*Should a totalitarian party that gets enough votes to form a government through a democratic election be allowed to rule?*

On totalitarianism in a democratic

Society

To discuss this problem in an accurate manner, we must first define the context in which a party can be totalitarian in a democracy. A totalitarian government disregards democratic principles such as political representation of the people and free speech to enact its political agenda unhindered. A problem arises when such a government comes to power through a democratic election, which in itself goes against the very nature of a totalitarian government: How can a government truly be totalitarian if it represents the will of the majority through a democratic election?

The American statesman and political philosopher James Madison (1751 -1836) argued that a republican democracy would encounter a problem when the will of the majority went against the rights of minorities. He argued that some fundamental rights should not be subject to a democratic process, such as freedom of speech, right personal property and so forth. To protect a democracy against such totalitarianism through the majority, most modern democracies have a political constitution defining the fundamental rights of the people (religious freedom, freedom of movement, rights to a fair trial, etc.). Governments in power are expected to indiscriminately enforce these rights, regardless of the will of the majority. If, for example, the vast majority of a nation are stringent followers of a religion, the state might still be expected to remain secular and treat all religious beliefs equally according to a constitution. However, a truly totalitarian government would be its own definition not be expected to abide by any set rights and could for instance discriminate against an ethnic or religious minority, such as in the case of some middle-eastern totalitarian theocracies today.

I would therefore argue that a totalitarian government through democratic election is in fact the result of democracy gone too far; a tyranny by the majority that ignores the civil and political rights of a minority. The question, in this sense, becomes one of ethics and human rights versus democratic principles. *Do humans have fundamental civil rights that cannot be overruled, even by a democratically elected government?* And if so, what are these fundamental rights? These questions are vital for understanding what makes a party or government totalitarian if it exists in the context of a democracy. Many attempts have been made to define such rights, such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, or the modern United Nation declaration of human rights. They try to cover some essential civil liberties that are to be accepted and enforced by all. Yet what might be considered totalitarian and oppressive in some parts of the world could be considered a logical political agenda enforced by the government in others. For instance, in most western European countries, government gun control and regulations for civilians are taken for granted by most. Yet in the United States, the right to bear arms is considered by some a fundamental right protected by the constitution. Strict gun control would therefore be considered oppressive and a sign of totalitarianism in the US, whereas in Norway it is seen as a safety measure for the better good of society. This only further complicates the problem regarding totalitarianism in a democracy: what is considered totalitarianism changes according to the context of where it is enforced.

Taken to the extreme, one could even argue that the modern western democratic model is totalitarian in itself. As an individual one must abide by the laws of a country simply for existing in the given nation, because a majority of people one do not necessarily have any connection to and that happen to live in the same geographical borders decide so. What then makes forcing people to drive on the right side of the road less totalitarian than silencing political oppression? In the eyes of an autocratic society, both might be just as important to uphold an orderly and safe nation.

By my personal definition, a totalitarian government that comes to power through democratic elections would still be considered cruel and unethical if it actively oppresses what I consider to be the basic human rights of minorities. Yet this definition of basic human rights is also what decides whether or not is totalitarian at all. There are several examples of cases where totalitarian governments have come to power through democratic elections, the most obvious and extreme one being the Nazi party’s rise to power in Germany during the 1930s. But also today we can find examples of seemingly democratic countries with totalitarian tendencies. Is the Russian president Vladimir Putin right to censor political opposition because of his great popularity amongst the Russian people? One could argue that he was democratically elected and represents the will of the people, and is therefore simply exercising the outcome of a democratic process. What is seen as an exercise of free speech in my eyes might be viewed as an attack against the good will of the majority by others.

So to answer the question shortly; no, a totalitarian government that gets enough votes to form a government should not be allowed to rule, *but only according to my definition of totalitarianism.*