

REAFFIRMING DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN A TIME OF GLOBAL CRISIS

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ABSTRACT: Reaffirming Democratic Values in a Time of Global Crisis.

In the context of an increasingly interconnected world affected by various global crises such as pandemics, economic conflicts or climate change, democratic values become more vulnerable and can be undermined.

This paper examines the impact of crises on democratic institutions, political participation and civic engagement. It also explores how political leaders, the media, civil society and civic education can play a key role in protecting and reaffirming democratic values in such critical contexts.

The paper also presents case studies highlighting examples of countries that have succeeded in promoting and defending democratic values during global crises. In doing so, it underlines the importance of reaffirming democratic values to maintain stability and progress in difficult times.

Keywords: *reaffirmation, democratic values, global crisis, civil society, political participation.*

Introduction

In a global landscape marked by interconnectivity and rapid transformation, the escalating frequency and complexity of global crises, including pandemics, economic conflicts, and climate change, profoundly impact societies worldwide. In such tumultuous times, democratic values, which form the foundation of open and progressive societies, can come under extreme pressure and even be undermined.

In a context where democratic institutions can be threatened and citizens can be pushed towards authoritarian solutions, it is essential to focus on protecting and strengthening democratic values in order to maintain stability and sustainable development of society.

In this introductory section, we delve into the significance of democratic principles in facilitating the operation of an equitable and fair society, along with an examination of the impact of global crises on these principles. We will also focus on measures and strategies that political leaders, the media, civil society and civic education can adopt to strengthen and reaffirm democratic values in difficult times.¹

By addressing this theme, we hope to highlight the crucial role that democratic values play in securing the rights and freedoms of citizens and in promoting transparent and accountable governance.²

This paper aims to provide an in-depth and objective analysis of the current situation, illustrating the importance of reaffirming democratic values and offering suggestions for building a more resilient and prosperous future despite global challenges.

In a world marked by rapid and complex change, global crises have become an inevitable reality.³ In the face of these critical situations, democratic values are proving to be fundamental to maintaining balance and progress.

2. The importance of democratic values in society

Democratic values constitute the core foundation of a liberated and transparent society, where power emanates from the will of the people and is exercised for their benefit. Democratic principles, such as respect for individual rights and freedoms⁴, the rule of law, transparent governance and

1 „Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance”, ed. by Pippa Norris, in *American Political Science Review*, Oxford University Press, 1999. 303 p. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/abs/critical-citizens-global-support-for-democratic-governance-edited-by-norrispippa-new-york-oxford-university-press-1999-303p-6500-cloth-1995-paper/91006BFFF21E000C-D8A40CC59F3CFDD6> (Accessed 10 August 2023).

2 Cooley, A., „Countering Democratic Norms”, in *Journal of Democracy* 26 (2015), p. 49.

3 Devastating pandemics, economic instability, climate change and social conflict are just some of the challenges facing contemporary societies.

4 See, C. Mititelu, „The Human Rights and the Social Protection of Vulnerable Individuals”, in *Journal of Danubius Studies and Research*, vol. II, nr. 1 (2012), pp. 70-77; C. Mititelu, „The European Convention on Human Rights”, in vol. *10th Edition of International Conference The European Integration – Realities and Perspectives*, Danubius University Press, Galati, 2015, pp. 243-252; N. V. Dură, „Rights”, „Freedoms” and “Principles” Set

civic participation, provide a favourable framework for the development of a fair and inclusive society.⁵

Democracy is not only a form of government, but also a culture and a way of life that encourages dialogue, diversity and tolerance⁶.

By promoting democratic values, it creates an environment conducive to innovation, progress and mutual respect, enhancing cohesion and peaceful coexistence within communities.

3. The decline of democratic values during crises

Nonetheless, during periods of worldwide turmoil, democratic values may encounter challenges and potential jeopardy. Faced with major challenges, political leaders may be tempted to adopt restrictive measures, diminishing civic participation, and concentrating power in the hands of a small group. Thus, during crises, democratic institutions risk being undermined, and individual rights and freedoms affected.

Also, phenomena such as disinformation and the spread of fake news can weaken citizens' trust in the democratic process and in a free and fair media. These trends can pave the way for a polarised and divided climate in society, weakening cohesion and the ability to respond as one to challenges.⁷

By means of this analysis, we aspire to make a substantial contribution to the comprehension of the indisputable significance of democratic values and the imperative to safeguard and advance them under all circumstances, thus guaranteeing a more equitable, resilient, and prosperous global milieu for every member of the citizenry.

out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU", in *Journal of Danubius Studies and Research*, vol. VI, nr. 2 (2016), pp. 166-175.

5 Pop, N.; Valeriu Ioan Franc, *România în globalizare - argumentație, atitudine, acțiune și responsabilitate*, Academia Română Centrul de informare și documentare economică, București, 2018.

6 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Om-Demnitare-Libertate*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Risoprint, 2019, pp. 208-215.

7 Jones, T., "Crisis, Consolidation and Reaffirmation: 2005–2007", in *The Revival of British Liberalism: From Grimond to Clegg*, edited by Tudor Jones, London (2011), pp. 202–216. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230294929_11 (Accessed 27 August 2023).

4. Defining democratic values

4.1. The concept of democracy

Democracy is a form of government in which power is vested in the people and citizens actively participate in political decision-making.⁸ In a democratic system, governments are elected by the people and are accountable to them for their actions and decisions. In essence, democracy promotes the principle of equality and respects individual rights and freedoms. It implies that all citizens have the right to express their opinions freely, to elect and be elected to public office, to have access to information and to be treated with dignity and justice.

Principles and characteristics of democratic values

1. Participation and representation: A fundamental pillar of democracy is the participation of citizens in the decision-making process. This can be achieved through voting in free and fair elections, as well as through active involvement in public life, civic organisations and movements.
2. Rule of law: Democracy is based on respect for and equality before the law. No one is above the law, including political leaders and state institutions.
3. Protection of individual rights and freedoms: Democracy guarantees fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of religion⁹, the right to property and the right to a fair trial.
4. Transparent and accountable governance: Political leaders must be transparent in their actions and accountable to citizens for their decisions.

⁸ The term “democracy” comes from Greek and means “rule of the people” (demos - people, kratos - power).

⁹ See, C. Mititelu, „About the Right to the Freedom of Religion”, in vol. *Rethinking Social Action. Core Values*, coord. A. Sandu et al., Medimond, Bologna, 2015, pp. 833-838; N. V. Dură, „About the „Religious” Politics of Some Member States of the European Union”, în *Dionysiana*, III (2009), nr. 1, pp. 463-489; N. V. Dură, „Rules of national and international law prohibiting all forms of discrimination based on religion or religious belief”, in *Annales Canonici*, 12 (2016), pp. 45-64.

5. Diversity and pluralism: Democracy encourages diversity of opinion and pluralism of ideas. Tolerance of different opinions is essential for a functioning democratic society.
6. Protection of minorities: Democracy pays special attention to the protection of the rights of minorities and ensures that they are not marginalised or discriminated against.
7. Separation of powers in the state: The principle of separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers prevents excessive concentration of power in the hands of a single institution or person.
8. Civic education and involvement: In a democratic society, civic education plays a vital role in shaping informed and involved citizens, capable of making responsible decisions and participating actively in public life.

By respecting these principles and characteristics, democratic values contribute to maintaining a climate of freedom, justice and sustainable development, promoting well-being and progress for all members of a society.¹⁰

4.2. The relationship between global crises and democratic values

Global crises have a significant impact on democratic institutions, putting them to the test and bringing significant challenges to their effective functioning. During such critical situations, governments may be tempted to adopt exceptional measures to deal with the crisis, which may lead to the restriction of civil rights and freedoms in the name of security or stability.¹¹

The executive authority may experience heightened centralization, thereby jeopardizing the integrity of the separation of powers within the state, and in turn, undermining the efficacy of checks and balances inherent in democratic governance. For example, during public health crises, executive powers may gain increased powers to respond quickly and effectively, but this can lead to a lack of proper oversight and control.

10 Morais, H. V., „International Law in Crisis: Reaffirming the Rule of Law in a Divided World”, in *Journal of Malaysian and Comparative Law* 34, 1 (2007), pp. 1-20.

11 Jones, T., „Crisis, Consolidation and Reaffirmation: 2005–7”, în *The Uneven Path of British Liberalism: From Jo Grimond to Brexit*, (2019), pp. 279–299. <https://www.manchesterhive.com/display/9781526144287/9781526144287.00016.xml> (Accessed 24 August 2023).

Global crises can also affect the level of political participation and civic engagement of citizens. In the context of prioritising crisis management and ensuring stability, citizens may be less motivated to participate in decision-making or to get involved in voluntary action or civic organisations.

On the other hand, there is a risk that during crises citizens may become more vulnerable to misinformation and manipulation, which can undermine trust in democratic institutions and political leaders. This can reduce civic engagement and citizens' involvement in public decisions, weakening the vitality of democracy.

4.4. The risk of undermining democracy in times of crisis

One of the biggest threats during global crises is the risk of undermining democracy. Some governments may take advantage of a crisis situation to adopt restrictive measures on civil rights and freedoms¹², justifying them by the need to protect citizens or maintain public order.

Crises can also create a climate of instability and unrest that can foster the emergence of authoritarian leaders or populist movements seeking to seize power through undemocratic means. Democracy can thus be undermined both from within, through the actions of corrupt or abusive leaders, and from outside, through foreign interference or manipulative propaganda.

It is crucial to be aware of these risks and take proactive steps to protect democratic values during global crises.

Supporting and strengthening democratic institutions, promoting transparency and accountability in government, and actively engaging citizens in political and civic life are essential to strengthen democracy in the face of difficult challenges.

5. Reaffirming democratic values during global crises

5.1. The role of political leaders in promoting democratic values

Political leaders play a crucial role in reaffirming democratic values during global crises. In times of uncertainty and instability, it is essential that they are accountable and lead with transparency and integrity. Instead

12 F. Braşoveanu, „International Protection of Human Rights”, in *Ovidius University Annals: Economic Sciences Series*, 12, 2 (2012), pp. 135-137; F. Braşoveanu, „Considerations Regarding the Protection of Human Rights at European Level”, în *Analele Universităţii „Constantin Brâncuşi” Din Târgu Jiu, Seria Ştiinţe Juridice*, 3 (2015), pp. 27–34.

of taking advantage of crises to strengthen their power or adopt authoritarian measures, political leaders should be open to dialogue and involve citizens in the decision-making process.

By behaving ethically and respecting the rule of law, political leaders can demonstrate their commitment to democratic values and inspire confidence in democratic institutions. They should also encourage open and transparent communication with citizens and the media so that they are kept informed of developments and decisions related to the crisis.

5.2. The importance of free and fair media in times of crisis

Free and fair media have a critical role to play in reaffirming democratic values during global crises. Journalists and media organisations must provide accurate, verified and balanced information so that citizens are well informed and can form informed opinions.¹³

In times of crisis, there is a risk that misinformation and fake news will spread, which can undermine trust in democratic institutions and informed decision-making. Independent and professional media can play a key role in combating misinformation and providing credible and accurate information.

5.3. Mobilising civil society and non-governmental organisations

Civil society and non-governmental organisations have a significant influence in reaffirming democratic values during global crises. These entities can play a counterbalancing role to government and monitor the actions of the authorities to ensure that citizens' rights and freedoms are respected.

Through their advocacy, awareness-raising campaigns and civic mobilisation, civil society can put pressure on political leaders and push for positive change during crises. NGOs can also provide support and assistance to communities affected by the crisis, strengthening social cohesion and solidarity.

5.4. Civic education and promotion of active citizenship

Civic education plays a vital role in reaffirming democratic values during global crises. Understanding democratic principles and mechanisms can encourage citizens to participate actively in public life and exercise their civic rights and responsibilities.

13 See, Mouffe, C., *For a Left Populism*, London, Verso, 2018, pp. 5-93.

Promoting active citizenship involves encouraging citizens to be involved in the decision-making process, to express their opinions and to get involved in voluntary work or civic organisations. In this way, civic education and the promotion of active citizenship can strengthen democracy and help to reaffirm democratic values in times of crisis.

In conclusion, to reaffirm democratic values during global crises, it is essential to have accountable political leaders open to dialogue, free and fair media, mobilised civil society and informed and engaged citizens. By adopting these measures and strategies, we can protect and strengthen democracy in the face of difficult challenges and ensure that democratic values remain fundamental to the progress and stability of our societies.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper centred its attention on the theme „Reasserting Democratic Values Amidst Global Crises.” It involved an examination of the repercussions of global crises on democratic values and underscored the pivotal role played by these values in the context of open and forward-thinking societies. We discussed how crises can affect democratic institutions, political participation, and civic engagement. We also highlighted the risk of undermining democracy in such critical contexts.

Next, we explored ways of reaffirming democratic values during global crises. We looked at the role of political leaders in promoting democracy, the importance of free and fair media, the mobilisation of civil society and non-governmental organisations, and the role of civic education and the promotion of active citizenship.

Promoting democratic values in times of global crisis is crucial for maintaining stability, social cohesion, and sustainable progress of societies. Democracy provides an enabling framework for informed and responsible decision-making, the protection of individual rights and freedoms and the fight against corruption and abuse of power.

During crises, democratic values can be undermined, and citizens can be more vulnerable to misinformation and manipulation. It is therefore essential that political leaders act with accountability and transparency, that the media provide credible and balanced information, that civil society exercises active vigilance, and that citizens are engaged and informed to exercise their civic rights and responsibilities.

Future research should focus on developing specific strategies and policies to safeguard democracy during global crises. Identifying the most effective measures and mechanisms for reaffirming democratic values can serve as a guide for governments and international organisations in the face of such critical situations.

Also, civic education¹⁴ and raising citizens' awareness of the importance of democracy should be a priority in times of stability in order to strengthen society's capacity to face global challenges with integrity and confidence in democratic values.

Finally, protecting and promoting democratic values is not only the responsibility of political leaders or institutions, but also a collective responsibility of citizens and society at large. Through collective collaboration, we can ensure the steadfastness of democracy as the cornerstone for a more equitable, prosperous, and harmonious world.

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¹⁴ Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, “Current Values of Education and Culture”, in *Proceedings of the 24th International RAIS Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities*, August 15-16, 2021, Princeton, NJ, United States of America, pp. 87-92.

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