

Abusive Democracy: Your Rights Are Ignored by Our People

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Abstract:

The article explores the abuse of globally good “terms” like "democracy" and redefines "terrorism" in the context of Middle Eastern affairs, arguing that such language manipulation undermines genuine democratic principles and human rights. It highlights the contradictory use of "democracy" to describe Israel, despite its policies often being at odds with democratic values, and the redefinition of "terrorism" to delegitimize legitimate resistance movements. The article underscores the role of the United States in this narrative, noting its extensive military actions globally while labeling its adversaries as terrorist threats. This hypocrisy disheartens Iranian peace activists and reformists, who find their struggle for civil rights marginalized in favor of geopolitical alliances with Israel.

The piece delves into various democratic theories—classical liberal, participatory, deliberative, and radical democracy—illustrating how each offers distinct perspectives on governance and citizen engagement. It also contrasts Western democratic models with non-Western approaches like Ubuntu in Africa and Confucian democracy in Asia, which emphasize community and harmony over individualism.

Further, the article critiques media portrayals, highlighting Edward Said's and Noam Chomsky's arguments on biased reporting and propaganda. It discusses how media narratives shape public perception, often demonizing Muslim populations and justifying aggressive foreign policies. The article calls for a critical examination of these narratives and support for grassroots movements and human rights organizations striving for justice and peace in the Middle East. It concludes by reaffirming the need to uphold true democratic values and human rights, challenging the dominant, often misleading, political discourse.

Keywords: Democracy, Israel, Iranian reforms, Gaza crisis

Introduction:

In 25th July-2024 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the U.S. Congress, seeking support for the ongoing Gaza conflict amidst protests inside and outside the venue. Netanyahu declared that “our enemies are your enemies” and emphasized that Israel’s fight against Iran is aligned with U.S. interests. Outside the Capitol, thousands protested, branding Netanyahu as a “war criminal,” echoing accusations from the International Criminal Court. Inside, five individuals were arrested for attempting to disrupt the proceedings. Netanyahu criticized these protests, calling the demonstrators “useful idiots” for Iran. Highlighting Iran’s threat, Netanyahu portrayed a "terror axis" against the U.S., Israel, and the Arab world, describing it as a "battle of savagery against civilization." He thanked the U.S. for its longstanding military aid and requested accelerated support to hasten the end of the Gaza conflict despite an evident surplus of ammunition in Israel to target civilians (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024) , using a Churchill quote to emphasize his plea. Netanyahu downplayed the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, attributing food shortages to Hamas theft and advocating for a demilitarized. While the ongoing conflicts in Gaza has led to indirect loss of 186,000 individuals (Khatib et al., 2024) (Davoudpour, A.R., 2024) there is a necessity to redefine the terms and values of democracy to avoid equalizing democracy to fair and justice.

The use of grandiose words for malevolent purposes in the recent Middle Eastern affairs appears to have no end. The recent usage of the term "democracy" in relation to one of the world’s most reviled governments, Israel, seems so absurd that it brings disrepute to the concept of democracy and raises doubts about the principles and application of terms in global affairs. While International Court of Justice (19 July 2024) found that Israel’s policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory violate international law, constituting an ongoing wrongful act. Israel must cease these actions, dismantle settlements, provide reparations, and end its occupation and ruled that other states and the UN must not recognize or support Israel’s actions and must work to uphold Palestinian self-determination and international law (International Court of Justice, 2024) the use of the globally “good” terms has become a suspicious practice to justify any government and their actions.

Similarly, the application of the term "terrorism" to describe an oppressed nation appears crude and corrupt. Mick Wallace, a former member of the European Parliament, has stated that in the past twenty years, the United States alone has used as many bombs and missiles as the rest of the world

combined, while China has not used a single bomb in the last forty years. Despite this, the U.S. labels China as a terrorist threat¹.

This hypocrisy in rhetoric and dependence on the United States, and perhaps the praise of Israel, has exhausted and demoralized many Iranian peace activists, freedom fighters, and reformists. Aligning with Israel and ignoring the suffering of the people renders the quest for social freedom and civil rights meaningless.

These hollow and hypocritical words and actions are becoming increasingly clear to the politically inexperienced but news-following majority of society. This does not imply that the understanding of this matter will deter deceitful media from their efforts to mislead and degrade meanings. Two human tendencies, forgetfulness and complacency, will eventually lead people away from pursuing horrifying truths, but the malicious and well-funded efforts of politicians and their media organizations will continue to operate.

Defining Democracy: Perspectives and Interpretations

Democracy, derived from the Greek word "demos" (people) and "kratos" (rule), is a system of government where power is vested in the people. However, the interpretation and implementation of democracy vary widely across different contexts and cultures, leading to diverse perspectives on its definition and application.

Classical Liberal Democracy

Classical liberal democracy, as envisioned by thinkers like John Locke and Montesquieu, emphasizes individual liberties, rule of law, and the

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separation of powers. This model advocates for a government that protects the rights of individuals through representative institutions and checks and balances (Locke, 1689; Montesquieu, 1748). Key features include free and fair elections, freedom of speech, and an independent judiciary.

Locke's theory of the social contract posits that legitimate government authority arises from the consent of the governed, who agree to cede some freedoms in exchange for protection of their remaining rights (Locke, 1689). Montesquieu further articulated the necessity of separating governmental powers to prevent tyranny and ensure liberty (Montesquieu, 1748).

Participatory Democracy

Participatory democracy extends beyond representative democracy by advocating for direct involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. This perspective, influenced by the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, emphasizes the active engagement of citizens in political life, arguing that true democracy requires more than just voting in elections (Rousseau, 1762). Proponents argue that participatory mechanisms, such as referendums, citizen assemblies, and local governance, enhance the democratic process by ensuring that government actions reflect the will of the people.

Rousseau's concept of the "general will" suggests that true democracy is achieved when individuals participate directly in the formation of laws, thereby aligning personal interests with the common good (Rousseau, 1762). This model is evident in practices such as Swiss direct democracy and participatory budgeting in some municipalities.

Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy, as advocated by theorists like Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, focuses on the quality of discourse and reasoning in democratic decision-making. This perspective emphasizes the importance of informed and rational deliberation among citizens to reach consensus on public issues (Habermas, 1996; Rawls, 1993). It posits that democratic legitimacy arises not just from participation but from the process of deliberation itself, which should be inclusive, equal, and reasoned.

Habermas's theory of communicative action highlights the role of discourse ethics in achieving mutual understanding and rational agreement in the public sphere (Habermas, 1996). Rawls's idea of "public reason" asserts that the legitimacy of political decisions depends on their justification through rational discourse accessible to all citizens (Rawls, 1993).

Radical Democracy

Radical democracy challenges traditional liberal notions by emphasizing the inherent conflicts and power dynamics within society. Thinkers like Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau argue that democracy should embrace pluralism and acknowledge the inevitability of social antagonisms (Mouffe, 2000; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). This perspective views democracy as a continuous process of negotiation and contestation, rather than a stable set of institutions.

Mouffe's concept of "agonistic pluralism" suggests that democratic politics must create spaces for legitimate conflict and dissent, recognizing the role of power in shaping social relations (Mouffe, 2000). Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory underscores the contingent and contested nature of political identities and democratic practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

Democracy in Non-Western Contexts

In non-Western contexts, democracy often takes on different forms, reflecting local traditions and cultural values. For instance, African models of democracy, such as Ubuntu, emphasize community, consensus, and collective well-being over individualism (Letseka, 2012). Similarly, Asian interpretations, influenced by Confucianism, may prioritize harmony, social order, and moral leadership (Bell, 2006).

Ubuntu, an African philosophy of interdependence and shared humanity, informs democratic practices that prioritize consensus-building and communal decision-making (Letseka, 2012). Confucian democracy, as discussed by Daniel Bell, integrates hierarchical structures and meritocratic principles with democratic governance, emphasizing the role of virtuous leaders and the importance of social harmony (Bell, 2006).

Democracy and Its Misuse

The misuse of the term "democracy" to describe the state of Israel is a significant point of contention. Israel, often touted as the only democracy in the Middle East, has policies that many argue are antithetical to democratic principles. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, Israel's treatment of Palestinians amounts to apartheid, a serious violation of human rights and democratic values (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This perspective suggests that the term "democracy" is being exploited to cover up actions that undermine the very essence of democratic governance.

Terrorism and Its Redefinition

The redefinition of "terrorism" to label oppressed nations or groups fighting for their freedom further exacerbates the issue. The U.S. narrative that brands its adversaries as terrorists while engaging in extensive military actions worldwide highlights a double standard. As Mick Wallace points out, the U.S.'s use of bombs and missiles far exceeds that of other nations, yet it positions itself as the arbiter of terrorism (Wallace, 2023). This selective application of the term not only distorts its meaning but also serves to delegitimize genuine struggles for liberation.

The Role of Media and Political Rhetoric

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and maintaining these double standards. Edward Said, in his book "Covering Islam," argues that Western media often portrays the Muslim world through a lens of bias and misunderstanding, contributing to the demonization of entire populations (Said, 1997). This biased coverage supports political agendas that align with the interests of powerful nations and their allies, including Israel.

The influence of the media is not limited to international relations but also affects domestic understanding and political engagement. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, in "Manufacturing Consent," discuss how media propaganda serves the interests of elite groups by shaping public discourse

and opinion (Chomsky & Herman, 1988). This manipulation of information makes it difficult for the general public to discern the truth behind political actions and policies.

The Impact on Iranian Reformists

For Iranian peace activists and reformists, the alignment with Israel and disregard for Palestinian suffering are particularly disheartening. Iran's political landscape is complex, with various factions advocating for different approaches to governance and international relations. Reformists who seek greater freedom and human rights within Iran face significant challenges when the global discourse on democracy and terrorism is so skewed. The perception that aligning with Israel is necessary for political legitimacy further complicates their efforts to promote genuine democratic reforms.

Historical Context

The historical context of U.S. and Israeli actions in the Middle East is crucial for understanding the current misuse of terms like "democracy" and "terrorism." Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the U.S. has been a staunch ally, providing significant military and economic support (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). This relationship has often been justified under the guise of promoting democracy in the region, despite numerous human rights violations reported by international organizations (Amnesty International, 2022).

The U.S.'s broader foreign policy in the Middle East has also been marked by interventions that contradict democratic principles. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, justified by the false claim of weapons of mass destruction, led to widespread instability and suffering (Packer, 2005). Similarly, U.S. support for authoritarian regimes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, despite their poor human rights records, further undermines its claim to be promoting democracy (Blaydes, 2018).

Double Standards in Terrorism

The double standards in the application of the term "terrorism" are starkly evident in U.S. foreign policy. While groups resisting occupation or authoritarian regimes are labeled as terrorists, state actions that result in significant civilian casualties are often justified as counterterrorism measures (Chomsky, 2002). The drone strike campaigns in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, which have killed thousands of civilians, are a case in point (Boyle, 2013). These actions raise serious ethical questions and highlight the selective use of the term "terrorism" to serve geopolitical interests.

Media and Public Perception

The role of the media in shaping public perception is critical in maintaining these double standards. Media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for instance, often lacks balance, with disproportionate emphasis on Israeli perspectives (Philo & Berry, 2011). This biased reporting shapes public opinion and political discourse, making it difficult for the general populace to understand the complexities of the conflict.

Furthermore, the portrayal of Muslims and Middle Eastern societies in Western media often reinforces stereotypes and prejudices. Studies have shown that media coverage tends to depict Muslims as violent and backward, contributing to Islamophobia and justifying aggressive foreign policies (Poole, 2002). This biased portrayal not only affects international relations but also impacts Muslim communities in Western countries, leading to discrimination and social exclusion (Saeed, 2007).

The Struggle for Truth and Justice

Despite these challenges, there are voices and movements that strive for truth and justice. Human rights organizations, independent journalists, and grassroots activists work tirelessly to expose injustices and advocate for the oppressed. The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, for example, seeks to apply economic and political pressure on Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian territories and respect human rights (Barghouti, 2011).

Similarly, in Iran, reformists and activists continue to push for greater political freedoms and social justice, despite facing significant repression (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 2019). These efforts are part of a broader struggle

for democracy and human rights in the Middle East, challenging the dominant narratives and demanding accountability from powerful nations and their allies.

Conclusion

Democracy, in its various interpretations, remains a dynamic and multifaceted concept. While classical liberal democracy focuses on individual rights and institutional checks, participatory democracy advocates for direct citizen engagement. Deliberative democracy prioritizes rational discourse, and radical democracy emphasizes conflict and power dynamics, during the Gaza crisis there is a necessity to implement the terms and conditions of an abusive democracy.

The degradation of terms like "democracy" and "terrorism" in Middle Eastern discourse reflects broader issues of hypocrisy and manipulation in international relations and standards. The misuse of these terms by powerful nations and their media apparatus undermines genuine efforts for peace and justice. It is crucial for the international community to critically examine these narratives and support the voices of those who genuinely strive for democratic values and human rights.

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