# CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD

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**ABSTRACT**

*Democracy in the developed world faces a myriad of contemporary challenges, despite its long-standing establishment as a cornerstone of governance. Increasing polarization within societies, fueled by ideological divides and the rise of populism, has strained democratic institutions and norms. Technological advancements, while fostering connectivity, have enabled the proliferation of misinformation and cyber threats, undermining public trust in democratic processes. Economic inequality further exacerbates political disillusionment, as marginalized groups feel excluded from decision-making and wealth distribution. Moreover, the erosion of traditional media and the rise of echo chambers contribute to the fragmentation of public discourse, weakening societal consensus.*

*Internationally, the rise of authoritarian regimes and their influence challenge the global appeal of democratic values, creating a competitive ideological landscape. Climate change, another pressing challenge, highlights the difficulty of achieving consensus and action within democracies, often hampered by short-term electoral cycles. Additionally, demographic shifts, including aging populations and migration, test the adaptability of democratic policies to address evolving societal needs.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Challenges, Electoral Reforms

**Background**

The idea of the liberal democracy is based on the principles of equality and rule of law. This is the reason that this governing system is popular among the majority of the countries. Democracy has passed through different waves which helped to consolidate the ideas of democracy. But in the contemporary period, the ideas of liberal democracy are becoming fragile (Crouch, 2004). Democracy started to prevail in the world during the phase of modernization when the masses came to know about their rights. Now world is entering into the post-modern stage where again the tools of modernization i.e., modern technology, education and awareness are assisting in establishment of more liberal democratic ideas which started discussion about the reservations regarding the democracy which is why the democracy is now under the influence of more liberal ideas and discouraging the existing authoritarian and autocratic democracy (Crouch, 2016).

There are so many reasons that democratic ideas are losing their grips over the masses. Democracy is failing to accomplish its promises of equality and environmental protections because in the post-modern era, the developed nations are paying more attention to the environment. The democratic governments promised to undertake this issue but could not tackle the same which dissatisfied the people from the democracy and they are demanding stronger democracies rather the current weaker form of democracy. This led to the erosion of the liberal democracies in the developed countries as well. The developing world is already facing a lot of issues regarding the democracies

(Eckersley, 2004). This research article is an attempt to locate the challenges of the democracy while focusing the developed and pioneer countries of democracy.

## Methodology

The current research is purely qualitative in nature. The major research dimensions of this study are descriptive and exploratory in nature because the researchers tried to unveil the challenges of democracy while incorporating the developed countries i.e. New Zealand, European Union and Western World. The data was collected from the secondary resources in which the authors used research articles, books, journals, research reports, newspapers and other online sources.

## Highly Democratic Countries

The countries like Sweden, Finland, Norway and New Zealand are considered the most democratic countries across the globe. But the contemporary researches show that these highly democratic countries are also facing issues related the democracy which shows that democratic set up is facing serious concerns in the contemporary world. The major reasons are the autocracy and authoritarian form of governments under the democratic rule which is fading up the people from the democracy. For example, New Zealand, one of the most democratic countries is also facing the issues like environmental protection and the minorities rights. The democracy in this country is considered the limited type of democracy which is also on the way of decline. There are policies and plans taken in the form democracy but could not be executed on the same parameters which is again creating troubles for democracy (Marsh & Miller, 2012).

A totalitarian system is not liked in the modern political system because it is highly based on the authoritarian system. It has an eye on each individual of the country which dismantles the privacy of the citizens. The democracy is totally opposite to totalitarian system but in the current era, the democracy is also playing a role like that of totalitarian system due to its extensive vigilant system. The modern democratic governments have significantly enhanced their surveillance system through the modern political system. This mass-surveillance system raises serious concerns about the privacy of the people which is affecting the popularity graph of the democracy in the developed world.

The civil community is considered the backbone of the democracy as democratic system is mainly based on the philosophy of the government of the popular will. But contrary to that now the concerns are being shown by the communities regarding their limited participation in the political and administrative matters. Moreover, the democratic governments have introduced multiple institutional changes where only governments are responsible to take actions regarding any issue. They have empowered themselves to let them alone to participate in the decision makings especially on the environmental and social effects. All this has negated the power of civil community and the devolution process about the matters of governance. This is leading to somewhat like autocratic and authoritarian rule which is affecting the democratic ideas and the democratic set up is declining in the developed countries (Davies, 2011).

## Factors Responsible

The liberal democracy is a system to grant maximum benefits to the people but contrary to that the democracies of the present age are not fulfilling the same provisions. There are a number of issues and factors associated with the declining of the democratic system in the modern period (McChesney, 2014). Some of the prominent factors of restricting the liberal democracy are following.

Firstly, the modern democratic system is not fulfilling the promise of equality and meritocracy. These are two primary reasons of the economic inequality. The democracy is mainly triggered by the US which is based on the ideology of capitalism. Under the capitalism, the rich people rule over the middle and poor class-citizens. Hence, the democracy is not fulfilling the provisions of meritocracy and equality which is leading the economic inequality and considered the primary factor of halting the promotion of democracy.

Secondly, the liberal democracy also pays attention to develop a free and independent mass media but in the case of the developing nations, the mass-media is under the direct control of the powerful stakeholders. At the same time, the developed nations also failed to build free an independent mass media. As in the example of New-Zealand, the major political parties are given more time on the media than the minor political parties. The same is the case with other developed countries as well. There are hardly a few examples of developed countries regarding the free media otherwise the media is highly controlled by the democratic governments which is also halting the liberal democracy.

Thirdly, the civic engagement is the base of the liberal democracy because the democratic system consists of the active participation of the civil community. The developed countries have also introduced the ways of the direct democratic system yet in majority of developed countries, the civil society is not taken into consideration for the important policies and decision making regarding the future planning. The developed countries have high literacy rate so the educated people are not satisfied with such indirect decision making by a few people only while negating the popular will of the citizens. Hence, the limited participation of the civil society into the political matters is also causing about the declining of liberal democracy in the developed countries.

Lastly, the rule of law and independence of judiciary are also prominent pillars of the liberal democracy but again, the current democratic system is also not performing as effectively as it ought to be. The people are also showing their concerns about the unequal justice system because in the developed countries too, the rich and poor are treated separately. So, collectively all these factors are adding concerns about the liberal democracy which is upsetting the democracy in the developed and modern countries.

**Socio-Economic Inequality**

The democracy requires the equal distribution of the resources of a country where different segments of the society have equal chances to be benefited from these national resources. It also puts restriction on the emergence of the giant stakeholders to grasp these available national resources. But unfortunately, the current democratic practices reveal that the national resources are largely occupied by the giant corporations which create economic inequality in the democratic societies. This leads to the concentration of the resources among a few conglomerates which ultimately create economic imbalances among in the societies which treats to the future of democracy (Lindblom, 1977).

This economic inequality is started from seventies which started to flourish the disagreement with the democratic ideas. Although during this period, the democracy was passing through the third wave, while encompassing the more and more countries under democratic rule, the dissatisfaction also started to emerge since that time. The resources had also been used to portray the positive image of the democratic ideas but it is also a bitter reality that democracy could not provide the equal economic opportunities in the democratic countries (Beder, 1997).

The ideas of liberal democracies are no doubt fascinating as it develops a system to grant better service delivery system to foster the economic and infrastructure development of the nations. But on contrary, the actual practice of liberal democracies is different from its ideologies because in reality the poor and marginalized segments are not given advantages. The propagandas are formed to portray the positive sides of the democracy while the negative sides are not depicted so that people may be kept away from the actual reality which again disrupts the democratic process (McChesney, 2014).

In the view of a few above-mentioned factors, it is clear that democracies are on the way of its erosion due to many flaws being practiced in the democratic countries. The democratic set up was started to replace the existing authoritarian and plutocratic forms of governance but now the democracy itself has started the authoritarian and dominant rule which is largely based on the provisions contrary to the ideologies of liberal democracy (McChesney & Nichols, 2016).

## Authoritarian Style

The democratic leadership of the developed countries is posing authoritarian style of governance where the most powerful democratic countries i.e., US, UK and France etc. are having the dominant role over their respective areas. The minor democratic countries are running their democratic system according to the guidelines provided by their regional democratic powers which indicates a form of authoritarian rule (Wade, 2013).

At the same time, US is considered the main supporter and exporter of democracy but in reality, US has adopted a form of authoritarian style. The poor and developing democratic countries are economically supported by the world organizations which are under the influence of US. Hence, the US is molding the foreign polices of such democratic countries by its own which is now infiltrating the ideas among these democratic countries to look for another option. So, the popularity graph of democracy is declining due to the rigid and dominant policies adopted by the developed countries. Now the developing and poor countries are seriously looking for second options where China and Russia are planning to replace the democratic/US dominance over the developing nations (Gilens & Page, 2014).

Neo-liberal democracies provide that the governance and political administration will be run by the elected people on the basis of popular will. But in the current democratic practices, the unelected people are holding key positions in the national administrations. This is another reason of limiting the democratic popularity among the masses in both developed and developing countries. For example, the previous president Donald Trump's family members held the key positions in the political matters of the country which shows that the political role of the unelected people is also putting hurdles in the democracies because now masses are educated and they do not allow to rule an unelected individual in their countries (Crouch, 2004).

## Racism

Democracy is a system which largely opposes the discriminations based on ethnicity, caste and creed. Whenever the matter of racism is highlights, the west and Europe come froward and represent themselves as the ambassadors of the human rights and end of the racial discriminations. There are many studies which point out that west and Europe failed to do so because they are ambassador of the human rights in the papers and conferences but in actual these are failed to end the racism in their regions which is also putting hurdles for democracy in future. There are many factors which highlight that racism is found in the European and western democracy. For example, a report was published in 2015 by European Network Against Racism (ENRA) which revealed

there were almost 47,210 cases of racism reported in 2013 just in the European region (Capon, 2015).

The traces of the racism in the European region can be traced back to Nazism in the modern political history. Although, the era of Hitler ended with the end of WWII, and the democracy embraced almost whole of the Europe, the symptoms of racism still exist in many European and western countries. The democracy could not root out the racism as still in the modern period the black people are not being given the same social status in these developed countries. The constitutional provisions grant the equality of the social segments but the hearts of the white people are not ready to accept the colored and the blacks which is again infiltrating the racism in the most developed regions of the world (Wodak, & Reisigl, 1999).

Racism can be widely observed in the developed countries. There are numerous spheres highlight that representatives of the different social categories are not treated equally in the developed countries. Throughout all of the European and western countries, the marginalized communities are suffering from the high rates of unemployment. They have limited job opportunities and in the available jobs they are offered the blue color jobs and have limited chances to gain the access to white collar employment opportunities. The members of the minority groups are suffering from high rates of poverty. Their children have higher drop outs from the schools and have lower quality of education. They are offered the dirty businesses to do and not normally welcomed by the native majority groups. All of these determinants disclose that racism is also prompting the democracy in the developed countries. The phenomenon of racism is openly challenging the democracy in the developed countries (Grosfoguel et al, 2015).

Non-discrimination is also an important basis of the democratic rule because the popularity of the democracy was largely promoted on the same grounds. This was the reason that the third world was motivated to embrace the democracy after the disintegration of the colonial. But on contrary the founders of the democracy forgot the application of the non-discrimination which is now demotivating the people from the democracy. The people of all poor, developing and the developed countries are parting their ways from the democracy (Young, 2005).

The trends of the deviation from the democratic rule are not actually the parting from the democracy rather it is due to the undemocratic means being opted by the rulers in the name of democracy. Even today, the democratic values i.e., quality, liberty, freedom, rule of law and non-discrimination are admired by the masses across the globe. Everyone dreams of the true democratic rule but the problem is the attitude of the leaders of the democrats and the personals working on the behalf of democracy because they are not adopting the democratic attitude (Canovan, 1999). This issue was mainly perceived to be related with the developing world but now the developed countries are also adopting the dominant and authoritarian role in the political matters. They are granting more favors to the native people are ignoring the immigrants who came in their countries for the employment purpose. Such migrants do not gain the first-class citizen status even after staying the decades in these developed countries. There are only a few who secured first class employment opportunities.

In the actual the democracy should have built a democratic environment equal to all citizens but it looks as if the developed countries were failed to do so. They failed to develop a cordial environment among the different social classes as still in the modern and even the post-modern period, there exists the gap between the rich and poor. The west and Europe consider themselves the pioneers of the democracy but still the ordinary people do not have equal rights to that of ruling

class. Still, the United Kingdom is having the monarchy system. Although, this monarchy system is not as much influential as it used to be yet it negates the principles of the democracy.

Another important determinant of the racism in based on the religious dimension. The whole of the west and Europe is mainly Christian by religion so the principles of the Christianity are promoted in these regions. Although, there are many religions but west and Europe is terrified from the Islam which is the reason that Islamophobia is the basis of racism in Europe and west too. The Muslims are targeted primarily by these continents. They are not given as much prestige and facilities as the members of other religions enjoy which again highlights that democracy is also declining due to its racist ideologies (Fekete, 2014).

The Europe also portrays itself as the representative of the human rights. It depicts as if it was dealing as discriminatory inequalities prevailed across the globe but unfortunately the reality is not same. The hundreds and thousands of the immigrants are killed in the Mediterranean Sea. As per reports, in the single year of 2015 almost 2900 people died (IOM, 2015). Recently, again a boat was targeted and the reports reveal that coast guards forcefully allowed to the immigrants to be dead in the brutal waves of the Mediterranean Sea.

**Challenges to European Union**

After North America, Europe is the prominent region which strived for the promotion and consolidation of the democratic ideas. These both continents are chiefly promoters of democracy and made alliances with the countries of different regions across the globe to promote the liberal democracy. The whole Europe is bound under one flag known as European Union (EU). The recent developments in the EU show that democracy is not out of issues as some of the European countries are not satisfied with the democratic practices. They are tending to be motivated by the authoritarian rules once again i.e., Hungary.

The major reason of declining democracy among the democratic countries is the deviation from the democratic practices. The democratic values are losing its effectiveness due to lower level of democracy among these countries which lead to disappointment with the democracy. There has created a gap between the choices of the voters and the polices adopted by the policy makers. The political parties are not fulfilling the promises they have made before public during elections which is also weakening the democracy level. These policies also lack the level of transparency and accountability due to the powerful background of the politicians even in the developed countries. The powerful politicians are not treated in the same way as the ordinary citizens are presented before the law (Schmitter, 2000).

The European union is also under the great influence of the powerful nations. The minor European states do not have the same positioning as the UK, France, Germany and Switzerland etc. have. These above stated European states have oligopoly on the union and most of the decisions are made according to their influence. This shows that there are no demos, no common indemnity, no shared values as they are mentioned in the legal provision of the union which is also a factor leading to fragile democracy in Europe (Dahrendorf, 2001).

There are many reasons that democracy is not being prospered in the European union i.e., mistrust in the inter-governmental agreement and modification of the treaties signed for the establishment of the union. The European Union was established in order to provide maximum facilities to all of the member states so that it may end ethnic and racial differences on the basis of different national identities. But in current period, the treaties and provisions are being modified which is granting more access to the powerful European states which is leading the minor states to join the opposite

club. The eastern Europe is already under the influence of Russia further the dominance of the powerful nations is also helping them out to join the authoritarian club where they hope that they will gain more support than that of union (Moravcsik, 2006).

It is obvious that all of the European states are given the opportunities of participation but mere participation is not necessary. This increased participation does not generate more legitimization rather in reality the influence of the union is also declining due to lack of democratic policies. The voter participation in the union is also minimizing which is again the basis of the limited democracy level because the voters express their reservations regarding the domestic polices of the national governments and raise questions about their role in the union. This is hindering the democracy in Europe too which shows that even the most democratic region is also facing the fragileness of democracy (Bogdanor, 2007).

The EU is further creating disperse situation while taking the decisions by its own and neglecting the individual states. This creates a streak of inferiority among the member states especially among the smaller states of Europe which motivates them to look for other options. The powerful states are working under the union holding the prime positions which is why the union is taking unanimous decisions so that they may have lead role in making decisions of the respective region (Lord & Harris, 2006). Democracy grants equal rights to all participating member states of particular organization but contrary to that, the situation in the EU is also somewhat different which portrays that even the more advanced and democratic region of the world is leading to authoritarian practices and undermining the democratic provisions (Lord, 2004).

As the European Union is largely based on the democratic values, the coordination and the cooperation among the member states should be enhanced but this is not so. The democracy of EU failed to establish the true spirits of the coordination and integration among the different member states of union which again shows that there are a few flaws which are not allowing to establish democracy in this region. According to many researchers, the right of legislative initiative has mainly led to the negative integration i.e., the decision to remove barriers to the internal market. The removal of barriers of the internal market also has both negative and positive points. Here again the powerful states are getting more advantages than the weaker states (Majone, 2005).

The main power under the democratic system lies in the hands of the voters. The higher turnout of the voters depicts that masses are taking interest in the political matters. They show their power through their votes during elections and referendum. The history of European Parliament shows that the turnout remained satisfactory but in the recent era, it is declining which is leading to declining democratic rates in the European region. The voter participation in the European Parliament has been declined almost 20% which raises questions about the democracy in Europe. On the other side, the voter participation in the European Parliament is also strongly correlated with the popularity of the national governments which again represents the dark side of some governments because due to lack of democratic practices they are losing their popularity among the citizens (Hix, 1999).

Despite some of the draw backs, the positive point in the perspective of the Europe is that there are a few states that are handling the situation properly and eliminating the reservations of the citizens to consolidate democracies. For example, Denmark and UK are particularly making efforts to overcome the issues regarding democracy. They are granting more opportunities to the citizens to take steps by their own and promoting the popular will on the basis of the liberal democracy. This is the reason they are having the tight procedures in dealing with the European institutions

because their citizens demand the same (Hix, 1999). The example of Brexit is the prominent one whose decision is taken according the wishes of the masses. The matter of Brexit is positive on one side as its decision is taken on the true democratic provisions and negative in the sense that it is leading to lose coordination and integration among the European states. This is raising question regarding the validity and importance of the democracy (Lord, 2004).

Every region is encircled by a number of issues. Some of them are of minor while the others are major in nature. The members of the respective region take suitable steps to deal with them. Similarly, the European region is also having different regional and bilateral issues which affect the performance of the democracy in this region. But here the matter is related with democracy chiefly because Europe is known as the pioneer of the democracy so if it fails to have cordial and smooth relations then how it can motivate the rest of the world to sworn democracy. In the current scenario, the Europe is being divided on the left and right basis and different breaks up and coalitions are being formed which puts democracy on stake in this region (Bastasin, 2008).

According to western democracy, the power should be shared among the different participating shareholders. This creates a pressure on each power holding group because the rest are having a strong pressure on the same. This power should be shared among member states, technocrats, social groups striving for the betterment of the society, and other organized organizations. Europe is the example of portraying the same practices but now the modern technology and education system have brought a revolution among the youngsters that they demand more liberal values ensuring the true democratic values which are lacking in European side. This is a need of the day for Europe to take steps according to the modern technology and the youth so that future of the democracy may be preserved in this continent otherwise another system will replace the democracy (Majone, 2005).

**Conclusion**

The whole of the above article presented a detailed picture of democracy and its major characteristics. As the topic of the research was to highlight the challenges of democracy being faced in the developed countries, all of the sections of the research explained different dimensions of challenges to different regions. The major challenge found from the data is the variation in theory and practice of democracy. The democratic provisions are not being addressed because undemocratic and authoritarian rules are undermining the cores of democracy. The study found that socio-economic inequalities, authoritarian rule, absence of democratic practices, racism and dominant role of the powerful countries are a prominent challenges to the contemporary democracy in developed countries.

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