



Coexistence International at Brandeis University

Complementary Approaches to Coexistence Work

Focus on Coexistence and Democracy-building

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In multi-ethnic and diverse societies, democracy offers strong prospects for managing social and political conflicts. This is true for both politically stable societies like Australia and the Czech Republic and for countries emerging from deep divisions and war, like Rwanda and East Timor. In a contemporary globalized world characterized by increased diversity, a rise in migration, and consolidation of multi-ethnic states, democratic processes and institutions need to effectively safeguard equality, manage diversity, and foster interdependence, all of which contribute to coexistence at the national and intercommunal levels.

Democracy-building is the process by which domestic and international actors engage in reforms of political institutions, decision-making processes, and governance mechanisms. During the last decade, there has been a new and important emphasis in scholarly and policy realms on conflict- and coexistence-sensitive approaches to democracy-building and promotion of good governance. There is growing agreement that multi-stakeholder dialogue and consensus-building is essential in such efforts as constitutional- and electoral-system design, security sector reform, transitional justice initiatives, natural resource management, and national dialogues on minority and language laws. These efforts, when pursued in a participatory and inclusive manner, are as important as the content of the political treaties and normative documents that result from them. In societies that have endured long-lasting divisions, as well as in consolidated democracies, the sustainability of conflict-prevention efforts and intercommunal coexistence relies on democratic practice informed by principles of inclusion, participation, and respect for diversity.



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Methodology

This focus paper draws from an expert knowledge base and synthesizes lessons learned through an on-going research project carried out by Coexistence International (CI) about coexistence sensitivity in international democratization and governance programs. As part of this project, CI has 1) published a report on normative approaches adopted by thirty-six governments to manage diversity on the national level; 2) conducted a survey of forty international agencies on the extent to which concerns about coexistence are a part of international democracy and governance policies; 3) carried out interviews with key policymakers in six intergovernmental agencies whose work is either directly or indirectly related to democracy-building measures; and 4) convened a day-long discussion seminar with thirty policymakers on the relationship between democracy-building and coexistence. This practitioner-based and policy-oriented learning project seeks to strengthen the coexistence dimension within the international and intergovernmental institutions that design and implement democracy and governance programs in post-conflict regions and divided societies. This introduction to the issue highlights key theoretical, normative, and practical findings that have the potential to inform the current landscape of democracy-building in divided societies around the world.

In order to understand the importance of an integrated approach between democracy-building and coexistence efforts in post-conflict settings, it is also valuable to consider how stable and consolidated democracies address diversity. Therefore, illustrative examples and lessons learned from such societies are included here. The final section of the paper includes a summary of key lessons learned about mainstreaming coexistence into international democratization programs.

A wide range of democratic models and practices exist around the world. These models present both significant opportunities and potential pitfalls for lasting coexistence and non-violent conflict management. While CI recognizes that democracy has the capacity to foster coexistence among diverse social and political actors, it does not endorse or

espouse any particular democracy model. Rather this focus paper aims to serve as a departure point for further inquiry and dialogue on key principles and features of coexistence-sensitive approaches to democracy-building, with consideration of important differences in each context where democratization takes place.

Democracy and coexistence: a multifaceted relationship

Democracy enables greater societal reconciliation to take place via many routes, including increased civic engagement, rule of law, an independent judiciary system, equality legislation, and the recognition of both collective rights of minorities and the individual rights of citizens. Although democracy-building in war-torn societies is often correlated with peace and reconciliation processes, neither non-violent management of societal conflicts nor intercommunal coexistence can be achieved by simply “launching” democracy.

It is idealistic to assume that democracy-building is in itself a conflict-free process and that democracy as an end goal is effortlessly realized or provides the panacea to a post-conflict society. Many contemporary societies, but particularly those emerging from war, struggle with how to manage deep-rooted societal divisions. Such democratic “essentials” as elections, constitutional and security-sector reforms, and political-party formation can intensify and exacerbate identity-based divisions. Democracy can facilitate the development of multiple and complementary political identities, and yet it can also polarize them when it comes to political inclinations at the ballot box. Moreover, the political agendas and mandates of the leaders driving these processes have a tremendous impact on their conflict-inducing potential. In his rise to power in the early 1990s in Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic opted for a highly incendiary nationalist platform that prompted widespread ethnic violence. In Zimbabwe, President Mugabe and the ruling Zanu-PF party have fomented deep-seated polarization and violence during national elections.

Important lessons about democratic coexistence have been drawn from an analysis of politically stable multi-ethnic democratic societies, such as Canada and Belgium. While many democratic states are able to manage conflict and its various manifestations in a constructive manner, the relationship between democracy and coexistence cannot be oversimplified. Democracy flourishes in many contexts and takes a variety of forms—some of them detrimental to long-term coexistence. Colombia and Sri Lanka are just two examples of countries that combine apparent democratic processes with on-going violent conflict and deep divisions. The democratization process in Sri Lanka, which arguably helped set its on-going ethnic conflict into motion, brought about changes to the political structure of this post-colonial state while failing to take into account and safeguard the coexistence concerns of several minority ethnic groups.

Democracy, as a way of managing and sharing power by non-violent means, constitutes both an end goal and the process leading to it. Democracy is increasingly contested by many actors around the world due to the perceived gap between the expectations of what it promised to deliver and the enduring struggles in regards to human development. In Haiti, for example, poverty reduction and human-security needs present formidable challenges to the political reforms espousing democratic principles. Democracy's crisis of legitimacy and credibility is further complicated by the perceived political agendas behind external democratic assistance to countries in transition.

Why is coexistence-sensitivity important?

Daily media reports of intensifying violence, deepening divisions, and failing political arrangements in Afghanistan, Darfur, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere provide poignant lessons about the way societies can unravel when intercommunal coexistence issues are ignored. In divided and post-conflict societies, the lack of inclusive and representative institutions and participatory mechanisms for resolving societal conflicts causes a range of long-lasting destabilizing effects—from economic collapse to civil disorder. In consolidated democracies, continuous attention to intercommunal coexistence is no less important, as illustrated by recent cases of Muslim youth riots in France and the resurfacing of inter-ethnic divisions in Estonia and Romania.

In today's globalized world, individuals and groups often carry their identities with them when they cross borders and acquire new ones as they are absorbed by larger, multi-ethnic states. In states that range from Sweden to India and

from Iraq to Brazil, there is a growing demand for social and political inclusion of minorities, immigrants, and the historically marginalized groups. In an increasingly violent world, societies emerging from conflict seek a modus operandi by which to address the root causes of the conflict and prevent future discord. All of these developments require an enormous resourcefulness on the part of those who aim to foster social and political opportunities, processes, and institutions through which groups and individuals can live in security and with recognition of their cultural identities and their political and economic rights.

In order to most effectively resolve conflicts and achieve lasting security, coexistence efforts² need to be fully integrated into democracy and governance programs, addressing the multiple facets of a conflict in an integrated and complementary manner. Democratization should not take place in isolation from other social-change processes, and democracy-building interventions should be grounded in an integrated analysis of societal needs. It is critical to recognize and harness the vital linkages and synergies between development and economic reforms, political transitions, constitutional and parliamentary reforms, war-to-peace transitions, human rights promotion, and land reform. In the absence of comprehensive, effective, and sensitive policies, coexistence issues may be neglected, and efforts to improve inter-group relations may then be sporadic, ineffective, or divisive.

The intersections of coexistence work and democracy-building

In the last two decades, an increased focus on integrating war-to-peace transitions with democracy-building in divided societies has emerged in policy circles, scholarly and media analysis, and international interventions.³ The post-conflict democratization processes in Liberia, El Salvador, Rwanda, and Angola were driven by the urgent need to bring political and economic stability while enabling viable democracy to take root. It is now widely recognized that the nature of political organization in contemporary sovereign states is directly linked with their ability to constructively and non-violently manage the increasing diversity within their borders.

The inherent difficulties of undertaking democracy work in deeply divided societies require a continued commitment to and application of democratic principles and a positive leadership to sustain agreements and democratic institutions. Societies in transition require special attention to efforts that link and complement external interventions in the areas of development (e.g. building schools, health centers, water

systems, creating business opportunities), peacebuilding interventions (e.g. dialogue initiatives, confidence-building measures), and democracy assistance (e.g. elections, political-party support, and governance mechanisms). In recent years, an increased understanding of the need for meta-level analysis of conflicted societies has been accompanied by the development of new and innovative approaches in the policy arena. It is notable that more institutions and governments are adopting comprehensive and integrated approaches to the totality of work that is needed to address societal problems. For example:

- In Northern Ireland, equality laws and 'Good Relations' legislation ensure that not only are equality needs and respect for all aspects of diversity protected by the rule of law, but that any organization that receives public monies must ensure that its policy and practices assist interdependence, or 'good relations', between the communities;
- In Guyana, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) trained the members of the Interethnic Council in mediation skills that would allow this institution to serve as a mediator for local and national disputes involving various ethnic groups;
- In Guatemala and Haiti, the Organization of American States has worked with political parties and civil society actors to build the capacity for national dialogue, consensus-building, and local democratic governance in the run-up to national elections.

An integrated approach does not simply call for an "add and mix" strategy to democracy-building and the promotion of good governance. At the core of democracy are people's needs and expectations of their governments. Approaches that integrate coexistence values and democratic principles require rigorous analysis of the socio-political context, skilled and capable people, and resources to support the implementation of relevant policies. Otherwise, there is a danger of promoting social inclusion and coexistence through mechanisms and institutions that merely pay lip service to these principles, which could perhaps even deepen divisions.

Suggestions and examples of good practice

In designing democracy-building processes it is important to consider how they will lead to a stable and effective system of government in increasingly pluralistic societies. How can political processes contribute to a balance of power and good working relationship between the various cultural and political segments within a society? What sort of democratic

processes can contribute to a society that endorses both equality and diversity, while ensuring that the state still functions effectively? Heterogeneous societies urgently need to move beyond the simple-majority or first-past-the-post systems that are not effectively serving their coexistence needs. It is also important to ensure that electoral and political procedures are implemented at the local level, along with the national level political processes.

The **following suggestions** offer a starting point for approaching democracy-building and promotion of good governance through a coexistence lens. They are not prescriptive or context-specific, but rather are examples of how democracy-building can be more coexistence-sensitive and less conflict-inducing.

- 1) **Constitutions** should ensure the inalienable rights of every citizen, without distinction as to race, religion, sex, or belief. In particular, they should ensure that the rights of minorities and indigenous populations are respected.
- 2) The **development, revision, and implementation of a constitution** by the citizens of a state should, where possible, be undertaken by a consultative process, particularly in societies undergoing political transitions. Such national dialogue processes require a generous investment of time, but are likely to lead to a consensus-based constitution.

In South Africa, following the apartheid era, significant time and resources were allocated to create a process for developing a constitution that was representative, inclusive, and consultative. Particular efforts were made to hear from a wide range of society, including those who were illiterate and disabled, and those who lived in far-flung rural areas. Attention was paid to include women in the process, and the media was engaged creatively to help conduct the discussions in both national and vernacular languages. Citizens were also given a toll-free number to call with comments and suggestions. Similar processes have taken place in Nepal, Bolivia, Sudan, Nigeria, and Kenya.

- 3) Careful consideration needs to be given to decentralization and the **devolution of power**, developed to correlate with emerging needs for greater autonomy and responsibility at a local level. Such arrangements can often defuse political conflict by helping to accommodate collective identities within a state framework. The decentralization of power can also provide a way to recognize diversity and at the same time engage groups in central participatory and decision-making processes.

In 2001, Macedonia's multi-ethnic status was confirmed in constitutional language that guarantees the rights of all constituent peoples (including minorities such as the Roma, Turks, and Vlach) to cultural autonomy, full citizenship, and dignity together with "equitable representation." Ethnic Albanian Macedonians, about 25% of the country's two million people, were given greater control of local authorities in municipalities in which they are a majority, principally in the western part of the country. The country's municipalities were redesigned with new boundaries based on the results of a new census to determine the demographic breakdown of the country. Laws that affect the power and functioning of local authorities and local elections are subject to power-sharing decision rules in the national parliament, such that a majority of both communities must reach agreement before fundamental changes can be made in local-level autonomy. Local officials have considerable authority to appoint and oversee local chiefs of police, although the overall functioning of the police continues to come under the Ministry of the Interior. Albanian will be a second official language in municipalities in which there are more than 20% ethnic Albanians, which includes the capital city; for example, street signs and public documents will appear in both Albanian and Macedonian languages. (In communities where at least 20% of the population speaks another language aside from Albanian or Macedonian, that language will also have official status).

- 4) The choice of **electoral systems** has an impact on the peaceful development of diverse societies. Balance of power among the various identity and interest groups is more conducive to harmony in a pluralist democracy than a dual system of power, or than hegemony by a majority. There is no one single electoral system that works for all divided societies, and optimal choice depends upon factors specific to each country. A variety of power-sharing options have been tried in divided societies. There is evidence that some power-sharing arrangements, if not handled carefully, can be detrimental; for example, a power system that assumes people within a certain identity group will always share the same point of view and does not allow for a review or an "exit" from the system, may help cement, rather than dismantle, community divisions.

The Dayton peace agreement for Bosnia made provisions for a power-sharing system in which the different ethnic communities were represented, and elections were held using a proportional-representation model. However, the subsequent elections were unable to alter the solidification around political-party identities which corresponded to the

conflict lines during the war, and thus may have disempowered those citizens and parties wishing to move away from identity politics.

- 5) A practice of **inclusiveness** that will ensure the public representation and participation of as many diverse groups as possible should also inform all democracy and governance processes. While inclusion is critical, engaging perpetrators of violence raises difficult and sensitive issues, especially where retributive justice and reconciliation processes are being considered by societies.

In Northern Ireland, a broad-based coalition of civil-society actors supported by domestic and international political experts provided training to former paramilitaries on electoral and political transition processes after the Good Friday Agreement. This ensured a greater capacity on the part of the paramilitaries to gain influence through electoral rather than violent processes, and enabled their remaining conflicts to be addressed through the newly established democratic dialogue and power-sharing processes.

- 6) Important work is also being undertaken by some groups to develop **alternative decision-making processes**; these are particularly useful in divided societies where consensus is often difficult to achieve and is likely to break down along ethnic or sectarian lines, regardless of the issues at stake. In such cases, options may include a "referendum"⁴ system, aimed at achieving maximum consensus between conflicted groups and facilitating agreement. These systems can ensure a balance of power and encourage a growth of cross-cutting interests that may help to break down the divisiveness of community differences.
- 7) Political transitions in deeply divided societies require **a leadership with the passion and skills for inclusive democracy work**. Unfortunately, leaders often embrace "transactional" identity politics where in return for power, a leader promises to focus on the needs of a particularly favored group, rather than the needs of all groups. There is a critical need for cross-cutting or "transformational" leaders who are genuinely able to transcend identity lines to serve all citizens. Democratic transition processes and national dialogue will benefit from increased participation by moderate political groups and influential civic leaders who are committed to the principles of inclusive citizenship and participation, and who may serve as a bridge between grassroots and national leadership. The widely admired Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela were powerful leaders whose inclusive

visions rose above narrowly defined identity and interest groups; instead, they called for social and political changes to occur in concert with societal reconciliation.

- 8) The development of a **Bill of Rights** is a useful instrument whereby the state and its citizens agree on the rights of each individual. Developing such a document in conjunction with communities can help clarify the expectations of all parties and give a legal base for challenging actions that may appear to violate such rights.
- 9) **Legal instruments** can be used to encourage the passage of a state's laws so they protect the pursuit of equality and the validation of diversity for all of its peoples.
- 10) External democratization assistance should be provided not only for process-oriented reforms, but also for national-led **theme-oriented reforms**, such as reforms of parliamentary systems, of school-system curriculums, security sectors, justice systems, etc. This detailed work with institutions, where bargaining and identity-politics happen on a daily basis, is likely to give the best return on investment.

The institutional factors: mainstreaming coexistence sensitivity into democracy-building programs

Thus far the paper has focused on democracy-building and coexistence-sensitive approaches at the state level. An important factor shaping political-transition processes in many developing nations and divided societies is the role of international policies, democratic assistance, and technical expertise provided in support of democratization and peacebuilding. Democratization work and promotion of good governance in post-conflict and deeply divided societies have been the focus of the work of many international and intergovernmental agencies and donor governments. While decisions on constitutional and electoral reforms are ultimately agreed on at the national level, these processes are often assisted and sometimes set in motion by international bodies, especially in post-conflict contexts. International agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the Organization of American States (OAS), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), among

others, work with national governments and civil society in countries across the globe to design, implement, and support successful and lasting political and social transition processes that aim to advance social inclusion, human rights, security, and development.

Conflict and coexistence-sensitive efforts are increasingly recognized as an important success factor for internationally-supported democracy and governance programs. Collective lessons learned and articulated in the course of the Coexistence International research project include:

- **Changing mindsets** about the importance of inclusive approaches requires the use of concrete examples of why coexistence work makes democracy and development initiatives more effective and why complementary approaches generate better results;
- Integrating conflict-sensitive approaches into already established or emergent programmatic areas requires **flexible programming** and a range of strategies at the headquarters level as well as the country level;
- **Capacity-building** for agency staff, national stakeholders, and political leaders reinforces the likelihood that conflict prevention and conflict sensitivity are genuinely integrated into all relevant institutions, programs, and strategies;
- For coexistence issues to be placed on national agendas, it is critical that both country-level staff and the headquarters staff of intergovernmental agencies seek out and cultivate partnerships with **champions of conflict sensitivity** within their agencies and within national governments;
- **Adequate resources** need to be made available for agencies to develop conflict-sensitive approaches as part of their work, and donors need to be encouraged to be partners in such development;
- **Documenting practices** and sharing lessons learned promotes wider institutional learning, fosters receptiveness of conflict sensitivity, and establishes credibility vis-à-vis partners and local stakeholders;
- Understanding of regional contexts and **rigorous conflict analysis** involving local stakeholders should inform democracy-building programs at all stages;
- Organizational mandates should strive to **create incentives** on the part of external experts and national governments to transform policy recommendations into effective practices.

Conclusion

Democracy work in post-conflict and historically divided societies is a formidable task that requires attention to normative, institutional, and contextual factors. Democratization policies and governance mechanisms have to address root causes of conflicts, such as structural inequities and exclusion of minorities, and recognize that respect for diversity and inclusive processes are effective conflict-prevention measures. When identity groups are negated and marginalized the likelihood of future conflict increases. Therefore, sensitivity to coexistence issues at all stages of the democracy-building process is critical at both the national level where government entities and civil society are engaged in political reforms as well as at the international level, where international actors support the process as donors, collaborative partners, and experts.

Additional Resources on this Topic

Coexistence International Reports and Publications

- A Survey of Coexistence Sensitivity in International Democratization and Governance Policies *
- Coexistence Sensitivity in International Democratization and Governance Policies: Lessons Learned *
- Insiders and Outsiders: A Review of Policies that Recognize Diversity and Promote Inclusion and Coexistence (July 2006) *
- Report on the Discussion Seminar: Coexistence and Democracy-Building: What is the Connection? *

Other Papers and Publications

- Fitzduff, Mari. "Ten Things Leaders Ought to Know—and do—About Conflicts and War," *Leadership Is Global*, Link, W., et al., eds. (Tokyo: Shinyo-en Foundation, 2007).
- Harris, Peter, and Reilly, Ben. *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators* (Sweden: International IDEA, 1998).
- International IDEA, *Democracy, Conflict and Human Security: Pursuing Peace in the 21st Century*, Volume 1 & 2 (Stockholm, Sweden, 2006).
- Kumar, Chetan, and Hoffman, Benjamin. *What Really Works in Preventing and Rebuilding Failed States: Catalytic Initiatives for Country-Level Peace-Building Strategies: What Are They Accomplishing?* http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/Leadership_2.pdf
- Wolpe, Howard (co-authored with Steve McDonald). "Training Leaders for Peace," *The Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 126-132 (January 2006).
- Young, Crawford. *The Accommodation of Cultural Diversity: Case Studies* (London: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2002).

Organizations & Web sites

- A collection of Web links and resources on this topic is available on CI's Web site: www.coexistence.net
- Club of Madrid: www.clubmadrid.org
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA): www.idea.int
- National Endowment for Democracy: www.ned.org
- Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities at OSCE: osce.org/hcnm/
- Organization of American States (OAS): www.oas.org
- The Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: www.wilsoncenter.org
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA): www.un.org/esa/desa/
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP): www.undp.org
- World Bank Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit (CPR): www.worldbank.org/conflict

* Document available at www.coexistence.net

Endnotes

- 1 This paper has also greatly benefited from the input and ideas of Dr. Mari Fitzduff, Director of the MA Program in Coexistence and Conflict at Brandeis University.
- 2 Coexistence work covers the range of initiatives necessary to ensure that communities and societies can live more equitably and peacefully together, and includes conflict-prevention, -management, -resolution, and -transformation activities, as well as peacebuilding, diversity, and multicultural work. Coexistence policy and practice activities can range from work with governments, inter-governmental bodies, and institutions, to work with pertinent individuals and groups, as well as local communities.
- 3 To take just one example, in Democratic Republic of Congo a collaborative effort on the part of international donors, development agencies, and research institutions engaged Congolese political leaders in a capacity-building initiative to strengthen cohesion and build skills for political dialogue. For a comprehensive list of publications, policy briefs, conference proceedings, and interviews on this initiative, please visit the following link: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1417&fuseaction=topics.item&news_id=195889.
- 4 The preferendum is a tool to discover which options receive most consensus support in conflicted situations: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/mgt/papers/prefer/>.

About Coexistence International

Based at Brandeis University since 2005, Coexistence International (CI) is an initiative committed to strengthening the resources available to policymakers, practitioners, researchers, advocates, organizations, and networks promoting coexistence at local, national, and international levels. CI advocates a complementary approach to coexistence work through facilitating connections, learning, reflection, and strategic thinking between those in the coexistence field and those in related areas.

What is Coexistence?

Coexistence describes societies in which diversity is embraced for its positive potential, equality is actively pursued, interdependence between different groups is recognized, and the use of weapons to address conflicts is increasingly obsolete. Coexistence work covers the range of initiatives necessary to ensure that communities and societies can live more equitably and peacefully together.

About the Series

Fragmentation within the coexistence field, as well as divisions between coexistence and related areas, impede the achievement of effective, sustainable peace. Without cooperation and a recognition of complementarity, key players often work in isolation from one another—a situation that leads to missed opportunities or incomplete responses to conflicts.

With this publication series, Coexistence International examines where and how certain fields intersect with coexistence work. What challenges and opportunities exist when disciplines work together toward the common goal of a more peaceful, just world? This series illustrates the possibilities of effecting positive coexistence through cooperation among related fields.

Other CI Publications

Complementary Approaches to Coexistence Work

What is Coexistence and Why a Complementary Approach?

Focus on Coexistence and the Arts

Focus on Coexistence and Democracy-building

Focus on Coexistence and Natural Resources

Focus on Coexistence and Security

Country Studies

This series describes the state of coexistence within different countries around the world—including the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Latvia, Mauritius, and Poland—and compares their diversity and coexistence policies.

Publications can be accessed online at www.coexistence.net/pubs/publications.html.



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