

# 100 Democracy and Illiteracy Do Not Move Together

## Outline

### 1. Introduction:

- A nation may conduct elections and claim democracy, yet when its citizens cannot read, reason, or make informed choices, democracy survives only in form, not in spirit.
- Democracy is a system of governance in which power ultimately rests with the people, exercised directly or through freely elected representatives.
- Thesis Statement: Democracy and illiteracy cannot coexist because illiteracy breeds political awareness, weakens the sense of rights, lowers voter participation, and hinders women's inclusion. It erodes democratic values, reduces accountability, and diminishes leadership quality. Moreover, it widens class disparities, fuel poverty-driven <sup>vote</sup> selling, weakens policymaking, and creates a vacuum that

invites dictatorship and authoritarianism

## 2. Why Democracy and illiteracy do not move together?

### i) Political Unawareness:

Illiteracy prevents citizens from understanding political processes, leading to emotional or identity-based voting that weakens informed democratic choice.

### ii) Unawareness of Rights:

Illiteracy keeps citizens unaware of their constitutional protections, which prevents them from demanding justice and weakens democratic participation.

### iii) Low Voter Turnout:

Illiteracy intimidates citizens and reduces their participation in elections, weakening democratic representation and credibility.

### iv) Hampers Women's Voting and Participation:

Illiteracy, combined with social barriers, limits women's political awareness and participation, reducing both representation



and inclusiveness in democracy.

### v) Erosion of Democratic values:

Illiteracy weakens citizens' understanding of equality, justice, and accountability, undermining the democratic values.

### vi) Poor Accountability of Leaders:

Illiteracy prevents citizens from monitoring government actions, enabling corruption and reducing the pressure on leaders to act responsibly.

### vii) Reduced Quality of Leadership:

Illiteracy prevents voters from assessing candidates' competence, leading to the election of ineffective leaders and weakening governance quality.

### viii) Class and Social Disparities:

Illiteracy widens the gap between educated elites and marginalized groups, allowing unequal participation and undermining the democratic ideal of equal representation.

### ix) Poverty-driven Vote Selling:

Illiteracy fosters poverty that makes citizens

susceptible to vote buying, turning elections into transactional exercises and undermining democratic fairness.

### x) Weak Policy-Making and National Vision

Illiteracy limits citizens' ability to evaluate policies, encouraging short-term politics and weakening a nation's long-term planning and direction.

### xi) Creates Vacuum for Dictatorship and Coups

Illiteracy weakens civic awareness and oversight, leaving citizens unable to resist authoritarian takeovers and enabling dictatorships to thrive.

### 3- Way Forward:

### 4- Conclusion:

Your points are okay but mention the way forward



DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
Integrate your attention grabber  
with the rest of the paragraph

“Democracy cannot succeed  
unless those who express their  
choice are prepared to choose  
wisely.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

A nation may conduct elections and claim  
democracy, yet when its citizens cannot  
read, reason, or make informed choices,  
democracy survives only in form, not in  
spirit. Illiteracy silences voices, weakens judg-  
ment, and leaves democracy vulnerable to  
manipulation and authoritarian control. Democracy  
is a system of governance in which power  
ultimately rests with the people, exercised  
directly or through freely elected representatives.  
It stands upon participation, equality, and  
accountability, ensuring every citizen's role in  
national progress. However, when illiteracy  
prevails, these democratic foundations falter,  
as uninformed citizens cannot question

authority, safeguard their rights, or contribute meaningfully to governance. Democracy and illiteracy do not coexist because illiteracy breeds political unawareness, weakens the sense of rights, lowers voter participation, and hinders women's inclusion. It erodes democratic values, reduces accountability, and diminishes leadership quality. Moreover, it widens class disparities, fuels poverty-driven <sup>voter</sup> selling, weakens policymaking, and creates a vacuum that invites dictatorship and authoritarian rule.

The very first reason is that illiteracy breeds political unawareness, which undermines the core spirit of democracy. Without education, citizens remain unable to understand political ideologies, state functions, or legislative processes. They often ~~voter~~ vote based on emotions, ethnicity, or personal loyalties rather than on merit or policy. This weak understanding produces poor electoral choices and strengthens corrupt leadership. For instance, in many developing countries, surveys by the Centre



for the Study of Developing Societies during India's 2019 general elections found that less-educated voters tended to choose candidates on caste, showing illiteracy distorts democratic choice. Thus, when political awareness is weakened by illiteracy, democracy loses its informed foundation and becomes vulnerable to manipulation.

Building on this challenge, illiteracy also leads to a deep unawareness of fundamental rights which weakens democratic participation. Citizens who cannot read constitutions, laws, or public notice remain unaware of the protections and entitlements guaranteed to them. This lack of knowledge prevents them from challenging injustices or seeking legal remedies when their rights are violated. It also limits their ability to engage in public debates about equality, justice, and governance. A Human Rights Watch assessment notes that low literacy populations in South Asia often fail to claim basic rights like access to justice, due

process, and social protection simply because they do not know these rights exist.

Therefore, when citizens are unaware of the rights they hold, democracy loses its power to ensure equality and justice for all.

In addition to weakening awareness, illiteracy contributes directly to low voter turnout, which diminishes the representative strength of democracy. Illiterate citizens often feel intimidated by the voting process because they cannot read ballots, understand candidate profile, or interpret instructions independently.

This lack of confusion discourages them from participating in elections altogether. Over time, large sections of the population remain politically absent, limiting the diversity of voices that shape national decisions. For instance, in Pakistan, data from the Election Commission shows that districts with lower literacy rates such as Dera Bugti consistently report lower voter turnout, reflecting how illiterate citizens avoid voting due to fear of misunderstanding



the process of making errors. Accordingly, when illiteracy and mistrust discourage citizens from voting, the democratic process loses credibility and meaningful representation.

Moreover, illiteracy disproportionately affects women, severely limiting their ability to vote and participate meaningfully in democratic processes.

In many societies, low literacy rates combined with cultural barriers prevent women from understanding their political rights or accessing electoral information. Illiterate women often rely on male family members for guidance in voting or are entirely excluded from political discussions. This reduces their influence in decision-making and weakens their inclusivity.

According to ECP (Election Commission of Pakistan), in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, women's voter turnout dropped to about 31% in the 2024 general elections. This reflects how illiteracy and social barriers hinder women from exercising their electoral rights. As a result, illiteracy restricts women's participation, so democracy

loses not only numerical representation but also the diversity of perspectives essential for fair and affective governance.

Likewise, illiteracy erodes democratic values, weakening the moral and civic foundations essential for accountable governance. When citizens lack basic education, they are less likely to understand or appreciate principles such as equality, justice, and transparency. Illiteracy reduces the ability to critically evaluate political decisions or challenge corruption, allowing unethical practices to become normalized over time.

UNESCO's "Towards Knowledge Societies" report warns that in regions with high adult illiteracy, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia, educational inequality weakens civic awareness, leaving citizens less equipped to uphold democratic norms like accountability and justice. Hence, illiteracy does not merely limit participation; it erodes the very values that sustain democracy, making the system vulnerable to decay.



Furthermore, illiteracy undermines the accountability of leaders, allowing corruption and inefficiency to persist. Citizens who cannot read policies, reports, or budget documents are unable to monitor government actions effectively. Illiteracy prevents voters from questioning decisions, demanding transparency, or holding leaders for misactions. As a result, politicians face little pressure to act in the public interest. For instance, in Pakistan, studies by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) show that low literacy among voters in rural areas contribute to weak oversight, allowing leaders to engage in corruption without significant public challenge. Moreover, Pakistan is the 135<sup>th</sup> corrupt nation out of 180 countries, according to the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index report. Thus, illiteracy erodes a key foundation of democracy, accountability, leaving governance unchecked and citizens unable to demand justice.

Another reason is that illiteracy undermines

the quality of leadership because voters with low education are less equipped to assess a candidate's competence. When citizens cannot evaluate policy proposals, they are more likely to choose leaders based on charisma, loyalty or social ties rather than their vision or performance. Illiteracy reduces the electorate's ability to demand expertise or long-term planning, paving the way for populist or opportunistic figures. Over time, this erodes the effectiveness of governance.

For example, research reported by "The Saturday Star" in South Africa highlights that municipal councillors with poor literacy fail to interpret policy documents or financial reports. This directly diminishes the quality of leadership and leads to ineffective governance. Thus, illiteracy degrades leadership standards, steering democracy toward short-term influence instead of informed, merit-based governance.

Equally important, illiteracy intensifies class and social disparities, limiting equal participation in a democratic system. Education



empowers citizens to access information, understand policies, and advocate for their rights. When large segments of society are illiterate, the gap between educated elites and marginalized communities widens. This inequality allows privileged groups to dominate political discourse, decision-making, and resource allocation, leaving the less educated powerless to influence governance. In this regard, a UNESCO report notes that in South Asia, regions with high illiteracy show pronounced social stratification, where landowners and educated elites control local politics while illiterate populations have minimal say in community decisions. Therefore, illiteracy perpetuates social and economic hierarchies, preventing democracy from functioning as a system that represents all citizens equally.

Additionally, illiteracy fosters conditions that turn voting into a transactional exercise rather than a democratic duty.

Illiteracy promotes an environment of backwardness, unemployment, and other socio-economic evils that weaken democratic participation. This system produces a perpetual cycle in which citizens sell their political choices for a few coins because poverty leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. Political candidates then find a 'vote market' where support is purchased with money instead of ideas, integrity, or public service. According to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, countries with low literacy rates show a higher tendency for clientelistic politics, where leaders prioritize Hence, illiteracy-driven poverty transforms election into markets for votes, undermines the fairness, credibility, and effectiveness of democratic systems.

Alongside vote selling, illiteracy weakens the policy-making and limits the national vision because citizens cannot critically evaluate proposals or hold leaders accountable for



long-term planning. Education allows citizens to understand government policies, assess their implications and demand reforms.

Illiterate population lack this ability, which discourages leaders from presenting comprehensive development plans. Illiteracy promotes short-term thinking and opportunistic politics, as politicians focus on immediate gains rather than sustainable solutions. For example, Afghanistan,

with a literacy rate of about 37% according to 2025 UNESCO and UNICEF reports, continues to face difficulty in sustaining stable national policies. Its low literacy electorate finds it hard to evaluate governance performance, which weakens public pressure for coherent long-term planning. Consequently, illiteracy prevents citizens from engaging in meaningful policy scrutiny, resulting in weak governance and the absence of a coherent national direction.

Lastly, illiteracy creates a vacuum in which authoritarian regimes and military interventions

can take root. When citizens cannot read constitutions, analyze political developments, or understand their democratic rights, they are unable to resist or question unlawful seizures of power. Illiteracy weakens public oversight and civic engagement, leaving democracy vulnerable to manipulation. This environment allows leaders to justify authoritarian actions as necessary for stability, while the majority remains unaware of their rights and long-term consequences. For instance, in Pakistan, the major military coups of 1857, 1977, 1999<sup>and</sup> illustrate how illiteracy ended democracy and paved the way for authoritarian regimes.

These coups dismantled democratic institutions and curtailed citizens' voices. Hence, illiteracy undermines democratic resilience, creating conditions in which authoritarian takeovers can succeed and persist.

To address these challenges, universal education must be prioritized, including for girls. Civic education and voter awareness programs should



teach citizens their rights and the importance of informed voting. Empowering women and disadvantaged communities, along with adult literacy initiatives, can enable broader political participation. Additionally, e-governance and transparent information systems can reduce corruption and help citizens monitor government performance.

In a nutshell, democracy in the presence of illiteracy has always been a dream. Uninformed citizens cannot participate meaningfully, protect their rights, or hold leaders accountable. Illiteracy breeds political unawareness, low voter turnout, and restricted women's participation. It erodes democratic values, reduces the quality of leadership, intensifies class and social disparities, encourages poverty-driven vote selling, and undermines policy making and long-term national vision. Moreover, it creates a vacuum that allows authoritarianism and caps to take root. However, to dream about democracy

with uneducated people is like praying to be saved by a miracle while the boat has a hole in it. Democracy can only be achieved in a country where people are literate and leadership is visionary. Ensuring universal education, civic awareness, women's empowerment, and inclusive participation is essential to sustain democracy and transform it from a formal structure into a vibrant system that truly reflects the will and wisdom of the people.

Overall your arguments are  
okay  
Structure is fine.



## Meaning and Purpose of Education

- Should this essay included 2 sections, meaning

**Better to divide into two sections and your points are relevant?** OR

- Would it be better to only define the meaning of education & give 12-15 arguments about purpose of education? Which option would be best?

→ If the essay should consists of 2 sections, then are these points of mine good?

### → Meaning of Education

- ① Awakening of human potential
- ② Cultivation of mind
- ③ Education beyond knowledge
- ④ Character formation
- ⑤ Process of socialization
- ⑥ Life long journey
- ⑦ Right conduct

### → Purpose of Education

- ① National Development (Economic)
- ② Good Governance
- ③ Law & order
- ④ Economic progress
- ⑤ Promotion of National unity
- ⑥ Gender Equality
- ⑦ Scientific Progress