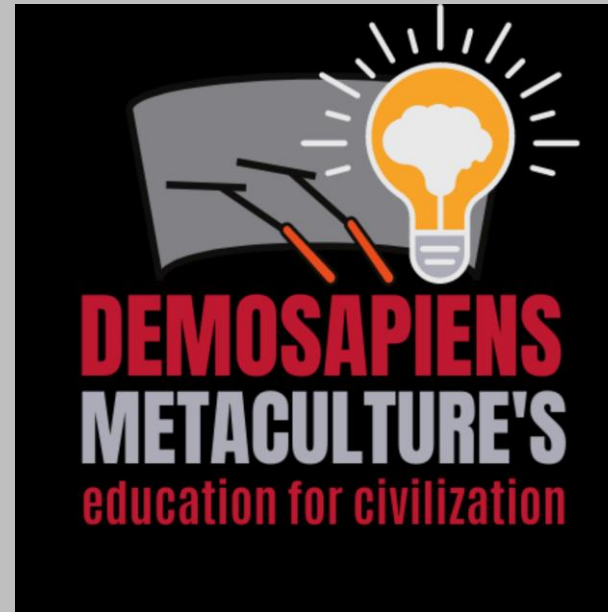


# THE 12 LAWS OF DEMOCRACY & PLURALISM



**REALITY CHECK & INVITATION TO RETHINK**  
Setting right a few dangerous fallacies and assumptions  
that can destroy democracy and pluralism.

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# THE 12 LAWS OF DEMOCRACY & PLURALISM

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## The 12 Laws of Democracy and Pluralism look unflinchingly at reality- and its implications.

They are based on:

1. Laws of nature (physics, biology, chemistry, etc.).
2. Ways in which human beings tend to feel, think and behave.
3. Ways in which systems (ecological, social, political, economic) tend to work.
4. The relatively short history of modern democratic and pluralistic societies, and the long history of human and societal evolution.
5. What I have learned from three decades of creating, maintaining, repairing, and sustaining democratic systems (working with families, work teams, organizations, and communities).
6. What I have learned by working on issues related to race, religion, ethnicity, gender, caste, labor/management, and class divides.
7. My paying fulltime attention to cultural, political shifts- instead of my career.

**I have tried not to impose my preferences or biases, however, if you think they have seeped through, I'm sure you will let me know.**



**THE 1<sup>st</sup> LAW**  
Nothing lasts forever-  
everything in nature and  
society (eventually)  
runs out of energy,  
gets corrupted, and devolves  
into disorder and chaos.

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## Everything breaks down- how long can you sustain your diet, exercise regimen, or new year resolutions?

It takes strength, power, discipline to create social and political order:

- a. Without asserting power to impose discipline, we cannot establish order.
- b. The powerful tend to create systems that primarily benefit themselves.
  - c. Power is easily concentrated- but cannot be easily shared.
  - d. Those with power will also, always, be tempted to abuse it.
- e. Societies rarely collapse because of excessively concentrated power.
- f. They collapse when there is insufficient power to maintain order.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. Egalitarian societies and systems take more strength and power to maintain than autocratic or despotic societies.
2. It takes wisdom to reform or change society without destroying it.



**THE 2<sup>nd</sup> LAW**  
All societies veer towards  
majoritarian or autocratic rule.  
The minorities, weak  
and marginalized  
are rarely protected  
or given a voice.

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## Liberal democracies are unusual in aspiring to create an egalitarian society that protects minorities.

Historically only the strong had the power to create order- hence they ruled. Those who rule will, naturally, seek to maintain order- and their own privilege.

When threatened, the ruling class (the majority or elites) will always prize order and stability above human rights and freedoms (even their own).

### REALITY CHECK!

In autocratic societies minorities or the weak can survive (or thrive) by:

1. Keeping a low profile and avoid getting in the way of the powerful.
2. Submitting to the powerful in return for their protection.
3. Finding a way to be useful to those in power, so that they leave you alone.
4. Fighting to overthrow the current regime.



**THE 3<sup>rd</sup> LAW**  
Only the strong  
and powerful (elites)  
can design, establish,  
or sustain democratic  
and pluralistic societies.

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## The elite are not the enemies of democracy.

- Only a powerful elite can create social, political, and economic stability.
- It also takes an elite and powerful group (who have surplus power) to establish a society with an optimal level of order (and minimal dignity) for all.
- To that end they must be willing to share power with the rest of society.
  - A democracy requires that the elite have the vision, competence and resources to design and maintain an unimaginably, complex society.
  - They will, also, need to do the hard work of persuading the majority (and other powerful stakeholders) to give up their need to dominate.
  - Without such an elite, democracy can not be created or maintained.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. Democracies require that the elite willingly (and continuously) invest resources to counter the forces of disorder, chaos and despotism.
2. Only the elite have the necessary resources or power.
3. The elite will not support a system that attacks or marginalizes them.



**THE 4<sup>th</sup> LAW**  
Democracy and Pluralism  
(being counter-intuitive and  
counter-cultural)  
go against the grain  
of the human desire  
for order, security, and control.

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## Humans are instinctively tribal. We trust and engage with people we know.

- We also tend to, naturally, distrust strangers and those who are different.
- Democracy and Pluralism requires toleration and embracing the unfamiliar.
- This requires questioning old (subjective) loyalties to family, ethnicity, land.
  - **Cosmopolitans have already weakened their own roots through urbanization, consumerism, hyper-individualism and immigration.**
- They, also, have vulnerable identities, and a low sense of belongingness.
- Cosmopolitans, hence, quite easily learn to live with diversity, build intimacy with strangers, create intentional communities and appreciate variety.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. Cosmopolitans tend to be emotionally, socially and culturally unmoored.
2. However, in crisis, their intentional, interest-based, affinities tend to crumble as friends and peers move away- or old tribal loyalties resurface.
3. Cosmopolitanism, based on weak roots and a low sense of belongingness, makes societies vulnerable to disorder and collapse.





**THE 5<sup>th</sup> LAW**  
Democracy and Pluralism  
(exponentially) increase  
the complexity of society or  
political system- far beyond  
its capacity to sustain itself.

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**Free and open societies, by increasing complexity, increase competition, conflict- and decrease cohesion.**

- The more voices are included, the more dissent will be allowed to surface.
- In the process, decision-making processes slow down or even break down.
- Resources being finite, investment in negotiation and dispute management will take resources away from other essential services.
- This forces the elite or the government (who have access to resources) to make increasingly greater investments- just to maintain order and keep the system running.

## **REALITY CHECK!**

1. Increasing demands on the system, constant protest and unyielding dissent (from opposition, activists, special interest groups) will paralyze the system.
2. Never-ending negotiations, also, antagonizes the elite, and further disincentivizes their investment in a clumsy (and hostile) system.



**THE 6<sup>th</sup> LAW**  
Democracy and Pluralism,  
being inclusive,  
will also increase citizen  
expectations, exacerbate  
tensions, and slow down  
decision making processes.

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## Democracy and pluralism are not an easy solution to the problems posed by diversity, inequality and injustice.

- Rule of Law (with an equal, transparent process), cannot deliver perfect justice.
  - They merely protect the fundamental rights of expression, assembly and belief- which constrain the powerful and protect the weak.
    - Fundamental rights ('Negative' Rights) prevents the state from acting against the individual, thereby protecting us from tyranny.
    - Advanced rights ('Positive' Rights) requires that the state deliver material/social support (education, jobs, housing, respect) to citizens.
  - Totalitarian systems promise subjects 'Positive' Rights- making them attractive to those impatient with democracy's slow progress on rights.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. The delivery of Positive Rights requires the creation of a complex, expensive, and powerful state bureaucracy, and infrastructure.
2. Powerful states (with access into every facet of society) can turn tyrannical when they encounter resistance from the people.
3. Perfect equality and a society free of discrimination or bias is possible only under communism, fascism or tyranny.





**THE 7<sup>th</sup> LAW**  
Rule of Law, reason,  
evidence, debate, merit,  
and quality, are the only  
factors that can level  
the playing field for  
the weak and minorities.

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## Plurality of opinions require a common basis for comparison, evaluation and decision-making.

- Stories and experiences from marginalized populations are necessary to arrive at a complete and holistic understanding (truth) of any situation.
- However elevating subjectivity over reason and evidence, weakens democracy.
  - Without objective yardsticks and common standards of judgment, outsiders and minorities can succeed only through positive discrimination.
  - Positive discrimination is a useful measure, but it can create resentment if it seems permanent- and is perceived as disadvantaging the majority.
- It can also cheat minorities of their right to be treated (and judged) as equals- just as it destroys society's ability to value competence, quality, and the truth.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. Societies that elevate subjective experiences over reason and evidence, eventually legitimizes the dominant group's (much louder, emotional) stories.
2. Populism and demagoguery are always fueled by the dominant group's highly emotional, and deeply felt, stories of grievance.



**THE 8th LAW**  
The elite, the dominant group,  
the majority and conservatives,  
who have access to resources  
and power, don't need  
democracy or pluralism.

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## The elite and the majority tends to be conservative- because the system works for them.

- Conservatives are, also, more likely to value tradition, order and continuity. Liberals are more open to change, progress, and hence democracy and pluralism.
  - A liberal elite is a unique and visionary creature.
  - Liberals, progressives, minorities, and the weak, are, also, dependent upon a system that tolerates and accommodates differences.
  - Frustrated by incremental change, these groups are, also, most likely to aggressively push change upon the dominant group (and conservatives).
- Change in a democracy is incremental and requires intelligent trade-offs.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. When the dominant group is attacked in a democracy, they question the logic of sharing power (and being held accountable to the weak).
2. Frustrated and adversarial minorities can tip the elites towards tyranny.



**THE 9<sup>th</sup> LAW**  
In free and open societies  
attacks on the government,  
the elite and other  
dominant forces,  
weakens the democracy  
and empowers despotic forces.

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## Revolution can overthrow tyrants, but cannot deliver us an egalitarian democracy.

- Democracies are created by a visionary elite (with power and resources).
- But they can only be sustained by a mature and cooperative minority.
  - Accommodating competing and clashing stakeholders requires constant negotiation, compromise and even sacrifice.
  - Overthrowing the elite in a democracy removes the only group with the strength and interest in sustaining a pluralistic democracy.
- The extreme Left and Right are authoritarian and are not served by a democracy.
  - Minorities must recognize that slow and incremental change is the only way to preserve or grow their own freedoms and rights.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. Minorities must not assume that aggression will get them results—the powerful can summon greater violence than they can.
2. Even victory through violence will only create a dictatorship of the progressives, not a pluralistic democracy.



**THE 10<sup>th</sup> LAW**  
Once a society loses its  
existing democracy  
(and pluralism),  
the loss of trust and  
social cohesion will make  
rebuilding almost impossible.

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## Democracy and pluralism are dynamic systems that are inherently unstable and vulnerable.

- Radical social and political change destabilizes societies that will, thereafter, struggle to revert to previous levels of openness and freedoms.
  - When communication breaks down, inter-personal trust crumbles, and people retreat into narrow communities.
  - Loss of inter-personal trust reduces trust in the system, itself, reducing its capacity to maintain itself, making collapse more likely.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. Radical change increases anxiety, distrust, and creates polarization.
2. Hence, all change in democracies needs to be slow and incremental—except in times of crisis (famine, earthquake, recession, war).
3. A crisis may also necessitate (temporary) authoritarian measures to stabilize the state and society.



**THE 11<sup>th</sup> LAW**  
Democracy and Pluralism  
require unending dialogue/  
negotiation/compromise;  
delayed gratification;  
and periodic/painful sacrifice.

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## Citizens in a mature democracy have low expectations from the system and high expectations of themselves.

- Civil society cannot, merely, hold those in power accountable—they must also hold citizens (including minorities), and themselves accountable.
- They are also required to model the best values and culture by:
  - a. engaging constructively with those that they disagree,
  - b. negotiating with those they disagree with (or think are wrong),
  - c. compromising on things they feel strongly about, and
  - d. periodically sacrificing their own benefits for (the larger) democracy's sake.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. A aggressive citizenry that demands benefits, or attacks the system, without investing in sustaining the system will lose its democracy and pluralism.
2. Democracy is not a default political system, a gift, or a right, it is a privilege earned afresh— by each generation.
3. Pluralistic societies are not willed into being by legislation or advocacy—they are modelled each day, by mature, generous people in communities.





THE **12<sup>th</sup>** LAW  
Democracy and Pluralism  
can only be sustained by a  
knowledgeable, attentive,  
and wise citizenry.

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## A democracy makes extraordinary demands on the citizen.

- Authoritarian states promise basic needs, security, and national pride, in return for a singular vision, obedience and unquestioning loyalty.
- A democracy's ability to deliver services depends on the quality of citizen investment, and their ability to make difficult and mature decisions.
  - Citizens need to understand how democracy and pluralism work; be educated about vital issues; and think beyond narrow self-interest.
    - Also, everyone, including activists and revolutionaries, would do well to appreciate that their system is far more tenuous than they realize.

### REALITY CHECK!

1. Sustaining a democracy requires citizens to do more than protest or resist, they need the wisdom to maintain a complex and demanding system.
2. Most of all we need to be grateful to those who left us this system—we may not have been able to create one like this today.





**THE 12 LAWS**  
Of Democracy and Pluralism  
come out of my thirty (plus)  
years as a professional in  
diversity/ conflict management,  
critical thinking, and  
democratic systems design.

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## THIS PRESENTATION IS ONLY A TEASER.

There is, of course, so much more to all of this- not counting possible solutions to the crisis of democracy and pluralism.

If you would like to learn more about my reasoning and evidence; challenge my facts or assumptions; or just chat; please contact me at:

**ashok@metaculture.studio**

I would very much welcome a conversation.

Free and open societies, imperfect as they,  
are far too important for us to lose.

**It would be even worse if we lost them simply because good people who tried to protect them ended up, unwittingly, exacerbating the problems.**