**The global state of democracy**

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We have recently witnessed the largest transfer of state pow­er in decades. At present, there are more than 50 countries that have passed legislation to legalise or permit the election of an authori­tarian regime. This was also ac­companied by a significant in­crease in political polarisation on all sides of the aisle and a growing number of violent pro­tests. These events have been fu­elled by the belief—and the increas­ingly prevalent opinion—that one’s vote does not matter as much as it did dur­ing the electoral college debates follow­ing the close of the 2020 US presidential election. As such, elections have become increasingly polarising, with little con­sensus on how they should be conduct­ed, or whether they should even be held at all. While many of these actions will undoubtedly benefit those who enjoy a degree of freedom of speech and assem­bly, there can be no doubt that democra­cy is under pressure around the world. In country after country, we are see­ing a rise in populism and nationalism and a consequent decline in support for traditional democratic institutions and values. Across these trends, however, a common thread remains—democrat­ic majorities are becoming less popular, despite their role as the bedrock of liber­ty around the globe. And now, there are signs that this shift is being accelerated by rising authoritarian populism across the continent. Such developments could very well lead to new forms of repres­sion of dissent, which may not be limited to democracies but also include people who oppose authoritarian regimes. They can also create opportunities for those seeking influence and patronage within government agencies.

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The emergence of authoritarian popu­list movements has increased uncertain­ty in the global order today. It presents a dilemma, with authoritarian-dominated states claiming to represent the rights of other citizens. With some exceptions, they have largely failed to address the economic challenges facing developing nations and instead resorted to protec­tionist measures, further increasing in­equality. Conversely, authoritarian gov­ernments may pursue foreign interests alongside domestic ones and can lever­age the current crisis to their advantage. For example, Russia and China continue to dominate international trade, often through unfair practices. Yet the trend towards authoritarianism doesn’t just occur globally; it’s happening here in the US, too. Recent data released ahead of November’s midterms showed the Re­publican Party retaining control of Con­gress while Democrats lost seats across several key battleground states. A host of factors contribute to these patterns: 1) a shifting balance between public and private sector participation in our econ­omy, 2) the deepening divide that exists in society, 3) rising polarisation among groups opposed to the status quo and 4) the effects of COVID-19. Each of the aforementioned factors highlights what I call the “globalisation paradox,” stat­ing that globalised politics have simul­taneously fostered greater integration across societies and widened social gaps. On the flip side, policies pursued by national leaders and parties tend to be inconsistent and/or ill-calibrat­ed as a result of poor policy formula­tion. When one takes a closer look at in­dividual countries, the picture becomes bleaker. While democracy appears to be declining in most cases, they are per­forming considerably worse than non-democratic states. Indeed, according to a 2021 report from Freedom House, 56 countries have fallen below the thresh­old set by the organisation for the first time since the early 1990s. That means they may face persecution, arbitrary ar­rest, torture, extrajudicial killings, and/or other human rights violations, which has led many to question the nature of democracy itself, in terms of basic free­doms. Ultimately, we need to under­stand why, given the scale of the prob­lem. One major factor is the failure of democracy itself, wherein elected offi­cials fail to fulfill the expectations of the electorate and choose to uphold old tra­ditions, undermining the ability of indi­viduals to change things. Another is the failure of democratic institutions them­selves, including the lack of account­ability mechanisms and the inability to hold politicians accountable for actions that hurt society. Thirdly, the pandemic revealed many shortcomings of liberal capitalism, where the emphasis on mar­ket freedoms has left many vulnerable to predatory corporations that seek to ex­ploit workers at lower wages. Fourthly, authoritarianism has served as a breed­ing ground for autocracy and extrem­ism, bringing new elements of instability to societies. Lastly, the changing demo­graphics of the global population put massive pressure on existing systems as well as creating conditions making de­mocracy harder to maintain.

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In light of the above challenges, any form of democracy faces threats from authoritarianism. What must be done to reduce risks and promote good gover­nance? An ideal solution would require a comprehensive approach from across all sectors, encompassing individuals, institutions, ideas, governments, and the entire spectrum of interest groups. Im­portantly, the process must begin with everyone involved—individuals, local communities, businesses, NGOs, civil so­ciety groups, religious bodies, etc.—and gradually expand to include the wider social landscape. Thus, democracy is ex­pected to remain viable in each case, re­gardless of the kind of system used. The best way to accomplish this is through strengthening civic education and civic engagement through regular participa­tion in politics from young generations of the general population. Furthermore, strong media regulation is needed to en­sure that politicians do not use the plat­forms they currently wield to manipulate voters. Ultimately, I believe democra­cy can prosper while respecting human rights, upholding dignity, promoting tol­erance of difference, respecting diversity, and building a healthier planet through cooperation; it will only be secure if our shared future can be shaped properly. Let us live in peace, together!

[Pak-Argentinian BPC held to boost bilateral cooperation](https://www.nation.com.pk/06-Dec-2022/pak-argentinian-bpc-held-to-boost-bilateral-cooperation)

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