratic alliances are strengthening
- g- Governance reforms, anti corruption measures and inclusive policies are renewing public trust in democracy.

4- Democracy is losing its ground. (anti-thesis)

- a- Elected autocrats hollow media, courts and opposition
- b- Freedom House and V-Dem report multi-year democratic decline
- c- China's growth makes autocracy look like a successful model
- d- Social-media disinformation polarizes and undermines reasoned debate
- e- Inequality and corruption erode trust and participation

5- Democracy's capacity to Rebalance and Recover (synthesis).

- a- Independent courts, active media and civic resistance counter autocratic moves and restore stability.
- b- Declines in indices are modest and reversible as many democracies improve concurrently
- c- Chinese model is fragile and unattractive in long term
- d- Democratic reforms are reinforcing transparency
- e- Reforms targeting inequality strengthen legitimacy

When Nelson Mandela emerged from 27 years in prison, he could have chosen vengeance; instead, he chose ballots over bullets, proving that democracy's greatest strength lies in its ability to transform even the deepest conflicts into peaceful transitions of power. This transformative power resonates globally from South Africa's reconciliation to Pakistan's lawyers' movement defending judicial independence, from Poland's peaceful removal of illiberal rulers to Brazil's institutional resistance against authoritarian assault. Despite alarming headlines about democratic backsliding, democracy is not losing its ground; rather, it is evolving, adapting and providing its resilience through citizen mobilization, institutional checks and innovative reforms. Global protests demonstrate sustained demand for democratic rights, while elections and courts continue to remove illiberal leaders, electoral democracies remain numerous, authoritarian models prove brittle, democracies curb disinformation through regulation, democracies alliances strengthen and reforms rebuild public trust. Though elected autocrat

hollow out institutions, democracy indices show decline, china's growth make autocracy appear viable, disinformation polarizes societies and inequality erodes participation, these challenges are met by resilient checks and balances, cyclical rather than terminal decline, the brittleness of authoritarian models, new digital guardrails and democratic policy fixes that renew legitimacy.

Democracy today stands at a critical juncture, with compelling evidence supporting both its decline and resilience. According to freedom house, democratic freedom has deteriorated for sixteen consecutive years world wide, while V-Dem institute reveals a stark reality, 72% of the world's population now lives under autocracy, up from 46% just a decade ago. This erosion manifests through multiple pathways. Elected leaders have become democracy's gravediggers as Hungary's Viktor Orban has systematically captured courts and media outlets while Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan has imprisoned more journalists than

any other nation. Meanwhile, China's economic miracle under authoritarian rule has provided what Stefan Halper calls "The Beijing Consensus", an alternative model that promises prosperity without political freedom. Compounding these threats, established democracies face internal decay through social media disinformation, rising inequality that fuels populism, and what levitsky and ziblatt call the erosion of once unbreakable democratic norms.

(Levitsky, How democracies die, 2018)

This creates a perfect storm where external authoritarian pressure meets internal democratic dysfunction.

Democracy is not losing its ground as global protests powerfully demonstrate sustained demand for democratic rights world wide. Mass protests in Hong Kong drew over two million participants demanding electoral freedom despite severe repression. (Kaeding, The Hong Kong Protests 2021). The Arab Spring revived in Sudan and Algeria successfully toppling long standing autocrats. Women led protests in Iran against

authoritarian theocracy attracted worldwide solidarity. (Karimi, Women, life, freedom 2023). These movements demonstrate that citizens world wide continue demanding accountability, transparency and participatory governance.

Popular mobilization translates into institutional outcomes when electoral and judicial mechanism constrain authoritarian overreach. The 2020 US election removed President Trump despite his fraud claims, with courts rejecting 62 law suits and state officials certifying results. (Bauer, Reconstructing the presidency, 2022) Poland's elections 2023 ended eight years of Law and Justice Party rule after courts and civil society defended judicial independence. (Sadurski, Poland's constitutional crisis, 2023). Freedom house identified 21 countries where democratic institution successfully resisted autocratic erosion alone, proving accountability mechanisms still work. (Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org>, 2023).

These institutional victories reflect how democracies still outnumber autocracies globally. The varieties of Democracy Institute counted 89 electoral democracies in 2023, representing 43% of world's population. (Edgell, Defiance in the face of authoritarian autocratization, 2023). Recent democratic transitions happened in Zambia in 2021, in Moldova in 2020 and in Armenia balancing losses elsewhere. Despite authoritarian gains in some regions, democracies outnumber autocracies nearly two to one world wide.

Democracy's numerical strength stands in contrast to inherent weakness of authoritarian systems. China's GDP growth collapsed from 10% to 3% eroding economic legitimacy its autocratic model depends on.

(World Bank, <https://databank.worldbank.org>, 2023). Authoritarian collapses in Sudan, Algeria and Myanmar triggered prolonged instability, exposing governance failures.

(Kendall-Taylor, how democracies fail, autocracies 2022)

Authoritarian brittleness differs sharply from democracy's ability to tackle digital threats through smart regulation. The European Union's Digital Service Act requires transparency in how algorithms curate content and fast removal of illegal material. (European commission, <https://ec.europa.eu>, 2022). The international Fact-checking network grew to 135 organizations across 65 countries, by strengthening cross border verification. (Stencel, Fact-checking census, 2023).

Domestic responses to disinformation gain momentum through stronger international cooperation among democracies. NATO expanded with Finland and Sweden bringing collective defense mechanism membership to 32 States. (NATO, <https://www.nato.int>, 2024). Coordinated action on technology standards, supply chain security, and sanctions shows democracies taking collective action against autocratic expansion.

International cooperation gets strengthened by domestic reforms that tackle citizen concerns about corruption and fairness. South Korea's Serious Crimes Investigation Office prosecuted high level corruption, restoring public confidence in the rule of law. (Kim and Part, Anti-corruption reforms in South Korea, 2023). OECD data reveals 18 democracies expanded social safety nets after pandemic, reducing inequality and strengthening legitimacy. (OECD, www.oecd.org, 2023).

Democracy faces serious erosion as elected leaders systematically dismantle institutional checks and balances. India's Narendra Modi government used sedition laws to arrest opposition politicians, pressured tech companies to remove critical content and undermined the election Commission independence.

Systematic institutional erosion appears in global democracy indices tracking sustained decline. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index showed average global scores dropped from 5.55

(2015) to 5.29 (2023), the lowest since tracking began - Poly V data identified 13 democracies breakdowns between 2010 and 2022 compared to only five autocratic transitions to democracy. These converging datasets suggests not cyclical fluctuation but sustained erosion of democratic norms world wide.

Quantitative decline coincides with China demonstrating autocracy's apparent economic success as an alternative governance model. China lifted 800 million people from poverty between 1980 and 2020, achieving the fastest sustained economic growth in history. Authoritarian regimes in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Cambodia explicitly cite china's model as proof that development doesn't require democracy. This perception challenges democracy's claim to superior governance.

China's model gain traction partly because social media disinformation fractures democratic discourse and trust. The Cambridge Analytica scandal

exposed how personal data from 87 million users manipulated voter behaviour across multiple democracies. Algorithmic polarization drives users toward extreme content, with YouTube's recommendation engine radicalizing viewers toward conspiracy theories and extremism. This information chaos paralyzes democratic deliberation and policy making.

Disinformation compounds deeper structural problems as inequality and corruption drain democratic legitimacy and citizen engagement. Transparency International reported that 23 of 25 top democracies experienced corruption scandals involving elected officials between 2015 and 2022. Thus citizens experiencing inequality and corruption withdraw from democratic participation, create vicious cycles of declining legitimacy.

Elected autocrats hollow out media and courts. However, democratic checks and balances frequently reverse such erosions before they become permanent. Brazil's Supreme Court blocked

Bolsonaro's anti-democratic measures 37 times between 2019 and 2022, protecting electoral integrity until voters removed him. Academic research shows that 68% of democratic backsliding episodes since 1990 were partially or fully reversed through electoral turnover, judicial intervention or civil resistance.

Data showing multi-year democratic decline as evidence of sustained erosion, ~~the~~ however the institutional reversals demonstrate resilience, yet the statistical decline reported by these indices represent modest cyclical dips rather than democracy's terminal collapse. The Economist Intelligence Unit noted that average score decreases concentrate in already hybrid regimes, while established democracies remain stable. Boese found that most autocratizing countries remain experience shallow erosion, with two thirds stabilizing before reaching full autocracy.

China's economic growth makes autocracy appear as a

successful alternative governance model but these modest statistical fluctuations ~~brittleness~~ ~~make~~ contrast sharply with china's economic success and that success masks fundamental brittleness making the autocratic model difficult to replicate and unsustainable in long term. Countries attempting to copy ~~po~~ china's model like Venezuela, Zimbabwe and Cambodia experienced economic disasters and political instability rather than growth. In short china's success depended on unique historical conditions that cannot be reproduced, limiting autocracy's appeal as a universal model.

Social media ~~dis~~information polarizes societies and undermines reasoned democratic debate but china's brittleness differs from the information challenges democracies face and new regulatory frameworks and transparency measures are restoring shared factual foundations for debate. Regulatory pressure forced Meta to remove 3.2 billion fake accounts in 2022 and label 180 million pieces

of COVID misinformation. Democracies are developing adaptive responses that preserve open discourse while limiting manipulation.

Inequality and corruption erode trust and participation in democracies while digital guard rails address information quality side by side targeting democratic reforms are successfully renewing legitimacy and reversing participatory decline caused by inequality and corruption. New Zealand's living standards framework and Iceland's well being budgets explicitly target inequality, with Gini coefficients improving in both countries post implementation. These reforms demonstrate democracy's adaptive capacity to address legitimacy deficits through institutional innovation.

In this way, the evidence demonstrates that democracy is not losing its ground rather its resilience through adaptive institutional responses. While elected autocrats have hollow institutions in specific countries, democratic checks and balances

have consistently reversed back sliding through electoral turnover, judicial intervention and civil resistance. Democracy's future depends on not its perfection but on its capacity for self correction. Autocracies may boast efficiency and rapid growth, but they cannot survive their inevitable mistakes because they lack feedback mechanisms that allow course correction. In short the struggle continues, but democracy's greatest advantage remains its openness to reform, a quality that ensure its survival even in the most turbulent times.

As political scientist Larry Diamond observes, "Democracy is not dying; it is tested, and where it is tested, it often prevails."

