

HANDOUT 3.3: PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY



All individuals are valued equally and have equal opportunities. Individuals may not be discriminated against because of their race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation. The human rights of all citizens are protected. For example:

- Everyone has the right to freedom to live and move within their own country.
- Everyone has the right to leave and return to their own country.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- Everyone has the right to organize and take part in peaceful protests.



The government allows some private ownership of property and businesses. People are allowed to choose their own work and join labour unions. It is generally accepted that a free market should exist in a democracy and that government should not control the economy.



An established list of citizens' rights and freedoms. This document explains the freedoms that are guaranteed to all people and protects people from a government that might abuse its powers. Canada's Bill of Rights, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, is entrenched in the Constitution of Canada and can be enforced by the courts.



All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination. No one is above the law – this includes elected officials, the police and members of the military. Laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently.



Corruption occurs when government officials use public funds for their own benefit or they exercise power in an illegal way. To protect against corruption, democratic governments are often structured to limit the powers of government offices and those who work for them.



Elected officials are chosen by the people in a free and fair manner. Elections are held regularly, usually every few years. Adult citizens have the right to vote and run for office regardless of gender, background or economic status. There are no obstacles to voting and no intimidation or threats to citizens before or during an election.

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Multi-Party Systems

More than one political party participates in elections and plays a role in government. Multiple-party systems provide the government with different viewpoints on issues and voters are given a choice of candidates, parties and policies. Countries with only one party are usually dictatorships/autocracies.



Citizen Participation

Citizen participation in government is more than just a right – it is a responsibility. Participation can take the form of running for office, voting in elections, being an informed citizen, debating issues, attending community meetings, paying taxes, serving on a jury and protesting. Citizen participation builds a stronger democracy.



Accountability and Transparency

Elected and appointed officials are responsible for their actions and are accountable to the people. Officials must make decisions and perform their duties according to the wishes of those they represent, not for themselves. For government to be accountable, people must be aware of the actions their government is taking. A transparent government holds public meetings and allows citizens to attend. The press and the public are kept informed regarding decisions being made.



Independent Judiciary

Courts and the judicial system are impartial. Judges and the judicial branch are free to act without influence or control from the executive and legislative branches of government. They should also not be corrupted or influenced by other individuals, businesses or political groups.



Political Tolerance

Society is comprised of people with different cultural backgrounds, who practice different religions, form part of different races, have different gender identities or sexual orientations. The voices of these different groups are valued. Democratic societies strive to be politically tolerant and the rights of minorities are protected. Those who are not in power must be allowed to organize and share their opinions.



Accepting the Results of Elections

Free and fair elections have both winners and losers. The losers and their supporters must accept that they have lost an election. Democracy depends on the peaceful transfer of power from one party to the next.

Adapted from: *Deliberating in a Democracy in the Americas* (2011). Originally excerpted and adapted from *Democracy for All* (Street Law, Inc. 1994).