

The Misuse of Political Power Results in Human Rights Violations

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Abstract

The misuse of political power can be defined as the misapplication of authority by leaders and is immediately linked to the violation of human rights, which then leads to consequences we face, such as the oppression of minority groups and the exploitation of civilians during times of war. This research paper aims to investigate how the abuse of political power and misleading political actions during times of war lead to severe human rights violations. It is done so by focusing on two key issues: the systemic oppression of societal minorities and the erosion of human rights during wartime. It presents an analysis that compares contrasting perspectives and their causes and consequences. The analysis is then supported by global and national case studies, some of which include Uyghur Muslims in China, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and Dalits in India, as well as the human costs of the Russia-Ukraine war and the conflict in Sudan. The paper then aims to define what social exclusion is and how it can be understood and prevented, including any associated forms of discrimination. The paper also uses a good analysis of testimonies and reports from international bodies, such as the UNHRC.

Keywords: Misuse of political power, Human rights violations, and Oppression of minority groups

1. Introduction

"The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened."¹

– John F. Kennedy.

The term misuse of political power can be defined as the misapplication of power initiated by a leader or an elected official, leading to unfair advantages, oppression of minorities, and violation of the basic principles of justice and equality². According to the UNHCR, for the past 12 years, the number of displaced people due to violence, conflict, etc. has increased every year. One in every 69 people is forcibly displaced due to the violence they face.³ This paper aims to show how the misuse of political power and the violation of human rights go hand in hand.

¹ A quote by John F. Kennedy. (n.d.). <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/40398-the-rights-of-every-man-are-diminished-when-the-rights>

² GoodParty.org. (n.d.). Abuse of Power Meaning & Definition | GoodParty.org. <https://goodparty.org/political-terms/abuse-of-power>

³ Global trends. (n.d.). Retrieved 4 January 2025, from UNHCR website: <http://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>

Key Issues:

- Oppression of Minority Groups in Society
- The Exploitation of Human Rights due to Aggression of War Politics

Methodology

This research paper primarily relies on secondary data to examine the link between political misuse and human rights violations. This is also supported by a study of personal testimonies from victims and refugees, such as those from Abdul Halim (Rohingya crisis) and Beena Pallical (Dalit oppression), to understand the human impact of these systemic issues, which come from the misuse of political power. The secondary sources of information form the basis of evidence for the research in this paper. These included official publications and data from international bodies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. Furthermore, information was gathered from NGOs (non-governmental organisations), including Human Rights Watch, the International Crisis Group, and the World Prison Brief. News reports from the BBC were also used to give a social perspective to the case studies. The research paper also presents two case studies, providing both a global and national perspective on the selected key issues. The structure of this paper outlines the course of action we should take to address or remove the identified issue.

Key Issue 1: Oppression of Minority Groups in Society

The term oppression is defined as "a situation in which people are governed unfairly and cruelly and prevented from having opportunities and freedom."⁴ In this context, those facing oppression are the minorities of society. The term minorities of society can be defined as "any small group in society that is different from the rest because of their race, religion, or political beliefs."⁵

Causes and their Comparisons

Several factors, such as Social exclusion, Unjust Policies, State-backed Violence, etc, cause oppression of minority groups. Social exclusion can be described as "a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political, and cultural life."⁶ Minor groups of society face this issue in the forms of Caste Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism⁷. Due to this, they get limited participation in the government, leaving them helpless to make important decisions, which also affect their respective communities. Politicians and leaders sometimes also enforce specific laws that pose disadvantages to minority groups, making them a vulnerable target for violations of their human rights. These policies deny them access to essential resources, like education, healthcare, etc. I believe that social exclusion is the primary cause of these issues because their opinions are never incorporated into any important policy-making decisions. This issue forces minority groups to remain silent and not speak up for their rights.

4 oppression. (2025). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/oppression>

5 minority. (2025). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/minority?q=minority+group>.

6 The United Nations. (n.d.). Lenoir, René, Jr., et al. *The concept of social inclusion*. Retrieved January 4, 2025, from <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/chapter1.pdf>

7 Minorities, Discrimination and Statelessness. (n.d.). Retrieved October 24, 2024, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/minorities-discrimination-and-statelessness>

Consequences and their Comparisons

The oppression of a minority section of society can have significant impacts, such as disenfranchisement⁸ and social unrest due to exclusion from political and social exclusion. The significant consequence faced by the majority is social unrest because this violence can lead to the displacement of these minor groups, leaving them with no place to stay and no place to call home. The impact of unjust policies leads to economic inequality, where the poor remain poor, and the rich remain rich, widening the economic gap between society. Legal injustice is also faced by these minority groups, where they receive harsher penalties and unfair treatment by the legal system, which thus leads to distrust in the law. Due to state-backed violence, they mainly face human rights violations such as torture, forced disappearances, etc.

Global Perspective

One case of global oppression of minority groups of society is the oppression of the Uyghur Muslims in China and the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. These countries have both faced criticism for their treatment of ethnic and religious minorities. The Uygghurs are Turkic-speaking Sunni Muslims⁹ of China. In the summer of 2018, the United Nations revealed that at least 1 million Uyghurs had been detained in 'counter-extremism centers' in the Xinjiang province, thus shedding light on how the Minority was being treated.¹⁰ Furthermore, other countries like the USA determined that China's action accounted for a "genocide, while a UN report said it could amount to crimes against humanity."¹¹ However, the Chinese government opposed this scenario and blamed the UN document for being a 'farce'.¹²

Similarly, Myanmar has been condemned by the international community on their records with the Rohingya Muslims, which almost resulted in a humanitarian crisis. On August 25, 2017, according to Human Rights Watch, more than 600,000 people remained under the oppressive rule in Myanmar. A testimony by Abdul Halim, a Rohingya refugee residing in Bangladesh aged 30, stated, "Myanmar authorities brutalized us. They burned down our houses, raped our mothers and sisters, and burned our children."¹³ This shows how severe the situation was in Myanmar and indicates the rise of a humanitarian crisis.

National Perspective

In India, a marginalized community known as 'Dalits' often faces oppression in many forms. The term 'Dalit' is derived from Sanskrit, which means "broken.". This term is used to describe people who are considered "untouchables" and are placed at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and therefore at the bottom

8 *The Imperative of Restoring and Strengthening the Voting Rights Act.* (2024). Retrieved January 4, 2025, from <https://www.aclu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ACLU-Report-The-Imperative-of-Restoring-and-Strengthening-the-Voting-Rights-Act-2024.pdf>

9 *Minority Rights Group.* (2024b, April 12). *Uyghurs in China - Minority rights group.* <http://minorityrights.org/communities/uyghurs/#:~:text=The%20Uyghurs%20are%20predominately%20Turkic,roughly%2011.5%20million%20in%20China>

10 *Regencia, T.* (2021b, July 14). *What you should know about China's minority Uighurs.* *Al Jazeera.* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/8/uyghurs-timeline>

11 *Amnesty International.* (2022, August 8). *China: Draconian repression of Muslims in Xinjiang amounts to crimes against humanity.* <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/china-draconian-repression-of-muslims-in-xinjiang-amounts-to-crimes-against-humanity/>

12 *Jazeera, A.* (2022, September 1). *UN, China present opposed reports on Uighurs in Xinjiang.* *Al Jazeera.* <https://aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/1/un-china-present-diametrically-opposed-views-on-xinjiang>

13 *Myanmar: No justice, no freedom for Rohingya 5 years on.* (2022, August 24). *Human Rights Watch.* <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/24/myanmar-no-justice-no-freedom-rohingya-5-years>

of society.¹⁴ The BBC News reports that "India's 200 million Dalits find themselves among the nation's most marginalized citizens, condemned to the lowest echelons of society by a rigid caste hierarchy."¹⁵ According to the UNHRC, violence against the Dalit caste is a "daily and tragic occurrence." The National Crime Records Bureau of India estimates and reports that some 45,935 cases of violence are recorded every year. This indicates how grave the situation is in the country. An Indian Citizen, Beena Pallical, passed a testimony stating, "In India, around ten Dalit women are raped each day."¹⁶ Due to this prevalent struggle, the Indian government is now advocating for change in the lives of these minorities.

Key Issue 2: The Exploitation of Human Rights Due to Aggression of War Politics

The "exploitation" of human rights due to aggression of war politics refers to when political decisions or strategies are implemented during times of conflict; these decisions are made to address the military and political struggle during the conflict and 'prioritize' these agendas over protecting the human rights of individuals.

Causes and their Comparisons

The primary and most significant cause of human rights erosion due to aggression in war politics is the indiscriminate violence against civilians in conflict-prone areas. The UN has estimated and verified 315,000 "grave violations" committed by political powers that lead to conflict in more than "30 conflict-prone areas across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America." The UN also reported that "more than 120,000 children are killed or maimed, with more than 16,000 children being subjected to sexual violence."¹⁷ Another consequence faced is an internally displaced population becoming refugees and having no home, which is caused by political violence. These people have no choice but to live in refugee camps where their fundamental rights, such as access to shelter and healthcare, are not provided up to a standard and, therefore, are vulnerable to exploitation.

Consequences and their Comparisons

There are numerous consequences of exploitation of human rights due to conflict, such as forced mass displacement of people, civilian casualties, etc. The UNHCR refers to 'Forced displacement' as a "consequence of the failure to uphold peace and security."¹⁸ Refugee crises and 'forced mass displacement' also occur, which is the most significant consequence in this context because it results in civilians having no right to access shelter, and they do not have a livelihood or home to sustain. As a result of aggressive political tactics, there are increased civilian casualties and suffering among the people. According to the UNOCHA, 300 million people globally need humanitarian assistance and protection¹⁹. The escalation of

14 Minority Rights Group. (2024a, April 12). *Dalits in India - minority rights group*. <https://minorityrights.org/communities/dalits>

15 BBC News. (2023, December 20). In pictures: The many lives of India's Dalits. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-67700608>

16 OHCHR. (n.d.). The Dalit: Born into a life of discrimination and stigma. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/04/dalit-born-life-discrimination-and-stigma>

17 *More than 9,000 children have been killed or maimed in Iraq since 2008*. (n.d.). <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/press-releases/more-9000-children-have-been-killed-or-maimed-%E2%80%AFIraq-2008>

18 OCHA. (2025, January 3). UNOCHA. <https://www.unocha.org/>

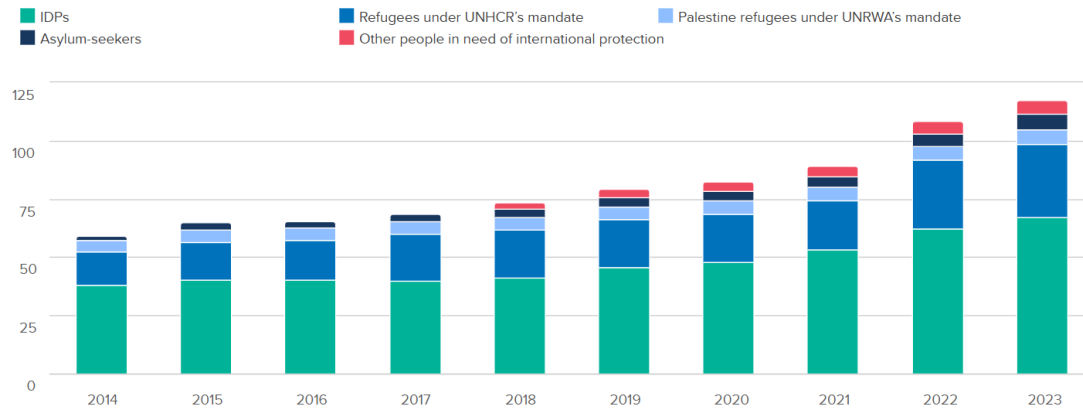
19 *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024 [EN/AR/FR/ES]*. (2023, December 11). OCHA.

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfrs>

conflict due to these political tactics results in human rights violations, which, according to the International Crisis Group, leads to more conflicts.²⁰

This image is published from the Global Trends, United Nations website.

People forcibly displaced worldwide | 2014 – 2023



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Global Perspective Case Study

One example of this issue is the Russia-Ukraine war. The war has sparked controversy among many governments, leading to different viewpoints and perspectives. Countries like North Korea and China supported Russia in the war, while countries like the United States of America supported the Ukrainian government. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed a sum of 39,081 civilian casualties resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine as of October 31, 2024. Among these, 26,919 individuals were reported as injured²². A Ukrainian perspective on the war is that it is not only a war between the two countries but can be escalated to a war between the Global West and the Global South.²³

On September 23, 2022, the UNHRC launched a press release that stated that "The UN Commission concluded that war crimes have been committed in Ukraine and expressed their concern about the suffering of civilians."²⁴

According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, they believe that the Russian government has not upheld the principles of international law and humanitarian law.

Furthermore, they also believed in having evidence against the Russian government for violating the human rights of the Russian armed forces for possible harm to civilians. Due to Russian armed forces,

20 Crisis Group. (2025, January 2). <https://www.crisisgroup.org/>

21 UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency. (n.d.-b). *Global Trends | UNHCR*. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>

22 Statista. (2024b, December 2). *Number of civilian casualties during the war in Ukraine 2022-2024*.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties/>

23 Looking from Within: A Ukrainian Perspective On Russia's Invasion. (n.d.). Institut Montaigne.

<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/looking-within-ukrainian-perspective-russias-invasion>

24 OHCHR. (n.d.). UN Commission concludes that war crimes have been committed in Ukraine, expresses concern about suffering of civilians. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/un-commission-concludes-war-crimes-have-been-committed-ukraine-expresses>

civilians have been endangered. The population of Ukraine told of suffering endured during relentless shelling and aerial bombardments, which caused large-scale death, injury, and destruction.²⁵

National Perspective Case Study

Sudan is located in the Middle East, where conflict broke out in April 2023, according to the UNHCR Global Trends published in June 2024²⁶. It is reported that 9.1 million Sudanese were internally displaced with no access to shelter. Now, the country has the largest IDP population ever recorded.²⁷ Due to this civil war, many casualties have occurred, impacting the Sudanese population and the whole Middle East in general. In the global opinion, the perspective lay that the conflict was condemned as a genocide against non-Arab populations.²⁸ The US state government reported that the prisoners faced "abusive physical conditions." The World Prison Brief (NGO) "estimated, based on 2017 data, that the country's prisons held 21,000 prisoners in facilities designed for 7,500 prisoners."²⁹ This indicates how the government of Sudan has to manage the situation now because it has resulted in overcrowding of these prisoners, which again is a violation of their rights.

Course of Action

Firstly, the social exclusion of minority groups in society leads to their oppression. The government, alongside side agencies like UNHCR, which can help moderate the actions taken, should ensure their equal representation in political matters by guaranteeing them legislative seats. This measure was taken by New Zealand, with the Māori parliamentary seats being allotted to this minority group. This action will ensure that their voices are heard, whether making policies or decisions. This measure will help make this community less marginalized.

Secondly, for the exploitation of human rights during times of war, the governments, with the help of the UNHCR and the ICC, should strengthen their international laws and empower both local and international courts to hold exploiters accountable for this action during times of conflict. The ICC should moderate the court trials, as they did with Yugoslavia, and this can ensure that there is no foul or external play and that justice is served.

Conclusion and Reflection

I chose this topic because, growing up, my dad used to volunteer for the UNHCR and go on missions to the Middle East quite often, and his hard work inspired me to take up and research this topic. I used to see the suffering of Dalits, a minor group of society within India, on the news, but I never fully understood how profoundly impacting these issues were in the political system. Before researching, these injustices were relatively minor and did not affect on a large scale. Now, I understand the

25 OHCHR. (n.d.). Ukraine: UN Commission concerned by continuing patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/ukraine-un-commission-concerned-continuing-patterns-violations-human-rights>

26 UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency. (n.d.-c). Global Trends | UNHCR. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>

27 Sudan - Conflict triggers more displacement than in previous 14 years combined. (n.d.). IDMC - Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. <http://www.internal-displacement.org/spotlights/Sudan-Conflict-triggers-more-displacement-than-in-previous-14-years-combined>

28 Civil War in Sudan | Global Conflict Tracker. (n.d.). Global Conflict Tracker. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan>

29 Sudan - United States Department of State. (2023, December 7). United States Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/sudan/>

systematic oppression and exploitation these minor groups and civilians face due to the misuse of political agendas. As an individual, I can help solve this issue by volunteering with the UNHRC and my local government initiatives, as this will serve as my contribution and impact on society. In conclusion, political power, when misused, can severely exploit human rights, and this impact can affect minorities of society to war victims. The world needs the cooperation of individuals and the government to solve this. The world needs the cooperation of everyday people, like you and like me.

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