

## Freedom of expression/speech

I do not agree with what you say, but I will defend to death your right to say it.

### OUTLINE

#### 1. Introduction

- a) Freedom of expression is a fundamental pillar of a just society.
- b) Tolerance towards different opinions creates harmony in a society.
- c) Societies and individuals who uphold the right to free expression thrive, while those who do not, risk stagnation and decline.

#### 2. Culture of freedom of expression in a society

- a) Teaching children from a young age about the concept of equality and equal rights.
- b) Freedom of speech creates tolerance and harmony in a society and promotes pluralism.
- c) Diverse thoughts and opinions lead to progression by providing various perspectives.

#### 3. How dissent shaped history

- a) Magna Carta, 1215 an example of how dissent formed against oppression, <sup>establishing the formation of democracy</sup> ~~successfully taking rights~~.
- b) French Revolution, 1789, dissent against the corrupt monarchy - led to its overthrow and a shift in European political thought.

c) Challenging slavery in America was a dissenting stance that went against the norm, but these voice ignited the Civil War (1861-1865), ultimately leading to victory of freedom and equality.

4. How silencing dissent sparked chaos in history.

a) Stalin's Great Purge (1936-1938), a crackdown on dissent led to mass arrests, executions and wide spread fears, destabilizing the nation and causing lasting turmoil.

b) Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) - a crackdown on dissent led to violence, chaos and severe disruption of China's cultural & educational systems.

5. How contemporary world is learning to deal with dissent?

a) Political parties now instead of shutting the voice of other down; all have a voice so they can be heard and people can decide for themselves who they agree with.

b) Fridays for future, led by Greta Thunberg, the movement has pushed for climate change, despite resistance from political and business interests.

c) People, especially in the west used their right of expression in support of Gaza despite threats of job insecurity.

d) Scandinavian countries, with high rankings in freedom of speech & happiness show how protecting dissent contributes to both societal stability & well-being

# ESSAY

The word 'freedom' has always held great privilege in human society, history and culture. Wars fought over it, revolutions came in the name of it, it is a part of human essence - an inherent desire to be free. And since society is made up of humans, freedom of expression is a fundamental pillar of a just society. It creates tolerance among people through acceptance of opinions different than one's own. All throughout history, it has been seen that societies and individuals who uphold the right of free expression, thrive while those who do not risk stagnation and decline. This essay argues that freedom of speech and expression is one of man's natural rights and when it is taken away, it has resulted in chaos.

Culture is a social construct, a man-made phenomena, this entails that it is also dynamic. Hence, to turn freedom of speech into a culture, teaching from a young age about the concept of equality and equal rights is necessary. This ensures change in the next generation where equality might not be just a myth. Teaching children that freedom of expression is a fundamental right of an individual and cannot be taken away will highlight its importance within a society.

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Moreover, freedom of speech creates tolerance and harmony in a society and promotes pluralism. It enforces you to listen to opposing ideas and opinions and critiques. This notion goes back ~~1400~~ years as well when Islam introduced tolerance and harmony in a society despite multiple religions living ~~under~~ in Medina. Even the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) were champions of free speech as they allowed the common man to express his complaint or critique against the governor or the Khalifah as well. Those were the ideal societies, promoting tolerance and a pluralist notion, and that was the reason they thrived as well.

Additionally, diverse thoughts and opinions coming forth through freedom of expression also lead to growth, both at an individual and societal level. A company listens to its advisors' opinions and perspectives to extract out ideas that might lead to some progress. Different outlooks by different people somehow always lead to growth and innovation. Had such freedom of speech not existed in companies, they would have fallen into a state of stagnation. Similarly, a government by listening to its people might lead its country towards development. This shows that individual rights of people exist not only to benefit the individual but also to contribute to a healthy society.

Looking at history, we see how dissent-opinions opposing the common-held belief shaped events. Magna Carta - the English Charter of 1215 often considered the foundational document of democracy is its first example. This charter forced upon King John by rebellious Barons who held the view that even the king shall be subjected to law and that all free men are equal, shows how dissent formed against oppression lead to the foundation of progressive beliefs and values. Freedom of speech and expression for that reason is democracy's cornerstone and holds great value in the system.

Similarly, the overthrow of the French monarchy in 1789 because of its corruption led to the French Revolution and a shift in European political thought. Dissent against monarchy, backed by Enlightenment ideas challenging it, inevitably led to the end of absolute monarchy. Thus, giving way to ideals such as liberty, equality and fraternity fueling the concept of democracy and eventually human rights movement globally. This shows that freedom of expression from the Enlightenment period led to revolutions like that of French and American and granted them basic rights of men.

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Also, challenging slavery<sup>a</sup> was a dissenting stance that went against the norm, especially in the confederate states (southern states) in the 1860's. However, through the voice of Abraham Lincoln and ~~th~~ after a 5 year civil war, freedom and equality won. Emancipation of the black people, done both on political and moral grounds set a base for the now ~~American~~ values of equality. It can be argued here that change and progress throughout history did not happen on its own, rather there were people who exercised their natural right of free expression to stimulate such change.

In contrary to this, there are events in history that show how silencing dissent sparks chaos. One of its examples is Stalin's Great Purge (1936-1938), a crackdown on all opposing forces or voices that led to mass arrests, executions and wide spread fears, destabilizing the nation and causing lasting turmoil. In order to silence the voices that went against Stalin and his regime, multiple lives were lost and tortured, taking away their right to free speech and ensuring that people under that regime never exercise it either.

similar to this case is the Mao's cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976) in China - a crackdown on dissent that led to violence, chaos and severe disruption of China's cultural and educational systems. In order to silence any voice that went against the Mao's communist ideology, mass persecutions were carried out in the name of revolution. These two incidents show that in order to take away man's right of free expression, destruction and chaos has always come forward as a result. In this cultural revolution, China's cultural sites and educational system suffered a lot highlighting the consequences of silencing dissent.

Moving forward to the contemporary world and how it is dealing with dissent, an acceptance of the right of free expression is seen. In light of democracy, free speech is protected, now instead of shutting the voice of others down, it is left on people to decide who they agree with. Political parties like that of Republicans and Democrats in USA, debate each other, encouraging different opinions and perspectives. ~~Similarly~~ This creates a more harmonious and tolerant society towards each other.

A movement, "Fridays for future" led by the young ~~Green~~ Greta Thunberg pushing for climate change is an excellent use of freedom of expression. Despite much resistance from big corporations and political entities, she has refused to back down, standing firm for what she believes in. ~~This shows that the right of free speech is being exercised for the good of the world as well.~~

Similar to that is the use of freedom of expression ~~for~~ support of Gaza, especially in the west. People are now acutely aware of their rights and use them despite the threat of job, education or social insecurity. History has taught the world about exercising their natural right of free expression for values like that of life, liberty and equality.

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Furthermore, it ~~is seen that the protection of right of free expression leads to a harmonious society through the example of the Scandinavian countries. These countries are at the top of the list of the happiness index, showcasing how allowing dissent contributes to both societal stability and well being.~~

## Counter-Argument

While freedom of expression is certainly a fundamental value of a just society, it also at times presents itself as a ~~boane~~ <sup>bane</sup>. Individuals can exercise this right for hate speech, inciting mischief or spreading malice. A case study for this claim would be ~~the Quran burnings frequently taking place in the Scandinavian countries especially Sweden.~~ In 2023, several Quran burning incidents took place in Sweden led by a man named Momika, hurting the muslims religious sentiments across the world. Since Sweden protects the right of free speech, the man was not held accountable as desired by muslims, this led to him being shot in the January of 2023. So, it can be argued that while freedom of expression is a right not to be denied, it should <sup>also</sup> come with some limitations to ~~discourage~~ <sup>avoid</sup> such actions.

In conclusion, history has taught the world that freedom of expression is necessary for a society to progress and grow. It is the cornerstone of democracy and once this right is taken away, democracy dies. Societies who protect this right thrive, while those who do not risk decline. A tolerant

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and harmonious society is made by giving the people the right to free expression but also by ensuring that <sup>this</sup> right may not be misused. ~~Pakistan~~ So, one may not agree with what ~~the other~~ **well done** says but shall have the moral compass pointing the fact out that they have every right to say it.