

The Need for Democracy in The Present Day

Puttaswamy A. C.

**(Department of Political Science, Government First Grade College for Women, Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka, India)*

Abstract:

Democracy is one of the most significant forms of governance in the modern world. It is not merely a system through which governments are formed through periodic elections; rather, it is a comprehensive political system founded on liberty, equality, social justice, human rights, freedom of expression, accountability, and popular participation. In the twenty-first century, democracy is confronted with several emerging challenges, including political polarisation, authoritarian tendencies, social inequality, misinformation, digital manipulation, declining public trust, and the misuse of social media.

The significance of democracy becomes particularly important in a diverse country such as India, characterised by linguistic, religious, cultural, social, and regional plurality. Democratic institutions provide opportunities for different sections of society to participate in governance and enable conflicts and disagreements to be addressed through constitutional and peaceful mechanisms. Fundamental rights, freedom of expression, an independent judiciary, a free and responsible media, the Right to Information, periodic elections, and constitutional governance are essential mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability.

The present paper examines the need and relevance of democracy in contemporary society. It analyses the importance of democracy in protecting fundamental rights, ensuring political representation, managing diversity, promoting peaceful coexistence, strengthening governmental accountability, facilitating citizen participation, and supporting people-centred development. The paper also discusses the opportunities and challenges posed by the digital age and emphasises the role of young citizens in strengthening democratic values and institutions.

Keywords — Democracy, Liberty, Equality, Human Rights, Social Justice, Political Participation, Accountability, Freedom of Expression, Digital Democracy, Democratic Governance.

1. Introduction

Democracy has emerged as one of the most widely accepted forms of political governance in the modern world. At its core, democracy is based on the principle that political authority ultimately derives from the people. However, democracy cannot be reduced merely to the periodic election of representatives. It is a broader system of governance that seeks to protect individual dignity, political liberty, equality before law, social justice, and meaningful participation in public affairs.

The twenty-first century has witnessed remarkable developments in technology, communication, education, and economic integration. At the same time, contemporary democratic societies are facing new and complex challenges. Political polarisation,

authoritarian tendencies, economic inequalities, misinformation, disinformation, declining institutional trust, and the manipulation of digital platforms have raised serious questions about the quality and sustainability of democratic governance.

Recent comparative evidence reinforces the urgency of this debate. V-Dem's Democracy Report 2026 estimates that, at the end of 2025, the world contained 92 autocracies and 87 democracies, while about 74% of the world's population—around 6 billion people—lived in autocracies. The same report identifies freedom of expression as one of the most severely affected dimensions, with 44 countries experiencing deterioration in 2025. [1]

International IDEA's Global State of Democracy 2026 similarly reports that 98 countries, or 57% of

those assessed, experienced a decline in at least one factor of democratic performance in 2025 compared with five years earlier, while 55 countries (32%) experienced improvement. Freedom of expression declined in 42 countries and freedom of the press in 23% of countries in the dataset. [2]

Democracy assumes particular significance in a pluralistic country such as India. The Indian political system encompasses enormous linguistic, religious, cultural, social, and regional diversity. Constitutional democracy provides a framework through which such diversity can be accommodated while maintaining national unity and political stability.

The protection of fundamental rights, freedom of expression, independent institutions, judicial review, electoral participation, media freedom, and public accountability constitute essential elements of democratic governance. Democracy also provides institutional mechanisms through which disagreements can be addressed through dialogue, debate, elections, legislation, and judicial processes rather than through violence.

The scale of citizen participation in India also illustrates the continuing practical importance of electoral democracy. According to the Election Commission of India, the 2024 General Election recorded 65.79% voter turnout at polling stations. [3] This large-scale participation demonstrates that elections remain a major avenue through which citizens exercise political choice and influence government formation.

Therefore, in the context of rapidly changing political, social, economic, and technological conditions, examining the contemporary relevance and necessity of democracy has become increasingly important.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the meaning and contemporary relevance of democracy.
2. To analyse the need for democracy in the twenty-first century.
3. To examine the role of democracy in protecting fundamental rights and individual liberty.

4. To analyse the importance of political representation and popular participation.
5. To understand the role of democracy in managing social and cultural diversity.
6. To examine the importance of accountability and transparency in democratic governance.
7. To identify the major challenges confronting contemporary democracies.
8. To examine the impact of digital technology on democratic processes.
9. To analyse the role of youth and informed citizens in strengthening democracy.

3. Democracy and Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is one of the fundamental pillars of democratic governance. Democracy provides citizens with the opportunity to express their opinions, participate in public debate, criticise government policies, and contribute to political discourse.

A healthy democracy does not necessarily require unanimity of opinion. Instead, it recognises disagreement and provides institutional mechanisms for managing differences through discussion and dialogue. The ability of citizens to question public policies and express criticism contributes to governmental responsiveness and prevents the concentration of political power.

Freedom of expression is therefore not merely an individual liberty but also an essential condition for informed democratic participation. The contemporary deterioration in freedom of expression identified by both V-Dem and International IDEA makes protection of this democratic value especially important. [1][2]

4. Protection of Fundamental Rights

The protection of fundamental rights constitutes one of the central purposes of constitutional democracy. Rights relating to equality, liberty, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and access to education and justice provide citizens with the institutional foundation necessary for a dignified life. In India, the Constitution provides an extensive framework for the protection of fundamental rights and establishes constitutional safeguards against

arbitrary exercise of state power. Independent courts and constitutional remedies further strengthen the protection of individual rights.

Democracy becomes meaningful when constitutional rights are not merely formally guaranteed but are effectively accessible to all sections of society.

5. Democracy, Diversity and Peaceful Coexistence

India represents one of the world's most diverse societies. Linguistic, religious, cultural, ethnic, and regional differences form an integral part of Indian social life. Managing such diversity requires institutions capable of accommodating competing interests and facilitating peaceful political participation.

Democracy provides space for different communities and groups to express their interests within a constitutional framework. Political dialogue, representation, federal arrangements, electoral participation, and constitutional safeguards help manage diversity without undermining national unity.

Thus, democracy is particularly significant for maintaining peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies.

6. Political Representation and Inclusion

An important characteristic of democracy is the principle of political representation. Democratic institutions provide opportunities for different sections of society to participate in political decision-making.

Women, minorities, historically disadvantaged communities, socially and economically weaker sections, and other groups can seek representation through electoral and constitutional mechanisms. Inclusive representation enhances the legitimacy of government and ensures that public policy is not determined exclusively by a narrow section of society.

The expansion of political participation has therefore become an important dimension of democratic development.

7. Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts

Conflicts and disagreements are inevitable in every society. The distinctive feature of democracy is that it provides institutional mechanisms for managing such disagreements peacefully.

Elections, legislative debates, negotiations, public consultations, judicial procedures, and constitutional mechanisms allow competing interests to be accommodated without resorting to violence.

The rule of law provides the institutional foundation for peaceful conflict resolution. Consequently, democracy contributes to political stability and social peace by transforming conflicts into processes of negotiation and institutional decision-making.

8. Governmental Accountability

Accountability is fundamental to democratic governance. In a democracy, governments are expected to remain accountable to citizens and constitutional institutions.

Periodic elections provide citizens with the opportunity to evaluate the performance of elected representatives. Governments that fail to meet public expectations may be replaced through electoral processes.

However, democratic accountability extends beyond elections. Legislative scrutiny, judicial review, independent institutions, public audits, civil society organisations, the media, and citizen participation also contribute to ensuring that political power is exercised responsibly.

Democracy therefore creates multiple mechanisms through which public authorities can be held accountable.

9. Right to Question the Government

The ability of citizens to question governmental actions is an essential component of democratic governance. Transparency and access to information enable citizens to understand how public institutions function.

In India, the Right to Information framework has strengthened citizens' ability to seek information concerning public administration and governmental decision-making. Transparency mechanisms can help identify administrative shortcomings and strengthen public accountability.

An independent judiciary further ensures that governmental actions remain subject to constitutional and legal limitations.

Thus, the right to question public authority is an important safeguard against arbitrary governance.

10. FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MEDIA

A free and responsible media is an important institution of democracy. The media informs citizens about public affairs, government policies, social developments, and political debates.

At the same time, journalism performs an important watchdog function by examining governmental decisions and bringing administrative failures and public concerns to wider attention.

However, media freedom must be accompanied by professional responsibility, accuracy, ethical journalism, and verification of information. The credibility of democratic communication depends not only on freedom of the press but also on responsible dissemination of information.

11. DEMOCRACY AND PEOPLE-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT

Democratic governance has an important relationship with inclusive and people-centred development. Public policy in a democracy is expected to respond to the needs and aspirations of citizens.

Education, healthcare, employment, social security, poverty reduction, welfare programmes, and the protection of vulnerable groups are among the major areas in which democratic governments are expected to demonstrate responsiveness.

Democracy can contribute to inclusive development by providing citizens with opportunities to influence public priorities and demand accountability from public institutions.

12. DEMOCRACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The emergence of digital technology has transformed contemporary democratic communication. Social media and digital platforms enable citizens to access information, participate in

public discussions, communicate with political representatives, and mobilise around social and political issues.

Digital governance has also increased the accessibility of public services and government information.

However, the digital environment has simultaneously created new challenges. Misinformation, disinformation, manipulated content, online hate speech, political micro-targeting, digital polarisation, and the rapid circulation of unverified information can negatively affect democratic discourse.

Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, media literacy, fact-checking practices, responsible online behaviour, and ethical use of technology has become essential for protecting democratic institutions in the digital era.

13. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY

Despite its importance, democracy faces several significant challenges in the contemporary world. These include:

- Political polarisation and social fragmentation
- Corruption and lack of institutional transparency
- Excessive influence of money and power in politics
- Misinformation and disinformation
- Social and economic inequalities
- Political apathy and declining civic participation
- Weakening public trust in institutions
- Misuse of digital and social media platforms
- Pressure on independent institutions and media
- The growth of authoritarian tendencies

These challenges demonstrate that democracy cannot be treated as a static political achievement. It requires continuous institutional strengthening, civic engagement, constitutional commitment, and public vigilance.

14. SELECTED CONTEMPORARY STATISTICAL EVIDENCE

The following indicators provide an empirical context for understanding why the need to protect and strengthen democracy remains significant in the present day.

15. THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

The future of democracy depends significantly on informed and responsible citizens, particularly young people. Young citizens constitute an important section of the electorate and play a crucial role in shaping political and social developments.

Youth participation should extend beyond voting. It should include awareness of constitutional values, participation in public discussions, respect for diversity, responsible use of social media, community engagement, and constructive criticism of public institutions.

Young people should also develop the ability to distinguish reliable information from misinformation. Critical thinking and digital literacy are particularly important in an age in which information can be produced and circulated instantaneously.

A politically aware, socially responsible, and constitutionally conscious younger generation can significantly strengthen democratic culture.

16. DEMOCRACY AND CONSTITUTIONAL VALUES IN INDIA

Indian democracy is rooted in constitutional principles such as justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. These values provide the normative foundation for democratic governance.

The constitutional framework seeks to balance individual liberty with social justice and national unity. Parliamentary institutions, elections, fundamental rights, judicial review, federalism, and constitutional governance collectively contribute to the functioning of Indian democracy.

The success of Indian democracy therefore depends not only on formal institutions but also on the continued commitment of citizens and public authorities to constitutional values.

17. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Democracy remains essential for protecting individual liberty and human dignity.

2. Democratic institutions provide mechanisms for political participation and representation.

3. Democracy is particularly important for managing diversity in pluralistic societies.

4. Electoral accountability helps make governments responsive to citizens.

5. Freedom of expression and media freedom strengthen public debate.

6. Independent institutions are necessary for maintaining constitutional checks and balances.

7. Digital technology has expanded opportunities for democratic participation but has also generated new risks.

8. Media and digital literacy are increasingly important for democratic citizenship.

9. Youth participation is essential for the long-term sustainability of democratic institutions.

X. DEMOCRACY REQUIRES CONTINUOUS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM RATHER THAN PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE.

18. CONCLUSION

Democracy in the twenty-first century is not merely an electoral arrangement; it is a comprehensive political and social system founded on liberty, equality, justice, participation, accountability, and respect for human dignity. Its significance has increased in an era characterised by technological transformation, political polarisation, social inequalities, misinformation, and renewed authoritarian tendencies.

For a diverse country such as India, democracy provides an institutional framework for accommodating differences and promoting peaceful coexistence. Fundamental rights, representative institutions, independent judiciary, media freedom, transparency mechanisms, and regular elections collectively contribute to the functioning of democratic governance.

At the same time, democracy cannot survive solely through constitutional provisions and formal institutions. It requires informed citizens, responsible political leadership, independent

institutions, ethical media, an active civil society, and meaningful participation by younger generations.

The empirical evidence cited in this paper indicates that democratic decline is a significant contemporary global concern. At the same time, large-scale electoral participation, as demonstrated by India's 2024 general election, shows the continuing importance of democratic participation. Democracy therefore requires not only elections but also sustained protection of rights, institutions, accountability, and informed citizenship. [1][2][3]

The challenges confronting democracy are substantial, but democracy possesses an important capacity for self-correction through elections, public debate, institutional reform, judicial review, and citizen participation. Its continued success therefore depends upon the ability of democratic societies to strengthen institutions while adapting to new technological and social realities.

Ultimately, preserving democracy is not the responsibility of governments alone. It is a shared responsibility of citizens, institutions, political organisations, civil society, educational institutions, the media, and particularly the younger generation. Strengthening democratic values is essential for creating a society that is free, inclusive, peaceful, accountable, and just.

REFERENCES

- [1] V-Dem Institute. (2026). Democracy Report 2026: 10th Edition. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, University of Gothenburg.
- [2] International IDEA. (2026). The Global State of Democracy 2026: Democracy in an Age of Conflict. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm.
- [3] Election Commission of India. (2024). General Elections 2024: 65.79% voter turnout recorded at polling stations. Election Commission of India.
- [4] International IDEA. (2025). The Global State of Democracy 2025: Democracy on the Move. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- [5] Rajasekhar, H. M. Bharata Sarkara Mattu Rajakiya. Kiran Prakashana, Mysuru.
- [6] Varma, R. K. Rural Political Leadership. Amar Prakashana, Delhi.
- [7] Subramanya, G. Samakalina Rajyashastra.
- [8] Halappa, N. Administrative Theory. Unnati Prakashana, Bengaluru.
- [9] Halappa, N. Administrative Theory and Indian Administration. Unnati Prakashana, Bengaluru.
- [10] Devaraju, D. L. The Constitution of India.
- [11] iPleaders. "Theories of Democracy: All You Need to Know."
- [12] Fort Hays State University. Introduction to Political Science: Democracy and Democratic Theory.
- [13] Testbook. "Theories of Democracy."