

**Centre for International Relations & Strategic Studies**

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In conversation with the Expert Speaker **Dr. Ashok Acharya** on the issue of “**Are Democracies in Decline? Assessing Global Trends**”, the Speaker provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving landscape of democracy, focusing on the optimistic outlook at the end of the 20th century and the subsequent challenges faced in the 21st century as in the democratic backsliding or decline and how complicated it is to assess the pertaining situation.

### **The Optimism of the 20th Century**

**Post Cold War Optimism:** At the end of the 20th century, there was a widespread belief that the 21st century would usher the spread and entrenchment of democracy worldwide. This optimism was bolstered by the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of post-Soviet Republics, which many believed marked the triumph of liberal democracy.

**Early Signs of Trouble:** However, by the late 2000s, concerns began to emerge about the sustainability of new democracies. There was an observable regression in these fledgling democracies, signaling that the optimism might have been premature.

### **Confusion and Crisis in the Global South**

**Confusion Post Cold War:** The fall of Communism in the early 1990s led to a period of uncertainty, particularly in the Global South. There was confusion about the appropriate models of development and governance, even as liberal democratic models were being promoted.

**9/11 and the 2008 Economic Crisis:** The early 21st century was marked by significant events like the 9/11 attacks and the 2008 economic crisis, which had profound effects on the fortunes of democracies worldwide. These crises contributed to the erosion of democratic institutions and the rise of autocratic tendencies in some regions.



## **Democratic Backsliding and Autocracy**

Understanding Democratic Backsliding: The concept of "democratic backsliding," in which democratically elected leaders gradually undermine democratic institutions. The constitutive pillars of democracy that are under threat include:

Free and fair elections, the suppression of political rights and liberties, and the weakening of checks and balances within the government.

Autocratic Leaders in Democracies: The paradox of democracy is where democratic systems can elect leaders who then become autocratic, undermining the very system that brought them to power.

## **Challenges of Majoritarianism and Political Polarization**

Majoritarianism vs. Democracy: The distinction between majority rule and democracy, emphasizes that democracy involves much more than simply majority rule. The protection of minority rights and the separation of powers are essential components of a healthy democracy.

Political Polarization: The rise of political polarization was discussed, particularly how leaders like Donald Trump have used simple, populist rhetoric like "America First" which is enough to polarize the society. This polarization often leads to the displacement of centrist political forces and the rise of more extreme political parties.

## **The Future of Democracy**

Global Trends and Democratic Decline: Examining global trends in democracy, note that while some democracies are in decline, others are evolving in ways that challenge traditional definitions of democracy. The future of democracy may involve redefining the liberal democratic model to better fit the changing global landscape.

Engaging Citizens in Democracy: Concluding this lecture, the Speaker emphasizes the need to involve citizens more actively in the policymaking process, suggesting that this could help reclaim the lost ground of democracy and adapt it to the new challenges of the 21st century.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion Dr Ashok presents a nuanced view of democracy's trajectory and acknowledges both the initial optimism and the subsequent challenges and that while some democracies are in decline, others are redefining their democratic models, particularly in the Global South, leading to a complex landscape where the future of democracy remains uncertain.

He highlights the importance of protecting democratic institutions, engaging citizens and adapting democratic models to meet contemporary challenges.

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## **Event Details**

Date: Monday, August 23, 2024.

Time: 5:00 pm - 6:45 pm (Indian Standard Time)

Location: Virtual via Zoom



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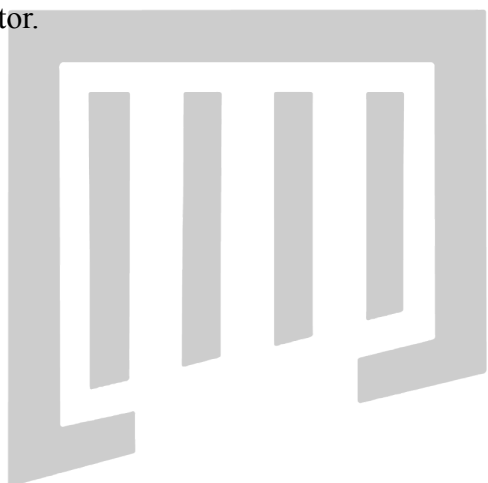
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### Speaker

Ashok Acharya is Professor in the Department of Political Science, Director, Delhi School of Transnational Affairs, University of Delhi, and Global Justice Fellow, Yale University.

He has received his Ph. D. from the University of Toronto. He is the co-editor of Political Theory: An Introduction (Pearson, 2008) and editor of Citizenship in a Globalizing World (Pearson, 2012; 2nd revised edn., 2022). His areas of research interest include comparative and contemporary political theory, ethics and politics, themes surrounding global and social justice, global democracy and governance. He presently leads the Centre for Ethics, Politics and Global Affairs as its Founding Director.



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