

# **Liberty and Prosperity Under the Rule of Law: A Framework for Democracy**

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Safeguarding liberty in order for prosperity to bloom is essential in any working democracy brought upon by creating and enforcing rules of law that society can uphold and respect. The relationship between liberty, prosperity and the rule of law shall be attempted to be elucidated in this essay.

Liberty, according to Merriam-Webster dictionary, is the absence of constraints in order to have the power to do as one pleases. It is essential for fostering prosperity within any society as the foundation of individual sovereignty. It encompasses not only the absence of external constraints but also the presence of rights and freedoms that enable individuals to pursue their goals and aspirations. These rights include civil liberties like freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, as well as economic liberties such as property rights and the freedom to engage in commerce.

In the context of a functioning democracy, the protection of these liberties is enshrined within a framework of laws and regulations. The rule of law serves as the bedrock upon which individual freedoms are safeguarded and societal order is maintained. It ensures that no one, not even those in positions of power, is above the law, and that legal processes are fair, transparent, and accessible to all.

Prosperity, on one hand, is the condition of being successful or thriving especially in economic well-being (Merriam-Webster). The prosperity of an individual should, ideally, lead to the prosperity of his community, which in turn should push his culture and ultimately, his nation. Prosperity can be a direct result of an individual's hard work, luck, and machinations in place by the State that creates and harbors laws that provide great economic opportunities for the people it serves.

The goal of the rule of law should allow and encourage personal liberties to lead to prosperity by creating an environment of opportunities that is equally accessible to all. To ensure the rule of law creates prosperity by enabling liberties, as a future legal practitioner potentially participating in the legislative processes, it is important to understand and envision what liberties we are trying to promote. And by promoting liberties, which liberties are we inadvertently encroaching on.

To examine that point, consider an example. You are walking along a corridor. You are free. You turn left. Nothing stops you from turning right or going straight but

still, you turn left. Your liberty to choose to turn left is unhindered, that is, there were no figures to tell you which way to go, hence the absence of constraints. Hence, being free. But if we add a context wherein you turned left because you are going into a secret room to go drinking with your friends because you are struggling with alcohol dependency, we can deduce that, yes, you did not have constraints, but alcohol dependency influenced you to go that way. Further added context, by going drinking, let us say you are neglecting your work responsibilities where you should have gone straight to work that could have led to you making money and therefore, prosperity. But let's say another person did go to work. That person, through a combination of hard work and luck, prospered. With alcohol dependency as a disability, do you deserve to live a life of misery and poverty for individual actions that are debatably out of your control?

Consider another example of an individual who's had the guidance and education to know which corridors to walk through, which rooms to enter, and which people to meet in order to prosper. Then consider another individual who is just going with the flow, randomly opening doors, or opening doors because it is all he can afford.

In all of the examples above, no constraint, no one was stopping anyone from choosing any path or choosing any doors to open. Yet having unconstrained liberties didn't mean mostly for the end path to be prosperous.

Liberty, therefore, in the context of prosperity, accounts for acting in a way, freely choosing options to realize an individual's purpose with the aim of reaching one's highest potential.

Of course, prosperity or success could mean differently from individual to individual but for egalitarian purposes, liberty in the context of prosperity, should mean freedom to do whatever one wants without economic constraints. As someone with a future legal career, this definition could become a framework for guidance on how to apply that career.

At this point, it is pertinent to apply this idea to one of the socioeconomically disadvantaged sectors in the Philippines, the agriculture sector. In many rural areas where agriculture is a primary source of livelihood, prevalent poverty highlights the struggles faced by most of the small-scale farmers, including some of my own relatives. These people struggle to make ends meet. Hindered by a lack of access to vital resources and technology, alongside high costs for necessities like fertilizers, these farmers often find themselves in a tough cycle of poverty and deprivation. In stark contrast, large corporations operating within the agricultural sector have

complete access to the latest tools and equipment, and abundant resources and are not encumbered by financial constraints.

While both small-scale farmers and big corporations technically possess the same freedom to engage in farming activities, the disparities in market access and financial capacity render their experiences much different. Large corporations have the capacity to mobilize extensive labor forces and acquire fleets of delivery trucks, thereby securing a wider scope of the market. As a result, these corporations are the ones reaping substantial profits from farming. On the other hand, small-scale farmers often rely on family members, including their own children, to perform labor-intensive tasks. Due to lack of access to advanced technologies, their produce is of less quality than those who have access to advanced technologies. As a result, they are compelled to sell their goods at much lower prices just to secure a sale, further aggravating their economic struggles.

As a future legal practitioner, advocating for fair trade policies appears as a critical avenue for redressing the imbalance within the agricultural sector. Essential to this endeavor is the imperative to afford small-scale farmers direct access to markets and empower them with access to modern agricultural technologies. By equipping these farmers with the tools and equipment necessary to enhance the quality and competitiveness of their produce, they can go beyond just selling in the local markets and compete on a broader scale. Moreover, by removing middlemen and implementing mechanisms to ensure fair pricing, small-scale farmers can exercise their rights in negotiating equitable terms and accessing broader markets for their produce.

Engagement with policymakers at both national and local levels is another indispensable strategy for rectifying the disparities within the agricultural sector. By promoting policies that prioritize the needs and interests of small-scale farmers, legal practitioners can contribute to fostering a more equitable and inclusive socioeconomic environment. This involvement can lead to the implementation of supportive measures such as subsidies, access to technology, fair trade agreements, and infrastructure development tailored to empower small-scale farmers and enhance their competitiveness in the market.

Another prominent issue demanding attention is the pervasive spread of what is commonly referred to as "fake news."

In the digital age, where information is spread at an unprecedented pace, the rise of fake news poses a significant challenge. Fake news encompasses both false

information which is unintentionally disseminated on online platforms and disinformation that is deliberately created and spread to deceive, mislead, or manipulate public opinion. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the Philippines, where an ever-evolving online environment and high social media penetration create fertile ground for the spread of false narratives. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube amplify the impact, contributing to the dissemination of inaccurate and, at times, harmful content. The consequences of misinformation extend beyond the digital world, influencing what people think and their decision-making process, thereby affecting their daily lives.

The impact of disinformation on democracy in the Philippines is a matter of serious concern, as it undermines the foundations of a democratic society. The proliferation of fake online accounts and the machinery behind the creation and dissemination of false stories manipulate public opinion to favor specific political, economic, or ideological interests. This manipulation threatens the integrity of democratic processes and undermines the very foundations of a functioning society.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, false information regarding rumors, myths, conspiracy theories, and misconceptions about vaccines spread rapidly across social media platforms, fueling vaccine hesitancy among community members. This misinformation not only hindered vaccination efforts but also had cascading effects on other public health initiatives.

Another significant challenge posed by fake news arises during elections, where fabricated stories, manipulated images or videos, and misleading information with politically charged content designed to deceive voters are circulating online. The dissemination of deceptive content swayed the public opinion and potentially impacted election outcomes, undermining the democratic process.

The problem with continuous exposure to fake news is that it can lead to the normalization of deception, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. This normalization contributes to a culture where misinformation is accepted or dismissed as commonplace. Such a cultural shift undermines the pursuit of truth and distorts objective reality, posing a profound threat to societal well-being.

Certain groups of individuals are particularly vulnerable to the influence of fake news, particularly those with lower levels of digital literacy. This vulnerable group encompasses diverse segments of society, ranging from youth and students, to the elderly and professionals. People with limited experience or understanding of digital

media and the internet may struggle to distinguish between credible and false information online.

Consequently, these individuals may unknowingly make crucial decisions, whether personal choices such as health-related decisions, or larger decisions like voting in elections, based on false or misleading information believing it to be true. The consequences of these misinformed decisions could have a domino effect on people's lives. It could result in jeopardizing their own health or the health of others, potentially causing economic loss, or instigating public panic or unrest. Thus, addressing misinformation among these vulnerable groups is imperative to safeguarding individuals and communities from the adverse effects of false information.

Addressing the issue of fake news requires a delicate balance between curbing its spread and upholding the principles of freedom of speech. Lawmakers in the Philippines must prioritize legislative efforts to tackle fake news while safeguarding the fundamental right to free speech. Striking this balance is crucial for creating effective and ethical measures to mitigate the negative effects of misinformation.

As key players in disseminating information, social media platforms bear a significant responsibility in mitigating the impact of fake news. Implementing measures to identify and curb the spread of false information, along with promoting responsible social media use, is crucial. Collaboration between technology companies, governments, and civil society is imperative to develop effective strategies against the multifaceted challenge of fake news.

Recognizing the importance of an informed public, initiatives promoting media literacy are also essential. By fostering media literacy, individuals gain the skills needed to critically evaluate information, discern credible sources, and identify potential red flags indicating misinformation. This empowers citizens to resist the influence of fake news, contributing to a more discerning and informed society.

Through the collaborative effort to dismantle the sources of fake news and raise awareness of digital literacy, the vulnerable groups can be prevented from making decisions based on false information. As such, this endeavor will cultivate a safer digital environment, thereby nurturing a society where individuals can confidently make intelligent and informed decisions, and ultimately contribute to the prosperity of the nation.

Combatting fake news in the Philippines demands collective efforts from governments, civil society, and technology companies. Initiatives promoting media literacy, fact-checking, and responsible social media use are crucial components of a comprehensive strategy. Striking a balance between safeguarding freedom of expression and curbing the spread of harmful misinformation is essential to fostering a well-informed and resilient society. Ultimately, addressing the issue of fake news requires a commitment to truth, transparency, and the cultivation of a digital landscape where accuracy prevails over deception.

To conclude, the future of legal practice hinges on law students' pivotal role in upholding the philosophy of liberty and prosperity under the rule of law. As an aspiring legal practitioner, I must delve deeply into a comprehensive understanding of legal principles encompassing constitutional rights, property law, civil law, and regulations that impact economic activities. By mastering these foundational pillars of law, I can effectively equip myself with the necessary tools to advocate effectively for the safeguarding of individual liberties and the formulation of legal structures conducive to economic growth and prosperity.