

Reconciling Democratic Politics and Environmental values: an Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Concepts of environmental democracy try to accommodate two normative goals: ensuring environmental sustainability while safeguarding democracy. These ideals are frequently conceived as being in conflict, as democracy is perceived as too slow and cumbersome to deliver the urgent large-scale collective action needed to tackle environmental problems. This article reviews democracy-environment nexus, theoretically. Present study is based on secondary sources of data. Data is mostly taken from official government websites, books and other research works till date. The objective of the presented research paper is to figure out reconciling democratic process and environmental outcomes which is absent in any other form of Political system (such as autocratic, etc.). Ascertaining that democracy provides the best conduit to environmental quality, relative to other governmental structures, thus reducing the risk of environmental degradation. This also reveals civil society participation in global environment governance. The findings of the study shows how democratic values and policies are essentials in combating environmental emergency.

KEYWORDS: *environmental Democracy, democratic process, civil society, global environmental governance, environmental emergency.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Connection between democracy and the environment come in differing shades, along with the ideas of ecological, environmental and green democracy. A core theme of research on this relationship is whether it is feasible to reconcile two broadly held normative ideals: guaranteeing environmental sustainability while safeguarding democratic values and practices.¹

If residents accord low priority to ecological values, efforts to strengthen environmental protection and sustainability through democratic processes may falter. Contrarily, preserving environmental values through authoritarian rule comes at a excessive democratic price.² The world has entered a state of ecological or climate emergency warranting a rapid and sweeping response because of the rise of nationalism in numerous countries amid declining public trust in democratic institutions and world organisations.³ But at the same time, a resurgence in environmental activism, particularly among youngsters, offers restored trust that democratic practices can coexist with progress towards sustainability.⁴

In brief, *environmental democracy* contends that reconciliation between the ideals could be accomplished largely through changing existing institutions of liberal democracy and capitalism to incorporate environmental values and growing participatory governance. This article aims to foster a more sustained dialogue between environmental values and democratic institutions. Use of science and technology studies on greening Democracy and Democratizing environmental and natural resource management by deploying renewable energy among communities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Reconciling environmental sustainability while safeguarding democratic values.
2. Analysing comparative environmental policies.
3. Role of civil society in Global environmental governance.

II. METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on secondary data is obtained from published annual reports, research papers, magazines, news papers, official government websites, journals etc.

ENVIRONMENTALISM

Environmentalism advocates the preservation, restoration and seeks to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities, taken as a form of movement to combat pollution or protect plant and animal diversity.⁵

The earliest thoughts of environment protectionism can be traced in Jainism, which was restored by Mahavira in 6th century BC in ancient India. His teachings is a mutualism between all living beings and the five elements—earth, water, air, fire, and space—form the premise of environmental sciences today.⁶



Early environmental laws and movements in democratic regimes

Laws: first wide-ranging, modern world environmental laws came in the form of Britain's Alkali Acts, passed in 1863, to control the harmful air pollution (gaseous hydrochloric acid) given off by the Leblanc process, used to generate soda ash.

It was handiest underneath the impetus of the Great Smog of 1952 in London, which nearly introduced the metropolis to a standstill and may have caused upward of 6,000 deaths, that the Clean Air Act 1956 was passed and airborne pollution in the city was first tackled.⁷

Movements: Systematic efforts have been made on behalf of the environment in the late nineteenth century; it grew out of the amenity movement in Britain in the 1870s, as a response against excessive industrialisation, the growth of cities, and worsening air and water pollution. This all led to the formation of Commons Preservation Society in 1865, this movement hold a torch for rural preservation against the encroachments of industrialisation.

The movement in the United States began in the late 19th century for protecting the natural assets in the Western world, with individuals such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau were the key philosophical contributors.⁸

Emerging Global Concerns

In 1962, *Silent Spring* by American biologist Rachel Carson was published. The book catalogued the environmental impacts of the indiscriminate using of DDT in the US and questioned the logic behind releasing large amounts of chemicals into the environment without any understanding their effects on human health and ecosystem.

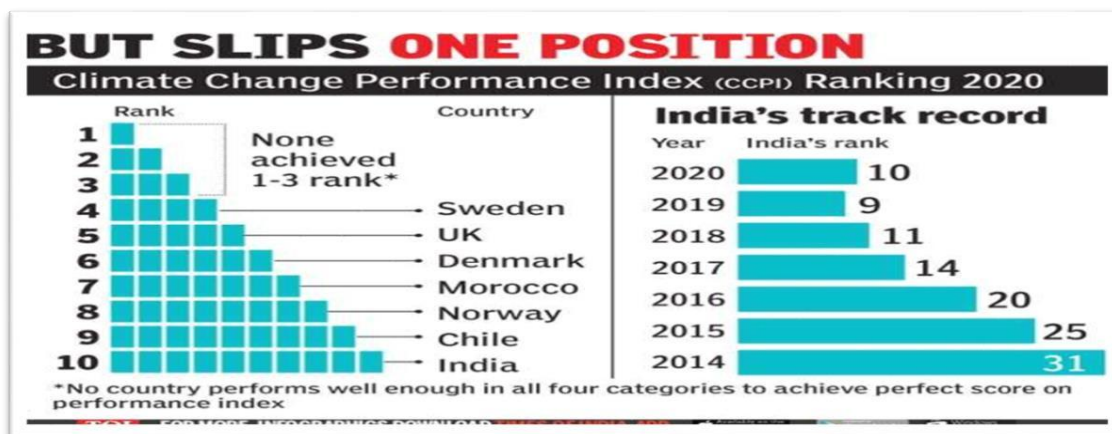
Earth Day was first observed in San Francisco and other cities of the world on 21 March 1970, the first day of spring. It was created to spread awareness to environmental concerns. On 21 March 1971, United Nations Secretary-General U Thant spoke of a spaceship Earth on Earth Day, referring to the ecosystem and life-saving services the earth supplies to us, and hence our moral obligation to protect it.

Magna Carta of human environment

The UN's first notable conference on international environmental concerns, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (known as the Stockholm Conference), was held on 5–16 June 1972. It marked as a cornerstone in the development of international environmental politics.

Reconciling democratic processes and environmental outcomes

In the post-Cold War era optimism about democracy among many political theorists often saw deliberative democracy as a promising way of enlarging ecological outcomes because of the potential for comprehensive and respectful dialogue to prioritize long-term, shared interests over short-term, private ones. In the year 2000s, many researches has expanded the reconciliation between liberalism and sustainability within the framework of environmental democracy.⁹ Emphasized on democratising global environmental politics has attained new urgency with the outburst of scholarly debate on the Anthropocene: an unofficial unit of geologic time, used to describe the recent period in Earth's history when human activity started to have a disastrous impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems.¹⁰



Against the backdrop of global environmental concerns, the capacity of democracies to respond to climate change has increasingly taken centre stage in both theoretical debates and empirical analysis.

Environmental democracy might be visible as part of a bigger constellation of studies that connects environmental and democratic values theoretically and empirically, including work on participation, environmental justice, transparency, accountability and legitimacy in environmental governance.

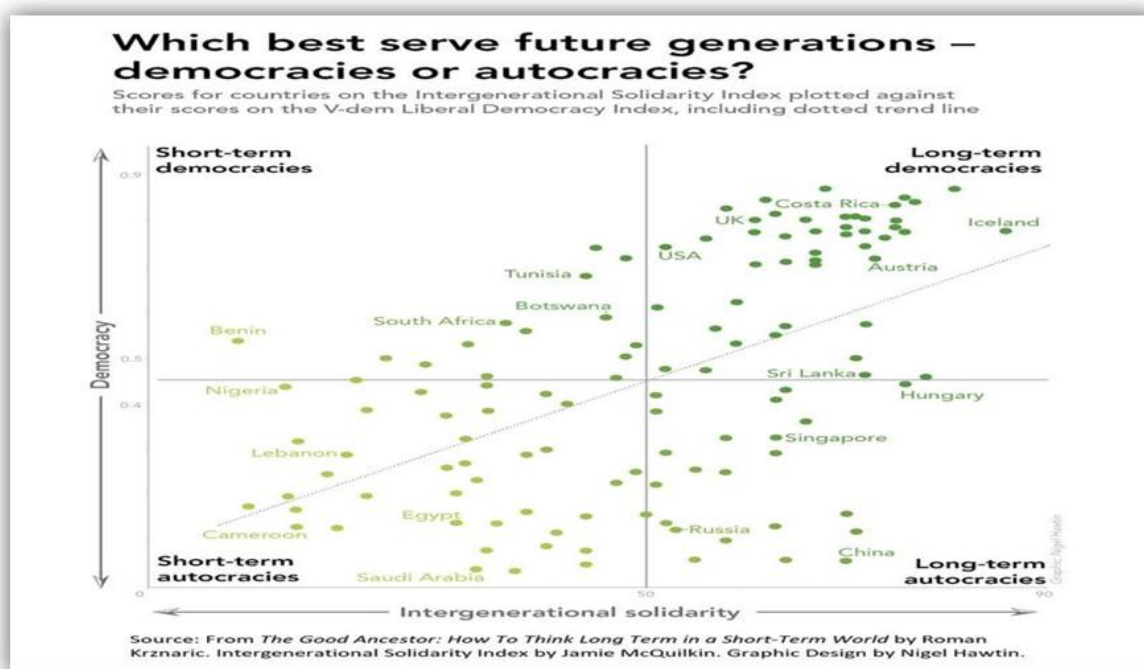
Contemporary democracies is entwined with the development of fossil fuel industries, but now it explores more pathways (renewable energy) to democratising energy production and consumption.¹¹

The Intergenerational Solidarity Index

Quantitative measures that compares the long-term policy of nations have been developed by academics and policy experts over the past decade. The most conceptually coherent, methodologically rigorous and geographically comprehensive of them is the new Intergenerational Solidarity Index (ISI), created by the interdisciplinary scientist Jamie McQuilkin.

The ISI provides a single index rating for 122 countries every year between 2015 and 2019, and primarily focuses on ten different indicators of long-term policy performance. Environmental indicators include carbon footprint and deforestation, wealth inequality and net savings these are measures for economic indicators, while the social indicators conceal regions such as primary education and child mortality.

Out of the 25 countries with the highest scores on the ISI, 21 of them – 84 per cent – are democracies. Out of the 25 countries with the lowest scores on the ISI, 21 of them are autocracies.¹²



Global Environment Policies: An Overview

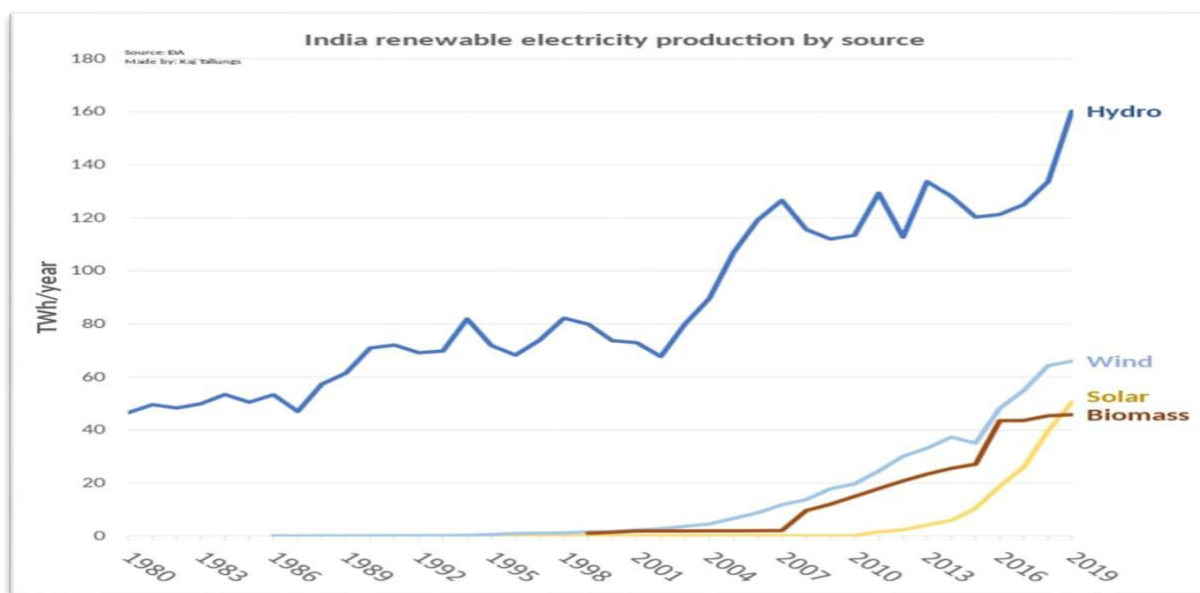
Comparative empirical assessment between democracy and environmental performance has resulted in mixed conclusions. Environmental performance index (EPI) responsible for measuring the performance of nations, reflecting whether they meet internationally established environmental targets or not. Finland top the index with 90.68, followed by Iceland 90.51.

New Zealand also passed a bill with a target: to reduce all greenhouse gases(except biogenic methane, emitted by plants and animals sources) to net zero by 2050. In 2018, China also enact two environmental protection laws as china is biggest emitter of CO₂, formalizing the emissions discharge fee into a tax collected from industrial polluters to prevent water pollution more effectively. ASEAN-EU cooperation on environment currently focuses on the sustainable use of peatland and haze mitigation, biodiversity conservation and management of heritage parks in theregion of ASEAN. The 7th Environmental Action Programme of the EU, entitled “Living well, within the limits of our planet” runs to 2020, focuses on low carbon economy and safeguard union’s citizens from environmental pressure and risks to health.

India’s Role

India is leading in the developing nations with 18 biosphere reserves, 543 wildlife sanctuaries and 104 national parks. Ernst and Young’s 2021 Renewable Energy Country Attractiveness Index (RECAI) ranked India 3rd behind USA and China. India’s Cochin airport is the world’s first fully solar powered airport.

In 2016, Paris Agreement’s Intended Nationally Determined Contributions(INDC’s) targets, India made commitment of producing 40% of its total electricity from non-fossil fuel energy by 2030. In 2018, India’s Central Electricity Authority set a target of producing 57% of the electricity from non-fossil fuels sources by 2027. India has also set a target of producing 175 GW by 2022 and 450 GW by 2030 from renewable energy sources.¹³



Environmental laws in India

Although the real panic in India came to be felt only after the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984, yet it began concentrating on the problem of pollution soon after the Stockholm conference. India parliament passed many statutes to protect and improve the environment viz. Wildlife (protection) Act, 1972; Water (prevention and control of pollution) Act, 1974; the forest (conservation) Act, 1980; the air (prevention and control of pollution) Act,1981 and above all the Environment (protection) Act, 1986.

Further the constitutional (forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976 include two significant articles viz.

Article 48-A (The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country) and

Article 51A (g) (places a duty on the citizens of India to protect and improve the natural environment and have compassion for all living creatures)

thereby making the Indian Constitution the first in the world conferring constitutional status to the environment protection.

• Right to Clean Environment: A basic Human Right

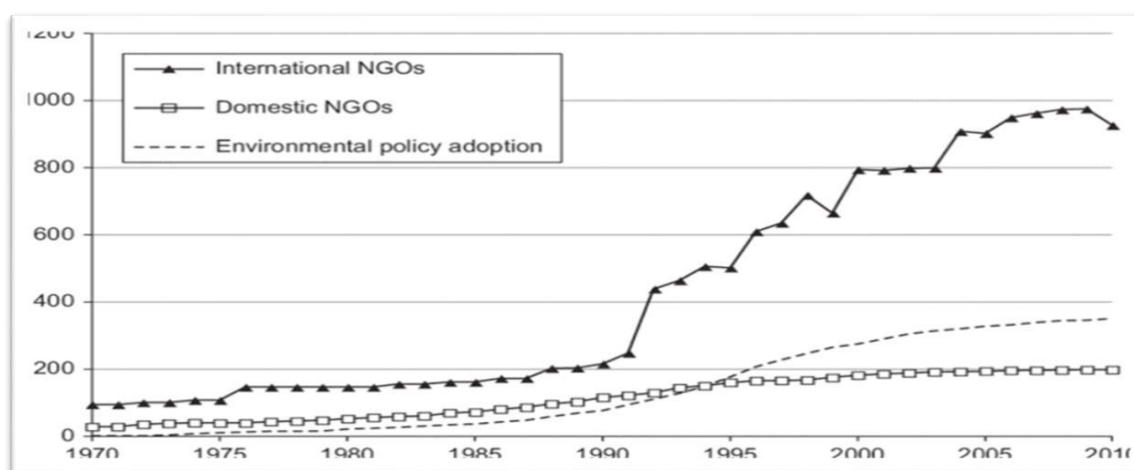
Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar

It was held that the right to enjoyment of pollution free water and air for full enjoyment of life was held as a part of right to life under Article 21.

Civil society participation in Global Environmental Governance

Over the past 25 years of multilateral summitry on climate and sustainable development resulted in a model of ‘participatory’ or ‘bottom-up’ multilateralism involving civil society participation, multi-stakeholder dialogues, and institutionalised representation of non-state actors in world summits. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Rio de Janeiro in 1992 paved the way for institutionalised civil society participation in global climate diplomacy.¹⁴ Also the Paris Agreement in 2015 bolstered the concept that participation by non-state actors in global sustainable development diplomacy is essential to effective collective problem-solving.¹⁵

However, levels of participation differs across domains and modes of governance: for example, civil society is much less intensively engaged in networked climate governance than in multilateral climate negotiations. Graphical interpretation shows that the higher the number of environmental Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) participating in environmental treaty negotiations than the stronger nation-states’ commitments tend to be.¹⁶



By allowing non-state actors say, access and institutionalised channels for representation and participation in conducting research to facilitate policy development, building institutional capacity, facilitating independent dialogue, agenda-setting and monitoring, it is expected that stronger ownership and compliance enhanced environmental outcomes.

III. CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals the fundamental weakness of the claims in favour of autocracies: there is no systematic empirical evidence that authoritarian regimes perform better than democratic governments when it comes to long-term policies that serve the interests of future generations. After 1990s civil society and NGOs participation in global climate diplomacy has paved the way for further strong commitments in democracies. There is needs to take account of broad contemporary social and ecological trends and increasing sense of emergency and crisis surrounding the planet’s accelerating ecological degradation, and the related growth of new environmental movements, demands, and strategies in response. Taking care of the earth is not just a responsibility, it’s a necessity.

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