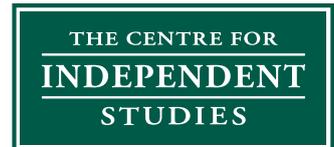


RESEARCH REPORT SNAPSHOT



The Democratic Deficit: How Minority Fundamentalism Threatens Liberty in Australia



Peter Kurti

A new kind of fundamentalism confronts us – call it ‘minority fundamentalism.’ It has all the features of religious fundamentalism, such as:

- ideological fanaticism;
- intolerance of dissent; and
- a total certainty about truth and falsehood.

The weapons preferred by the new fundamentalists are hatred and vituperation, and they deploy them to wage war on ‘intolerance.’ The new behavioural norm is ‘non-discrimination’ - and groups like the Greens want to apply it with totalitarian thoroughness to everyone without exception.

This is the tyranny of ‘identity politics’ – the style of politics increasingly backed by law, such as the s18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, characterised by heavy use of stigma and shame, and enthusiastically pursued by the Progressive Left.

According to political scientist Joshua Mitchell, “Identity politics offers up a calculus of debt based on the presumption of fault (and its associated logic of victimhood) and wagers that debate can be repaid through a political scheme of compensations and affirmative action.”

In pursuit of that scheme, the minority fundamentalists aim to eradicate all forms of discrimination in the name of liberating those deemed to be oppressed. The net of anti-discrimination is being cast ever more widely, as was seen most famously in the 2011 ‘Andrew Bolt’ case (*Eatock v Bolt*).

Frequently cited categories of oppression include gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, whose ramparts must be breached in the name of equality, for example:

- Campaigners such as the Safe Schools Coalition hold that social structures, such as gender, must be dismantled in the name of equality;
- Advocates for same-sex marriage insist that reform of Australia’s marriage laws is nothing less than a matter of justice;

Newly-minted, fashionable rights, such as the right to equality, are intended to address disadvantage and exclusion, but in doing so, they often threaten to trump any other right with which they might conflict.

Contemporary human rights have morphed from a concern for the rights and responsibilities of individuals living in particular communities – such as the nation state – into a series of global moral norms transcending all state and

societal boundaries, based upon which an individual may not only claim protection from the arbitrary exercise of power but seek redress against perceived inequalities of power and opportunity.

“Liberalism and multiculturalism privatise identity: one by attributing it to the individual; the other to the ethnic or religious community,” says Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth. “But there is, intentionally, no overarching structure of meaning holding it together.”

In the absence of that overarching structure, those who do not belong to excluded minority groups are finding that the shared assumptions underpinning a liberal democracy are under threat — even when they are guaranteed by law.

This leads to what is known as a *democratic deficit* — a growing discrepancy between our expectations and our experience of democratic institutions.

Democratic freedoms like free speech and freedom of religion are being eroded by identity politics whose ‘equality’ purports to buttress against tyranny but, in reality, threatens to foster it.

“The society that puts equality before freedom will end up with neither; the society that puts freedom before equality will end up with a great measure of both,” said Milton Friedman.

The weakening effect of identity politics is that it prioritises equality over freedom and, in doing so, locks people into specific categories at the expense of individual liberty — all in its pursuit of democratic egalitarianism

Minority fundamentalism poses a threat to the normal political and social functions that we take for granted.

Author

Peter Kurti is a Research Fellow at The Centre for Independent Studies in the Religion & Civil Society program.