

## Why Does Free Expression Matter In Democracy?

Our world is filled with a variety of people who hold their own set of beliefs and opinions, which some can argue is good and bad. Different ideologies can lead to a lot of conflict and division among groups and nations when presented with a choice, or a decision that must be made. Knowing that everyone will not agree and that you cannot please everyone, why do we allow the right to share one's beliefs? Why do we allow one to express oneself knowing that it could cause potential harm? In a democratic government, free expression is a key component to the survival of the nation. There can be no democracy without free expression, as it relies on the open exchange of ideas to shape rules and policies, as well as holding the government accountable with the election of representatives, and allowing all voices to be heard regardless of their platform.

As stated before, free expression serves as the cornerstone of democracy, fostering a great exchange of ideas that shape public rules and policies, as well as societal norms. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, "It's vital to the attainment and advancement of knowledge, and the search for the truth. The eminent 19th-century writer and civil libertarian, John Stuart Mill, contended that enlightened judgment is possible only if one considers all facts and ideas, from whatever source, and tests one's conclusions against opposing views. Therefore, all points of view — even those that are "bad" or socially harmful — should be represented in society's "marketplace of ideas". This excerpt from the ACLU highlights the fact that choices or "enlightened judgments" can only be made when all ideas and views are factored in. Being able to take thoughts and viewpoints from the "marketplace of ideas" allows our nation to grow and develop further. Opposing views may challenge certain assumptions, and expand understanding on certain issues and conflicts. Not only does listening to one's set of beliefs help shape and develop our society as a whole, but it can also resolve conflicts that could be prominent in one's society. By just listening to someone speak their thoughts and beliefs, even when you don't agree, you can facilitate understanding and empathy. It shows that you care what they have to say, and may help find some type of common ground on the matter.

Secondly, free expression plays a pivotal role in keeping the government accountable and ensuring the election process truly shows the will of the people. A report from Cornell Law School states, "The most basic component of freedom of expression is the right to freedom of speech. Freedom of speech may be exercised in a direct (words) or a symbolic (actions) way. Freedom of speech is recognized as a human right under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to freedom of speech allows individuals to express themselves without government interference or regulation. The Supreme Court requires the government to provide substantial justification for interference with the right of free speech when it attempts to regulate the content of the speech". This report references the First Amendment and how it states

that we as a people have the right to have freedom of expression, and the government is not allowed to intrude on this right. This gives the people the ability to keep the government in check, whether this be exposing wrongdoings, public debate, criticism, or informed electorates. The government is not fully transparent to the public when it comes to certain decisions, or how certain situations are handled. With free expression at our disposal we, the citizens of the United States, have a voice and say about these kinds of matters. We can change the course of the nation by speaking up and enforcing the rules that define the democracy of our nation.

Lastly, freedom of expression allows all groups to be heard regardless of whether they hold significant power or not. One way that people can do this is through the expression of protest as stated in the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, “Freedom of peaceful assembly enables individuals to express themselves as part of a collective, including by engaging in public marches, protests, pickets, and demonstrations. Assemblies can be platforms to advocate for change and for people to raise awareness about the issues that matter to them, whether it relates to human rights or otherwise”. Expression is a variety of different concepts, whether that be religion, speech, press, or in this case protest. Protesting is a way that people from smaller backgrounds can get their points and views across to others. This is beneficial to the democratic government style, as long as it is kept peaceful and doesn’t stray into unconstitutional.

In conclusion, free expression is essential to the health and vitality of a democracy. It supports pretty much every aspect of a democratic society, from shaping policies and regulations, maintaining government accountability, and ensuring that every voice, no matter how marginalized, has the chance to be heard and acknowledged. Without free expression the very foundation and principle of democracy would be weakened, seeing as how it relies on the continuous exchanges of ideas, authorities, and the shaping of society members. Therefore, free expression is something that should be safeguarded and protected, seeing as how it's not only a fundamental human right, but the nurturing center of democracy in itself.

#### Work Cited Page

<https://www.aclu.org/documents/freedom-expression#:~:text=The%20right%20to%20express%20one's,such%2C%20deserves%20society's%20greatest%20protection.>

[https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/first\\_amendment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/first_amendment)

<https://cfnhri.org/human-rights-topics/freedom-of-expression-association-and-peaceful-assembly/>