



The Impact Of Identity Politics On Political Obligation In Pluralist Democracies

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ABSTRACT

In pluralist democracies, identity politics has emerged as a defining factor in shaping political dynamics, landscapes, governing bodies, and political responsibilities. Although it promotes diversity and guarantees representation for underrepresented groups, it also brings with it political polarization, economic inequality, and governance difficulties. Using case studies from South Africa, the US, and India, this study investigates how identity politics affects political duty in various democratic contexts. The research underscores the advantages and disadvantages of identity-based political participation by analysing governance challenges, economic disparities, social movements, and global influences.

According to the findings, identity politics can lead to political fragmentation and a reduction in collective political responsibility, even while it also increases democratic engagement. Political responsibility is greatly impacted by economic inequality, especially for underserved populations, which restricts their ability to participate in governance. Identity-based struggles influence political engagement, as seen in social movements including South Africa's post-apartheid civil rights activism, India's caste-based mobilizations, and the United States' Black Lives Matter. Moreover, migration, media influence, and globalization provide identity politics additional dimensions that call for adaptive governance techniques.

This work fills a significant research vacuum by combining comparative assessments of identity politics and political obligation across various democratic environments. It emphasizes the significance of inclusive policies, responsible media coverage, and educational programs to foster national unity while honouring identity-based political involvement. It is still difficult to strike a balance between identity politics and national cohesion in pluralist democracies. The study provides information for policy suggestions that might ensure that different political identities make positive contributions to government while bolstering democratic stability. Future research should examine how digital activism and technology developments affect identity-driven political mobilization.

Keywords: Identity Politics, Political Obligation, Pluralist Democracies, Multiculturalism, Minority Rights

Research Questions

1. How does identity politics influence political obligation in pluralist democracies?
2. What are the governance challenges arising from identity-based political engagement?
3. How do economic and social disparities affect political participation?
4. What role do education, media, and civil society play in shaping identity politics?
5. How can pluralist democracies balance identity-based demands with national unity?

INTRODUCTION

Diversity is the foundation of pluralist democracies, which permit the coexistence of diverse social, cultural, and political identities. However, the emergence of identity politics has fundamentally changed political engagement, influencing political duty and governance. The term "identity politics" describes the political mobilization of people based on common traits like gender, caste, race, religion, or ethnicity. Although it guarantees that underrepresented groups have a voice and improves representation, it also brings about problems with political division, economic disparities, and ineffective government.

The impact of identity politics frequently complicates governance in pluralist democracies. Identity-based narratives are widely used by political parties to rally voters, sometimes at the expense of greater national cohesion (Mouffe, 2005). Caste and religious affinities are at the heart of identity politics in nations like India, which influence public policy and election results. Similar to this, racial and ethnic identity in the US significantly influences political engagement and policy views. Identity-driven movements promoting social and economic justice continue to influence South Africa's post-apartheid political environment.

Political responsibility is greatly impacted by economic inequality, especially in countries where access to resources is impacted by discrimination based on identity. According to Rawls (1971), a just social compact in which everyone has equal possibilities is the foundation of political commitment. However, marginalized people may have restricted access to political involvement in societies with pronounced economic disparities. Economic disparity has an impact on political engagement, as seen by the caste-based economic disparities in India, the racial wealth divides in the US, and the ongoing economic difficulties of apartheid in South Africa. According to Fukuyama (2018), polarization and a deterioration of collective political responsibility can result when economic inequality coincides with identity conflicts.

Identity politics has been shaped in large part by social movements. Movements like the US's Black Lives Matter, India's Dalit, and South Africa's anti-apartheid campaigns have brought attention to the importance of identity in political mobilisation. If not handled inclusively, these movements can exacerbate polarization even while they are effective instruments for promoting rights and legislative improvements (Taylor, 1994). The way that social movements and political duty meet begs the question of how democracies should make sure that identity-based activism enhances rather than detracts from democratic stability.

The media can either increase identity-based narratives, which often exacerbate divisions, or it can promote informed democratic participation (Habermas, 1996). Civil society organizations act as intermediaries, advocating for inclusive policies that bridge identity differences. To ensure stable governance, pluralist democracies must invest in education, responsible media representation, and civil society engagement to counterbalance the risks of identity-based divisions. Civil society, education, and the media are all critical in mediating the effects of identity politics.

Identity politics are no longer limited to national borders in today's globalized world. Transnational movements, economic interdependence, and migration all have an impact on identity politics in many democracies. Identity construction and mobilization have changed as a result of the growth of populist movements, greater migration, and global human rights activism. Globally, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS have an impact on identity-based policy debates. With an emphasis on social movements, economic disparities, and governance issues, this study aims to investigate how identity politics affects political duty in pluralist democracies. The research offers insights into striking a balance between identity politics and national cohesiveness by looking at case studies and theoretical frameworks, ultimately adding to the larger conversation on democracy and governance.

Identity Politics in Pluralist Democracies

Defining Identity Politics

Organizing political movements according to social identities, including caste, gender, religion, and ethnicity, is known as identity politics. These movements frequently react to perceived discrimination, injustices, or exclusion from the political system. When political loyalties are decided only based on identification rather than policy concerns, identity politics can lead to social fragmentation even though it can strengthen oppressed people by giving them a forum for advocacy.

Identity politics is a key component of political discourse in pluralist democracies. For example, caste-based movements aim to rectify past inequality, feminist movements promote gender equality, and civil rights movements fight for racial justice. By influencing how people view their commitment to the state—whether as a source of oppression or as a way to achieve justice—these identities have an impact on political obligation.

Majoritarianism vs. Minority Rights

The conflict between majoritarianism and minority rights is one of identity politics' main issues in pluralist democracies. Minority communities are frequently marginalized when the majority identification group has an excessive amount of influence over state decisions. This is known as majoritarianism. Laws that support the cultural, linguistic, or religious preferences of the majority may be one way this shows up and could result in systemic discrimination.

Minority rights advocacy, on the other hand, aims to guarantee equitable representation and defence against marginalization. To level the playing field, multicultural legal frameworks, reservation systems, and affirmative action measures are sometimes used. However, majority groups may also view these actions as preferential treatment, which would exacerbate political tensions and cast doubt on the idea of a single national identity. In these situations, political duty is frequently questioned because majority groups may oppose policies that they believe threaten their standing, while minority groups may feel cut off from a state that does not adequately represent their interests.

Intersectionality

A concept known as intersectionality studies how distinct experiences of privilege or oppression are produced by overlapping social identities, including caste, gender, race, and class. The term "intersectionality," which was first used by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, draws attention to the difficulties associated with political duty and engagement in pluralist democracies. For instance, in India, a Dalit woman may face prejudice not just because of her caste but also because of her gender, which may influence her political activism and sense of accountability to the government. In a similar vein, racial and gender-based obstacles may affect an African-American woman's participation in political institutions in the US. A more inclusive framework that takes into account the various responsibilities citizens have to the state can be created by policymakers by acknowledging these intersecting identities.

Identity-Based Voting Patterns

In pluralist democracies, identity politics has a big impact on how people vote. By addressing their issues and making promises of policies that meet their requirements, political parties frequently win over members of particular identity groups. Voting blocs based on gender, caste, religion, and ethnicity have resulted from this.

For example, in India, Dalit voters are mobilized by caste-based parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), whereas in the US, African-American voters have traditionally supported the Democratic Party because it supported civil rights. Additionally, religious identity is important; for example, Muslim minorities in Europe typically support progressive platforms that promote multicultural policies, whereas Christian conservative voters in the United States prefer to support right-wing parties.

By giving underprivileged groups a voice, identity-based voting can boost political participation, but it can also exacerbate sectarian divisions and cause divisiveness. Political duty can erode more general democratic values and promote contentious politics when it is seen through the prism of identity rather than national unity.

Economic Dimensions of Identity Politics

Economic inequality has a significant impact on identity politics, affecting state involvement and political duty. Because of institutionalized discrimination, limited educational options, and exclusion from economic opportunities, historically excluded communities frequently experience economic disadvantages. Therefore, identity-based fights often coincide with economic justice movements.

For instance, caste-based quota laws are being implemented in India to rectify the historical economic inequalities that lower-caste populations have experienced in the areas of employment and education. Comparably, discussions for reparations for African Americans in the United States demonstrate the close connection between racial identity and economic disparities.

Political commitment can be reinforced or weakened by economic frustrations. Marginalized groups may feel more obligated to engage in the political process when states enact measures that address economic inequities. Disenfranchisement, on the other hand, can result in political alienation, protests, and in severe situations, civil upheaval, when economic disparities continue. All things considered, political responsibility is complicatedly shaped by identity politics in pluralist democracies. Although it gives underrepresented groups a forum to fight for their rights, it also poses problems with majoritarianism, economic inequality, and national unity. One of the fundamental issues facing contemporary administration is striking a balance between identity-based political participation and more general democratic ideals.

Political Obligation and Group Identity

Citizenship and Political Loyalty

Although citizenship is the cornerstone of political duty, people frequently juggle their national identity with subgroup affinities in pluralist democracies. Shared political beliefs, civic education, and historical narratives influence many people's sense of patriotism. However, people may put their ethnic, religious, or cultural identity ahead of their national responsibilities when identity politics fosters a sense of exclusion or institutionalized discrimination.

For example, in countries with a history of marginalization, some minority groups may find it difficult to remain loyal to the government because they believe it does not sufficiently represent their interests. On the other hand, by encouraging a feeling of community among varied groups, policies that support inclusive citizenship—like equal representation and intercultural recognition—can increase political responsibility.

Social Justice Movements

Social justice movements are essential in rethinking political duty because they promote equity and challenge established power systems. The goal of movements like Indigenous activism in Australia and Canada, the Dalit Rights movement in India, and Black Lives Matter in the United States is to confront systematic oppression and historical injustices. The way that citizens view their obligation to the state is frequently altered by these movements. Opponents may regard activism as a threat to national unity, while supporters may

consider it as a moral duty to demand reform. While governments that repress such movements run the risk of alienating people, which can result in resistance and political disengagement, those that actively address complaints can strengthen political obligation.

Historical Injustices and Reparations Debates

Political responsibility is impacted for a long time by the legacies of colonialism, slavery, caste inequality, and Indigenous relocation. Debates over reparations and restorative justice are sparked by the fact that many communities that have experienced past injustices still deal with systemic injustices. Political duty may be influenced by how much a state recognizes and corrects these injustices. Centuries of racial injustice are at the heart of the reparations controversy for African Americans in the United States. Affirmative action laws in India are intended to address inequalities based on caste. Disenfranchised communities may feel more obligated to participate in democracy when states take aggressive steps to right historical wrongs. On the other hand, alienation can result in doubts about the legitimacy of the state when complaints go unanswered.

Religious Identity and Political Allegiance

Religious identity has a big impact on political duty and how people interact with the government. Sometimes national and religious identities coincide, which strengthens civic responsibilities. However, conflicts may develop and lead to resistance or disengagement when states implement secular policies that are seen as antagonistic to religious values.

Strict secularism regulations, for instance, have caused problems in France among Muslim communities, who feel singled out by prohibitions on religious symbols. The political division has also resulted from measures in India that are thought to favour one religious community over another. Maintaining political responsibility and averting sectarian tensions require that religious identity be honoured within a pluralist framework.

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Identity-Based Political Obligation

Social media's ability to facilitate identity-based movements, political activism, and discourse has revolutionized political responsibility. Digital platforms enable real-time political interaction, organize protests, and elevate underrepresented voices. But they also fuel polarization, echo chambers, and false information that deepens divisions based on identity. Social media has been a powerful tool for enlisting citizens in political engagement and facilitating involvement in movements like the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, and climate justice initiatives. Meanwhile, misinformation campaigns and identity-based political propaganda have been employed to sway public opinion and erode confidence in democratic institutions. Utilizing social media's benefits while reducing its polarizing effects on political duty is a challenge for pluralist democracies.

Challenges to Political Obligation in Identity Politics

Fragmentation of National Identity

The division of national identity is one of the biggest problems identity politics presents. Weakening political commitment can result when people and groups put their ethnic, religious, or ideological identities ahead of their national allegiances. In severe situations, this disarray could lead to internal strife, secessionist movements, and a decline in confidence in government agencies. For instance, identity-based tensions have made political stability and national unity more difficult in nations with significant ethnic divisions, like Spain (Catalan independence movement) and Belgium (Flemish vs. Walloon groups).

Populism and Political Polarization

Populism has increased as a result of identity politics, in which leaders take use of identity-based grievances to bolster their hold on power. Deep political polarization results from populist movements' propensity to spread a "us vs. them" narrative. Rigid identity divisions between political groupings make democratic discourse challenging, and when voters lose faith in democratic institutions, political obligation erodes. For example, political discourse in the US has grown more divisive along racial, ideological, and religious lines, which has weakened civic trust and reduced bipartisan cooperation.

Conflicts Between Individual and Collective Obligations

Individual rights and group responsibilities may clash as a result of identity politics. Voting, paying taxes, and abiding by the law are civic obligations that citizens are required to do in democracies. However, people may refuse to carry out these responsibilities when state policies clash with the beliefs or objectives of identity groups. The dispute over France's ban on religious symbols in public institutions is one example of how religious minorities may be against governmental secularism policy. Legal and political disputes may also result from indigenous tribes rejecting state-imposed legislation that they believe threatens their traditional forms of government.

State Responses to Identity-Based Movements

Responding to requests based on identity while preserving national unity is a challenge for governments. States occasionally use legal protections, multicultural policy, and affirmative action to accommodate a range of identities. However, instability and increased alienation may result when governments use authoritarian tactics to stifle identity-based movements. How state responses impact political obligation is demonstrated by how protests are handled, such as the suppression of pro-democracy rallies in Hong Kong or the Indian government's handling of farmer protests. People are less inclined to submit to state authority when they believe that the government is oppressive or insensitive to issues based on their identities.

The Role of Media and Political Narratives

Identity-based political commitments are significantly shaped by the media. Social media and traditional media can increase political consciousness and civic engagement, but they can also deepen divisions by spreading false information, biased reporting, and ideological echo chambers. Identity-based political attachments have been strengthened by the advent of algorithm-driven content consumption, frequently at the expense of national cohesion. Fake news, hate speech, and politically driven narratives can undermine public confidence in democratic institutions, making it more difficult for governments to promote a sense of collective civic responsibility.

Economic Disparities and Identity-Based Grievances

Political duty is influenced by the intersection between identity politics and economic inequality. Systemic economic disadvantages sometimes cause marginalized communities to feel disenfranchised, which lowers their involvement in democratic processes. Racial and caste-based economic inequalities impede broad political participation in many developing nations. As evidenced by movements calling for economic justice, including the Dalit movement in India and the fight for reparations in the US, political commitment erodes when economic complaints coincide with identity-based discrimination.

Identity Politics and the Erosion of Democratic Institutions

The effectiveness of democratic institutions depends on public engagement and confidence. However, democratic governance is compromised when identity politics is used as a weapon to destroy institutions. Public trust in the rule of law is weakened when the judiciary, political processes, and law enforcement are politicized for identity-based reasons. Political duty is frequently substituted by allegiance to identity-based factions rather than to democratic institutions in nations where identity-based preference predominates in administration, such as ethnically divided states.

Case Studies

1. United States: Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Political Obligation

Political Obligation and Black Lives Matter (BLM) An important illustration of how identity politics affects political responsibility is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which rose to international prominence following George Floyd's murder in 2020. Systemic racial injustices, including police violence against African Americans, gave rise to BLM. When state institutions fail to guarantee equal protection under the law, the movement challenges their legitimacy.

African Americans and their allies are faced with a moral conundrum from the standpoint of political duty: how much should they submit to a legal system that disproportionately criminalizes Black people? Traditional theories of political obligation that presume a duty to observe laws simply because a democratic government passes them are challenged by civil disobedience, a key element of BLM protests. Rather, the movement is in line with conceptions of responsibility that are based on justice and consent, where compliance is dependent on how equitable the system is. This duty is made more difficult by the U.S. government's unwillingness to address structural racial imbalances, which has resulted in widespread demonstrations, requests for police reform, and in some cases, even rejection of state authority (e.g., calls to defund the police).

2. India: Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC)

The proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 in India sparked protests around the country, especially among Muslims and other underprivileged groups who were afraid of losing their right to vote. There are worries that Indian Muslims may be unfairly singled out because the CAA offers citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from nearby nations, while the NRC seeks to identify unauthorized immigrants. Political duty in a pluralist democracy like India is typically determined by constitutional principles rather than by a person's race or religion. But by equating citizenship with religious identity, the CAA and NRC blurred this line, resulting in an identity-based crisis of political duty. They questioned whether they had any duty of allegiance to a state that seemed to be discriminating against them. Mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, and legal challenges emerged in reaction as manifestations of conditional political obligation, whereby submission to the state was only deemed acceptable if it supported democratic and secular ideals. Various identity groups reevaluated their political obligations as a result of the government's response, which included internet shutdowns and police crackdowns, further straining the relationship between the state and its residents.

4. South Africa: Post-Apartheid Identity and Government Trust

This identity-based split complicates Scotland's political responsibilities. Many Scots believe that Westminster does not sufficiently represent their interests, which weakens their perceived need to follow choices made across the United Kingdom. This behavior is consistent with associative political obligation theories, which hold that loyalty to a political organisation is predicated on a feeling of community and common interests. By claiming that Scotland's political duty should rest with an independent Scottish government rather than the UK, the Scottish National Party (SNP) has used these feelings to advocate for a second independence vote. This movement's tenacity demonstrates how identity politics can change political duty from a state-level commitment to a regional or national one.

The emergence of alternative political groups such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is another indication of how South Africa's political obligations are changing. Younger, more radical Black South Africans who believe the ANC hasn't done enough to combat economic inequality are drawn to the EFF. Within the same democracy, identity politics can result in both active resistance and steadfast allegiance, as this difference in political duty illustrates.

Reimagining Political Obligation In The Age Of Identity Politics

Reimagining political obligation in pluralist democracies is crucial as identity politics continues to influence institutional structures and political activity. The difficulty is in promoting a feeling of shared accountability while honouring the variety of identities that characterize contemporary cultures. Adopting a multipronged strategy that incorporates participatory democracy, civic education, inclusive government, constitutional protections, and institutional reforms is necessary to accomplish this.

Deliberative Democracy and Inclusive Governance

Promoting deliberative democracy is one of the fundamental ways to uphold political duty in the face of identity-based divisions. Promoting candid communication between different identity groups helps people understand one another and develop a feeling of civic responsibility. To ensure inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, governments should establish discussion forums where various populations can express their views. For political institutions to be inclusive, all social groups must be represented.

Incorporating minority identities into the mainstream political system through affirmative action laws, quota systems, and legal protections can strengthen their sense of duty to the state.

Constitutional Safeguards and Legal Frameworks

In order to strike a balance between national unity and identity politics, legal measures are essential. Individual rights should be protected by constitutional safeguards that make sure that democratic values are not compromised by group-based political mobilization. To stop identity-driven fragmentation, laws against hate speech, discrimination, and exclusionary politics are required.

Another essential element of upholding political responsibility is judicial independence. In order to prevent identity-based claims from undermining constitutional norms, courts must serve as impartial arbiters. Legal systems should also safeguard the rights of minorities while avoiding the abuses of majoritarianism.

Strategies for National Cohesion

It is crucial to create a unified national identity that takes into account various ethnic, religious, and cultural affinities. Policies that foster togetherness without stifling individual and collective identities must be put in place by governments. Public holidays, civic initiatives, and national symbols can highlight common values and a sense of community, enhancing citizens' emotional and political ties to the government. However, by giving local governing institutions more autonomy, decentralization and federalism can support identity-based claims. This strategy allows various identity groups to maintain their integration within the larger political system while exercising self-governance.

Educational Reforms for Civic Responsibility

In the face of identity politics, education is a vital long-term option for promoting political responsibility. The significance of democratic values, pluralism, and active political involvement should be emphasized in civic education programs. The historical development of identity politics, the function of political duty, and the values of coexistence in varied cultures should all be covered in the curriculum at schools and universities. Educational reforms can combat the polarizing effects of identity politics and raise a generation that values both individual identity and collective national duty by encouraging critical thinking and intercultural understanding.

Participatory Mechanisms for Diverse Populations

Participatory systems that actively include citizens in governance are necessary for states to strengthen their political obligations. Mechanisms that allow individuals from diverse identity histories to participate in policymaking include advisory boards for marginalized groups, citizen assemblies, and local governance initiatives.

Direct democratic practices, public discussions, and participatory budgeting provide citizens a greater sense of agency and strengthen their dedication to democratic institutions and political duties. Despite identity-based distinctions, people are more likely to stick with the larger political system when they observe measurable outcomes from their political participation.

Mediating Conflict through Federalism and Decentralization

Decentralization and federalism are useful strategies for resolving identity-based disputes. States can permit identity groups to exercise some degree of self-governance without breaking apart from the larger nation-state by giving authority to regional or local administrations. By guaranteeing that identity-based political claims are addressed at the proper levels of governance, this strategy eases tensions. Furthermore, past grievances can be addressed with the aid of mediation institutions, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, which open up channels for discussion and resolution. States can promote reconciliation and strengthen political responsibility among historically oppressed people by recognizing historical injustices and providing forums for dialogue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have diverse perspectives on how identity-based mobilization affects democratic governance. Taylor (1994) and Kymlicka (1995) argue that multiculturalism fosters inclusivity by ensuring marginalized groups receive political representation. However, critics like Mouffe (2005) and Fukuyama (2018) warn that excessive identity politics may lead to fragmentation and weaken collective democratic obligations.

From the perspective of justice and fairness, Rawls (1971) emphasizes equal opportunities as essential for political obligation, while Dworkin (1986) highlights fairness in political participation. Fukuyama (2018) further cautions that identity-linked economic disparities can intensify polarization, reducing collective responsibility.

On governance, Habermas (1996) advocates deliberative democracy to bridge identity-based divisions. Case studies from South Africa, the US, and India, however, reveal that identity politics is often leveraged for electoral gains, sometimes deepening social tensions. Jaffrelot (2019) and Jayal (2006) analyze caste and religious influences in India, noting their role in shaping policies but also their potential to reinforce divisions. Similarly, Taylor (2016) explores how movements like Black Lives Matter shape social justice debates.

Economic inequality significantly impacts political engagement. Piketty (2014) and Deshpande (2011) argue that wealth disparities discourage marginalized groups from political participation. Alexander (2010) highlights how racial income gaps influence voting behavior in the US, reinforcing Fukuyama's (2018) concerns about identity-driven divisions.

Identity-based activism plays a crucial role in political participation. Tarrow (2011) examines how movements like Dalit activism and post-apartheid campaigns in South Africa shape policies. However, Mouffe (2005) warns that such movements can deepen democratic instability if they become overly divisive.

Education, media, and civil society also influence identity politics. Giroux (2011) argues that education can either foster democratic engagement or reinforce identity divisions. Chomsky (1997) highlights media's role in shaping identity narratives, while Keane (2009) emphasizes civil society's role in bridging identity-based divides.

Finally, globalization has reshaped identity politics. Sassen (2006) explores how transnational migration and economic interdependence influence identity-based mobilization, while organizations like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization play a role in shaping global identity politics.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the complex relationship between political duty and identity politics in pluralist democracies. While identity politics empowers marginalized groups and enhances representation, excessive mobilization can lead to social tensions and fragmentation.

Political commitment is not inherently weakened by identity politics its impact depends on how diversity is managed. Inclusive institutions that ensure equal representation strengthen state loyalty, while discrimination and repression breed disillusionment and resistance. Challenges such as majoritarianism, polarization, and economic disparities further complicate cohesion, requiring constitutional safeguards and deliberative democracy to balance national unity with diversity. Social media plays a dual role amplifying advocacy while also fueling misinformation and radicalization. Addressing these digital challenges is crucial for fostering inclusive political discourse.

Ultimately, pluralist democracies must implement policies that promote unity while respecting differences. Inclusive education, economic equity, and participatory governance can reinforce political responsibility across identity groups. Future research should examine real-world case studies and evolving policy approaches to managing identity politics in an increasingly interconnected world. With the right institutional frameworks, identity politics can be harnessed to strengthen rather than undermine democracy.

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