
(Opinion Piece) Power Harassment, War, and the Fragility of Democracy

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Power harassment, an insidious form of abuse, is pervasive in many organizations. Often, perpetrators are unaware of their actions, compounding the harm inflicted. The “dark triad” of personality traits – Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism – are frequently found in perpetrators, drawing a chilling parallel between workplace bullies and authoritarian leaders. The Machiavellian’s ruthless pursuit of power, the psychopath’s chilling lack of empathy, and the narcissist’s inflated ego all find disturbing echoes in positions of authority, from the boardroom to the battlefield. While we might hope to exclude such individuals from leadership, their ambition and superficial charm can prove seductive, underscoring the urgent need for robust oversight.

This oversight is crucial because unchecked power tends to corrupt. What begins as subtle intimidation in the workplace can escalate into outright abuse. Similarly, on the world stage, appeasement of territorial aggression rarely prevents further transgressions. History, from pre-war expansionism to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, offers ample evidence of this dangerous pattern. While democratic elections ideally serve as a check on power, the international community must hold those who flout democratic principles accountable.

Though vastly different in scale, power harassment and war share a common thread: the profound suffering inflicted upon individual victims. Whether the aggressor is a head of state or a corporate manager, the violation of human dignity is equally reprehensible. We all – journalists, citizens, employees – share a responsibility to challenge abuses of power, to vote, and to speak out against injustice. Leaders, in turn, must earn respect through fairness and integrity, not through fear and intimidation.

Yet, even as we champion democratic ideals, we must confront the disquieting realities of our time. Are our elections truly safeguarding against the rise of dangerous demagogues? In the age of social media, where misinformation and extremism proliferate, are we inadvertently empowering the very forces that threaten democracy? Are we, in our pursuit of compromise, drifting toward a world increasingly shaped by falsehoods rather than facts? The rise of inflammatory rhetoric, often laced with misinformation, and the casual disregard for international norms by some world leaders are deeply troubling signs. These actions stand in stark contrast to the principles of just leadership, and they underscore the urgent need for critical thinking and information literacy.

Democracy's resilience is now being tested. While we place our faith in the strength of democratic countries worldwide, Japan must lead by example. We must demonstrate the power of deliberative democracy, cultivate a healthy public discourse in the digital age, and foster a just and equitable society at every level. This requires constant vigilance and unwavering commitment from each and every one of us, both those who wield power and those who hold them accountable.

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