The Evolution of Democracy: Historical Perspectives and Modern Challenges

Abhishek Awasthi

UGC NET Qualified candidate for Assistant Professor (Political Science)

Abstract: *This paper explores the evolution of democracy from its historical roots to contemporary challenges. It delves into ancient democratic practices, the influence of Enlightenment thought, and the rise of representative democracies. The study examines modern challenges such as populism, digital misinformation, and economic inequality, and discusses the resilience and adaptability of democratic institutions in addressing these issues. Through this comprehensive analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of democracy's historical development, its enduring appeal, and the complex dynamics shaping its future.*

Keywords: Democracy, revolution, political system, justice, historical evolution, populism, representative democracy, modern challenges

1. Introduction

Democracy is a political system in which people rule. This prominent and disputed idea has changed rapidly throughout time. Democracy dates back to ancient Greek city-states when citizens actively engaged in governance to modern representative democracies. Over the decades, cultural, social, economic, and political influences have shaped democracy. This text discusses democracy's history and current concerns.

Democracy has its roots in early civilisations like the 5th-century BC Athenian democracy, when only people directly participated in governing. The Roman Republic, with its blend of democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy, advanced democracy. Some early democratic exercises may have failed and gone out, but they laid the stage for future democracy expansion. In the Middle Ages, democracy, constitutionalism, and parliaments were founded with the Magna Carta.[1] Enlightenment began in the 17th and 18th centuries, whereas renaissance occurred during the 14th and 17th centuries. Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau developed ideas such individual rights, checks and balances, rule by popular consent to revolutionaries, and democratic nations in the 18th century. The American and French revolutions demonstrated representative democracy for liberty, equality, and justice. Revolutions were necessary to spread democratic principles and construct democracies. Democracy has had a bumpy road. Democracy has been endangered by populism, authoritarianism, internet misinformation, income inequality, and climate change.[2]

However, democratic systems are dynamic and resilient. During crises and reform, democracies can correct their mistakes and grow, consolidating their position as the dominant political system in the modern world. Civil society, international collaboration, and democracy are interconnected and vital to democratic governance, according to this article.

This article examines democracy's history, current threats, and democratic organisations' strengths and shortcomings. Thus, by examining these aspects, the research will illuminate democracy's previous history, existing impact, and future prospects.

2. Literature Review

A) Ancient Democracy

Democracy originated in 5th-century BC Athens. True democracy began in ancient Athens with this kind of democracy. Direct action includes assembly and council decision-making. The essay "Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens" by P. Cartledge discusses Athenian democracy, decision-making, scarcity, and civic engagement. Ober writes that Athenian democracy was based on isonomia and isegoria, even if women, slaves, and metics were banned.[3]

Athenian democracy started in 508 BCE, while the Roman Republic, which lasted from 509 BCE to 27 BCE, had a blend of democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy. The Republic's Senate and popular assemblies helped democracy evolve. Finally, Polybius' Histories describe the Roman Republic's political structure, emphasising legality and popular representation.[4]

B) Medieval and Early Modern Periods

The bill of rights specifically the magna carta signed in 1215 was one of the milestones towards constitutional democracy. Backdrawing to the historical facts, James Holt's "Magna Carta"a work of history, has given detailed information about Magna Carta and its

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[1] Hantos, E., 2005. The Magna Carta of the English and of the Hungarian Constitution: A Comparative View of the Law and Institutions of the Early Middle Ages. The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd..

[2] Miller, M.L. and Vaccari, C., 2020. Digital threats to democracy: Comparative lessons and possible remedies. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 25(3), pp.333-356.

[3] Josiah Ober, "Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens" (Princeton University Press, 2008).

[4] Ibid.

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implication of making people know that the ruler wasn't beyond law and the formation of parliaments. Holt also sheds light on values that were championed by the Magna Carta; particularly, procedural fairness and specific bodily liberties against tyranny.[5]

Also, the establishment of early parliaments in England and other parts of Europe contributed to the progression of democracy. In his book "The Reign of Henry III" David Carpenter shows how English Parliament developed into the bicameral legislative body representing all layers of society.[6] Historians such as C. G. Russell and John Morrill have given insights the Petition of Right (1628) and the English Bill of Right (1689) that rest on the sovereignty of the parliament and curtail the influence of monarchy.

C) Enlightenment and Democratic Ideals

The enlightenment was the most important epoch in the development of contemporary democracy. Enlightenment intellectuals including John Locke, Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacque Rousseau promoted individual rights, separation of powers, and sovereignty. John Locke's "Two Treatises of Government" discussed life, liberty, and property rights and how communities and governments were founded. In "The Spirit of the Laws," Montesquieu argued that legislative, executive, and judicial power tripartitions underpinned contemporary democracies. The Social Contract by Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasised people's sovereignty and the general will, which asserts that legitimate authority originates from the people.

D) The Rise of Representative Democracy

The American and French revolution are generally considered revolution that shaped the history of democracy. Bernard Bailyn's book, "The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution", deals with the impact of the Enlightenment movement on the American founding fathers and the creation of a political system of a republic with major values of liberty, equality and justice. The United States of America Constitution signed in 1787 and the Bill of Rights signed in 1791 became the references for democracy globally. In the case of Europe, the French revolution proved to play a pivotal role in democratization. Lynn Hunt's "The French Revolution and Human Rights: The article 'A Brief Documentary History' throws light on what is known as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen adopted in 1789 and its features that define the elements of democracy. The Revolution's political legacy is one of Hunt's focuses where the happenings contributed to the advancement of republicanism.

E) Modern Challenges

New political tendencies like populism and authoritarianism threaten democracy. In "What is Populism?" Jan-Werner Müller defines populism and analyses populist movements' effects on democracies. Müller shows in the paper that populist dictators who preach about the people's will and construct authoritarian regimes may harm democracy.[7]

Brazil showed how democratic institutions and fundamental freedoms in Russia, China, and Turkey are declining. When authoritarians threaten the globe, the book emphasises the necessity to defend democracy and its principles.[8]

F) Digital Misinformation and Cyber Threats

'Fake news' is another area that has emerged with the changing times; mainly due to the growth of use of the internet and social media. Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts' "Network Propaganda: "Disinformation: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics" looks at the effects of fake news on the American population's trust in their government. The book therefore observes that since social media is a fertile playground for fake news, it is affecting electoral processes and opinions.[9] It is pertinent to note the advanced in the acts of terror predominantly, challenging the democracies with cyber threats. Thomas Rid's "Cyber War Will Not Take Place" offer extensive information on threats posed by cyber terrorism on democratic institutions and the general importance of implementing enhanced measures to ensure electoral security.[10]

G) Economic Inequality and Social Justice

Income disparities create a major problem for democracy in the modern world. Thomas Piketty's book, "Capital in the Twenty-First Century" analyzes the phenomenon of inequalities and their influence on the democratic values.[11] Hence, Piketty appeals for want of progressive policies and subsequently inclusive means of economic growth to help reduce economic inequalities further and to ensure the continuity of democratic societies.

Such social justice causes as the BLM and the Me Too movements concern civil and human rights, and advocate for changes and punishment of the violators. In "From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation", Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor writes about the social justice

[5] Holt, J.C., Garnett, G. and Hudson, J., 2015. Magna carta. Cambridge University Press.

[6] Crane, E.H. and Boaz, D., 2003. Cato Handbook for Congress: Policy Recommendations for the 108th Congress. Cato Institute.

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[8] (n 7).

[9] Pyo, Y.J., 2019. Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics. International Journal of Communication, 13, p.3.

[10] Rid, T., 2012. Cyber war will not take place. Journal of strategic studies, 35(1), pp.5-32.

[11] Piketty, T., 2014. Capital in the twenty-first century. Harvard University Press.

movements with regard to the fight for the rights of the oppressed and the protection of the democracy.[12]

H) Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

Global warming & climate change is the most prominent threat to the future of democracies around the world. Naomi Klein's "This Changes Everything: The article under discussion "Capitalism vs. The Climate" focuses on the way climate change affects social justice and equity and importance of policies to tackle climate crisis for democratic societies. Klein views the environmental problem as global, and thus calls for transformations in systems or sources of energy, youths' consumption habits, and the global economy.[13]

I) The Resilience of Democracy

Despite these challenges, democratic systems have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability. Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry's "The Resilience of the West: Democracy, Liberalism, and the Future of the Global Order" explores historical examples of democratic resilience and the capacity for self-correction and renewal. The book highlights the importance of civic engagement, international cooperation, and democratic innovation in sustaining democratic governance.[14]
Civil society organizations play a crucial role in safeguarding democracy. Michael Edwards' "Civil Society" provides an in-depth analysis of the role of civil society in advocating for transparency, accountability, and human rights.[15] The book emphasizes the importance of a supportive environment for civil society engagement in democratic processes.

3. Historical Perspectives

I) Ancient Democracy

a. Athenian Democracy

Modern democracy evolved from 5th-century BC Athenian democracy. In direct democracy and power, Athenian residents elected assemblies and councils to make decisions. Athenian democracy included problems like no representation for women, slaves, and non-citizens, but it laid the groundwork for future democracy. Ekklesia and Boule allowed residents to debate and vote on a variety of problems, demonstrating that democracy valued citizen decision-making. When examining Athenian democracy, numerous pros and cons may be identified for its evolution. It promoted voting and

political involvement and established an example for democratic nations. However, merely counting tribal votes reveals how early democratic systems were constrained. Other milestones like isonomia, or legal equality, and isegoria, or equal speech, established additional democratic concepts.[16]

b. Roman Republic

The Roman Republic, from 509 BC to 27 BC, included democratic, oligarchic, and monarchic regimes. Senate and assembly checks and balances to the People defined later civilising Democracy in the Republic. Senate business was aristocratic, whereas popular assemblies let people voice their ideas.[17]

Roman Republic is an example of a flawed democracy. It introduced representative democracy by having leaders represent people. Republic's legal system was founded on the Twelve Tables, although many of them addressed individual rights and society's rules. However, the collapse of Republic led to civil wars and authoritarian rule, exposing democratic regimes to internal and foreign influences.

II) Medieval and Early Modern Periods

a. Magna Carta and Early Parliaments

The 1215 Magna Carta lay the groundwork for constitutional democracy. The Magna Carta established the idea of separation of powers between the administration and judiciary, declared the monarch not above the law, and established parliamentary systems worldwide. It created civil freedoms like due process and habeas corpus to protect individuals from tyranny. Other formal venues like early English and European parliaments also improved democratic regimes. The bicameral English Parliament that evolved from 1265 represented estate interests with a House of Commons and House of Lords. The Petition of Right Act (1628) and English Bill of Rights Act (1689) advanced parliamentary sovereignty and restricted monarchy.[18]

b. Enlightenment and Democratic Ideals

The 17th and 18th century Enlightenment movement created most of the concepts that underpin democratic democracies. Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau's focus on nation's rights, separation of power, and people's

[12] Taylor, K.Y., 2016. From# BlackLivesMatter to black liberation. Haymarket Books.
[13] Finn, J.C., Castree, N., Declet-Barreto, J., Johnson, L., Larner, W., Liverman, D., Watts, M. and Finn, J.C., 2015. Book review: This changes everything: Capitalism vs. the climate.
[14] Peoples, C., 2024. The liberal international ordering of crisis. International Relations, 38(1), pp.3-24.
[15] Ottaway, M., 2000. Funding virtue: Civil society aid and democracy promotion. Carnegie Endowment.

[16] Aguiar, G., 2010. THE AGRARIAN BASIS OF ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY. Journal of Comparative Politics, 3(2).
[17] Millar, F., 2002. The Roman Republic in political thought. UPNE.
[18] Johnston, P., 2013. The'Glorious Revolution'Down Under: Parliamentary Privilege and the Bill of Rights 1689 (UK)--Its Application in Criminal Proceedings Against Members of Parliament: England and Australia Compared. Paper delivered to Australian Association of Constitutional Law, WA branch, at the Constitution Centre, West Perth, 4.

sovereignty remains Enlightenment philosophy's foundation. These inspired uprisings and democratic governments. In 1689, political philosopher John Locke advocated legal right to life, liberty, property, and government based on people's contract in the Second Treatise of Government. Political Liberalism In 1748, Montesquieu built on the separation of powers idea in The Spirit of the Laws, which is now the cornerstone of contemporary democracy. The Social Contract (1762) by enlightenment writer Jean Jacques Rousseau supported popular sovereignty and public will, arguing that authority comes from the governed.

4. The Rise of Representative Democracy

a. American Revolution

It is believed that 1775-1783 American events shaped democracy. The Enlightenment revolutionaries operated a free, equal, and fair republic. Democratic governments worldwide are based on the US Constitution (1787) and Bill of Rights (1791). Liberty and government-citizen relations dominated the American Revolution. To prevent tyranny, the Constitution divides authority among the three parts of government. In addition to personal liberty, fair trial, and lodging troops at home, the Bill of Rights protected First Amendment rights. In the US experiment, democracy had problems including balancing majority authority with minority protection. In the Federalist Papers, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay explained how to prevent divisions and majority rule. The remarkable growth of American democracy, including the liberation of slaves, the enfranchisement of women, and the battle for racial equality, shows that society is continuously striving for justice.[19]

b. French Revolution

After the French Revolution (1789–1799), democracy expanded. Despite the chaos, Revolution prioritised liberty, equality, and fraternity. The French Revolution, influenced by enlightened leaders like Robespierre, produced a Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789 that set democratic goals like people's power, individual freedoms, and law supremacy. Undoubtedly, the French Revolution had a major impact on political changes occurring across the globe at the same time. It impacted European and Latin American revolutionaries, promoting republicanism and eroding monarchical and colonial governments. The Revolution also showed democracy's problems: fanaticism, political violence, and tyranny. The Napoleonic era was a conflict between democracy and tyranny after Revolution. Napoleon Bonaparte's rise to power and the Napoleonic Code transformed political and legal frameworks, establishing legal equality and a central authority. The

Restoration and French revolutions showed democracy's cycle of tendencies and processes.[20]

5. Modern Challenges

I) Populism and Authoritarianism

Populism has threatened democratisation in recent decades. Populists profess to serve the country and its people while destroying democratic structures. This has been seen in the US, Brazil, and Hungary. Populism opposes economic and political institutions and emphasises popular power. Populists exploit economic worries, animosities, and resentments. As with every political phenomena, populism may unite disillusioned people and fight oligarchic elites, but it also threatens democracy. Because of their widespread backing, populist leaders typically erode or eliminate democratic balances like the judiciary, media, and election procedures. They may also use rhetoric that denigrates political opponents and divides factions. Populism, which deepens the divide between elites and people, challenges democratic institutions and checks and balances.

Global democracy is threatened by rising authoritarianism. Russian, Chinese, and Turkish autocrats have cemented authoritarianism and human rights violations. The modern democratisation process, particularly in established democracies, also threatens democratic government.

Authoritarian governments deploy censorship, political repression, and election manipulation. They have used governmental power to suppress dissent, democracy, and civil freedoms. Concentration of power in the leadership or political party erodes accountability and legality. Increased political authoritarianism reduces democratic values including openness, tolerance, and individual liberties. Populist authoritarian leaders utilise nationalism, bigotry, and social divide to gain support. Democracy is deteriorating worldwide, thus appeals for safeguarding democratic institutions and fighting for democratic principles must be heeded.[21]

II) Misinformation and Fake News

Modern civilisation is plagued by false news, a digital age threat to democracy. Social media has become a hub for bogus news, undermining public faith in democracy. Misinformation seems to plague election processes and public opinion.

Misinformation and false news change public opinion and political choices, making them harmful. The echo chamber effect of social media makes it hard to flood the populace with facts and true information, thus fake news spreads quickly. Such phenomena cause polarisation and

[19] Bouton, T., 2007. Taming Democracy:" The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution. Oxford University Press.

[20] Edelstein, M., 2016. The French Revolution and the Birth of Electoral Democracy. Routledge.

[21] Bhasin, T. and Gandhi, J., 2013. Timing and targeting of state repression in authoritarian elections. Electoral Studies, 32(4), pp.620-631.

a loss of public knowledge. Information warfare and control, especially by global nations and non-state actors, threaten democratic systems. Democracy is dishonoured when foreign nations interfere in elections via cyber assaults or false news. Thus, media literacy, legislation, and technology are needed to overcome disinformation.[22]

III) Cybersecurity and Electoral Integrity

Modern computer and cyber-crimes against democracy have evolved. Cyber vandalism, bogus news, and espionage undermine democratic processes. Vote security and integrity are crucial to public faith in democracy. Hackers undermine political systems such online voter register, electronic voting, and campaign, demoralising supporters. Cyber technologies used to influence public opinion and political processes throw democratic organisations' immunity to foreign and internal dangers into question. Cybersecurity, openness, and accountability can defend election integrity. Governments must preserve election systems, upgrade IT, and focus on electoral process. International cyberspace regulations and collaboration are also crucial to cyber security.

IV) Economic Inequality and Social Justice

The challenge to democratic government is caused by economic disparity. The rising concentration of riches and power in a few works against equality and justice. Democracy must evolve and evolve to provide economic justice and access to economic opportunities via policies and wealth distribution for society's prosperity. Economic disparity causes social division and political upheaval. To prove their superiority, people factor money, riches, and resources. Minorities influence majority, weakening democratic regimes. Since seemingly weak people have little say in politics, economic disparity affects political actions. Progressive systematic taxation, welfare, education, and health expenditure may reduce economic disparity and social injustice. The present Western democracies' resistance to radicalism is based on shared affluence to maintain stability and democracy. The Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and other social justice groups protest injustices and demand change. These movements are crucial to defending the rights of different classes and democracy for everyone.[23]

Social justice movements draw attention to bias, uneven rights, and injustice. Public engagement, policy impact, and institution scrutiny are its goals. It is possible to evaluate the outcomes of the battle for justice and equality in the framework of the analysed social justice movements and emphasise the role of civic action and ordinary people in the contemporary democratic state. Authorities' resistance is social justice movements' worst

setback, illustrating their ongoing struggle. Together with issues like economic injustice and environmental protection, social justice is a complicated notion that is difficult to realise.

V) Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

Global warming threatens democracies. Climate change exacerbates natural catastrophes, resource depletion and distribution, forced migration, and other social and economic justice challenges. Democracy governments should behave responsibly and discover methods to mitigate climate change. Climate change-induced sea levels, heat waves, and natural calamities threaten human security and development. Developing nations are in the forefront of climate change's consequences. International collaboration and environmental analysis in every decision-making helps combat climate change. Climate change will also affect democracy. Short-term political goals and economic rationale may conflict with this message for systemic and rapid climate change action. Democracy requires citizens to support the environment, economy, and the poor.

6. Resilience of Democracy

I) Adaptation and Reform

Nevertheless, one can note that democratic systems have rather impressive stability and flexibility. Democracies have faced various challenges and changes over time, which only proved the ability of a democracy to correct itself and progress. The strength of democratic institutions lies in their pertinence to address contemporary challenges and adjust to the existing circumstances.

The examples of democratic stability are the reactions to the economic downturns like the great depression and social issues including the blacks' right to vote. These periods of crisis led to change such as the increase of social welfare programs, civil rights for individuals and the enhancement of democracy. Democratic systems have also evolved to meet other changes such as the introduction of the internet and social media which has revolutionized political communication and activism. The existence of new interventions like the digital activism and e-governance show that democracy can be innovated in the digital territory.[24]

II) Global Democratic Trends

Democracy today is a global phenomenon with different and ever-changing characteristics. While there has been democratic regression in some geographic areas, progress has also been made in several other parts of the world in the area of democratic improvement. In maintaining the international democratic trends, there is a need for

[22] Fink, U. and Gillich, I., 2019. Fake news as a challenge for journalistic standards in modern democracy. U. Louisville L. Rev., 58, p.263.

[23] Lampinen, A., 2020. Tweeting for change: how Twitter users practice hashtag activism through# BlackLivesMatter and# MeToo (Master's thesis, A. Lampinen).

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cooperation, support of the democratic movements, and encouragement of the human rights.

Some areas of the World like Latin America, EU as well as Africa have recorded bursts of democratization with what has been achieved in the democratization process today. However, these regions also have their problems such as political instabilities, corruption, and the recent emergence of authoritarianism. The process of democratization of the world is characterized by successes and failures.

United Nations, European Union and Organisation of American States among others have crucial role in the sustenance of democratic principles and encouraging democratic reforms. International cooperation in matters like election observation, protection of human rights, and fight against corruption strengthens the democratic institutions.

III) The Role of Civil Society

Civil society is therefore important when it comes to protecting democracy. They fight for freedom of information, probity, and human rights; sometimes operating against the government. In this case, civil society formations are involved in democratic activities, thus guaranteeing that different people's opinions are considered as well as democratic standards are observed. Non-governmental organisations, pressure groups, civil society and other forms of advocacy and grass root formations participate in firming up the democratic system by providing oversight on the governments' act, pushing for change in policies and or consolidating the opinion of the masses. They help subjugated people to have a voice of course in political issues as well as in political activities. The problems of civil society organisation, such as curtailment of civil liberties, financial constraints, and increased political oppression, thus call for favourable civil society engagement environment. All individuals and groups within a society must be safeguarded and the environment for civil action must be encouraged for healthy democracies to be built.

7. Conclusion

The development of democracy as a sign of people's interest and the desire of freedom and equal rights for everyone, justice. Modern democracies face various challenges; however, successes and challenges of democracy give hope for positive outcomes in future. Tackling these challenges through reform, innovation, and governing for the inclusion of more people in the democracies, the democratic societies will remain stable in maintaining the tenets of democracies. Analyzing the roots of democracy and the principles that are reflected in modern representative democracy, it can be stated that democracy has always been in process and always will be. The tasks of dealing with populism, authoritarianism, digital fake news, economic neoliberalism, and climate change point to the contemporary democracy as hybrid and multifaceted. Solving these issues assumes a complex task of safeguarding democratic processes and institutions and supporting inclusive economic and social models while incorporating the environmental dimension into all levels of governance and decision-making. Thus, civil society, international cooperation, and democratic innovation remain vital for continuing and moving forward with democratic governance in the twenty-first century. By defining and addressing the challenges that face democracy, democratic societies would be in a position to determine its future. Therefore, making use of liberty, equality, and justice provisions, as well as encouraging the development of a civic political culture and active citizenship, democratic societies may further develop to meet the contemporary challenges.

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