The Democratic Citizen, Political Plasticity and National Development: A Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

The global context in which national development is taking place has changed in important ways, including widening and entrenched inequalities, deglobalisation, weakened democracies, more aggressive dictatorships and the rise of authoritarian strongmen in many countries. Within this changed context, we examine the central role of the democratic citizen and political plasticity in national development. Our arguments are supported by reference to empirical psychological studies, as well as applied challenges in national development. We identify the 10 most important psychological characteristics of the democratic citizen. Achieving these characteristics requires change, which we discuss through the concept of *political plasticity*, how fast, in what ways, and how much political behaviour can (and cannot) be changed. We point out that in some domains political plasticity is very low and changes extremely slowly. We identify a narrative approach as the best path for nurturing democratic citizens, building on the narrative story-telling

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tradition that is already indigenous to many non-Western societies. The incorporation of a narrative tradition to strengthen democratic citizenship does not require expensive technology or other material resources.

Keywords

Democratic citizen, plasticity, psychology and change, citizens and national development, narrative tradition, education, democracy

The traditional understanding of national development, based on *per capita* Gross Domestic Product (GDP), was swept aside in 1990 when the *United Nations Development Program* (UNDP) began to apply the idea of *Human Development*, referring to the opportunities and choices people have available. In the 21st century, the Human Development Index (HDI) has replaced GDP to become the main measure in evaluating human development (see the UNDP 2021–2022 HD report). The HDI is based broadly on health, education and the standard of living, and is related to material indicators, such as energy use (Wang et al., 2020). In line with this broader approach to national development and continued efforts to improve measures of human development (Ghislandi 2019), we argue that *democratic citizenship*, the ability to participate in and sustain a more open society (Moghaddam, 2016), should also be included as a measure of progress in national development.

In part one, we discuss the changed global context of national development, particularly as it relates to democracy and democratic citizenship. Key elements of the changed global context include increasing wealth concentration and resource inequalities, the turn toward deglobalisation, ethnocentric nationalism and authoritarianism (Moghaddam, 2019). This is followed by a discussion of the psychological characteristics of the democratic citizen. We see these characteristics as providing the profile of the ideal democratic citizen. Various thinkers, including Plato (427–347 BC), Thomas More (1478–1535) and Karl Marx (1818–1883) among others, have put forward different types of ideal societies to inspire people to action. We believe that supporters of ideal or *actualised democracy* (Moghaddam, 2018) should make greater efforts to formulate democratic ideals also encourage more change towards democracy, even though the democratic ideal faces enormous challenges in the 21st century. Anti-democratic forces have been on the

ascendance, and this is an important reason why we must pay greater attention to democratic citizenship.

We argue that the reasons why change toward actualised democracy is so difficult, is usefully explained through the concept of political plasticity, how fast and in what ways political behaviour can (and cannot) be changed (Moghaddam, 2023). Political behaviour in some domains has very low political plasticity; behavioural change in these domains is achieved extremely slowly, over very long periods—sometimes thousands of years. An example is leader-follower relations—all major societies continue to have leaders, who are usually male, older and often authoritarian. In part three, we shall examine examples of political behaviour with lower and higher political plasticity, concerning possibilities for progress toward actualised democracy.

The Changed Global Context of National Development

The global context of national development has changed in the 21st century, from greater resource equalities that came through World War Two (Scheidel, 2017) to widening and solidly entrenched inequalities, from globalisation to deglobalisation, from movement towards more open societies to weakened democracies, more aggressive dictatorships and the rise of authoritarian strongmen in many countries (Moghaddam, 2019).

Increasing wealth concentration and wealth inequality is an important characteristics of the contemporary global context. As documented by Thomas Piketty and other economists, wealth concentration accelerated the Second World War, particularly since the 1980s (Atkinson, 2015; Piketty, 2014). At the global level, the richest 10% of the population owns 76% of all wealth ($771,300 per person on average), whereas the poorest 50% owns just 2% of all wealth ($4,100 per person on average) (Chancel et al., 2022). Wealth concentration has continued in recent decades—the richest 0.01% owned 7% of wealth in 1995, and 11% in 2021. Oxfam estimated in May 2021 that the increase in Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' wealth since the start of the Pandemic was sufficient to give each of his company's 1.3 million workers a bonus of $65,000, and still leave him with a $113 billion fortune he enjoyed prior to the Pandemic (Oxfam, 2021, p. 6). In some respects, we have returned to the level of wealth inequality that existed in Roman times, 'Two thousand years ago,

the largest Roman private fortunes equalled about 1.5 million times the average annual per capita income in the empire, roughly the same ratio as for Bill Gates and the average American today' (Scheidel, 2017, p. 4). In terms of regions, inequality is highest in the Middle East and North Africa, followed by Latin America and East Asia; Europe has the lowest inequality levels (Chancel, 2022).

In this context of wealth concentration and increasing inequality, globalisation is taking place in a fractured manner: whereas economic and technological forces are pushing towards global integration, identity forces are pushing toward distinctiveness, separatism and independence (Moghaddam, 2008). A trend of deglobalisation is strengthening and there is evidence that in the 21st-century barriers to trade and other activities (particularly migration) are increasing across nations (Kim, 2020). Political leadership and rhetoric have changed in response to these changes. The slogan 'Make America Great Again' popularised by Donald Trump is echoed by numerous other authoritarian leaders for their own countries, with retrenchment toward greater ethnocentrism and rejection of dissimilar others. This trend is associated with greater intergroup conflicts and repression of minorities, including societies that are closer to dictatorship (e.g, where Kurds and other minorities are persecuted) as well as those that are closer to democracy (e.g., India, where Hindu-Muslim clashes are being fermented by political leaders).

Deglobalisation is underway at a time when democracy is in some important respects in decline. Several objective assessments (e.g., by *Freedom House, Journalists Without Borders*) have shown that in the early 21st century, the quality of democracy has declined and freedoms have been diminished, including in the United States and India. One possible factor influencing this trend is increased perceptions of threats, in line with evidence showing that increased perceived threat is associated with declines in support for human rights (Carriere, 2022). Such perceived threat arises from a range of changes, including environmental degradation and global warming, and increased voluntary and involuntary movements of people across national borders and regions (Moghaddam & Hendricks, 2022).

The experiences of European and North American societies in the 21st century have shown that the sudden arrival of large numbers of dissimilar others can result in backlash and the rise of ethnocentrism and right-wing nationalism. Major conflicts in the Middle East resulted in millions of Muslim refugees moving to European societies, which in turn led to the further rise of extremist Christian Nationalist movements,

seeking to re-define Europe and North American societies as White and Christian. These dissimilar others from non-Western countries are needed in the West because of labour shortages, but economic needs and interests are often overlooked because of political pressures and the influence of authoritarian leadership.

Thus, there have been significant changes in the global context of national development in non-Western societies. Wealth concentration and wealth inequalities have been increasing, with particularly high increases in the Middle East, Latin America and some other parts of the non-Western world (Chancel et al., 2022). The plight of the poorest 40–50% of the population in non-Western societies has become relatively more difficult. They experience relative deprivation in part because global mass communications provide the poor with more information and images of affluence among other groups within their developing societies and in other societies—without necessarily providing concrete paths for how to improve their own lives.

At the same time, the movement towards democracy has weakened, and there has been a rise of authoritarian strongmen. Revolutions in a number of non-Western countries, such as the Arab Spring countries, did not end dictatorships (Moghaddam, in press). The second-largest economy in the world is now China, but the expectation that the growth of the Chinese middle class would lead to democratisation in China has not been met. On the contrary, the leadership of Xi Jinping has led China further away from democracy (Economy, 2019), just as the leadership of Narendra Modi has weakened democracy in India (Jaffrelot, 2021). These developments make it imperative that psychologists give more attention to democratic citizenship, and examine the psychological characteristics required for citizens to be able to actively participate in and support the upholding and further development of democracy, particularly in non-Western societies.

The Psychological Characteristics of the Democratic Citizen

The psychological characteristics of citizens have been modelled in ways that conform to the demands of life under dictatorial leadership. Since the development of agriculture and larger human settlements over the last 10,000 years or so, almost all major societies have functioned as dictatorships (Moghaddam, 2013). Leaders with titles, such as chief,

king, emperor, maharaja, shah, sultan, tsar and the like, have ruled societies as despots. Various legitimizing ideologies have been used by these despots to justify their rule, often directly or indirectly incorporating religion (e.g., the divine right of kings). Religion continues to be used to justify some contemporary dictatorships, directly (as in Iran) and indirectly (as in Russia, where Vladimir Putin has enriched the Russian Orthodox Church to support his rule).

Experiments in varieties of more open societies have also taken place, as in Athenian democracy about 2,500 years ago and the Roman Republic about 2,000 years ago (as well as smaller experiments, such as the Florentine Republic of the 15th century; Clarke, 2018). But these were short-lived in historical time, and it was not until the 18th century, with the advent of the American and French Revolutions, that the modern, more sustained period of democratic experimentation began. Even now, large dictatorships, such as China, Russia and a long list of smaller dictatorships challenge the assumption that the future of the world is necessarily headed towards democracy. Throughout most of the last 10,000 years or so, when humans experienced living in largely settled societies, our cultures, social relations, social skills, cognitions, and psychological characteristics broadly, have taken shape within dictatorships.

The psychological characteristics developed throughout history in dictatorships do not simply vanish when we change a political system towards democracy. Most of these psychological characteristics developed in dictatorships have low political plasticity and change very slowly, even when institutions and formal national constitutions change to make democratic procedures and behaviours more possible. For example, the psychological characteristics of leader-follower relations that took shape in dictatorships are very much with us today, resulting in a heavy reliance on centralised 'strong' male leadership. We have far less experience with and knowledge of the psychological characteristics associated with democratic citizenship, particularly with female leaders.

As part of our efforts to move towards actualised democracy, we must identify the psychological characteristics citizens need to develop in order to be able to participate in and support democracy. In this discussion, we put forward a set of psychological characteristics that we believe are integral to ideal democratic citizenship (see Figure 1). The purpose of this ideal is to inspire further debate on the psychological requirements for democratic citizenship and to identify an ideal that we can work towards.
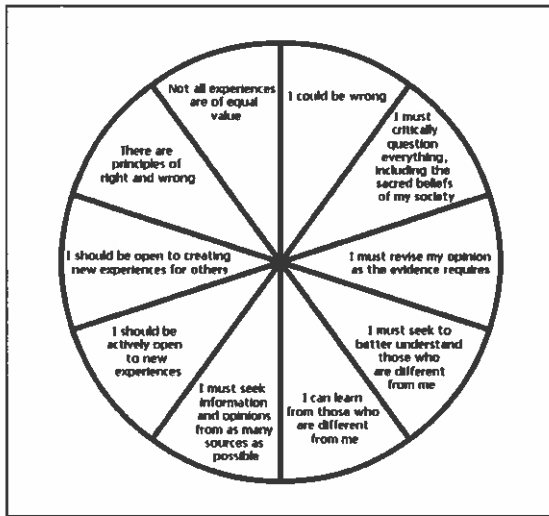
Figure 1. The Psychological Characteristics of the Democratic Citizen

Source: Moghaddam (2016, p. 51).

The 10 psychological characteristics of the democratic citizen depicted in 1 begin with the ability to initiate any activity with the acknowledgement that 'I could be wrong'. This seemingly simple and apparently easily attained requirement is in practice extremely difficult and for some individuals almost impossible to achieve. For example, individuals who are rigidly committed to a particular political ideology and/or religion and believe they already have the answers will find it extremely difficult to admit that they could be wrong. In terms of personality characteristics, such individuals tend to have a low tolerance for ambiguity, see the world and other people in Black–White terms, select a simplistic solution early in a complex situation, remain closed and unaccepting toward the unfamiliar as well as dissimilar others (see Furnham & Marks, 2013 for a review of tolerance for ambiguity research).

The research on tolerance for ambiguity was pioneered by Else Frenkel-Brunswik (1908–1958), who also contributed in major ways to authoritarian personality research, which further sheds light on the levels of ability (or inability) of individuals to admit 'I could be wrong' (Adorno et al., 1950). Follow-up research (e.g., Altemeyer, 1988) has shown that individuals high on authoritarianism tend to be categorical thinkers,

prone to believing conspiracies, vindictive towards minorities and those who violate conventional values, but obedient to authority (Elms & Milgram, 1966). In essence, it is not being religious or political in orientation but, rather, having a particular dogmatic style of religious and/or political belief that makes it more unlikely that a person is able to admit, 'I could be wrong'.

It is important to clarify that the ability to begin interactions with the acceptance that 'I could be wrong' is associated with a feeling of confidence in oneself, and is foundationally different from self-doubt 'as a general sense of feeling unsure about one's competencies, abilities, and thus outcomes in daily life that stem from those abilities' (Braslow et al., 2012, p, 473). Research shows self-doubt to be associated with self-handicapping, experiencing the imposter phenomenon and other negative consequences (Want & Kleitman, 2006). In contrast, taking the position that 'I could be wrong' prevents hasty decision-making, as demonstrated with schizophrenic participants (Moritz et al., 2015), and can make individuals more aware of risks in domains, such as social media (Di Gangi et al., 2018). Related to this, starting with 'I could be wrong' could help prevent some negative unintended consequences of policy interventions, such as the gender bias interventions proposed by Caleo and Heilman (2019), who begin by considering 'What could go wrong?' in gender bias interventions. The position 'I could be wrong' takes us a step further back, and is more focused on the self, than 'What could go wrong?'

The next requirement we identify is 'I must critically question everything, including the sacred beliefs of my society'. There are two aspects to this characteristic: the first is a general tendency to question everything, and the second is to critically question the sacred beliefs of one's own society. In essence, the democratic citizen must learn to move against the strong current of ethnocentrism that has been found to characterise most if not all societies (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). The implication is that the democratic citizen must learn to resist pressure from others, both ordinary group members and group leaders. As a result, if the democratic citizen is placed as a participant in Milgram's (1974) obedience to authority studies, then the citizen would be one of the minorities of participants who disobey the authority figure and refuse to administer high levels of electric shocks to the learner. Similarly, if the democratic citizen served as a participant in Asch's (1955) conformity study, she would not conform to majority pressure and report the wrong line lengths

(as reported by the majority). Thus, research demonstrates that as things stand, when under pressure most people obey and conform with incorrect commands and norms. We need to change this situation by strengthening democratic citizenship so that most people most of the time become disobedient and non-conformists in response to incorrect commands and norms. Towards this goal, experimental research demonstrates that critical thinking is a flexible learned ability that can be strengthened through educational programs (El Soufi & See, 2019; Green & Klug, 1990; Lutzke et al., 2019).

'I must revise my opinion as the evidence requires' is the next requirement. The first aspect of this is that opinion must be evidence-based, and the second aspect is that opinion must change as the evidence changes. Research on motivated reasoning has been interpreted to mean that people find it very difficult to gather and apply evidence in objective ways; rather, people tend to be biased. In general, people acknowledge, accept, and adopt evidence that fits with their prior beliefs, even in scientific domains (Dietz, 2013). For example, those who believe in and those who refute human-induced climate change tend to engage in directionally motivated reasoning, by rejecting new information that contradicts their current beliefs (Druckman & McGrath, 2019). The extensive literature on motivated reasoning confirms that socialising the democratic citizen to make judgements in an unbiased manner is highly challenging, but we do have a workable model we can follow—training individuals to conduct objective peer reviews in research. There are available excellent programs for teaching undergraduates about the peer review process, objectivity in evaluations and the like (Guilford, 2001), and these can serve as a launching platform for programs to teach evidence-based opinions. A related avenue is to use available programs and work with young people to nurture their intellectual humility, 'the understanding of one's limitations and biases when making evidence-based decisions' (Zmigrod et al., 2019).

The next two characteristics of the democratic citizen we must nurture are, 'I must seek to better understand those who are different from me', and 'I can learn from those who are different from me'. These two characteristics are challenging to achieve because in most situations most humans are attracted to others who are similar (not dissimilar) to themselves; this is true at both the interpersonal and intergroup levels (Montoya & Horton, 2012; Osbeck et al., 1997). Our ethnocentric tendencies (as discussed above) lead us to stay away from others who are dissimilar to ourselves and, consequently, we have fewer opportunities

to learn from them. However, research suggests that by creating greater opportunities for people from different groups to have more direct and indirect contact with outgroup members, we can increase intergroup attraction (Paluck, et al., 2019). In turn, greater interactions between people from different groups and backgrounds lead to more information exchange and better understanding (and liking) between them.

One of the central challenges to socialising the democratic citizen is to instil an understanding and motivation to seek new information and opinions from as many sources as possible. Some sources will result in information that go against the beliefs of the information gatherer. However, by diversifying communication channels and the sources of information as much as possible, a more comprehensive and accurate set of data are accumulated. This is an effort to work against the tendency for people to communicate within *echo chambers*, where interactions tend to be only with like-minded others (Cinelli et al., 2021). Looking to future progress, advances in the use of experimental games are showing promise in improving our understanding of intergroup understanding and decision-making (van Dijk & De Dreu, 2021).

Two more important characteristics that need to be developed within the democratic citizen are the belief that she should be actively open to new experiences, and she should be open to creating new experiences for others (openness to experience is also one of the so-called big-five personality traits that dominate mainstream personality research, see Chapter 4 in Moghaddam, 2022). In order to develop this characteristic, individuals must interact with dissimilar others, outsiders to their group who could benefit from gaining new experiences and could also create new experiences for others. Practical policies need to be developed to bring individuals from different groups together. Towards this goal, a highly promising body of research on business organisations focusses on open innovation, the idea that 'firms can and should use external ideas as well as internal ideas as they look to advance their innovations' (Bogers, et al., 2019, p. 77). At the same time that business firms are seeing advantages to incorporating external ideas, research is showing that greater diversity within the ingroup leads to better productivity (Gomez & Bernet, 2019; Li et al., 2015). In a sense, diversifying the ingroup involves making some outgroup members part of the ingroup.

The first eight requirements of democratic citizenship involve the ability to question oneself, nurture openness to other values and lifestyles, share cultural experiences with others and be open to adopting new information and perspectives. The danger is that such an approach will

leave individuals vulnerable to relativism and an 'anything goes' mentality. The final two characteristics nurtured in the democratic citizen are designed to transcend such relativism, by socialising citizens to believe that there are principles of right and wrong, and not all experiences are of equal value. The principles of right and wrong can be derived from the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* and similar well-established sources, endorsed by *Amnesty International, Journalists Without Borders* and other international justice authorities.

Political Plasticity and the Democratic Citizen

Having put forward what we believe to be the core ideal characteristics of democratic citizens, we next turn to consider the challenge of nurturing such citizens. Our focus is more specifically on the role of *political plasticity*, limitations on how fast, how much, and in what ways political behaviour does (or does not) change (Moghaddam, 2023). There has been considerable research on brain plasticity, which has become a vast sub-field generating at least hundreds of publications annually (for example, see the journal *Brain Plasticity*, published since 2015 by IOS Press). However, political plasticity is only now starting to receive research attention (Moghaddam, 2023).

As a first step toward better understanding the role of political plasticity in socialising the democratic citizen, we note that in some domains political plasticity is extremely low and change only takes place over extremely long periods. There is a tradition of modern researchers, influenced particularly by John Dewey (1859–1952), exploring the role of education in democracy (Bradshaw, 2013; Hickman & Alexander, 1998). From this perspective, nurturing the democratic citizen is highly dependent on education, which is inherently a long-term process.

The development of political constitutions can also serve as a means for nurturing democratic citizens, by setting rules that guide socialisation at home and in schools and other formal educational institutions (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). For example, political constitutions that establish the rule of law help to shape the morality of citizens and strengthen the idea that all people are equal before the law. However, constitutions have to be developed through collaborative, collective processes and involving the masses. Otherwise, a rift might grow between the written constitution and the cultural inclinations of the people. This is illustrated by the recent case of Chile, where a referendum

was held in 2022 and a proposed new constitution was rejected by the majority of people. The new constitution was perceived to be contrary to slowly acquired cultural practices, values and morality.

Another domain of low-political plasticity becomes apparent when we consider the relationship between citizens and political leaders. Why is it that so much of our decision-making, including in life-and-death areas such as going to war against another nation, is dependent on individual political leaders? For example, the devastating 1980–1988 war between Iran and Iraq was started, continued and ended based on the decisions of two individuals (both older males), Saddam Hussein (1937–2006) and Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989), the leaders of Iraq and Iran, respectively. Similarly, the US-led invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), and the decades of fruitless, destructive war that followed, were the result of decisions by President George W. Bush. Of course, advisers to political leaders also play a role, but the final decision is taken by individual leaders; for example, if other leaders with different personalities and ideologies had been in place instead of Saddam Hussein, Ruhollah Khomeini and George W. Bush, we might not have had the Iran–Iraq war and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the gruelling wars that followed. Of course, an even more tragic example is Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)—would World War Two (1939–1945) have taken place if he had not become the leader of Germany? Why is it that we continue to rely on such dogmatic, dictatorial male politicians to lead and make decisions on behalf of entire nations?

We now have the technological capabilities to make collective decision-making, as is the practice among honeybees (Seeley, 2010) and some other animal groups (Conradt & Roper, 2003, show the advantages of democratic, inclusive decision-making over dictatorial decision making in different groups of animals). Electronic communication systems are rapidly advancing and expanding, so that it is technically possible to involve large numbers of citizens (potentially tens and even hundreds of millions) in decision-making, particularly on crucially important issues that directly involve them, such as launching an international war that will require thousands of citizens, perhaps millions, to sacrifice their lives. Although some steps have been taken in this direction in urban planning (Wilson 2019), no serious progress has been made towards mass public participation in decision-making in mainstream politics either in non-Western or Western societies.

We continue to rely on centralised leadership and decision-making by single male leaders, to determine the direction of societies. Over the last

few decades, these leaders have tended to be more authoritarian, perhaps because of the appeal of authoritarianism in times of uncertainty and perceived threat (Moghaddam, 2019). These behavioural tendencies are continuing a style of leader-follower relations that is thousands of years old, reflecting low political plasticity. The continued dominance of males in domains, such as politics and business reflects the same low political plasticity, and this is probably related to the extremely slow rate of cultural change and the normative system that regulates the behaviour of women and men. For example, in developing societies, there has been a rise in the education level of women, improved economic opportunities and a fall in fertility, but the female labour force participation levels have remained stubbornly low in many countries, especially in the Middle East and South Asia (Klasen, 2019).

The lower fertility rate in countries, such as Iran would lead us to expect much higher levels of female labour force participation. As Klasen (2019) noted about fertility levels,

> The recent pace of decline in some regions, most notably the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and South Asia is astounding, as were earlier reductions in East Asia. This reduction has freed up women's time spent with being pregnant or caring for a small child substantially, enabling greater labor force participation. (p. 166).

But the corresponding increase in female labour force participation has not taken place in some developing countries, and the reason is often the slow pace of changes in gender roles. For example, in Iran fertility rates have fallen sharply and women now make up the majority of undergraduate students in higher education, but gender roles defined by extremist interpretations of Islam severely restrict the labour force participation of women (the mullahs, who are all males, were not able to force women out of higher education, but they have mostly excluded women from the government dominated economy). The political system of Iran continues to be completely dominated by males and led by a male dictator, as it was before the 1979 anti-shah revolution.

Given the serious obstacles in the way of development towards 'actualised' or full democracy (Moghaddam, 2016), what strategies can we use to nurture democratic citizens with the ideal psychological characteristics we have outlined? The research of Jerome Bruner (1915–2016), Rom Harré (1927–2019) and others in the narrative tradition (Bruner, 1990; Harré & Gillet, 1994) points to promising solutions, particularly with respect to how we should conceptualise and organise

education. According to the narrative tradition, humans incline to think in storied terms and to organise their experiences as stories, which are sequential and have plots.

Narratives incorporate both what is routine and what is exceptional, weaving together varieties of experiences as individuals go through their lives. Narratives also help to create meaningful identities. According to McAdams and McLean (2013), people form a significant sense of identity by telling their life stories. For example, the researchers report that young adolescents that create redemptive stories to understand and build their identities have better psychological well-being. In a similar vein, Marta Nussbaum (2008) shows how literature and imagination intertwine to create meaning which can foster democratic citizens. Narratives can elicit emotions in the reader, such as empathy framing the actions of a democratic citizen. Nussbaum believes that storytelling helps individuals understand how to interact with others in society in a respectful and ethical manner. Therefore, narratives hold the potential to shape the attitudes of citizens by promoting democratic ideals through imagining democratic narrative identities.

Moreover, most traditions are communicated through stories. Religions and cultures use narratives to transmit their values, such as in the case of the Karbala narrative (about the battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Hussein, the Prophet's grandson) which is extremely influential in Shi'a Islam (Aghaie, 2001). Narratives also play a central part in the Confucian tradition, which holds that the legitimacy of a ruler is based on the 'Mandate of Heaven'. According to Xu (2006), this concept was associated in early Confucianism with the 'people's will', a key construct of modern democracy. Recently, there has been a rediscovery of the Chinese narrative tradition (Hajdu, 2018). In the Western world, educational curriculums teach democratic values through the fictional exercise of Plato's Republic (Plato & Reeve, 2004). This exercise emphasises the belief that reason should have a significant role in society, which is a fundamental principle of democratic societies' rule of law. Thus, different cultures show the capacity to pass on stories that educate democratic citizens.

A radical change in the collective story is more likely to undermine the capacity of a democratic citizen to assimilate change, demanding a higher level of political plasticity than the citizen is capable of. Hence, socializing democratic citizens requires long-term planning and slow and steady change, such as provided through education. Sudden

revolutions rarely bring about such change, no matter how violent and destructive they are towards the old regime.

Education can be conceived as one of the most important means through which we change the central narratives used by people. For example, to be educated to become a lawyer involves acquiring the ability to frame events and experiences through the narrative of law, with adherence to the numerous 'black-letter' or formal rules and regulations that are applicable. Since law varies to some extent across different nations, the narratives that work for lawyers in the United States are in some ways different from the narratives that work for lawyers in China, or France, or Nigeria or other countries. What is common across nations is that legal education and training socialise students in each nation to enter legal discussions and interactions by using the appropriate narratives.

Narrative practices are utilised in various ways to foster the development of democratic citizens. One crucial trait of a democratic citizen is their aptitude to resolve conflicts peacefully. In effect, John Paul Lederach (2009, pp. 138–149) shows how individuals (Westerners and non-Westerners) use narratives to gain a profound understanding of the conflict's origin. According to Lederach, narrative practices frame violence as a disturbance in individuals' stories or the collective's narrative. The narrative created encompasses the memory of the recent events of the conflict and the lived history of the involved individuals and groups. The conflict narrative provides an insightful interpretation of the conflict within a time framework that covers the development of the identity of the conflicted or traumatised group since its inception. Consistent with the benefit of narrative practices shown by Lederach (2009), Bhatia (2019) comments that narrative psychology has the potential to create meaning for individuals who live in places where the intersection of Western and non-Western traditions is marked by violence. Narratives can create new meanings that enable Indian youth to reconcile conflicting local and Western values.

As the examples of narratives used by cultural traditions, lawyers and peace scholars suggest, people compete to persuade others of the correctness of their narratives. Moreover, narratives create identities by using human imagination and passing democratic values through generations. This is also the science case. At the highest levels of abstraction and in cutting-edge domains, the narratives used by scientists are often controversial and in dispute. Consider the following two

examples, concerning human intelligence in psychological science and black holes in physics. Since the 19th century, research programs in Western psychology have attempted to define, measure and discover the source(s) of intelligence, and competing narratives have evolved in response to basic questions (Serpico, 2021). Is intelligence unitary or multiple? To what extent is intelligence inherited? Does intelligence become fixed at a certain age? How much, if at all, can intelligence be influenced through environmental programs? Different researchers have developed different narratives to answer these questions, and their narratives have in important ways been shaped by their (implicit or explicit) political ideologies (Moghaddam, 2022). As a second example, consider the varying narratives used by scientists to explain black holes. When their existence was initially proposed, some researchers denied that black holes do exist, while others put forward what seemed to be exotic explanations (such as the 'fuzzball proposal for black holes'; Skenderis & Taylor, 2008). After several more decades, narratives evolved reflecting greater conviction that black holes do exist, even though the uncertainties continue about what they are—are they dark matter? (Carr & Kühnel, 2020).

Just as education shapes the narratives used by people to think and talk about issues, such as intelligence and black holes, education can more strongly influence narratives that nurture democratic citizenship. From the earliest days of schooling, the psychological characteristics of the democratic citizen should be woven into the larger story of good behaviour. In this way, the story of being a good student becomes interwoven with the story of being a good democratic citizen. This narrative approach is not dependent on expensive technology or other material resources that are relatively scarce in non-Western societies.

The narrative approach proposed by Bruner (1990) and others is highly suitable for many non-Western societies because they already have strong narrative traditions (for example, see discussions of narrative traditions in South Asia in Richman, 1991). In many non-Western societies, even illiterate individuals often know by heart many traditional stories and numerous lines of poetry, which they enjoy retelling and reciting. We should build on this indigenous narrative tradition and incorporate it in the formal education system as a way to strengthen narratives about democratic citizenship.

Concluding Comment

The path towards actualised democracy is uncertain and long-term. It is not inevitable that societies will change towards more openness and democracy; dictatorships may be the dominant force by the end of the 21st century (Moghaddam, 2013, 2019). Those who want a democratic future for the world must plan and fight for their ideals. Central to their efforts must be the socialisation of democratic citizens, capable of participating in and sustaining democracy. As a way to stimulate research and debate, we have put forward 10 psychological characteristics that we see as essential for democratic citizenship.

Our analysis might be interpreted as fairly pessimistic, in that achieving the characteristics of democratic citizenship in a large population seems very challenging. However, recent research suggests that a more optimistic outcome is possible, particularly with respect to Millennials and Gen Z (abbreviated as Generation MZ), defined as those born between January 1983 and December 1994, and January 1995 and December 2003, respectively (Deloitte Global, 2021). There is some evidence that Millennials and Gen Z already embody at least some of the characteristics conducive to Democratic Citizenship. With their interest in individual accountability for addressing climate change, diversity and inclusion and social inequalities, as well as their demands on corporations to uphold these values (Deloitte Global, 2021), there is the promise that compared to older generations, Generation MZ's value system and behaviours are more in line with the needs of democratic citizenship. Championing these causes often comes at the cost of their financial security as Generation MZ shows a stronger inclination to choose jobs that align with their values rather than merely their financial goals—one of several likely factors that have made them the first generation to have a lower quality of life than their parents (Deloitte Global, 2021). Despite of this, they tend to be relatively more global-minded, socially aware, and active generation in caring for not just their well-being, but the wellbeing of the system as a whole (Deloitte Global, 2021).

In a cross-generational study of colonial, industrial and digital age Koreans by Kim and Kim (2022), Generation MZ is portrayed as holding a different value system than that of their parents and grandparents. Although the colonial generation was raised with a more formal outlook and conservative values, and the industrial generation was raised with a competitive mindset and exploitative relationship to nature, the digital (MZ) generation was raised with values more in line with democratic

citizenship (Kim & Kim, 2022). Some values included in the study (Kim & Kim, 2022) are more in line with the pillars of democratic citizenship: creativity is conducive to 'I should be open to creating new experiences for others'; self-development is conducive to 'I could be wrong', 'I must critically question everything, including the sacred beliefs of my society', and 'I should be actively open to new experiences'. Additionally, Generation MZ's values of diversity and inclusion (Deloitte Global, 2021) closely parallel 'I can learn from those who are different from me' and 'I must seek to better understand those who are different from me'. The value system of the digital generation most closely links to the 10 pillars of democratic citizenship we propose. Though Kim and Kim's (2022) study focused exclusively on Koreans, it makes an important point about how different generations' value systems affect their worldview and, potentially, their predisposition to becoming democratic citizens.

With respect to how we nurture democratic citizens with the characteristics, we have put forward, we propose to adopt the approach of narrative psychology. This is in line with powerful and pervasive human inclination for storytelling, but more specifically it is in line with the indigenous narrative traditions of many non-Western societies. The narrative approach does not require expensive technologies and material resources and can build on already available indigenous traditions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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