

# Journal Education Multicultural of Islamic Society

## Strengthening democracy-based interfaith networks

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### **Abstract**

Democracy is the predominant form of government in the world today. For the greater part of the world democracy has been a rare or recent phenomenon, but successive waves of democracy throughout the 20th century meant that by the new millennium more countries were governed through democratic than through non-democratic forms of rule. Various attempts to enumerate democracies in the world agree that more than 60 per cent of all countries today have in place at least some form of minimal democratic institutions and procedures. The Community of Democracies lists more than 100 countries while the United Nations International Conference on New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD) has grown in depth, breadth and importance since it was inaugurated in 1988 as a forum for global democratic development. Increasingly, governmental, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations emphasize that democracy is an end in itself, as well as an important means to other ends, such as economic development, poverty reduction and greater protection of internationally recognized human rights. There have been many explanations for the remarkable growth, spread and pace of democratization. Internal explanations focus on major socio-economic transformations; mobilization by social movements and civil society organizations; class alliances, challenges and revolutions ('coloured' or otherwise); and elite agreements and concessions. External explanations focus on the defeat of an incumbent regime in war; the role of 'contagion' from democratization processes in neighbouring states; the diffusion of democratic values through processes of globalization and various forms of international intervention, including support for civil society groups and nascent political party organizations, state building, institutionalization, and the specification of criteria for appropriate and acceptable forms of democratic rule; and armed intervention to depose existing regimes and construct democracy by force.

**Keywords:** Strengthening, democracy-based, networks

### ***Introduction***

A crucial element in mapping, explaining and encouraging this growth in democracy has been the need for valid, meaningful and reliable ways to measure and assess democratic progress and the quality of democracy itself. Scholars and practitioners have adopted a number of strategies to measure democracy, including categorical measures, scale measures, objective measures and hybrid measures of democratic practices, as well as perceptions of democracy based on mass public opinion surveys. In

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certain instances, measures have been developed for particular needs and then used for other purposes, while in other instances general measures of democracy have been developed for a wide range of applications by the academic and policy community. The quest for comparability and broad geographical and historical coverage, however, has meant a certain sacrifice of these measures' ability to capture the context-specific features of democracy, while the turn to good governance, accountability and aid conditionality among leading international donors has created additional demand for measures of democracy that can be used for country, sector and programme-level assessments. In response to these many developments and the proliferation of democracy measures, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) has developed an alternative framework for democracy assessment that moves away from country ranking and external judgement to comprehensive assessment based on national assessment teams led by governments or civil society and academic institutions. The framework combines a commitment to the fundamental principles of democracy, the mediating values that are related to these principles, and a range of questions about democratic performance. There is scope in the framework for using existing measures while at the same time incorporating much more contextspecific information on the quality of democracy that can then be linked to domestic processes of democratic reform. Its use across new and old democracies as diverse as Mongolia and Italy, Bangladesh and Kenya, Peru and Australia has shown that it works, and demand continues for the framework to be applied in new and challenging contexts around the world. After the successful application of its democracy assessment framework in over 20 countries, International IDEA, along with the UK-based Democratic Audit, the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom, and the larger 'State of Democracy' network, has drawn on the lessons, built further on the strengths of the framework, and incorporated these into the thoroughly revised framework contained here. Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical 7 Guide includes all the normative principles and practical elements of the framework, experiences from those countries that have used the framework, and the ways in which democracy assessment can be linked to

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the process of democratic reform Children Rights regarding the rights of thought, conscience and religion; association, expression, movement, owning property, marriage and family life (Osler and Starkey, 2000). Since the idea of citizenship is based on the concept of equality and diversity in which all individuals hold the same human rights, democracy and human rights are two important aspects of the exercise of citizenship. This means that the principles of democracy in the practice of citizenship are not only about individual rights, but it is about respecting the rights of others based on universal human values.

The main agenda of civic education is about human relations within individuals and between groups which are an important part of democracy. Tibbits (2005) asserts that the main purpose of education for citizenship is most closely related to “*learning to live together*” (Tibbits, 2005, p: 11). Democracy offers “*political space*” for individuals to have the freedom to enjoy their rights, but at the same time they have a responsibility to guarantee the freedom of others to exercise their rights as well (Osler and Starkey (2005). Citizens are given the opportunity to learn from one another and to share about “*values and priorities*” (Sen, 1999; cited in Osler and Starkey, 2005, p.142).

Human rights education is an important strategy to achieve important goals in the concept of learning to live together. Human rights education will help students to become educated citizens who are committed to human rights values and social responsibility so that students have the capacity to participate in democracy at all levels, from local, national to international. In other words, human rights education is education for citizenship which tends to evolve “*awareness of individuals and groups about their rights and responsibilities as citizens, awareness and commitment to human rights and freedom, equality, rule of law and pluralism*” ( Duerr et al., 2000, p: 37). Thus human rights education provides an important framework for achieving harmonious and stable social relations, in which the rights of all citizens of diverse cultural backgrounds are respected and respected.

## ***School Environment and Student Participation***

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School appears to be the most fundamental reason for civic education. The argument is that the school community consists of a group of people with different cultures and beliefs that reflect a community (Osler, 2005). According to Schnapper (1994, cited in Osler and Starkey, 2002, p: 80), schools have the potential to become a model for a democratic state which he calls "*a community of citizens*".

"This school is not only for transmitting national ideology and general historical memory through the curriculum. At a deeper level, such as a political nation, schools form spaces where students, like citizens, are treated equally, regardless of their family or social background. It is a place, both literally and as a concept, built against real inequalities and there is a society that stands out against the forces of discrimination found in civil society. The concept of school, such as the concept of citizenship, is impersonal and formal, children will learn to understand human rights and feel included in the political state" (Schnapper, 1994; quoted in Osler and Starkey, 2002, p: 80).

There is no doubt that schools have the potential to foster a conducive environment for upholding human rights principles in implementing a democratic society.

Basically what is needed for a democratic power is to build a culture of human rights in which all individuals with diverse cultures can participate in decision making (Osler, 2005). Human rights education in the school environment will be able to encourage the development of a human rights culture. Understanding and experiencing human rights in schools will help students to practice citizenship and democratic principles in a real way in the context of the school community. This means that schools need to recognize students as current citizens, not just prepare them for future citizenship where the school supports the development of diverse student identities and guarantees their right to participate as citizens to take part in cultural, economic and political affairs in wider society (Carter and Osler, 2000).

Participation is a key means of building democracy and measuring democracy. Human rights education must be able to be a means to increase the capacity and skills of students to participate in decision-making in schools and develop democratic values and respect for human rights, for example through advocacy, counseling and listening skills,

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conflict resolution (Osler, 2000). Thus students should be given the opportunity to actively practice using their rights to participate in decision-making and responsibilities in school in order to prepare them for citizenship in “*a free democratic society*” (Pais, 2000).

The essence of every democratic society needs “*productive collaboration*” between children and adults to improve the quality of democracy itself (Hart, 1992). In this case, the involvement of adults is important to consider in order to be able to actively participate together with children. This means that adults should not only offer guidance for students to participate, but they should also learn from their active involvement in the participatory process.

## ***The Problems of Human Rights Education in Schools***

There are claims that schools are appropriate places for members of the school community to carry out civic functions by applying democratic principles on the basis of human rights and social justice. Osler and Starkey (2002) argue that the practice of citizenship should be more applicable to the wider complexities of society, and that schools are a “*microcosm of society*” of a diverse global population. However, the claim that schools are a “*microcosmic society*” remains questionable. The question is not whether schools have the potential to represent the interests of the wider community outside of schools, but the extent to which teachers understand their responsibilities in society and how much their capacity is in integrating issues of human rights and democracy in the school context.

Teachers' perceptions of human rights play an important role in the transmission of knowledge about human rights. According to Wilkin (2005), teachers' perceptions are heavily influenced by their ideology, understanding and personal experience of human rights issues. Wilkin (2005) provides an example of racism where teachers experience difficulties in overcoming structural discrimination in education if their perceptions of discrimination remain rooted in their personal domain. Wilkins (2005) found that there are still many teachers who fail to fully involve themselves in the social processes that

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cause and reinforce their racist acts, even though they understand that they are responsible for teaching the values of racial equality. In a study conducted in Nigeria in the field of child rights participation exemplified how policymakers and school administrators such as teachers and principals do not allow their students especially in primary schools to participate in making rules and regulations that have an effect on their lives at school because it is believed that students are unable to make rational decisions (Ejeh and Akinola, 2009).

In addition, schools have not been able to provide sufficient materials for human rights education in dealing with global community problems. The fact that students as citizens must be aware of the major problems of global society such as injustice, poverty, inequality, hunger, conflict and war, discrimination, racism, xenophobia. However, in many cases, schools still have difficulty finding ways of teaching human rights related to global issues in accordance with the school context (Senarclens, 1983). This is because *“the lack of appropriate educational materials is a reason given by many educators for their failure to deal with global and human rights issues”* (Buerghenthal and Torney (1976), cited in Tarrow, 1991, p: 197).

The third column of Table 1.1 then sets out the institutions that provide the means to realize these mediating values. The list in this International IDEA 25 column presents examples and is not exhaustive. And it will be observed that some institutions serve, or may serve, to realize more than one value. Thus the electoral process serves to realize the values of participation, authorization, representation and accountability simultaneously, and it is therefore against all these criteria that it can be judged. Similarly, the associational life of what is called ‘civil society’, including political parties, NGOs and other associations, contributes to a number of different values, and again it is consequently against a number of different criteria that it can be assessed. From the other side, a value such as participation also underpins the accountability and responsiveness of the process of government, and so ensures the interconnectedness of different elements in the assessment framework. If these complexities are understood, as well as the basic logic of the progression from key principles, through mediating values and their requirements,

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to institutional processes, then the account of the assessment framework that follows below should be readily understood. Our aim is to construct the assessment framework around a coherent narrative of democracy, rather than as a random set of items put together without explanation. [19] Democracy, then, begins with a set of principles or 'regulative ideals', and only then come the institutional arrangements and procedures through which these principles are realized. Although these arrangements and procedures form the subject of our assessment, as in the framework set out below, the criteria against which they are to be assessed are the core principles themselves, and the mediating values of accountability, representativeness, responsiveness and so on. It is these that determine how democratic we should judge our institutional arrangements to be.

## *Conclusion*

The first is that the purpose of the assessment is to identify strengths as well as weaknesses, and to chart progress as well as to identify what most needs improving. An unrelieved diet of bad news is simply debilitating. So a combination of looking back to a reference point in the past, from which improvement can be charted, with a futureoriented standard or benchmark which helps identify what still has to be done, may well have merit. Like athletes in training who use past performance to measure their progress as well as a national or international standard to provide a target to aim for, a democracy assessment can also employ benchmarks of both kinds. [42] The second point to make is that we cannot avoid taking a position on relevant standards or benchmarks if we are engaged in a democracy assessment. What position we take will determine both what data we look for in answering a given question and how we present it. 'Letting the facts speak for themselves' does not relieve us from making a judgement, even if this is only done by implication. So, for example, if our question is about public access to government information, then the examples of government non-disclosure that Assessors choose to use a number of different assessment standards or to employ different ones for different sections of the democracy assessment framework. Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide 38 we draw attention to in any findings will depend on a

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prior conception we have of what count as legitimate exceptions from the norm of disclosure (to protect privacy, say, or national security, or commercial confidentiality), and what do not – as well as, of course, whether the government manipulates such categories to withhold information which could properly be released.

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