

## The Flaws at the Root of Representative Democracy: A Critical Analysis

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**Abstract:** In most nations across the world, representative democracy is considered as the most modern and superior form of government. The core principle of this system of government is to grant the people full power to elect qualified representatives to govern through proper process. However the people's role in the current system of selecting candidates and electing them as people's representatives has largely become a formality. This raises fundamental questions regarding the very foundation of representative democracy.

In every step, from selecting candidates to electing representatives, political parties and their selected few leaders make all the decisions. The people's role is merely to validate those decisions through elections. The fundamental principle of democracy-its very root is that the people have the final say in selecting and electing the right candidates as their representatives to the government. If there are flaws at this root, true democracy can never be established. This paper aims to critically analyse the flaws in selection and election process of the people's representatives by using proper descriptive and analytical research methods. This paper attempts to establish that, for the democratic system to be fully effective and successful, the active participation of the people in selection and election of the peoples' representatives and governmental decision-making processes must be ensured. Otherwise, true democracy will devolve into a mere illusion.

**Keywords:** democracy, people, representatives, candidates, election, participation.

### **Introduction:**

It is a universally accepted truth in the modern world that democracy is the best form of government. Very few disagree and those who do are generally not taken seriously. Speaking against democracy is often regarded as political blunder. The prevailing view is that democracy is the most acceptable and modern form of governance, aligning perfectly with 21st-century civilization. Other historical forms of government, such as monarchies, autocracies, or dictatorships had lost their legitimacy (Dahl 1), and are now considered outdated and unacceptable in today's world. The global consensus is that every nation should embrace democracy, as it is believed to be the only path to true human liberation by granting essential rights like

liberty, equality, justice, and protection from exploitation. Proponents of democracy firmly believe it can create a society and a world free from exploitation, discrimination, and injustice.

A pertinent question arises; Does democracy have no problems or flaws? The answer is that it certainly does, yet it remains the best form of government for which humanity has not yet found a better alternative. The existing alternatives are far more problematic. Therefore, it can be said that if there is an alternative to democracy, it must be an even better form of democracy. Churchill in his parliamentary speech famously said "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." (Churchill). So, while democracy has its problems, it remains the most acceptable form of government. However, this does not mean we should accept this current form of flawed democracy without questioning it. Issues and limitations of democracy need to be addressed, because some problems are so fundamental that they shake the very foundation of democracy, preventing it from becoming a true democracy. Before analysing the deep-rooted flaws of democracy, the true meaning and purpose of the democracy must be understood.

### **Democracy and Representative Democracy:**

Democracy is generally used in two senses: as a form of government and as a philosophical way of life. The latter is an ideal and a collection of values like liberty, equality, justice, and fraternity, which are necessary to build an "ideal life," "ideal society," and "ideal state." This discussion, however, focuses on the first sense: democracy as a system of government. But what does this mean in practice? In practice democracy means "rule by the people." The common definition is "government of the people, by the people, for the people" (Lincoln). Currently, this refers to representative democracy where people elect their representatives to govern.

Historically, two main forms of democracy have been discussed: direct democracy and indirect democracy. Direct democracy is a system where all citizens of a state participate directly in governance, all decisions of the government are collectively taken by the people in a direct manner. Given the size and population of modern states, this is not a practical system. While direct democracy successfully governed ancient Greek city-states, they were tiny compared to modern nations. Later, in the 18th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau based his concept of general will on direct democracy (Rousseau 126). It is true that direct democracy is the truest form of democracy where every citizen has the power and dignity to participate directly in governance. However, it is also true that it is impossible to govern a modern state with this form of government. Because of this limitation, indirect or representative democracy emerged. In this system of government, the peo-

ple rule indirectly by delegating their authority to the representatives who are elected by the people through election.

### **Representative Democracy and Its Flaws:**

The process of the representative democracy seems simple where adult citizens vote at regular intervals to elect their rulers to rule up to next election. But a deeper analysis reveals significant problems in the democratic process itself. The most critical and concerning issue in a democracy is the selection of its rulers, i.e. the election of the people's representatives (Huntington 6). If the people cannot elect the right representatives or do not get the opportunity to do so, then competent and worthy rulers will not be elected. This leads to a weak and corrupt democracy, which can ultimately destroy it. The correct method of representative election is of utmost importance in a democracy.

Unfortunately, we see a global lack of qualified and corruption-free leaders. This suggests that people are failing to elect the right representatives, leading to a worldwide questioning of democracy. Is democracy truly the best system? Can it provide genuine freedom? Is it the best tool for human civilization? If democracy fails to answer these questions, it will quickly lose the people's trust, and they might start seeing autocratic or even monarchical systems as superior, which would be a step backward in history.

According to the fundamental idea of democracy, the people are their own rulers, and elected leaders are merely their representatives and servants. In reality, these elected representatives become the masters. This essential process of representative democracy transforms the people from being rulers to the ruled. Democracy is no longer "the rule of the people"; it is the "rule of a few so-called representatives," whom the people elect but cannot control. Instead, the people are controlled by them.

People participate in an election every four or five years, cast a single vote, and then their role is effectively over. For the period between elections, they become pawns of the rulers they themselves elected. While proponents of democracy claim that the state is governed by the will of the people and that their blessing is essential, this is a half-truth. It is legally true that a ruler who loses the people's support is voted out. However, the problem is that the people have no control over the ruler's decisions until the next election (Schumpeter 272). A ruler can ignore the people's opinions and can make decisions without their consent, which goes against the principles of democracy.

Even if a ruler is defeated in the next general election and a new ruler is elected, the situation does not change. Under the new ruler, the people remain subjects, controlled and governed by a handful of individuals. The core tenet of democracy, "rule by the people," becomes a facade. It is not a government of the people but a government of their "self-elected representatives". This shows that the people's role is limited in the representative

government, with no real say in the decision-making process.

### **Political Parties and the Flaws in the Representation:**

Is it even true that the people elect their representatives? Do they have a real opportunity to do so? In a representative democracy, the election system revolves around political parties. These parties are controlled by a select few powerful leaders, often called the "party high command." This high command decides who will be a candidate and who will not—in simple terms, who gets the ticket to run for an election.

At the time of an election, political parties present their chosen candidates to the public and tell them to elect from those pre-selected candidates (Zakaria 167). The problem is that the people might not like any of the candidates, but they are forced to elect one from the available options. For example, if four candidates are running, and all are corrupt or have criminal charges, the public is essentially forced to elect the "least bad" option according to their political beliefs. Thus, the people's freedom in candidate selection and representative election is severely limited.

This means that political parties have the highest control, and their decisions are final. Not only ordinary voters but even ordinary party members have no significant role to play. They are merely foot soldiers who carry out the orders of the leaders they are just 'party workers'. A handful of individuals within the party control everything, from who runs in an election to who becomes the president, prime minister or chief minister. In this situation, democracy transforms into a system of government which is controlled by party elites, and the people become dependent on the decisions of those elite party leaders, often accepting them without question. Ultimately, democracy, which was supposed to be the rule of the people, becomes the rule of a few party leaders. It is more accurate to call it a system of governance run by political parties for the benefit of a few of their leaders. The people become party slaves, and democracy becomes a 'particracy' - a system ruled by parties rather than the people.

If we analyse the Indian electoral system, we see that political parties are more important to voters than the candidates themselves. To protect the future of democracy it is essential to understand why representative democracy turns into a 'particracy'. When democracy fails and becomes corrupt, it gives rise to autocrats and dictators, as seen with the rise of fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany after the failure of democracy following World War I (Paxton 112). To protect democracy from such fascist and autocratic tendencies, it is necessary to strengthen its foundation, which is the genuine rule of the people.

### **Solutions to the Problems:**

What are the main reasons for the flaws in candidate selection and election process? The main reasons are the people's lack of political awareness, which is a consequence of illiteracy, poverty, apathy, laziness, and a ten-

dency to go with the flow. The majority of people lack the mental strength and will to change the situation. They do not want to protest or agitate, they think that it is not their business to meddle in politics it is the interest of the politicians. Ordinary people just want to live their life peacefully and happily; they see politics as evil for the society and can cause disturbance in the public life. So, they avoid politics as far as possible. Most of the people think that just casting their vote is the only political duty they ought to do. They cast vote because they see politics as a necessary evil. A large group of people do not even care to cast their votes because they believe that nothing will change by casting or not casting a vote. But the irony is that they won't do anything to change the situation. Poverty and illiteracy are the biggest enemies of the representative democracy. A poor illiterate person struggling to make a living often does not have the time, means, or desire to engage in the deep struggles of politics (Sen 146). Political leaders and parties take advantage of the poor and illiterate people and make them their slaves and they themselves act as masters.

So, what are the solutions? First and foremost, the people must become politically aware to actively participate in politics. They cannot remain passive and indifferent participants. The way to make people aware is to promote education, especially political education, to create awareness among the people about their rights in a democracy. Economic development is the backbone of every aspect of life, therefore for the development of the representative democracy economic development is the precondition. The state must bear the responsibility for providing education and economic development.

Ultimately, mere words will not work. The active participation of the people, especially in candidate selection, representative election, and government decision-making process, must be ensured through a legal framework which must be inviolable. Therefore, it is essential to reform the flawed system of representative selection to establish a truer form of democracy. A true representative democracy must ensure that the people have the final say. The people should not merely have to choose from a list of pre-selected candidates from political parties. Instead, the people themselves must decide who they want as a candidate, and political parties should be forced to nominate them.

The direction of the government, which currently flows from the top down (leader to people), must be completely reversed. It must flow from the bottom to up (people to leader). The system where people are forced to accept the decisions of leaders must end. Instead, a system where leaders are forced to work according to the people's wishes must be put in place by a proper constitutional framework, as an inalterable basic structure which will give local bodies and its members (who are directly elected by the local people) the constitutional rights to select the candidates. They must also play a pivotal role in governmental policy making and decision making. If the government fails to take these measures the people must force the gov-

ernment to do so. The people must act as supreme authority because the people have the right to act as supreme authority (Locke 242). Only then can the dream of true democracy be realised.

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