

Student handout 3.2

Taking part in democracy – basic rules and principles

Taking part in democracy means taking part in negotiating the common good

In democracies, everyone – individuals or groups – may take part and promote their interests and ideas. The final decision may not meet our goals fully, but if we don't take part, no one will take notice of our interests.

In democracies, decisions and solutions are found through controversy and competition of interests and ideas. Consent is achieved through a good compromise that all parties, or the majority, can accept. Such a decision may be considered, for the time being, as a definition of the **common good**.

Controversy and political competition generate an element of struggle. It is therefore very important that all players in the political arena agree on a framework of rules, based on the principle of mutual respect.

Basic rules and principles for negotiations and controversies in democracy

1. Clarity and mutual respect:







“I disapprove of what you say,
but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”
Voltaire (1694-1778)

This means you treat persons with different interests and views as your adversary, not as your enemy. You are not fighting, you are engaged in something more like a sports contest.

2. Human rights are there for everyone

Human rights establish the principle of non-violence. Political competition is carried out through words, arguments, ideas, charm, and wit.

3. Willingness to compromise

-   Try to find win-win solutions.
-   If that does not work, make sure both sides find something to agree on.
-   Avoid win-lose situations, no matter who wins and who loses.

4. Tips for negotiation

Have a clear idea of your goal in mind. Players who know what they want often win for this sole reason.

Try to understand the other's point of view. Focus on what you can agree on rather than on what you disagree on – look for shared interests and concerns, and work on those. But be very clear on points that are important to you. Do not accept solutions that you think are unfair or inefficient, and do not suggest them to others.

Try to focus on issues that allow compromise, basically anything that can be measured or quantified in figures – for example the distribution of resources, money, land, or time. Avoid disputes over collective identities (colour, ethnic origin).