

Democracy in Perspective: Reflecting on the Effects of Political Blindness in Society

Reinaldo Pereira da Silva*

Master Degree Student, Lawyer, Universidade Federal do Parana, Curitiba, Brazil

Abstract: This article addresses the contemporary challenges faced by democracy, with a particular focus on infocracy, populism, and political moralism. The research employs a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach, integrating theoretical and critical analyses of political and media phenomena, aiming to comprehend how these dynamics impact democratic integrity. In the introduction, the concept of infocracy, as defined by Byung-Chul Han (2022), is presented as a transformation in the information regime influenced by digitalization and the proliferation of communication technologies. The methodology includes an examination of the effects of this transformation on the transparency and quality of information available to the public. The study investigates how media fragmentation and the spread of fake news undermine democratic discourse and facilitate social polarization. The second section explores the influence of populism and political moralism on democracy. Drawing on references such as Gouvea and Branco (2020), Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), and Salgado (2018), the paper analyzes how populism fosters simplistic dichotomies between the "people" and the "elite," weakening democratic institutions and promoting the erosion of democratic norms. Political moralism, in turn, further polarizes society by transforming complex issues into binary conflicts. The conclusion proposes solutions to address these challenges: promoting media literacy to discern truthful information, strengthening democratic institutions, and revitalizing the role of traditional media. It also suggests a renewed commitment to civic education and ethical political leadership to restore and uphold the integrity of the democratic process.

Keywords: Infocracy, Populism, Political Moralism, Social Polarization, Media Literacy.

1. Introduction

Political blindness, akin to the literal blindness described by Saramago [1], manifests in various forms within contemporary politics. Corruption, for instance, exemplifies a type of blindness where personal interests and the benefits of select groups overshadow the common good. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) [2] argue that democratic erosion often begins with the gradual subversion of democratic norms, leading to a state of political blindness where leaders and citizens can no longer discern the fundamental values of democracy. Social blindness,

the inability to recognize the dignity and rights of others, manifests itself through acts of violence, exploitation, and dehumanization.

When examining the recent political context, we can identify troubling parallels. Democracy, idealized as a system of government where citizens have a voice and actively participate in political decisions, is often distorted and manipulated by personal interests and power groups. The pursuit of power or its preservation, coupled with corruption and a lack of transparency, undermines the foundations of democracy, leading it into a state of moral blindness where the common good is neglected in favor of individual or group-specific benefits.

In the twentieth century, democracy not only had a more nascent character but also faced particularly specific threats, such as coups d'état. Initially, one observes a rise in political violence among citizens, followed by military intervention, the emergence of a new "leader," and ultimately, changes to the existing regime.

In contemporary democracies, this threat "seemed" quite distant.

Seemed!

In Brazil, emboldened by the process of re-democratization following the end of the military dictatorship and the enactment of the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, we let our guard down, failed to hold those responsible accountable¹, and the threat to democracy became a reality.

The step-by-step progression of the twentieth century—hatred, violence, military intervention, new leadership, and regime change—has been modernized, and perhaps the concept of a "coup d'etat" needs to be revisited. Indeed, the mechanisms that currently undermine democracies from within and have the potential to subvert them without violence, without the intervention of generals, or without disorder in the streets seem to include electoral fraud, restrictions on the rule of law, the accumulation of personal power by the executive branch and its leader, disregard for the separation of powers, lack of accountability, and perhaps most importantly, a fundamental

¹ The "silences" of official history are profoundly significant, as they obscure the complexity of the dictatorship's experience and contribute to a simplistic and incomplete understanding of that era. The Brazilian state's failure to acknowledge the human rights violations committed, along with the lack of accountability for the perpetrators of such acts during the civic-military

dictatorship in Brazil, was and remains a deliberate choice, one that continues to affect Brazilian society. This is evident in the fact that a segment of the population harbors nostalgia for this dark period. See the article "Silências da Ditadura" by Heloísa Maria Murgel Starling, which discusses the memories of Brazil's military dictatorship and its relationship with "official history."

misunderstanding of what democracy is not.

Democracy has historically been able to generate collective enthusiasm and energy, as well as provide solutions to shared problems. However, in recent decades, a certain disconnection has emerged: on one side, the “expressive” dimension of democracy has morphed into a form of protest that serves as an end in itself (i.e., the argument for democracy is wielded against democracy itself), while on the other side, the “problem-solving” dimension has been monopolized by an exclusive segment of humanity.

Even in democratic societies, we observe systematic violations of rights. The blindness to the needs and suffering of the marginalized (the subhuman) leads to the perpetuation of social inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion. The absence of a critical and ethical perspective prevents us from recognizing our shared humanity and acting in the interest of collective well-being.

Dixon and Ginsburg (2017) [3] discuss how constitutions can function as political insurance, establishing limits and frameworks that safeguard democracy. However, when these safeguards are manipulated or disregarded, democracy becomes vulnerable to corruption and authoritarianism. This degenerative process can be viewed as a form of institutional blindness, where mechanisms designed to protect democracy are deliberately undermined.

The manipulation of information and the proliferation of misinformation, phenomena extensively examined by Byung-Chul Han (2022) [4], create an environment in which truth is obscured, complicating citizens' ability to make informed decisions. Han explores how the information overload and data manipulation in the digital age contribute to a modern form of political blindness that threatens the foundations of democratic engagement. Infocracy fosters an environment where misinformation and fake news proliferate, hindering citizens' capacity to make informed choices. This dynamic is exacerbated by social media polarization, which creates information bubbles and reinforces existing biases, further alienating individuals from democratic dialogue and mutual understanding.

Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher (2002) [5], in “The Postmodern Political Condition,” discuss how the fragmentation of modern society contributes to political alienation. The loss of a shared consensus and the fragmentation of social values reflect a collective blindness that impedes coherent and unified political action. This state of disunity and misinformation results in a weakened democracy, incapable of effectively responding to its citizens' demands.

The rise of populism is another troubling manifestation of political blindness. As discussed by Gouvea and Branco (2020) [6], populism feeds on public dissatisfaction with elites and established institutions, often simplifying complex issues and offering attractive, simplistic solutions. This phenomenon can be understood as a collective blindness where emotion overshadows reason, and inflammatory rhetoric obscures critical analysis and thoughtful deliberation, which are essential to democracy. Populists frequently employ the rhetoric of “us versus them,” creating divisions that blind citizens to the

nuances and complexities of public policy.

Gabardo (2017) [7] warns of the dangers posed by political moralism, which can obscure the principles of the rule of law by advancing an agenda grounded in subjective values at the expense of constitutional norms. This form of political moralism frequently results in selective justice and inconsistent application of laws. Moralism, often driven by populist agendas and disdain for democratic institutions, undermines trust in these institutions, leading to a state of political blindness where citizens can no longer discern what is legal and just.

When moralism and populism are combined, the effects can be even more detrimental to the Rule of Law in a democratic state. Populist rhetoric may merge with a moralistic discourse, creating a polarized narrative that divides society into “virtuous” and “corrupt” or “pure” and “impure,” or the “righteous citizens” and the “wicked citizens.” The truth is that this exaggerated division, exacerbated and amplified by the conjunction of moralism and populism, fosters a toxic political, social, and familial environment where cooperation and dialogue are supplanted by confrontation and hostility, further intensified by the media and social networks.

From this perspective, moralism, in its broadest sense, with the adoption of a rigid stance on moral norms and values, can manifest in politics as the imposition of a specific vision of morality on others, often based on particular religious or cultural beliefs.

When moralism becomes dominant in the public sphere, it can stifle the diversity of opinions and suppress healthy debate on complex and controversial issues, disregard the fundamental principles of the Rule of Law, and lead to a selective and arbitrary application of the law, where certain groups or individuals are treated unequally based on subjective moral judgments. As Gabardo suggests, political moralism is a simplistic and superficial approach that tends to overlook the complexities and nuances of political and legal life, seeking quick and immediate solutions to social and institutional problems.

Contemporary democracy faces significant challenges, many of which can be understood through the metaphor of political blindness. Saramago's work provides profound insight into the loss of moral and ethical vision that can affect both individuals and entire societies.

This article, therefore, aims to examine how these various facets of political blindness—corruption, misinformation, populism, and moralism—contribute to the erosion of democracy. The analysis will be structured into three main sections. The first section will address political blindness in contemporary democracy, highlighting how the quest for power and corruption impact democratic institutions. The second section will discuss the role of media and infocracy, exploring how digitalization and information manipulation contribute to misinformation and political polarization. The third section will examine the effects of populism and political moralism, analyzing how these forces destabilize democracy and contribute to a state of political blindness.

Through this analysis, the aim is not only to understand the challenges faced by democracy but also to suggest potential

pathways for the restoration of its fundamental principles. Transparency, accountability, and commitment to the common good are essential values that need to be reaffirmed to prevent political blindness from further undermining our democratic institutions. Ultimately, José Saramago's work serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of maintaining moral and ethical vision in our societies, and how the loss of this vision can lead to the collapse of social and political order.

Political blindness, as described in this article, is not merely an issue of corruption or information manipulation; it represents a deeper loss of the ability to discern the common good and act in accordance with democratic principles. To restore clarity in our democracies, it is crucial that both citizens and political leaders commit to a continuous process of ethical and moral vigilance, ensuring that the fundamental values of democracy are not sacrificed on the altar of personal interest or political power. This commitment is essential to ensure that democracy, with all its challenges and imperfections, remains the system that best represents and protects the interests of all citizens.

2. Political Blindness in Contemporary Democracy

Political blindness serves as a compelling metaphor to describe the erosion of democratic principles and values that occurs when leaders and citizens prioritize personal or group interests over the common good. This phenomenon can be analyzed from various perspectives, ranging from systemic corruption to the manipulation of democratic institutions. This section will explore how these factors contribute to political blindness and their implications for contemporary democracy.

Corruption is one of the most apparent manifestations of political blindness. When public officials embezzle resources or exploit their positions for personal gain, they are blind to the needs and rights of the collective. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) [2] emphasize that corruption erodes trust in democratic institutions and undermines the rule of law. In an environment of widespread corruption, justice becomes selective, and citizens lose confidence in the ability of institutions to function fairly and impartially.

Corruption creates a vicious cycle: the erosion of trust in institutions leads to increased political apathy and decreased citizen engagement, which, in turn, allows corrupt practices to flourish without adequate oversight. This phenomenon represents a form of political blindness, where both leaders and citizens fail to perceive and act in favor of the common good, resulting in a weakened and dysfunctional democracy.

Another dimension of political blindness is the manipulation of democratic institutions to consolidate power and weaken the opposition. Dixon and Ginsburg (2017) [3] discuss how constitutions can serve as political safeguards to protect democracy by setting clear limits on power and establishing oversight mechanisms. However, when these instruments are manipulated by those in power, their effectiveness is compromised. Constitutional and institutional manipulation may involve electoral reforms that benefit the ruling party, control over the judiciary and media, and the persecution of political opponents.

The strategic use of democratic institutions to undermine

democracy represents a form of political blindness that jeopardizes the integrity of the political system. Instead of serving as mechanisms for balance and oversight, these institutions become tools for power preservation, disregarding the fundamental principles of transparency and accountability. Such a scenario fosters public disillusionment with politics and the perception that democracy fails to safeguard their interests, exacerbating apathy and political alienation.

Democracy is sustained not only by formal rules but also by informal norms that ensure mutual respect and moderation in the exercise of power. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) [2] indicate that the erosion of these norms is a clear signal that democracy is at risk. When politicians and parties begin to flout the boundaries of decency and political civility, adopting aggressive and divisive rhetoric, they contribute to polarization and societal fragmentation.

The erosion of democratic norms constitutes a form of political blindness, where the focus shifts to winning at any cost, disregarding the damage inflicted on the social fabric and democratic institutions. Inflammatory rhetoric and disdain for norms of political civility create an environment where cooperation and compromise become unattainable, leading to a cycle of recrimination and conflict that undermines democratic governance.

The disproportionate influence of economic interests in politics is another factor contributing to political blindness. When corporations and interest groups leverage their economic power to sway legislators and public policies, democracy is distorted in favor of a privileged minority. Krenak (2020) [8] criticizes the subordination of human life to economic interests, highlighting how this dynamic undermines social and environmental justice.

Regulatory capture, where public regulators act in favor of the industries they are supposed to oversee, is a clear example of this political blindness. Rather than implementing policies that benefit the general populace, political decisions begin to reflect the interests of powerful economic groups. This phenomenon not only weakens democracy but also exacerbates social inequalities, contributing to public distrust in institutions.

Social inequality is both a cause and a consequence of political blindness. A profoundly unequal society faces significant challenges in maintaining a functional democracy, as substantial disparities in wealth and economic power create conditions for the political exclusion of vast segments of the population. When large groups of citizens are systematically excluded from political processes, democratic legitimacy is called into question.

Runciman (2018) [9] argues that democracy can enter a state of crisis when it ceases to be inclusive and representative. The political exclusion of minorities and marginalized groups contributes to political blindness, as the needs and demands of these groups are either ignored or undervalued. This perpetuates a cycle of inequality and alienation, transforming democracy into a mere facade, incapable of fostering justice and equity.

The crisis of representation is one of the most evident signs of political blindness in contemporary democracy. Many citizens perceive that their elected representatives do not reflect

their interests or concerns, leading to a disconnect between the populace and their rulers. This sense of disenchantment may result in political apathy or, in more extreme cases, the search for authoritarian alternatives that promise swift and effective solutions to problems.

Salgado (2018) [10] explores how judicial populism and political moralism contribute to this crisis of representation by undermining trust in democratic institutions. When judges and political leaders use their positions to advance personal or ideological agendas rather than adhering to constitutional principles and the rule of law, they exacerbate public disillusionment and mistrust. In this context, political blindness manifests as an inability to recognize the need for fair and equitable representation that genuinely addresses the interests of the populace.

Therefore, political blindness, as demonstrated through corruption, institutional manipulation, erosion of democratic norms, disproportionate economic influence, social inequality, and the crisis of representation, poses a significant threat to contemporary democracy. To confront these challenges, it is crucial for citizens and political leaders to rediscover and reaffirm the core values of democracy by promoting transparency, accountability, and commitment to the common good. Only through this approach can the moral and ethical vision necessary for effective and inclusive democratic governance be restored.

3. The Role of the Media and Infocracy

In the digital age, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and sustaining democracy. However, the digitalization of information and the proliferation of new technologies have introduced significant challenges to the integrity of the democratic process. Byung-Chul Han (2022) [4] offers a comprehensive analysis of how infocracy, or the regime of information, is transforming contemporary politics. This section will explore the role of the media and infocracy, emphasizing their impacts on democracy and society.

Traditionally, the media has been regarded as the fourth estate, a mechanism of oversight and balance that ensures transparency and accountability of rulers. Traditional media, including newspapers, radio, and television, has played a crucial role in fostering public debate and disseminating information. However, digitalization and the internet have radically altered this landscape.

The shift to digital media has broadened access to information but has also fragmented the media space. Whereas previously there were a limited number of media outlets adhering to stringent journalistic standards, there is now a plethora of information sources, many of which do not adhere to the same standards of verification and impartiality. This has led to a proliferation of misinformation and fake news, which Byung-Chul Han describes as one of the most significant challenges of infocracy. The credibility of traditional media has been undermined, leaving the public overwhelmed by a torrent of contradictory information.

Infocracy refers to the regime of information where digitalization and the ubiquity of information and

communication technologies (ICTs) shape governance and society. Byung-Chul Han argues that in infocracy, information becomes a commodity, and the sheer volume of data available does not necessarily lead to better understanding or a healthier democracy. On the contrary, the abundance of information can result in paralysis and superficiality in political comprehension.

In infocracy, social media plays a central role. It not only facilitates the rapid dissemination of information but also allows for the precise targeting of audiences, often exacerbating polarization and fragmentation of public opinion. Sophisticated algorithms create information bubbles, where individuals are primarily exposed to content that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs, thereby limiting debate and pluralistic deliberation essential for democracy.

Misinformation and fake news pose a direct threat to the integrity of the democratic process. In an environment where truth is frequently obscured by deliberate falsehoods, it becomes challenging for citizens to make informed decisions. Byung-Chul Han observes that infocracy facilitates the spread of fake news because digital platforms prioritize engagement and virality over accuracy. The algorithms governing social media value sensational and polarizing content, amplifying false news and distorting public perception.

The spread of misinformation is not merely an incidental phenomenon but is often a deliberate strategy employed by political actors to manipulate public opinion and influence elections. This strategic use of misinformation represents a form of political blindness, where the relentless pursuit of power disregards ethical principles and democratic responsibility. Infocracy, thus, not only distorts information but also undermines the ability of citizens to discern the truth and engage meaningfully in the democratic process.

Social media has a profound impact on contemporary democracy. It provides a platform for individual expression and social mobilization but also presents significant challenges. The phenomenon of filter bubbles, where users are predominantly exposed to information that reinforces their existing views, fosters an environment of extreme polarization. This informational isolation restricts democratic debate and hinders the formation of consensus based on a shared understanding of facts.

Furthermore, social media is frequently utilized for misinformation campaigns and political manipulation. Byung-Chul Han emphasizes that social media not only disseminates information but also shapes behaviors and emotions. In the era of infocracy, politics becomes a matter of managing perceptions and emotions, often at the expense of rationality and informed debate. This environment conducive to manipulation constitutes a form of political blindness, where decisions are made based on manipulated perceptions rather than a clear and factual understanding of issues.

Digitalization and infocracy also raise concerns about transparency and surveillance. The initial promise of digitalization was to enhance governmental transparency, facilitating access to information and enabling greater public oversight. However, the reality is more complex. The massive data collection by governments and corporations raises

significant concerns about privacy and social control.

Byung-Chul Han argues that in infocracy, transparency can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can promote accountability and citizen participation. On the other, it can be used as a tool for surveillance and control, where citizens are monitored, and their personal information is exploited for commercial and political purposes. This digital surveillance can lead to a form of political blindness, where citizens become cynical and distrustful, believing that their actions and opinions are constantly monitored and manipulated.

To address the challenges of infocracy, it is essential to develop a robust democratic response that reinforces the integrity of democratic institutions and promotes media literacy. Digital citizenship education is crucial for empowering citizens to navigate the complex contemporary informational environment, distinguishing between truthful information and misinformation. Media literacy programs can help develop critical skills, enabling citizens to assess the credibility of information sources and understand the manipulation techniques used on digital platforms.

Additionally, it is necessary to strengthen regulations on digital platforms to ensure they operate with transparency and accountability. Public policies should be implemented to require social media platforms to adopt effective measures against misinformation and algorithmic manipulation. This includes promoting algorithms that prioritize the quality of information and democratic debate rather than merely maximizing engagement and profits.

Finally, the role of traditional media must be revitalized. Independent and high-quality journalism remains a fundamental pillar of democracy, providing verified and contextualized information. Supporting investigative journalism and ensuring editorial independence are essential measures to combat misinformation and reinforce democracy.

Therefore, infocracy represents a significant challenge to contemporary democracy. The transformation of media, the proliferation of misinformation and fake news, the impact of social media, and issues of transparency and surveillance create an environment where political blindness can thrive. To address these challenges, it is crucial to promote media literacy, strengthen regulations on digital platforms, and revitalize the role of traditional media. Only through a robust democratic response can the integrity of the democratic process be restored and ensure that infocracy does not undermine the fundamental principles of democracy.

4. Populism and Political Moralism

Technically, the specific event we refer to as a coup remains anchored in the context of the twentieth century. However, we are unable to fully grasp the significance of certain corrosive developments, such as the personalization of leadership, which also pose a threat to democratic foundations.

Populism and political moralism have emerged as significant phenomena in contemporary discussions about democracy. Both possess traits that can undermine democratic health by eroding trust in institutions and polarizing society. This section will explore the interplay between populism, political

moralism, and political blindness, drawing on the works of scholars such as Gouvêa, Branco, Levitsky, Ziblatt, and Salgado.

Populism is a political approach that claims to represent the interests of the “people” against an elite perceived as corrupt or detached. According to Gouvêa and Branco (2020) [6], populism is defined as a political strategy that seeks to establish a dichotomy between the pure people and the corrupt elite. Populist leaders often portray themselves as political outsiders, capable of breaking with the established system and returning power to the populace.

However, populism can lead to a form of political blindness. By reducing the complexity of political issues to a binary struggle between the people and the elite, populism tends to disregard the nuances and compromises essential for democratic governance. Additionally, populist leaders frequently employ inflammatory rhetoric that polarizes society and undermines democratic norms of civility and mutual respect.

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) [2] contend that one of the greatest threats posed by populism is its tendency to erode democratic institutions. Populist leaders often challenge the mechanisms of checks and balances that are crucial for democracy, such as an independent judiciary, a free press, and regulatory agencies. By attacking these institutions, populists weaken democracy's ability to self-regulate and protect the fundamental rights of citizens.

This institutional erosion represents a form of political blindness, where the relentless pursuit of power obscures the importance of democratic safeguards. Concentrating power in the hands of a populist leader can lead to authoritarianism, where civil liberties and human rights are compromised in the name of popular will. This dynamic is especially perilous in contexts where society is polarized and democratic institutions are fragile.

Democratic erosion refers to the gradual weakening of institutions and democratic values within a society. This process can be driven by a variety of factors, such as the excessive concentration of power in the hands of a single individual or group, widespread corruption, the suppression of civil and political rights, media manipulation, and the disregard for democratic norms.

Typically, it occurs incrementally, through actions and policies that gradually undermine the fundamental principles of democracy, such as the separation of powers, the rule of law, freedom of expression, and citizen participation. These processes can lead to a reduction in governmental transparency, a loss of trust in democratic institutions, and a weakening of accountability mechanisms.

Democratic erosion can manifest in several forms, including the manipulation of elections, restrictions on press freedom, the criminalization of political dissent, interference in the judicial system, and the adoption of policies that favor the perpetuation of power by certain groups. Over time, these trends erode the foundation of democracy and may lead to an authoritarian or dictatorial political system.

Political moralism is another manifestation of political

blindness, where politics is viewed in absolute terms of right and wrong, good and evil. Salgado (2018) [10] discusses how political moralism can lead to the disregard for constitutional norms and democratic principles. Political moralism tends to simplify complex political issues into a moral struggle, where political opponents are seen not merely as adversaries but as immoral enemies.

This Manichean view of politics fosters polarization and conflict, making compromise and cooperation—essential elements of democracy—difficult. Political moralism can justify extreme and undemocratic measures in the name of a superior moral cause. When politics is driven by rigid moral principles rather than democratic deliberation, individual rights and freedoms may be compromised.

The media occupies a pivotal role in the propagation of populist and moralistic narratives. Byung-Chul Han (2022) [4] argues that the digital age has facilitated the spread of populist and moralistic messages through social media and other digital platforms. Populist leaders leverage these platforms to disseminate their messages swiftly and effectively, often bypassing traditional media channels that might provide a critical analysis of their positions.

Media manipulation and the spread of misinformation are common strategies employed by populist leaders to consolidate their power. Infocracy, as described by Han, creates an environment where misinformation thrives, and truth becomes a matter of opinion. This setting is conducive to political moralism, where political issues are reduced to simplistic and emotional narratives rather than rational and informed debates.

The impact of populism and political moralism on democracy can be profound and enduring. The polarization resulting from these political approaches can lead to societal fragmentation, where various groups struggle to find common ground or engage in productive dialogue. Trust in democratic institutions may be eroded, leading to increased cynicism and political apathy among citizens.

Populism and political moralism can justify the adoption of policies and practices that undermine human rights and civil liberties. In the name of popular will or a moral cause, leaders may implement repressive measures that violate democratic principles. This cycle of repression and polarization can result in a downward spiral, where democracy becomes increasingly susceptible to crises and disruptions.

Addressing populism and political moralism requires a renewed commitment to democratic principles and values. This includes promoting media literacy so that citizens can discern misinformation and critically assess political messages. Strengthening democratic institutions is also essential to ensure they can withstand populist pressures and maintain their independence and integrity.

Civic education plays a crucial role as well. Educating citizens about the importance of commitment, informed debate, and mutual respect can help counterbalance the polarizing tendencies of populism and political moralism. Fostering a political culture of tolerance and pluralism is vital for the health of democracy.

Finally, political leaders and elites must strive to regain

public trust by demonstrating a genuine commitment to transparency, accountability, and the common good. This requires ethical and responsible leadership willing to confront the complex issues of democratic governance with honesty and integrity.

Therefore, populism and political moralism pose significant challenges to contemporary democracy. Both phenomena can lead to political blindness, where the quest for power and adherence to rigid moral principles compromise democratic deliberation and individual rights. To confront these challenges, it is crucial to promote media literacy, strengthen democratic institutions, and cultivate a political culture of tolerance and pluralism. Only through a renewed commitment to democratic values will it be possible to preserve and strengthen democracy in the face of populism and political moralism.

5. Conclusion

Saramago invites us to reflect on the challenges faced by democracy and human rights in our contemporary society. The author cautions us on the necessity of adopting a critical and active perspective that transcends mere acceptance of the status quo. We must look beyond the surface to understand the implications of our actions, as well as the power structures that shape our reality.

While there are criticisms and obstacles to democracy, such as corruption, political polarization, and inequality, most alternative political systems face significant limitations in terms of representation, individual liberties, and popular participation. Therefore, democracy remains widely regarded as one of the most desirable political systems, though there is always room for improvements and reforms to make it more inclusive and effective.

In this context, Saramago's work prompts us to question how we can avoid moral blindness and strengthen democracy and human rights. What politics or political agreements have we made? The answer is not straightforward, but it involves greater individual and collective awareness, civic engagement, the defense of strong democratic institutions, and the promotion of equality and social justice.

Contemporary democracy, grounded in the principles of popular participation, human rights protection, and equality promotion, is undergoing a period of profound transformation and significant challenges. The phenomenon of political blindness, manifested by the erosion of institutions, the rampant spread of misinformation, and the rise of populist and moralistic practices, threatens the integrity of democratic processes and social cohesion. In the digital age, infocracy—a regime where information, often fragmented and manipulated, shapes public perception—emerges as one of the most formidable challenges to preserving democracy.

A broader analysis reveals that the transition from the analog to the digital world has brought both opportunities and risks. While access to information has increased exponentially, it has come at the cost of media fragmentation and the proliferation of fake news. Byung-Chul Han argues that the overabundance of information does not lead to a better understanding of social issues but rather to paralysis and superficial analysis of political

matters. In this context, the formation of informational bubbles and audience segmentation by social media intensify polarization, undermining democratic debate and the pluralistic deliberation essential for the effective functioning of a democracy.

Furthermore, the rise of populism and political moralism has contributed to the radicalization of societies. Populism, by reducing political complexities to a simplistic dichotomy between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elite,” undermines the negotiation and compromise essential to a functional democracy. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt demonstrate that this populist approach, by challenging democratic institutions, weakens mechanisms of checks and balances, paving the way for authoritarian tendencies. Conversely, political moralism, by transforming political issues into manichean struggles of good versus evil, fuels polarization and justifies extreme measures that compromise fundamental rights and civil liberties.

In response to these challenges, a robust and multifaceted democratic approach is required. Firstly, it is imperative that society invests in media and digital literacy. Empowering citizens to navigate the complex contemporary informational environment with discernment is crucial. This includes not only the ability to distinguish between true and false information but also a critical understanding of the algorithms and manipulation strategies that pervade digital platforms. Media literacy programs should be developed at all educational levels, from schools to adult continuing education initiatives.

Simultaneously, it is necessary to strengthen democratic institutions to withstand populist pressures and maintain their independence. The independence of the judiciary, press freedom, and the integrity of regulatory agencies are fundamental pillars that must be protected at all costs. This involves not only ensuring that these institutions operate transparently and responsibly but also ensuring that they are equipped to address the new challenges brought about by digitalization and infocracy. Stricter regulations on digital platforms may be required to ensure they operate in a manner that promotes democratic debate and information accuracy, rather than merely maximizing engagement and profits.

Additionally, revitalizing the role of traditional media is crucial. In an environment dominated by fake news and manipulations, investigative and independent journalism remains an essential bastion of democracy. Supporting quality journalism should be considered a strategic priority for any society that aspires to maintain a well-informed and robust public sphere. Public policies that encourage the production of high-quality informative content and ensure editorial independence are essential to combat misinformation and promote transparency.

Finally, fostering a political culture of tolerance and pluralism is essential. Civic education plays a critical role in this

process by teaching citizens about the importance of commitment, mutual respect, and informed deliberation. A healthy democratic society requires an environment where diverse viewpoints can be debated civilly and where consensus can be achieved through negotiation and dialogue. To this end, political leaders and elites must demonstrate a genuine commitment to transparency, accountability, and the common good, regaining public trust through ethical and responsible leadership.

In summary, the challenges facing contemporary democracy—from infocracy to populism and political moralism—require responses that combine education, institutional strengthening, and the promotion of an inclusive and tolerant political culture. Political blindness, if left unchecked, can lead to the erosion of democratic values and the rise of authoritarian regimes. Therefore, it is essential that civil society, political leaders, and democratic institutions work together to preserve and strengthen democracy, ensuring it continues to be a system capable of promoting justice, freedom, and dignity for all. The struggle for democracy is ultimately a struggle to maintain a space where all citizens can participate meaningfully and where divergent voices can be heard and respected.

It is crucial to adapt approaches according to the specific cultural, social, and political context of each locality. Furthermore, promoting continuous awareness of democracy throughout the lives of citizens is essential to ensuring a deep understanding and the ongoing strengthening of democratic values.

The challenges and transformations of society are significant, and the changes that have occurred, particularly in the political sphere—most notably the erosion of grand ideological narratives and the fragmentation of political identities—have made it more complex and pluralistic, marked by a multiplicity of perspectives and voices that must be heard, including those of the marginalized².

Ultimately, “*Ensaio sobre a cegueira*” serves as a warning of the necessity to remain vigilant, to keep our eyes open, even in the face of difficulties and challenges. Only in this way can we build a more just society, where democracy and human rights are genuinely respected and valued.

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² We are the scourge of the planet, a sort of giant amoeba. Throughout history, humans—indeed, this exclusive club of humanity, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the protocols of various institutions—have been devastating everything around them. It is as if they have designated a caste, humanity, and all those outside of it are relegated to sub-humanity. [...] They

include caicas, quilombolas, and indigenous peoples, [...] all lives that we deliberately cast aside. [...] We discard along the way everything that is irrelevant, what remains, the sub-humanity—some of us are part of it. “A vida nao e facil”. Krenak, Ailton. Companhia das Letras, 2020.

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