

Majority – Minority Issues



Protecting the rights of minorities is a fundamental problem of a democracy. In a situation where “majority rules,” how can a nation ensure that *all* citizens have equal treatment and equal opportunities, even those who are not part of the majority?

Democracies and Majority – Minority Rights:

- Majority rule is a way of organizing government and making public decisions. It does not mean that the majority has the right to practise oppression. No majority, no matter how large, should take away the basic rights and freedoms of a minority group or individual.
- Minorities, based on factors such as race, ethnic background, culture, language, religion, geographic location, income level, or simply because they were the “losers” in elections or in political debates, are entitled to rights that may not be denied by government. In Canada these rights are protected by constitutional law.
- Minority rights need to be protected to ensure that *all* citizens are able to fully participate in the country's democratic institutions.
- All democratic governments should take measures to protect the basic human rights of citizens, whether of the majority or of a minority (e.g., freedom of speech and expression; freedom of religion and belief; due process and equal protection under the law; freedom to organize, speak out, dissent, and participate fully in the public life of their society).
- Democratic principles recognize that a key responsibility of government is to protect the rights of minorities to uphold their cultures, social practices, individual consciences, and religious activities.
- Acceptance of ethnic and cultural groups that seem strange or unusual to the majority can represent one of the greatest challenges that any democratic government can face. But democracies recognize that diversity can be an enormous asset. They treat these differences in identity, culture, and values not as a threat but as a challenge that can strengthen and enrich them.
- There is no single solution to dealing with minority-group differences in perspectives, beliefs, and values. Only through the democratic process of tolerance, debate, and willingness to compromise can free societies reach agreements that embrace the twin pillars of majority rule and minority rights.