

# Innovations

## **Liberal Democracy is not Democracy: Neoclassicism Politics Perspectives**

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**Abstract:** *Much work has been done on democracy and liberal democracy. Despite this, scholars have failed to convey that these are two distinct ideologies. This paper challenges fundamental propositions that hold democracy as synonymous with liberal democracy. The paper delves into individualism, rights, liberty, media, and the protection of minorities. The work thereby explores the differences between the two concepts — first, in principles, and second, in practice. Empirical examples provided offer a posteriori evidence aimed at enforcing the assertion that democracy, when infused with liberal tenets, forms a novel governance system: liberal democracy.*

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Liberal Democracy, Media Repression, Electoral Integrity, Liberty, Freedom, & Pluralism*

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### **Introduction**

The conflation of two distinct political ideologies — liberalism and democracy — to form a [novel] system of governance referred to as liberal democracy was intended to highlight the perceived shortcomings of democracy in protecting and guaranteeing individualism, rights, liberty, and more. Many people often become confused when asked to distinguish between democracy and liberal democracy. Some, if not all, believe there is no difference between the two. However, differences do exist, as the two ideologies represent distinct systems of governance (Graham, 1992). Moreover, they originated in different eras. Democracy predates liberal democracy, with the former being a product of ancient societies, while the latter emerged in the modern era.

As systems of governance, liberal democracy limits the powers of leaders, whereas democracy does not necessarily impose such constraints. This

distinction illustrates that the two systems differ not only in principles but also in practice, particularly in how they allocate political power. The concern here is not focused on who holds power, but on the extent to which power is allocated and exercised (Plattner, 1998). Even without considering other similar factors, this indicates that, in practice, democracy differs from liberal democracy. For instance, there are societies that are liberal but not democratic, and others that are democratic but not liberal. This clear dichotomy was earlier highlighted by Graham (1992), who questioned: Are all liberals democrats? Or are all democrats liberals? The answers are straightforward: not all liberals are democrats, and likewise, not all democrats are liberals. Similarly, some societies are liberal but not democratic, while others are democratic but not liberal.

On the one hand, a liberal society is typically one that guarantees individual freedoms and rights, including freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, and has rule of law that protects these rights. However, it may not be democratic if it lacks a system of governance that allows citizens to participate in political decision-making through free and fair elections. Examples of such societies include: Hong Kong (under British rule); before its return to China in 1997, Hong Kong was a relatively liberal society with significant economic freedoms, a strong rule of law, and protection of civil liberties. However, it was not fully democratic since its leadership was appointed by the British government, and there was no universal suffrage or elected government at the highest levels. Though local legislative bodies had partial elections, the system did not meet the full definition of democracy. Coupled to this, during much of the 19th century, the UK was a liberal society in terms of economic freedoms, the rule of law, and protections for individual rights (such as freedom of speech and property rights). However, it was not fully democratic as voting rights were restricted to property-owning males, excluding a large portion of the population from the political process. Also, Singapore has long been seen as a liberal state with robust protections for property rights, economic freedoms, and a reliable rule of law. However, it has often been criticized for not being fully democratic. The People's Action Party (PAP) has dominated Singapore's political scene since independence in 1965, with limited political opposition and restrictions on press freedoms, making it a liberal but not fully democratic state in the past. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) equally falls here; it has Free-market economy with significant foreign investments, business-friendly policies, and strong protections for property rights. But it's governed by hereditary rulers with no political parties or competitive elections, limited freedom of speech, assembly, and political participation.

While on the other hand, a democratic society has political systems that allow for regular elections and popular participation. It may not be liberal if it lacks protections for individual rights, such as freedom of speech, minority rights, or checks on the power of the majority. Examples include: Poland with free elections where the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party has a significant influence amidst active engagement of citizens in the political process. But the PiS led government changes to the judiciary that compromise its independence, increased government control and influence over public media outlets, are actions that undermine civil liberties and minority protections, signaling a democracy without liberal ideals. Another example is Hungary, under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, often cited as an example of a democracy without liberalism. While elections are held regularly, Orbán's government has implemented policies that limit the independence of the judiciary, restrict press freedoms, and erode the rights of minorities. Orbán himself has spoken about creating an "illiberal state," reflecting a democratic structure that lacks liberal protections for civil rights. Moreso, Venezuela, under Hugo Chávez and later Nicolás Maduro, has maintained democratic elections, though their fairness has been questioned in recent years. Despite the electoral process, the government has severely restricted individual freedoms, including freedom of speech, the press, and political opposition, making it a democracy that lacks the liberal safeguards for human rights and civil liberties.

As illustrated, a society can uphold individual rights and freedoms without offering democratic participation or can have a democratic system that lacks strong protections for civil liberties and minority rights. These examples show that societies can align with one principle while falling short on the other. Democracy alone cannot fully protect rights, freedom, and liberty (Plattner 1998; Zakaria 2003), leading to the emergence of liberal democracy to fill these gaps. Viewing liberal democracy as a mere continuation of democracy is inaccurate; the two ideologies exist as distinct systems of governance. A country is either a democracy or a liberal democracy, not both. Distinguishing between these ideologies is crucial for understanding whether a political system is progressing or declining. If a democratic country shifts towards authoritarianism, it's important to assess the state of its elections. Likewise, a liberal democracy can regress to a democracy if it begins to erode liberal values. Many countries still call themselves liberal democracies despite restricting free speech and eroding rights. This study provides a framework for scholars, policymakers, and institutions to recognize that liberal democracy is not a static status.

Democracy was achieving positive results even when it cornered all women and slaves and prevented them from all forms of political participations. American and Western democracies were proud of their governance system at this stage of their political lives. Is it right to say they were not a democracy at this time? As earlier mentioned; highlighting the gaps created by democracy, the tendency of alienating certain groups of people because of their gender and/or social status, gave rise to resistance against democracy. Therefore, necessitating the creation of a new governance system referred to as liberal democracy, with the sole purpose of being all inclusive (Plattner 1998). Knowing when a country was democratic and when it became a liberal democracy shed lights on advances and growth societies have made. Some authors wrongly refer to the West and USA as liberal democracies during the era of slave trade, slavery and colonialism. Meanwhile, these were anti-liberal actions which they perpetuated; this communicates that, these countries were not closer to, or fit to be called liberal democracies during these eras.

The concept of illiberal democracy has unscrupulously emerged in literature as the supposed opposite of liberal democracy. However, if this is accepted as scientifically accurate, it raises a significant question: what remains of democracy itself? Democracy, in its original form, is not inherently linked to liberalism. Therefore, the term illiberal democracy should be rejected in this context. The true opposite of liberal democracy is simply democracy, not illiberal democracy. This is similar to the concept of autocracy — just as the opposite of a liberal autocracy cannot be illiberal autocracy because autocracy inherently does not protect liberal values. These are common misconceptions in political discourse and writings that require correction. The opposites of political concepts are not derived from their direct grammatical opposites; political lexicons are unique and must be understood within their specific contexts.

Smith's critiques of liberal democracy, as cited in McManus (2021), illustrate that liberal democrats, who claim to assure freedom, often tend to curtail citizens' rights and freedoms whenever they perceive that the exercise of such freedoms might negatively impact their leadership. They frequently limit and constrain fair competition under the guise of government protection. These critiques highlight a clear distinction between liberal democracy and democracy, as two distinct political ideologies. While democracy does not inherently guarantee freedom, liberal democracy provides freedom but retracts it when it senses that it may be used against its interests. This paradox explains why liberal economists are skeptical of liberal democracy (Kukathas, 2006). For

instance, Hayek argues that governments, regardless of how liberal they claim to be, should not interfere in the economy, because interference contradicts the basic principles of a free market economy. Despite this, all liberal democracies interfere in markets, thereby justifying the view that liberal democracy is problematic; it creates opportunities while simultaneously opposing what it creates. This perspective aligns with arguments suggesting that significant portions of many societies are increasingly becoming ardent supporters of liberal autocracy, rejecting liberal democracy. Many observers accept the phrase "illiberal democracy," but they often fail to recognize that, in simpler terms, an illiberal democracy is merely democracy. Therefore, liberal democracy cannot and should not be considered, under any circumstances, synonymous with democracy.

Many writers have put forth extensive arguments highlighting the flaws of liberal democracy and hastily labelling it as illiberal democracy (Zakaria, 1997). Some observers fail to recognize the important distinction between democracy and liberal democracy. This confusion often leads anti-liberal democracy scholars to mistakenly believe that their critiques of liberal democracy are critiques of democracy itself. As a result, they frequently misidentify illiberal democracy in countries that have never been democratic. How can a country that recently emerged from colonialism or fundamentalism and is still grappling with the meaning of political independence be considered an illiberal democracy? Can a country become a liberal democracy if it has never experienced democracy? This perspective, which lacks careful consideration, is inherently narrow and flawed. Such arguments continue to surface, and there is little indication that they will subside anytime soon. The persistence of this debate stems from a failure to acknowledge that the fusion of liberalism and democracy has created a new system of governance known as liberal democracy, which is distinct from the older system of governance - democracy.

Liberalism's attempts to exist independently of governance structures ultimately failed because citizens' freedoms, rights, and liberties often fell victim to political overreach (Plattner, 1999). This suggests that democracy, in its natural state, does not inherently prioritize liberal ideals. As a result, liberal advocates sought to establish a system of governance that protects and guarantees these ideals, leading to the creation of what is now known as liberal democracy. In line with the adage; liberalism transformed into liberal democracy because democracy alone could not fully integrate its values. However, despite this development, some observers mistakenly argue that liberal democracy is merely an evolution or advancement of democracy. These conflicting viewpoints, particularly the negative one,

arise because many people are either unaware or deliberately ignoring the reality that liberal democracy is distinct from democracy. Can both systems function independently? If not, why not?

Idi Amin is noted to have asserted that freedom of speech is guaranteed in Uganda, but freedom after speech cannot be guaranteed. This suggests that the consequences of speech depend on the content of what is said. In other words, expressions critical of those in power are prohibited, and those who violate this unwritten rule face repercussions after exercising their freedom. For countries that claim to be liberal democracies, this might seem harsh and cruel, yet similar tendencies can be observed in many liberal democracies today. This observation underscores the need for a clear distinction between these ideologies. By making this distinction, perhaps everyone could better assess and determine whether a society is moving toward or away from democracy or liberal democracy. In this context, democracy can degrade into autocracy or despotism, just as a liberal democracy can regress into a democracy — as long as it continues to hold free and fair elections without upholding citizens' freedoms, rights, and liberties.

Assertions that liberalism laid the foundation for effective democracy are misleading because democracy existed long before liberalism. Ancient societies had various forms of representative governance; for example, the Athenians had a functional democracy without any trace of liberalism. More concerning is the fact that all political institutions today are referred to as democratic institutions. Liberal democracy is not the only concept affected by this conflation. Looking back, the House of Commons in the UK was established approximately in the 13th century, a time when there was no democracy in the UK. How, then, did political institutions that predate democracy are labelled as democratic institutions? Historically, both France and Britain were ruled by absolute monarchies with councils that functioned like courts. The political system in the US after independence distinguished between freemen (those enfranchised) and non-freemen (those disenfranchised). The political evolution of these countries over time shows that, centuries ago, liberal democracy was not the prevailing system of governance. When assessing recent developments, it is evident that these countries may no longer be liberal democracies, possibly having shifted toward a different political ideology altogether.

Plainly put, authoritarianism is a threat to democracy, and vice versa. However, the major and immediate threat to liberal democracy is liberal democracy itself. This may sound strange and untrue, but the infighting between the unlimited desires of some liberals has created two distinct



ideological camps: progressive liberals and conservative liberals (Hornat 2021). The former advocate for endless freedom, driven by the development of newly created rights and cultures, while the latter believe undefined and unlimited rights ultimately destroy established ones. In an attempt to preserve established rights and counter the progressives, many conservative liberals have started to develop positive views of and a preference for autocracy. They do this with the expectation that autocrats are best suited to preserve the milestones they have achieved in securing a certain degree of rights, freedom, and liberty. This illustrates how today's conservatives were yesterday's liberals. This phenomenon is likely to continue because once a liberal becomes satisfied with the status quo, they no longer see the need to champion new causes. It explains why most conservatives are older people, while the reverse is true for liberals.

Many authors argue that by 1960, several countries were adopting liberal democracy (Bollen 1993), but this claim has been strongly challenged (Carothers 2007). The persistent association of liberal democracy with various times and places stems from a research gap, where distinctions between democracy and liberal democracy are often overlooked. This has led to a false believe that liberal democracy is simply the Western form of democracy. Then what form of democracy exists outside the West? While democracy is well-defined, liberal democracy remains elusive. This explains why some authors mistakenly identify liberal democracy in eras and regions where democracy itself was absent. By 1960, much of Asia and Africa were still under colonial rule, deprived of freedom, sparking nationalism and anti-imperialism movements. How could a colonizing country be liberal? How could a newly independent nation be a liberal democracy when it had not yet achieved democracy? Post-colonies till date are unable to conduct elections.

Monarchy and autocracy gave rise to democracy in many countries due to tensions between elites and non-elites. However, the emergence of democracy in these contexts lacked liberal principles (Rodrik 2016), as elites who relinquished power sought to maintain their rights and control over resources; democracy primarily allowed the masses to engage in civic duties, such as political participation and, most importantly, choosing leaders through elections. In contrast, liberal democracy ensures equality under the law, without favoring any class. No group, regardless of status, holds exclusive property rights over others. This distinction makes liberal democracy fundamentally different from democracy. It supports the argument that liberal democracy should be recognized as a distinct political ideology, different from democracy.

## **Origin of Democracy**

Though the concept and practice of democracy have evolved over time, its origins can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where various forms of participatory decision-making and governance existed. Ancient Athens is often considered the birthplace of democracy. The city-state introduced a direct form of democracy in which eligible citizens directly participated in decision-making through assemblies and votes. The Athenian system allowed citizens to debate and vote on important issues, propose legislation, and hold public officials accountable. However, it is important to note that this form of democracy was limited to a relatively small portion of the population, excluding women, slaves, and non-citizens. The Roman Republic is another example of early democratic practices. Though not a direct democracy like Athens, the Roman Republic featured representative elements where citizens elected officials to represent their interests in various legislative bodies. The system had some sort of checks and balances.

Various indigenous communities around the world practiced diverse forms of participatory decision-making that could be seen as precursors to modern democratic principles. These societies often emphasized consensus-building and collective decision-making through discussions among community members. Most early subsistence societies achieved consensus before taking an action. For example, the Iroquois Confederacy, a group of Native American tribes, is often cited as having influenced the development of democratic ideas because the Confederacy had a system of representative government and councils where leaders were selected by consensus. Also, during the Middle Ages, some European societies held assemblies where nobles, clergies, and a few commoners gathered to discuss issues of governance and taxation. These assemblies contributed to the idea of broader participation in decision-making.

The concept of democracy continued to evolve through various political revolutions and movements, including the French Revolution, the Glorious Revolution, and the American Revolution. These events further shaped the development of democratic ideals, leading to the establishment of constitutional and representative democracies. It is therefore important to recognize that the origin of democracy is not limited to a single event or civilization. Instead, it emerged from a complex interplay of historical, sociological, cultural, and intellectual factors that influenced the evolution of governance and practices across different societies at different epochs (Carothers 2007).



## **Origin of Liberal Democracy**

While there may be some similarities with democracy, it is crucial to understand the distinct principles that liberal democracy upholds. The origins of liberal democracy can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Liberal democracy is a form of representative government that combines democratic ideals with the protection of minorities, justice, individual rights, and liberties. It emphasizes the rule of law, limited government intervention, and the importance of safeguarding individualism. The development of liberal democracy was influenced by several key factors and thinkers:

For example, the Enlightenment was an era marked by the rise of intellectual and philosophical ideas challenging monarchies and absolutism. Thinkers like Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Voltaire promoted ideas of natural rights, separation of powers, and the consent of the governed, which laid the foundation for liberal democracy. The concept of social contract and the idea that governments should exist to protect individual rights and liberties had a significant impact on its development. Rousseau argued that a government cannot govern successfully without the consent of its citizens, emphasizing the need for an agreement between the rulers and the ruled. Locke's belief in the consent of the governed and the right to revolt against oppressive rulers resonates with notions of popular sovereignty.

The American Revolution against British colonial rule was an attempt to implement liberal democratic principles. The Declaration of Independence (1776) articulates the idea that governments derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed and that individuals have inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, it is important to note that this era was still far from embodying true liberal democracy, as many Americans continued to own slaves. The U.S. Constitution (1787) further solidified concepts like the separation of powers and checks and balances. Similarly, the French Revolution played a role in advancing liberal democratic ideals, though it also faced challenges and contradictions. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) asserted equality, liberty, and freedom, highlighting the tensions between liberal democratic aspirations and authoritarian tendencies.

The rise of industrialization and urbanization brought new economic and social opportunities that empowered individuals financially and elevated their social positions. This shift allowed individuals to have a greater say in societal developments. Workers began forming unions to protect their services from exploitative employers, and liberal democracies addressed

these challenges by ensuring legal protections for workers, advocating for social welfare policies, and regulating business practices to prevent abuse and kinds of exploitations.

The Civil Rights Movement, led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of liberal democracy in the United States and beyond. At this time, though the American political system was democratic, it was far from being a liberal democracy due to pervasive segregation and racial discriminations. The achievements of the Civil Rights Movement by the 1970s helped transform the U.S. into becoming a liberal democracy through the passing of several anti-racial laws aimed at ensuring equality for all races. Canada implemented similar laws only in the 1980s. Therefore, it is historically inaccurate to refer to the U.S. and other Western states as liberal democracies before these changes, as they lacked the inclusive principles required for liberal democracy to thrive.

### **Explanation of Key Concepts**

#### **Democracy:**

Democracy is a political system characterized by the participation of citizens in decision-making processes, allowing collective choices to reflect the will of the people. In a democratic system, individuals have the right to vote in elections and participate in various aspects of governance. Similarly, individuals can choose to exercise this right by abstaining from voting. In this case, they must be prepared to acknowledge, respect, and abide by the outcome of an election they chose not to participate in. In democracy, such 'An-Inaction' (A-I) is considered 'An-Action' (A-A). The researcher considers A-I as a form of democratic participation — passive participation or affirming without direct involvement to abide by an outcome beforehand. Participation takes the form of choosing representatives, influencing policies, and holding leaders accountable for their actions. Apart from deciding not to vote, citizens who opt for A-I still have full rights to influence policies and hold leaders accountable through various means, such as debates and protests.

A fundamental principle of democracy is the idea that political power originates from the people, and government authority is exercised with their consent. This is what the researcher refers to as the potency and significance of the A-I and A-A in democracy. My aphorism aligns with Lincoln's adage: "*government of the people, by the people, for the people.*" This leaves no room for exclusion, irrespective of one's [in]action in an election, implying that A-I and A-A in democracy are of utmost importance.

People need to refrain from criticizing or negatively pointing at citizens who choose A-I over A-A. Both approaches help to accommodate all citizens. A-I and A-A in democracy represents a system of inclusivity, which aligns with democratic ideals. Democracies vary in their structures and practices, but they generally emphasize key principles such as political fairness and transparency. Democracy does not only try to ensure peaceful transitions of power but also fosters stability and prevents authoritarian rule. As such, democracy is not just a set of institutions but also a culture of civic engagement and active participation, promoting a sense of belonging and responsibility among citizens.

**Liberal Democracy:**

Liberal democracy builds upon the principles of democracy while incorporating a strong emphasis on the rule of law, individualism, and liberties. In addition to ensuring that political decisions reflect the will of the people, liberal democracies prioritize the protection of individual freedoms from infringement by the government and other citizens. This includes freedom of speech, press, assembly, property rights, and other civil liberties.

In a liberal democracy, the rule of law is paramount. This means that all individuals, including government officials, are subject to and must abide by the law. The judiciary plays a critical role in upholding these legal principles and ensuring that the rights of individuals are safeguarded. Liberal democracies include an exclusive system of checks and balances, where different branches of government have distinct functions with the ability to constrain one another's powers. The concept of liberal democracy also extends to protecting minority rights, ensuring that the rights of marginalized groups are not overridden by the preferences of the majority. This inclusivity aims to prevent the "tyranny of the majority" and promotes a diverse and pluralistic society.

To sum up, while democracy involves citizens participation in political processes, liberal democracy adds layers of protection for individual rights and minority freedoms and ensures that no one is above the law. These elements were absent in early democracies, such as Athenian democracy and that of the Roman Republic. The emphasis on the rule of law, exclusive checks and balances, and respect for minority rights distinguishes liberal democracy from democracy by projecting a political system that values both the collective will of the people and the individual rights of citizens. Contemporarily, some Western powers continue to exert indirect control over some Asian and African countries. If they are truly liberal democracies, why do they not allow every country to freely manage

its own political and economic affairs? Why interfere in the rights of others? This is contrary to liberalism. Evidently, liberal democracy is being misrepresented in political discourse.

### **Thoughts of Early Philosophers**

#### **Anti Democracy Political Thinkers**

Most prominent early philosophers were unsupportive of democracy because they believed educated individuals should not be considered equals with the uneducated masses, especially when it comes to public decision-making. Unfortunately, Socrates did not leave behind any written works on democracy. Nonetheless, his thoughts on democracy can be inferred from the writings of one of his staunchest students: Plato, particularly in his seminal work "*The Republic*." Socrates expressed skepticism towards democracy; he questioned the wisdom of allowing all citizens to participate in decision-making, suggesting that only those with knowledge and expertise should lead societies. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates critiqued the Athenian democracy of his time, suggesting that it creates a governance system that could lead to a rule by the ignorant masses and demagogues (Plato 1943; Sharples 1994; Saxonhouse 1998; Marshall & Bilsborough 2010; Scott 2000). In alignment with Socrates' concerns, Xenophon, in "*The Polity of the Athenians*," criticized Athenian democracy for its instability, highlighting its tendency to switch policies frequently (Kroeker 2009; Seager 2001). Though Plato's earlier works like "*Protagoras*" and "*Gorgias*" explored the potential benefits of democratic dialogues and rhetoric to arrive at informed decisions, he argued in "*The Republic*" that democracy could lead to chaos and instability. Plato firmly asserts that a just society should be led by *Philosopher-Kings* who possess wisdom and virtue, rather than allowing the majority to rule. He contended that the masses are prone to irrationality and impulsiveness, and that the rule of the masses could result in the pursuit of individual desires rather than the common good, which he feared could easily degenerate into mob rule. In "*The Republic*," Thrasymachus argued that democracy could lead to the rule of the strong and manipulative, rather than the just.

Aristotle presents a nuanced view of democracy by recognizing different forms, such as direct democracy and representative democracy. He argues that a well-balanced government could emerge if democracy were tempered with elements of aristocracy and monarchy. Hobbes had a more pessimistic view of democracy; he argued that humans are inherently self-interested and that a strong centralized authority is necessary to maintain social order. In his work "*Leviathan*," Hobbes advocates for an absolute sovereign to prevent the chaos of a state of nature. Similarly, Schmitt criticizes democracy in his work "*The Concept of the Political*" by arguing

for a strong sovereign authority to counteract political fragmentation. He sees democracy as a system that encourages the disintegration of political institutions and power, thereby making it difficult to govern (Cheek 1991; Lindsay 1992; Lintott 1992; Skidmore-Hess et al. 2017).

In congruent to the above, Brennan's work, "*Against Democracy*," argues that most citizens lack the knowledge and incentives to make informed political decisions and advocates for epistocracy. In contrast, H el ene Landemore criticizes traditional representative democracy and advocates for "*open democracy*," a system where citizens actively participate in decision-making. In partial disagreement, Nadia Urbinati criticizes the "*competitive cult of leadership*" in contemporary democracies, which she sees as detrimental to citizen participation, given that the efficacy of electoral democracy in post-colonial contexts has often failed to address deep-rooted socio-economic issues (Brennan 2016; Landemore 2020).

### **Pro Democracy Political Thinkers**

Rousseau was critical of representative democracy and advocated for direct democracy, arguing that true democracy requires active citizen participation and a commitment to the general will of the people. Although Tocqueville was generally positive about democracy, he also identified potential pitfalls, such as the tyranny of the majority and the risks of individualism, observing that democratic societies are characterized by equality and voluntary associations (Stoke 1935). In contrast, Marx viewed democracy within the context of class struggle, seeing the bourgeois governance system as a form of political control by the capitalist class that exploits the working class; he argued that true democracy could only emerge in a classless society. Meanwhile, Weber had a complex view of democracy; while he recognized its importance for modern societies, he highlighted the role of bureaucracy and rationalization in achieving a functional governance system. Additionally, Mannheim's views were influenced by his sociology of knowledge, seeing democracy as a way to manage the diversity of perspectives and ideas in modern societies, thus allowing for a more inclusive decision-making process. In the UK, John Stuart Mill, who had previously argued that intellectuals should be given more voting power than non-intellectuals, later became a staunch advocate for representative democracy, arguing that it is essential to safeguard individual liberties by preventing the tyranny of the majority and emphasizing the importance of open debate, freedom of expression, and the protection of minority rights.

Locke's ideas on government and individual rights laid the foundation for liberal democratic principles. In his work "*Two Treatises of Government*,"

Locke emphasizes the consent of the governed and the protection of natural rights within a governance framework. He argues that a government's legitimacy is derived from the consent of the governed and that individuals have natural rights that need protection. Locke's writings greatly influenced the concept of limited government, rule of law, and the separation of powers. Montesquieu further developed these ideas in his work "*The Spirit of the Laws*," where he elaborates on the concept of separation of powers, which became a cornerstone of modern political governance systems. Montesquieu illustrates that successful governance requires a system of checks and balances to prevent abuse of power (Montesquieu 1989). Economically, Adam Smith's arguments on political economy indirectly influenced democratic principles. Although not exclusively a political philosopher, his advocacy for economic freedom and limited government intervention contributed to the development of classical liberal thought.

Napoleon's views on democracy evolved over time throughout his leadership. Initially, he supported the idea of a strong central authority, but he later adopted elements of democratic governance in his administration, such as the Napoleonic Code, which introduced legal equality and protected some degrees of individual rights (Thompson 1954). His French counterpart, Rousseau, proposed the idea of a social contract in his work "*The Social Contract*," where citizens collectively participate in the creation of laws and advocate for direct democracy, allowing citizens to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Additionally, Thomas Paine's "*Common Sense*," advocates for American independence and the institution of democratic governance, arguing that citizens have the right to choose their own government and that such responsibility should not be left in the hands of a third party. These ideas contributed to the spread of democratic ideals.

### **Supporters for Liberal Democracy**

John Rawls, in "*A Theory of Justice*," emphasizes the importance of individual rights, equality, and the rule of law in a just society. His concept of the "*veil of ignorance*" supports the principles of liberal democracy by advocating for fairness and impartiality in the creation of societal rules. In connection to this, Amartya Sen, in "*Development as Freedom*," argues that liberal democracy is essential for development and human flourishing, highlighting the role of political freedom in promoting well-being. Robert Dahl's work on pluralism and democratic participation also aligns with the principles of liberal democracy. In "*Polyarchy*," Dahl discusses the importance of inclusivity and competition in democratic systems.



Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach underscores the value of human dignity and the need for individual freedoms to be protected by institutions, contributing to the principles of liberal democracy. Similarly, Dworkin's theory of "*Rights as Trumps*" and his defense of judicial review support the protection of individual rights within liberal democracies. Taylor's communitarian perspective advocates for the recognition of diverse cultural identities within a framework of shared political values, thus supporting liberal democracy. Jurgen Habermas's "*Theory of Communicative Action*" highlights the role of public discourse and rational argumentation in shaping policies and institutions in liberal democracies. And John Dunn's emphasis on citizen participation, accountability, and the protection of rights further aligns with the principles of liberal democracy.

### **Critics of Liberal Democracy:**

Michel Foucault's critique of power and knowledge challenges the claims of neutrality and objectivity in liberal democratic institutions. His insights help explain why issues like fake news and misinformation have become significant political problems in many liberal democracies, which struggle to manage diverse opinions that are perceived as harmful to their societies. Such issues can undermine freedom of expression, contradicting the core principles of liberal democracy (Guédon 1977). This illustrates why Slavoj Žižek's criticism of the commodification of freedom and the illusion of choice in consumerist societies also challenges the effectiveness of liberal democracy, a view supported by contemporary political occurrences. This context underscores Chantal Mouffe's critique of consensus-based liberal democracy, advocating for a more agonistic approach that acknowledges and engages with conflict and dissent (Davis 1999).

Wendy Brown's critique of neoliberalism and its impact on individual subjectivism raises profound questions about the compatibility of liberal democracy with market-driven values. Brown suggests that the pursuit of economic efficiency and market logic may compromise the core democratic principles of equality and participatory governance (McBride 2016). Michael Sandel's communitarian perspective further challenges liberal democracy by questioning its ability to tackle deeper moral and ethical issues within society, arguing that it frequently neglects fundamental values and communal responsibilities. In acknowledgement, Seyla Benhabib echoes this critique, advocating for a more inclusive deliberative democracy that transcends liberal individualism and addresses these limitations. Jacques Rancière's critique adds another layer, exposing liberal democracy's tendency to marginalize certain voices and

questioning its true commitment to genuine equality and meaningful participation for all.

### **Challenges faced by Liberal Democracy**

In an era marked by the proliferation of information and the interconnectedness of global societies, the concept of liberal democracy has gained significant prominence. Rooted in the principles of individual rights, rule of law, and protection of minorities, liberal democracy represents a governance system that does not only ensures the participation of citizens in decision-making processes, but also, safeguards their fundamental rights. However, as the boundaries of democratic practices are tested, it becomes evident that the label of "liberal democracy" should not be hastily applied to nations that engage in practices antithetical to the core tenets of liberalism. Because a nation is able to conduct free and fair elections, it does not evince that it is a liberal democracy. Free and fair elections are aspects of democracy, and though also being an incorporated aspect of liberal democracy, liberal democracy goes beyond this.

Central to the essence of liberal democracy is the recognition of pluralism and the divergence of opinions. A thriving liberal democracy thrives on the premise that citizens possess the autonomy to express their views, critique government actions, and engage in open debates without fear of reprisal. This open exchange of ideas is essential for the vitality of political institutions, fostering informed decision-making and holding leaders accountable. It is in this context that the actions of certain countries raise pertinent questions on their adherence to principles of liberal democracy. Many have given themselves the title solely because they have good electoral systems. Countries that employ tactics of media shut-down, arrest, maiming, and jailing of journalists, and the branding of all dissenting opinions as "fake news" or relieving workers from their jobs because of holding contrary views contravene the very essence of liberal democracy. By silencing voices that challenges the status quo, such nations undermine freedom of expression that is central to liberal democracy. The stifling of media outlets and the targeting of journalists does not only curtail the public's access to information, but also, erode checks and balances that are necessary to hold leaders accountable. Note that, contrary voices are the best to hold government accountable.

The refusal of leaders to concede defeat in elections directly contradicts the spirit of liberal democracy, which is founded on the principles of fair competition, and respect for the rule of law. A cornerstone of liberal democratic governance is the peaceful transition of power based on the

will of the people as expressed through elections. When leaders reject the outcomes of elections, they disregard the principle of majority rule and gnaw the faith of citizens in elections. This behavior stands in stark contrast to the acceptance of pluralism and the wide recognition that diverse opinions contribute to robust discourse and political good health. It is important to acknowledge that, the absence of liberal ideals in a country's governance raises valid concerns that indicate such a country is not a liberal democracy. The label – liberal democracy, should not be bestowed solely based on the presence of peaceful elections; rather, it should reflect a commitment to upholding liberal values that protect individual liberties, promote inclusive governance, and guarantee diversity of voices.

In a nutshell, the principles of liberal democracy encompass more than the mere trappings of democratic processes. The acceptance of all forms of pluralism, protection of individual rights, and liberty, are essential components that define true liberal democracies. Countries that engages in actions contrary to these principles, such as media suppression, persecution of press men, dismissal of all contrary opinions as conspiracy theories, and refusals to concede defeat, challenges the integrity of such a country for claiming to be a liberal democracy (Zakaria 2003). As the world navigates the complex terrain of governance, it is imperative to uphold the sanctity of liberal values as an integral part of political journeys, ensuring that the label "liberal democracy" is reserved only for nations that truly reflect these values in their policies and actions. Rejecting opposing opinions goes a long way to affirm arguments put forth against [liberal] democracy during its early years of inception; some of which holds that, democracy is a government of uneducated people. If this assertion is not true, governments should allow their citizens to have access to a variety of information, letting citizens be the judge of which information is right or wrong. Adherence to liberal democratic principles is not only a matter of moral imperative but also a practical necessity for sustainable governance. It is therefore, a precursor for societies to recognize that democracy is not a monolithic concept, but liberal democracy is a monolithic concept.

### **Difficulties of Liberal Democracy to Preserve its Attributes**

Abandoning liberal democracy and reverting to democracy has become the new normal in modern politics. This seismic shift has occurred largely unnoticed by the public. The cause of this paradigm shift lies in self-centered political interests and the inability of liberal democracies to ensure the free flow of alternative voices, especially those that challenge the opinions of those in power. The argument here does not concern whether contrary opinions are true, false, fake news, misinformation, or conspiracy theories. The focus is on the fact that liberal democracy was

developed to accommodate pluralism of opinions. No one's expression should be stifled simply because it is considered fake or contrary opinion. This plays in the hands of early philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Hobbes who had warned that a governance system that equates the uneducated with the educated is not ideal for society. When everyone is given an equal voice, the unwise majority may drown out the wise minority. What XX considers fake, YY may not. The pluralism of opinions is a significant challenge to liberal democracy because the only remedy seems to be curtailing freedom of expression and access to information deemed fake or misleading, which is inherently anti-liberal.

However, liberalism democracy was instituted when Western states realized that citizens' freedom sometimes needs protection from government actions. Before the Enlightenment, states did not permit "*Open-Freedom*" (a term coined by the author, meaning the freedom to criticize state authority in public). Public demands ensured that *Open-Freedom* was assured and protected by governments, transforming and replacing democracy with liberal democracy — a new governance system distinct from one that guarantees citizens political participation but restricted freedom and did not protect public criticism of leaders.

*Open-Freedom* ensures that citizens can make sound decisions for themselves and criticize whatever they choose, provided it causes no public or physical harm to self or others. This explains why Rawls supports government intervention in citizens' freedom if its exercise may harm others. He failed to recognize self-harm and could not see that government interference can sometimes take away freedom rather than protecting it. This is why Nozick's arguments often oppose those of Rawls, as governments frequently exploit this for their selfish interests.

### **Indicators of Democracy replacing Liberal Democracy**

Governments worldwide are increasingly silencing views contrary to their political agenda, often shutting down media outlets. This reduces citizens' access to information and conditions them to become passive consumers rather than rational and analytical thinkers (Michael 2018). It indicates that governments are failing to develop their citizens' mental capacity to attain traits of critical thinking. They fear what citizens might conclude after being exposed to contrary views. Governments worry that the consumption of alternative information might lead citizens to act against certain public policies. This has led governments to strangle communication mediums used by their opponents, forcing the media to align along political lines. Today, most media outlets are either pro-party XX or anti-party YY. For instance, in the USA, Fox News is widely

acknowledged as pro-Republican, while CNN is pro-Democrat. Even if they try to naively deny this characterization, they cannot reject the fact that they lean to the right and left, respectively. When mainstream media align along party lines, it indicates that liberal democracy has lost its values by reverting to democracy. This negatively influence a political landscape, as parties prefer holding debates on one media platform over another, leading to a loss of media neutrality. This further polarizes the electorate by enhancing a sense of media-scale-of-preference; this scenario is very unhealthy for any political system as it prevents opposing ideas from frequently meeting for deliberations and debates in order to give room for the best ideas to thrive. A system of one sided leaning media is antithetical to liberal democracy. An occurrence that facilitates certain political ideologies to overshadow others, for instance, media XX being projected as a mouthpiece for conservatives, while media YY prides itself as a cornerstone for liberals.

The scenario is common in many countries today, yet such countries continue to falsely claim they are liberal democracies. These countries have regressed, taking several steps backward into the realm of democracy. True liberal democracies are rare in contemporary societies because most states are overwhelmed by the ever-increasing dynamism of pluralism. The most common political contention today is "us versus them," where one is either with or against the ruling class. States claiming to be liberal democracies should allow citizens to access alternative information., preventing this reveals that countries claiming to be liberal democracies are lying, as liberalism has been eroded from their public policies. Such countries should be rightfully referred to as democracies, not liberal democracies. Democracy in ancient Greek society was developed to ensure leaders were truly chosen by the populace. It did not prioritize inclusive politics or freedom. This is democracy in its original form and political purity. As societies evolved, Western elites thought it wise to incorporate more elements into their system of governance. When new elements were added, the governance system could no longer be called democracy because the changes were significant as it completely changed the features of governance. All added aspects were focused more on liberty, freedom, justice, and minority rights, justifying why the new political ideology was aptly named liberal democracy. Importantly, this was not merely a renaming of democracy but the creation of a new system, reflecting a new beginning.

When media houses are no longer assured the safety and protection that liberal democracy once provided, it implies that liberal democracy is unable to survive in contemporary political dynamics in the face of

increasingly intense socio-cultural waves of pluralism. Countries that still hold free and fair elections but lack freedom of speech and access to all media are democracies, not liberal democracies. When a country restricts these freedoms, it has lost the ideals of liberalism in its governance system; it should no longer be recognized as a liberal democracy. They have degraded themselves to democracy. When journalists are suspended, sacked, arrested, tortured, maimed, or killed, or when governments censors media outlets these, or when political leaders' or citizens' social media accounts are monitored, blocked or deleted for offering alternative opinions that do not align with ruling elites, are signs of a dying liberal democracy.

Moreso, in liberal democracies, losing parties are expected to concede defeat, but in democracy, this is irrelevant. Once election results are officially announced, whether losing parties concede or not, it doesn't really matter. In 2020, Trump never conceded defeat, and similarly, Jair Bolsonaro never conceded defeat to Lula Da Silva in 2022, though it is assumed these elections met democratic standards. This is an indicator that these countries are no longer liberal democracies. When politicians no longer concede, it diminishes a vital aspect of liberalism, signaling a shift from liberal democracy to democracy. There is nothing wrong with being a democracy, as it allows citizens to freely choose their leaders. However, countries should not project themselves as liberal democracies if alternative views are being attacked and silenced in their political spheres. Contrary opinions should be challenged through constructive debates, not by crude methods. Today, most media are filled with information labeled as fake news. Scientifically, issues related to misinformation is not a new phenomenon — Galileo's findings about the sun being the center of the universe were initially rejected as fake, false, or misinformation, but were later proven right. Therefore, matters of misinformation need urgent scholarly attention because it impairs scientific inquiry and inquisitiveness.

Countries where the media focus heavily on highlighting fake news are also showing signs of declining from liberal democracy and moving toward democracy. Liberalism emphasizes the right to education. If states fail to provide the necessary resources to develop their citizen's mental capacities, it becomes a cause for concern. It is important to note that not all contrary opinions are wrong or false as illustrated by citing Galileo's findings about the cosmos. Today, opinions are highly politicized to the extent that XX may convince his/her supporters that all his/her opponent's opinions are lies. However, this is not new; it is how politics is structured to function – kicking against opponents. What is new is the increasing tendency to dismiss all opposing views as misinformation or fake news.



This goes a long way to support the argument that such a calculated approach is eroding liberal ideals. Consequently, liberal democracy is becoming increasingly rare in many contemporary nations; it is no longer what it used to be. While many countries still refer to themselves as liberal democracies, critical analysis shows that these nations have regressed into mere democracies. The indicators highlighted in this study are intended to provoke scholarly debates on the distinction between democracy and liberal democracy. Understanding this distinction is crucial for assessing whether a country's political trajectory is progressing or regressing.

### **Conclusion**

In the realm of governance, the concept of liberal democracy stands as a beacon of pluralism, liberty, minority rights, checking the powers of majority rule, and open discourse. Its core tenets rest on the premise that divergent opinions should flourish, the media should be independent and neutral, and leaders should accept electoral outcomes. Un-liberal actions emerge when certain nations, despite their liberal credentials, employ repressive tactics that defy the essence of liberal democracy. This work has explored how countries that silence the media, censor/delete citizens' social media accounts, persecute journalists, and who labeled all contrary views or foreign media as "fake news," channels should not be classified as liberal democracies.

Governments should educate their citizens and allow them to be the umpire on this. Central to liberal democracy is the nurturing of pluralism and the allowance for diverse opinions. This inclusivity extends to the media landscape, where an unfettered press ensures an informed citizenry. However, there are numerous instances where media outlets are forcibly shut down, journalists suspended, sacked, arrested, or maimed for daring to question leaders. Such acts do not only violate principles of freedom of expression but also undermine the crucial role media in safeguarding liberal democracy. Schudson (2008) asserts that an independent media serves as the watchdog of [liberal] democracy, holding leaders accountable and fostering transparency.

In a true liberal democracy, the marketplace of ideas thrives on open discussions and debates, which are vital for informed decision-making. Conversely, when dissenting voices are dismissed without proper discourse, the very foundation of open dialogue is compromised. This is particularly concerning in an era where disinformation and misinformation can undermine collective understanding of reality. A functional liberal democracy relies on exposure to diverse viewpoints while preventing the

undue influence of echo chambers (Sunstein 2017). Moreover, the reluctance of leaders to concede electoral defeat challenges the core principle of majority rule within liberal democracy. When leaders refuse to honor this process, they undermine democratic mandate and foster a climate of political uncertainty. As Lipset (1959) posits, [liberal] democracy is built on the acceptance of electoral outcomes, demonstrating respect for a collective choice. Evidently, as illustrated throughout this work, the hallmarks of liberal democracy extend beyond the procedural mechanics of elections. The arguments herein align with Freedom House's acknowledgment of the decline in freedom in many countries, including the USA.

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