



The Struggle for Democracy—Why Should We Care About It

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Since 2006, there has been a decline of the global population living in countries with democratic governments. In 2020, less than 20% of people worldwide resided in nations considered to have democratic systems of government. This alarming statistic compels us to examine a crucial question, why should we care about democratic declines around the world? By exploring the tangible benefits of living in a democratic country, we can better understand the importance of preserving democratic systems of governance.

Characteristics of Democratic Systems of Government

Before exploring the tangible benefits of living in a democratic country, it's important to understand what the fundamental pillars of democratic systems of government are. Political scientists have identified the following characteristics that form the bedrock of democratic systems:

- There are various mechanisms to remove a leader and their coalition out of office, such as national elections, votes of no confidence or impeachment.
- Leaders are bound by diverse types of institutional constraints that do not allow them sole decision-making abilities over domestic or international politics.
- Multi-party, competitive elections are held at specific time intervals with specified rules and regulations.
- To reach government consensus, a diverse coalition of citizens is needed for politician leader selection, policy direction and implementation in a country.
- There are institutional protections that insure press freedom.

Economic Advantages of Democratic Governance

Beginning by considering the economic advantages of democratic government, countries in which regimes are democratic tend to have higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita compared to those of other regime types, such as autocratic systems, whereby centralization of authority and control is consolidated in a centralized government system. Whether embodied by an authoritarian ruler or a collective entity such as a governing council or govern through one dominant political party. Political scientists have identified several factors that explain why democracies have a higher GDP per capita:

1. Higher levels of foreign investment, due to political stability and transparent institutions.
2. Strong property rights protection, encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation.
3. A more stable and diversified economy that is less prone to sudden economic shocks.

These economic advantages translate to tangible benefits for a country's population. In general, a country's population will experience social capital gains, such as increases in educational access at all levels, better job prospects with greater opportunity for career advancement, earning higher wages. These tangible benefits

thus lead to improved social mobility within a country.

Quality of Life Benefits

This economic prosperity fostered by democratic systems allows the population to purchase more and better-quality food for themselves and their families. A well fed and healthier population is better equipped to contribute to their country's productivity and economic growth for a longer period. The improved nutrition leads to numerous health benefits, including prevention of widespread **malnutrition** and the reduction in diseases associated with malnutrition, such as **anemia, marasmus, and kwashiorkor**. Overall, this is an improvement in public health indicators that increases the life expectancy of a country's population. Consequently, this creates a positive feedback loop that further strengthens the nation's prosperity.

Human Rights Considerations

Within the context of human rights, democratic countries tend to demonstrate a higher respect for personal integrity and human rights in general compared to countries that have autocratic forms of government. The implications of this respect for human rights are far reaching and benefit all members of society. Citizens enjoy protection from state sanctioned violence or arbitrary detention, and do not confront the immediate or long-term possibility of violence or death.

The long-term implications of a state's commitment to upholding human rights are significant. This includes preservation of the tax base due to citizen's willingness to contribute to their country's government. In turn, this is a source of revenue that governments can rely on, which can help them fund a well-equipped police force to protect their citizens. In addition, a country's government can use the reliable tax revenues for various social programs, such as children's education and provide some level of healthcare for their citizens. Another tangible benefit is increased spending on infrastructure projects, such as roads and bridges, which makes transportation and travel within the country more accessible. This is a positive feedback cycle in which government collects revenue, then revenue collection turns into wide social provisions for a country's population.

Civic Participation

In addition to economic, quality of life, and human rights, one of the most essential functions of a democracy is civic participation. The most common type of civic participation is voting for who can occupy various government offices at a local and national level. In a well-functioning democracy, most of a country's citizens can cast their votes without fear of government interference or manipulation of election outcomes. Also, citizens of these countries do not confront the possibility of repercussions, due to how they vote or voted in prior elections.

Beyond voting, citizens in democratic societies have multiple avenues of civic engagement. One is through direct communication with government representatives by calling their offices, writing letters or emails or going in person to express their opinion about government functions and legislation.

Lastly, if citizens are extremely discontent with their government, they can protest with the reasonable expectation that they'll remain unharmed. In every democratic country, there are varying levels of protections

for citizens who decide to protest. This civic right to protest, along with other forms of engagement, forms a crucial component of democratic societies, allowing citizens to actively participate in shaping their government's policies and actions.

Supporting Democratic Systems

It is crucial to recognize that the decline of the global population living in democratic systems of government implies that millions of people have lost access to the tangible benefits highlighted above. To counter this decline, citizens can support and promote democratic values by:

- Donating to a non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses on institution building internationally.
- Educating friends and family about the tangible benefits of living in a democratic country.
- Engaging civically by voting in local, state, and national elections.
- Becoming and staying better informed about political matters.

Taking these proactive steps will ensure that millions of people continue to enjoy the protections and benefits of a democratic system of government.