



United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

Topic 2: Measures to challenge the erosion of democratic and civil values in society

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1. Definition of Key Terms:

Democracy: the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA): One of the five commissions created by the UN in order to promote the cooperation among all regions of the world.

Civic values: The values everyone has to respect as citizens, as set forth in the Declaration of Human Rights and in Constitutions, such as: “All people are created equal, endowed with inalienable rights such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”.

Social equality: Social equality is when certain goods and responsibilities are divided evenly across a society. Those goods can also be ideals, such as freedom.

Liberal democracy: Liberal democracy is the institutionalization of human rights--it is the most practical solution to the freedom of each being compatible with the freedom of all.

2. Introduction

One of the main goals of the UN and, in particular, of UNESCO is to undergo a development that complies with the constant transformation that result in growing inequalities, extreme poverty, exclusion and the denial of basic human rights. These transformations demonstrate the urge for innovative solutions that conduct to universal values of peace, civic and social equality and non-discrimination. UNESCO’s programme MOST (Management of Social Transformations) was invented to promote initiatives on social transformation, such as creating bridges between social scientific knowledges, public policies and society. Referring



to the UN, the year in which the roles of civic values were the most important was 2015, when the new Agenda had to be developed.

3. Background Information

The values of freedom, respect for human rights as well as social and civic values, are essential elements of a democracy. Democracy means protection and realization of human rights. The values of democracy mentioned above are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which provides for political rights and civil liberties supporting meaningful democracies.

One of the most significant achievement of present time has been made through the continuous spreading of democratic values around the world to guarantee an increase in democratic societies. At the heart of every democratic society there is mainly the elective system, which is the beginning that enables the human rights mentioned in the Charter of the United Nations to be respected.

The UN also provides for an electoral assistance program since the late 1940s, when it supervised elections on the Korean Peninsula. During the subsequent era of decolonization, it supervised and observed referenda and elections worldwide. Even nowadays the UN continues to be a trusted provider of electoral assistance to nearly 60 countries every year. This help is given either at the request of UN Member States or based on a SC (Security Council) or GA (General Assembly) mandate.

In order to challenge the erosion of social and civic values, it is indispensable to improve the concept of democratic society among every citizenship. The measures that have been taken until now have already helped improving the democratic situation in many countries. However, it is necessary that the UN develops new ways to help preventing the erosion of civic and social values.

4. Major Countries Involved

The countries that efficiently guarantee democratic and civic values are: Norway, Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand, Denmark, Ireland, Canada, Australia, Finland, and Switzerland.

One of the strongest democracies in the world is the Norwegian one. Civil liberties are supported, elections are fair and the power is distributed in a balanced way among the parties.

A further example is Sweden, which is a parliamentary monarchy. As in Norway, even in Sweden, there are free and fair elections and civil liberties are guaranteed.

Currently, the countries that most need to avoid the erosion of democratic and civic values are: Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Equatorial Guinea, Turkmenistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Syria, and North Korea.

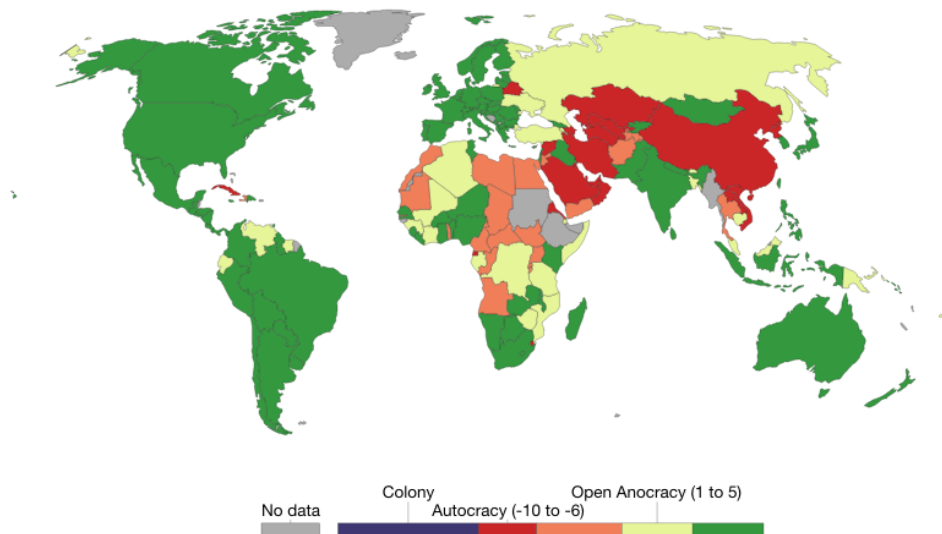
There are countries, such as North Korea where an authoritarian regime is still present, for this reason, it is not possible to exalt democratic and civic values.

Another example is Saudi Arabia, which is a state governed by a monarchy that limits civil liberties and political rights.

The political regime in every country of the world is visible in the following picture:

Political Regime, 2015

The Polity IV score classifies the type of political regime for each country on a range from -10 (full autocracy) to +10 (full democracy). Regimes that fall into the middle of this spectrum are called anocracies.



Source: Political Regime (OWID based on Polity IV and Wimmer & Min) OurWorldInData.org/democracy/ • CC BY-SA
Note: See the linked democracy entry for some discussion of the complexity in defining democracy and the limitations of this data.

5. UN Involvement

UN activities in support of democracy and governance are implemented through the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), among others.

Since 1998, every year the UN General Assembly has discussed at least one resolution, about aspects of democracy.

In 2005, Human rights and the rule of democracy were proclaimed by UN members, as fundamental principles of the United Nations.

In 2007 this commitment was reaffirmed in the resolution made by the General Assembly.



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In November 2007, the Secretary-General called for the development of a strategy in order to support democracy, in cooperation with the three pillars of UN work: human rights, peace and security, and development.

In the Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Democracy, it is reported that most of the states, which today define itself as democratic, have never reached "the democratic ideal": for this reason, the contribution of institutions and citizens is required.

The goal of the UN is to promote institutions, principles, and practices to improve and preserve and the quality of democracy in order to avoid the weakening of democratic values.

On November 8, 2017, the day of democracy was proclaimed by the General Assembly. This day is important to commemorate and review the state of democracy in the various states.



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6. Useful Links

<https://www.unescwa.org/about-escwa/>

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/social-transformations/>

https://civicvalues.typepad.com/civic_values/

<https://www.usaid.gov/yemen/democracy-and-governance>

<http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/democracy/>

<http://www.un.org/en/pdfs/FINAL%20Guidance%20Note%20on%20Democracy.pdf>

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>