**[A racist liberalism](https://www.dawn.com/news/1785166/a-racist-liberalism)**

[Dr Niaz Murtaza](https://www.dawn.com/authors/385/dr-niaz-murtaza) Published October 31, 2023 Updated about 5 hours ago

THE post-1945 liberal world order based on human rights and democracy is unique in history given its wide coverage of key issues and global acceptance. Many philosophies had earlier given similar ideas but had left out key issues and groups, such as women and slaves, or lacked global acceptance.

The adoption of this order in the UN conventions with its near-global membership make it the first globally dominant liberal order even if not all states accept all UN tenets. Even autocratic states are judged against, and have to defer partially to, them. It is intellectually simple. Unlike copious metaphysical edicts, all its detailed clauses can be derived from two moral tenets: don’t harm anyone and help those in need. Given these two, a secular person like me doesn’t need even a third one, let alone numerous tenets, to guide my life. Clearly, this order emerged, at least immediately, from the West though it absorbed the earlier ideas of other cultures.

This order had the potential to give a just world after 1945. But it has slowly lost its appeal. Illiberal ideologies such as fundamentalism and populism are now firing the imagination globally given its failure to fulfil its promise. While the acts of autocratic states have undercut it too, a bigger cause has been its hypocritical and racist use by its Western author states such as the US. On issue after issue, they have conjured up excuses for why these tenets can’t be applied when white Western states fight other races — on immigration, trade, global governance or in actual wars.

High racist walls are being erected around Fortresses Europe and US to exclude coloured immigrants, both documented and undocumented, on the openly racist pretext of protecting racial dominance and cultures. The logic is often couched in terms of economic burden, though studies show that immigrants of all status boost economic growth.

High racist walls are being erected in Europe and the US.

The plan to have rules-based global trade via the WTO remains unfulfilled. Western states have exacted concessions from weak southern states on issues beneficial to them such as foreign investment and intellectual rights but refuse to lower barriers in areas critical for southern ones like agriculture. Western states have stubbornly refused to democratise the IMF, World Bank and the UN. The US has shamelessly aided megalomaniac autocrats in many southern states despite the abuses its allies were inflicting locally. Even within Western states, coloured people are often treated as second-class citizens.

But this racist liberalism has unleashed its powers most destructively in wars pitting Western powers against hapless southern peoples, as in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. Elaborate UN, and their own, laws on protecting civilians are tossed into the trash bin as the US and its Western allies pursue their military interests. The aim of eradicating terrorism has been used as free licence to inflict grievous harm on southern civilians without remorse.

Nowhere is this done more viciously now than by Israel in Gaza. We are told ad nauseam that Israel has the right to defend itself even though it’s an occupier. A rational view on this right would cover Israel beefing up its air, land and sea border security, eliminating attackers from its land and strengthening its intelligence against future attacks. These steps alone can pre-empt a similar Hamas attack, which too was wrong in targeting Israeli civilians. But only a highly racist view would include under this right indiscriminate bombing of a dense civilian area to destroy Hamas when it also kills thousands of Gaza women, kids and elderly.

The Israeli attacks are more about revenge and repairing bruised egos. Gazans are being treated like sheep locked in a small pen, not allowed to leave while being butchered brutally by a mass murderer. Yet racist Western liberal conscience remains unmoved by the sight of such ghastly suffering. Coloured lives matter less than white ones is the clear message from the West.

These actions of domestically democratic Western states globally mirror those of unaccountable autocrats. Liberalism, though, is not inherently racist, only so in the hands of Western elites who adopted liberalism as it aided capitalism to spread nationally. While capitalism exploits weaker classes in markets only, racism exploits weaker ethnicities in all facets of life. But the entire West is not complicit in this hypocrisy as the marches of hundreds of thousands in Western cities against Israel show. Resistance to Western racist liberalism exists among many whites too. The path forward is for southern progressives to link with Western ones to challenge racist liberalism and pursue a global liberalism.

*The writer is a political economist with a PhD degree from the University of California, Berkeley.*

[**murtazaniaz@yahoo.com**](mailto:murtazaniaz@yahoo.com)

**X (formerly Twitter):** [**@NiazMurtaza2**](https://twitter.com/NiazMurtaza2)

*Published in Dawn, October 31st, 2023*