



Research Paper

The demand for freedom and rights in Rawls' theory of justice; an examination of the growing enthusiasm for social welfare and extreme nationalism in contemporary Western societies."

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Abstract

With the transformation of the nature of social movements in recent years, from rights-seeking and justice-oriented movements to nationalistic and social welfare-focused movements in Western societies, it appears that John Rawls' philosophical theory of justice faces a serious challenge in utilizing the tools required to establish justice as fairness. The liberalistic values envisioned by Rawls, which have fully governed Western societies in recent years, have failed to establish his principles of justice, which include the principle of equality and the principle of difference, in a well-ordered society aimed at securing an ever-greater share of primary goods, through the tools of foundational ideas, the most prominent of which are the idea of the original position and decision-making from behind the veil of ignorance, within Western societies. The authors of this article believe that the tools introduced by Rawls for establishing the principles of justice are insufficient; thus, they analyze and critique Rawls' viewpoint and, in the conclusion section, present an alternative approach to address the impasse of the growing enthusiasm for social welfare against the demand for freedom and rights, as well as to counter extreme nationalism.



Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

John Rawls's theory of justice, centered on "justice as fairness," offers a framework for equitable distribution of primary goods in liberal societies, using tools like the original position, veil of ignorance, and principles of equal liberty and difference (Rawls, 1971). However, contemporary Western social movements, such as Brexit (2016), the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and France's Yellow Vests protests (2018), driven by extreme nationalism and social welfare demands, challenge its applicability. These movements highlight issues like national identity, class divides, and power dynamics that Rawls's framework struggles to address. This study critically analyzes the theory's limitations from sociological and postmodern perspectives, examines its relevance to modern movements, and suggests reforms to align it with current societal complexities.

2. Methods

The study employs a **descriptive-phenomenological method**. It begins by outlining Rawls's theory, focusing on core concepts (justice as fairness, original position, principles of justice). A critical analysis follows, using sociological perspectives (e.g., Sandel, 1982) and postmodern critiques (e.g., Foucault, 1977; Bauman, 2000) to assess limitations in addressing identity, power, and social fluidity. Three

case studies—Brexit, the 2016 U.S. election, and Yellow Vests—are analyzed using secondary sources like news articles and academic studies (e.g., Becker et al., 2017; Spire, 2018) to illustrate practical shortcomings. Reform proposals are developed based on findings to enhance the theory's applicability. The analysis combines philosophical inquiry with empirical evidence from Western societies.

3. Results

Rawls's theory is inadequate for contemporary challenges. The **original position** and **veil of ignorance** are overly abstract, neglecting social identities like ethnicity or class (Sandel, 1982). Foucault (1977) argues that power relations, absent in Rawls's framework, shape outcomes, as seen in elite-driven Yellow Vests policies. The **principles of equal liberty and difference** fail to address inequalities; Brexit reduced opportunities for the disadvantaged, contradicting the difference principle (Becker et al., 2017). The **well-ordered society** concept is incompatible with polarization, as in the 2016 U.S. election (Fukuyama, 2018). Bauman's (2000) "liquid modernity" highlights social fluidity, undermining stable consensus. Case studies confirm these critiques: Brexit prioritized national identity, the 2016 U.S. election weakened cooperation, and Yellow Vests exposed distributive justice failures (Spire, 2018). The table below summarizes key findings:



Movement	Key Issue	Rawlsian Tool Violated	Evidence
Brexit (2016)	Extreme nationalism	Equal liberty, difference principle	Reduced migrant rights (Becker et al., 2017)
2016 U.S. Election	Populism, nationalism	Overlapping consensus	Paris Agreement withdrawal (Colvin & Pace, 2017)
Yellow Vests (2018)	Social welfare demands	Difference principle	Tax policies harmed the disadvantaged (Spire, 2018)

4. Conclusion

Rawls's theory struggles with modern nationalism, inequality, and power dynamics. Sociological and postmodern critiques highlight its limitations, confirmed by movements like Brexit, the 2016 U.S. election, and Yellow Vests. Proposed reforms include: (1) flexible principles, prioritizing the difference principle in crises (Spire, 2018); (2) global justice to counter nationalism (Fukuyama, 2018); (3) enhancing the original position with identity factors (Sandel, 1982); and (4) strengthening overlapping consensus via public dialogue (Williamson, 2018). Future research should compare Rawls's theory with other justice frameworks and explore non-Western contexts. Revising Rawls's theory is essential for fostering equitable societies.

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Authors' Contribution

The primary author (Hadi Saadatmanesh) was responsible for conceptualizing the study, con-

ducting the literature review, analyzing data, drafting the manuscript, and revising it based on feedback. Dr. Elmi, as the supervisor, provided continuous guidance throughout the research process, offering critical insights on content and structure. Dr. Behravan, as the advisor, contributed valuable consultations to refine the theoretical framework and analyses.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declared no conflict of interest.

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