Good governance and the problem of building consensual democracy and societal Security: The Lebanese model as study

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Abstract:

The concept of good governance and issues of democratization have sparked, and continue to spark, extensive debate worldwide in recent decades. Numerous studies and perspectives have emerged regarding the possibility of establishing genuine democracy and its position in the contemporary era amid global transformations. This is particularly evident in the challenges faced by citizens in the Third World, especially in Arab countries, where individuals are deprived of their right to express their views, enjoy freedom of expression, and participate in decision making and shaping their future. This article examines consociational democracy as an effective mechanism for managing diversity and as an appropriate framework for pluralistic and culturally diverse societies. It considers consociational democracy a viable approach for promoting stability among the different components of multi sectarian societies based on diverse sects, religions, beliefs, and traditions. It also seeks to ensure stability and political participation for minorities through coalition formation and power sharing.

Keywords: *Good Governance; Consociational Democracy; Societal Security; Political Empowerment; Political Participation.*

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Introduction:

Political system models are among the most consequential factors shaping the character and stability of societies. Alongside cultural forces, ideological traditions, levels of civic participation, and the functional demands placed on governing institutions, these models have long occupied a central place in the work of political scientists, political sociologists, and related scholars.

One model of particular relevance is consociational democracy, widely regarded as an effective mechanism for sustaining political and social stability in diverse, heterogeneous societies. Yet despite widespread democratic claims, many governing systems fail to translate democratic principles into practice. Researchers therefore identify political consensus as a decisive variable.

Western frameworks and development programmes have long pressed Third World countries to adopt models based on democracy, good governance, human rights protection, and sustainable development. respecting human rights, upholding the rule of law, broadening civic participation, nurturing political pluralism, ensuring institutional transparency, raising public sector efficiency, advancing political empowerment, guaranteeing equality, and cultivating the values of accountability, solidarity, and tolerance.

The central question guiding this research is:

To what extent can good governance and consociational democracy ensure political cohesion and stability, and in doing so, promote societal security in non-homogeneous societies?

To address this issue and other questions raised in this context, the study will be divided into the following sections:

- **Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Foundations:**
  - The concept of good governance.
  - The concept of consensual democracy.
  - The concept of Societal security.
  - The theoretical foundations of consensual democracy.
- **Mechanisms of good governance to promote community security and build consensus: Lebanese society as a case study**
  - The political, cultural, and social reality of Lebanese society.
  - The democratic culture is essential for fostering social cohesion in Lebanese society**.**
  - Critique and Analysis of Lebanon's Experience in Building Social Cohesion and Consensus Democracy**.**

1. Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Foundations

a. The Concept of Good Governance

Good governance reinforces human rights standards as a set of values guiding the conduct of governments and other political and social actors, while simultaneously providing the performance criteria by which those actors can be held accountable.

Many political analyses employ a structural and procedural model to define the characteristics of good governance. Under this approach, it is broadly understood as a set of political conditions governing the exercise of authority at the state, regional, local, or institutional level, grounded in coordination, consultation, and transparent dialogue (Arif, 2007, p. 35).

Although the concept of governance is as old as human history, it gained particular intellectual prominence during the 1980s and 1990s, when it entered mainstream development discourse and became a fixture of international public policy debate. Scholars and practitioners in these fields generally use the term to denote a complex constellation of public and private structures and processes, while writers working at a more general level often treat it as synonymous with government (Silaawi & Hasnawi, 2017, p. 222).

The United Nations Development Programme offers a complementary definition, describing good governance as an approach founded on transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. On this account, good governance aims to achieve sustainable development and secure the fundamental rights of individuals through meaningful participation and the equitable distribution of resources. It also establishes a normative framework governing the relationship between the state and society, one oriented toward social justice and long-term development (Weiss, 2000, pp. 795-814).

A related but broader definition understands governance as the exercise of political authority and societal control in the management of resources for social and economic development. This formulation encompasses the role of public authorities in shaping the environment within which economic actors operate, determining how benefits are distributed, and defining the terms of the relationship between rulers and citizens (Samir, 2015, p. 45).

The history of political science reflects a gradual evolution in the central concepts used to analyse collective life. Until the 1920s, government was the discipline's primary object of study. Attention then shifted toward the state, before turning, in the 1950s, to the political system as the preferred unit of analysis. By the 1970s, the state had reasserted its centrality, only to be accompanied, in subsequent decades, by the rise of civil society as a counterweight concept, capturing the idea of societal advancement alongside the perceived retreat of the state.

Key Principles of Good Governance (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1997, pp. 2-3):

- Participation: Encouraging the active participation of all members of society in decision making processes.
- Transparency: Providing the public with access to information regarding government decisions and political processes.
- Accountability: Ensuring that leaders and decision makers are held accountable for their actions and decisions.
- Rule of Law: Ensuring the fair and equal application of laws to all citizens regardless of their positions or status.
- Integrity: Requiring public officials to adhere to ethical standards and combat corruption.
- Efficiency and Effectiveness: Delivering public services efficiently and maintaining high quality standards.
- Responsiveness: Enhancing the ability of governments to respond effectively to citizens' needs and demands.
- Social Justice: Ensuring the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities among all individuals and communities.
- Equality and Non-Discrimination: Guaranteeing equal rights for all individuals without discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other grounds.
- Strategic Planning: Developing long term strategies that address societal needs and align with sustainable development objectives.
- Promotion of a Democratic Culture: Supporting democratic values and human rights through education and community participation.
- Strengthening Partnerships: Building cooperation among government institutions, civil society, and the private sector to promote sustainable development and achieve common goals.
- Judicial Independence: Ensuring the independence of the judiciary from political and social pressures.
- Redress Mechanisms: Guaranteeing the right of individuals to challenge administrative and judicial decisions.
- Rule of Law: Ensuring respect for and implementation of laws without exception, as adherence to the rule of law is essential for maintaining order and preventing arbitrariness and corruption.
- Efficiency and Effectiveness: Focusing on improving performance and achieving objectives with the highest quality standards and the lowest possible cost.

b. The concept of consensual democracy:

The concept of consociational democracy represents the intersection of political solutions that consider the representation of collective identities through

electoral systems, coalitions, and, in some cases, the political system as a whole. Its objective is to achieve stability and prevent conflict and civil war.

Consociational democracy proposes that power sharing institutions in pluralistic societies encourage collective cooperation among ruling elites and help prevent ethnic or sectarian conflicts. This makes it particularly suitable for countries seeking to establish stable democratic systems despite ethnic or sectarian divisions (Institute of Government in the Middle East and North Africa, 2021).

The theoretical model of consociational democracy was developed by the Dutch sociologist Arend Lijphart. He adopted a distinct approach to addressing divisions within pluralistic societies and their relationship with democracy. His perspective was based on an optimistic view of the future of democracy in pluralistic societies and drew upon successful European experiences following World War II in Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, and Austria (Norris, 2005, p. 03).

The concept of consociational democracy emerged during the 1960s to describe political systems in which divisions and conflicts among different groups are resolved through mutual agreement and consensus. In its broader sense, it is a form of representative democracy that does not rely exclusively on majority rule as the sole basis of governance. Instead, it emphasizes consensus among all components of multi ethnic or multi sectarian societies to achieve political stability and peaceful coexistence. In this context, consensus becomes the ability to achieve practical success despite theoretical limitations (Saad, 2019, pp. 1730-1747).

Building on these experiences, political scholars during the 1950s and 1960s developed the concept of consociational democracy. Among the most notable contributors were Gerhard Lehmbruch, Gabriel A. Almond, and Arend Lijphart. Lijphart, in particular, specialized in this model, developed its theoretical foundations, and later introduced modifications based on emerging applications, eventually presenting it as a comprehensive theory (Fadel, 2013, p. 100).

The term traces its origins to the writings of the German philosopher Johannes Althusius (1557–1638), who used the Latin term *Consociatio*. Lijphart notes that the concept also appeared in the writings of Austrian Marxist thinkers such as Otto Bauer and Karl Renner during the early twentieth century. It was later employed in studies by David Apter on Uganda in 1961 and by Arthur Lewis in *Politics in West Africa* in 1965. Lijphart also observed that Gerhard Lehmbruch used the same term in 1967 in his study *Proportional Representation Democracy*, which closely resembles the theory of consensus democracy (Bishara, 2018, p. 09).

Consociational democracy may also be defined as a complex set of rules and principles that can be applied to facilitate democratic governance and peaceful coexistence among different social groups in pluralistic societies. Arend Lijphart

defines consociational democracy as follows: *"It is defined in terms of its relationship* to the distinctive sectoral divisions of pluralistic societies and the political cooperation that exists among sectoral elites." Gerhard Lehmbruch defines it as "a strategy for managing conflicts through cooperation and compromise among different elites rather than competition and majority decision making." Hussein Obaid defines consociational democracy as *"a voluntary and contractual system often agreed upon by political leaders who play a decisive role in ensuring its continuity by maintaining a minimum level of understanding among themselves (Apter, 1961)."

Based on the various definitions of consociational democracy, the following key characteristics can be identified:

- It represents an approach to crisis management in heterogeneous and multicultural societies through its capacity for continuity and adaptation to changing circumstances.
- It provides a framework for building constructive relationships among the components of a single society, particularly within sectarian structures.
- Consociational democracy, also referred to as *compromise democracy*, operates within heterogeneous societies among political elites and is based on resolving conflicts among different social groups through consensus.
- It contributes to establishing a foundation for promoting mutual respect and acceptance among social groups.
- It is based on governance through consensual agreement among the majority of participating actors.
- It seeks to accommodate the interests and demands of different social groups.

c. The concept of Societal security:

The literature addressed various definitions of societal security and related concepts, as well as the interpretation of the security phenomenon advanced by Barry Buzan. His approach reexamined the influence of non-material factors in light of the growing importance of social and cultural variables. This perspective required an examination of the implications of emerging threats to societal security. The study concluded that globalization, migration, technological development, ethnic conflicts, and the spread of transnational phenomena pose direct threats to the identity of groups within the state (Lijphart, 2006).

For example, Barry Buzan defines societal security as the ability to preserve and maintain cultural patterns, customs, traditions, language, and identity within a particular society. He further argues that societal security represents a continuous effort to protect society from threats (Baldwin, 1997).

There is no consensus among researchers regarding the definition of societal security, as it remains a dynamic concept that is interpreted and applied differently across regions due to varying priorities and agendas. Some scholars define societal security as the establishment of an effective balance between cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic particularities and the need to strengthen national integration among citizens in the construction of a pluralistic and just society (Antar, 2005, p. 13).

It is also a symbolic and normative concept centered on the relationship between the self and the other, including gender identities and members of religious, linguistic, or ethnic minority groups. It reinforces social cohesion through the following dimensions (McRae, 2002, pp. 18-25):

- The issue of gender-based oppression affecting women in different social contexts.
- The issue of marginalization affecting minority groups without necessarily involving direct oppression.
- An individual's sense of belonging to a group or society, whether a family, local community, organization, ethnic group, or other social entity. Social cohesion contributes to preserving the distinctiveness of each cultural, social, or ethnic group while maintaining respect for diversity and difference. This also requires the achievement of social justice among various groups. Such an approach is closely linked to the realization of social solidarity and the harmony it promotes, or at least efforts aimed at overcoming conflict at both the individual and collective levels (United Nations, 1994, p. 31).

From the above discussion, it is evident that ethnic, racial, and religious groups constitute the primary units of analysis in societal security. Preserving their identity represents the central objective that societal security seeks to maintain. Therefore, emphasis must be placed on protecting the rights of these groups, particularly minority rights, which constitute a core element of societal security (Hogan, 2005, p. 88).

Threats to Societal Security: Among the major threats to societal security are the following (Roe, 2004, p. 290):

- Intergroup conflicts over resources and opportunities, as well as conflicts resulting from nationalist or religious intolerance and extremism. Such conflicts frequently occur within states and, in some cases, between states. Examples include events in Rwanda, Burundi, the former Yugoslavia, and Chechnya.

- The challenges faced by indigenous populations in many countries, including exposure to violence, exclusion, and reduced life opportunities compared to newly arrived populations.
- Weak societal security negatively affects individuals' sense of belonging. In the absence of strong social attachment, individuals may become sources of instability and tension. The consequences of this phenomenon are increasingly visible in ethnic conflicts occurring both within states and across national borders.
- Migration may also constitute a challenge to societal security.

d. -The theoretical foundations of consensual democracy:

Researchers argue that social stability is threatened when governments, or other entities within a state, fail to manage cultural diversity and pluralism effectively. This failure may occur in political terms through the inability to ensure security and establish strong institutions that guarantee the active participation of all citizens. It may also occur in developmental terms through the failure to uphold the principles and dimensions of comprehensive human security, resulting in weakened social cohesion and the emergence of conflict.

If consensual democracy is understood as a strategy for conflict management based on cooperation and harmony among various elites rather than competition and majority rule, then it can be considered a modern mechanism for governing pluralistic and diverse societies. It achieves this by sharing power among all social components and adopting majority-based decision making while guaranteeing minority rights to satisfy all parties (Asmahan, 2018, pp. 87-88).

Maurice Duverger defines the political system as "the set of solutions required to address the problems arising from the establishment and organization of governing bodies within a given social structure." Accordingly, the political system can be understood as a component of the broader social system. However, differences emerge regarding the form that the political system should take. concepts related to power, governance, and authority (Asil Mahmoud Al Kurdi, n.d.).

Section One: Characteristics and Objectives of the Democratic System

The democratic system is characterized by its emphasis on humanistic values that place human beings at the center of social and political life. Consequently, it derives its principles from the values of freedom, justice, and the rule of law. The system seeks to implement democracy through popular participation, whereby the people constitute the source of authority.

the procedural school, systems analysis, and the developmental school. National security refers to protecting a state, or a group of states, from internal and

external threats, safeguarding their vital interests, and creating conditions that facilitate the achievement of national goals and objectives, including political stability, social cohesion, and comprehensive development. Major General Adly Saeed defines national security as "securing the state internally and repelling external threats to ensure a stable life for its people. (Darwish, 1968, pp. 12-13)."

In his article *Comparative Political Systems*, Gabriel Almond classified political systems into four categories. The first category is the Anglo-American system, which includes Commonwealth countries. The second is the Continental European system, excluding the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, as these incorporate elements of both Anglo American and Continental European systems. The third category includes pre industrial or partially industrial systems outside Europe and America. The fourth consists of totalitarian political systems. This classification was based on the criteria of political culture and political role structure as components of the political system (Saeed, 1978, p. 17).

Almond associated a state's position according to these two criteria with the degree of political stability. He also integrated several relevant theories and concepts into this classification, including horizontal and overlapping membership, party systems, the separation of powers, and political development. Lijphart likewise considers these factors important in the analysis of consensual democracy (Bishara, 2018, p. 10).

Political consensus possesses several distinctive characteristics, including the following (Almond, 1956, pp. 391-409):

- **It is a comprehensive process:** This means that political forces emerging from different social groups must achieve consensus within the political environment governing the state, including both the ruling authority and the opposition.
- **It is a progressive and developmental process:** Consensus among political forces within a specific political framework reflects their capacity to overcome racial discrimination and promote interaction, advancement, and development within society and its governance structures.
- **It is a relative process:** Consensus varies according to changing social, economic, political, and legal conditions and is influenced by temporal and spatial factors.
- **It is a functional process:** It involves restoring and maintaining balance following conflict between opposing forces.
- **Consensus extends beyond reducing tensions:** It seeks to ensure recognition, existence, the protection of interests, and the fulfillment of genuine needs.
- **It is a dynamic process:** Consensus develops through stages beginning with dialogue, discussion, and acceptance of others. These stages lead to outcomes that remain interactive and evolving. The process is continuous.

In practice, these four elements represent a single issue related to the realism and openness of political elites. All these factors can be linked to the convictions of political elites, the relationships among elites representing different subcultures, the interactions among subcultures at the societal level, and the relationship between elites and the public within each subculture (Agha, 1989, p. 36).

This orientation has led many theorists to raise fundamental questions concerning democratic governance, the implications of this concept, and its underlying principles. Questions have also emerged regarding why this form of governance is regarded as a key element of human development and what practical mechanisms can embody the political and economic principles and processes associated with it (Lijphart, Consociational Democracy, 1969, p. 216).

2. Mechanisms of Good Governance for Promoting Societal Security and Building Consensus: Lebanese Society as a Case Study

a. The Political, Cultural, and Social Reality of Lebanese Society

Ethnic diversity constitutes one of the defining characteristics of Lebanese society. Ethnically, the population includes Arabs, Armenians, and Kurds. Religiously, Lebanese society is composed of Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Alawites.

The Muslim community is further divided into Shiites, Sunnis, Alawites, and Ismailis. The Christian community includes Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Copts, Latins, and Evangelicals.

This diversity is illustrated in the following table:

Table 1. Members of Social Groups in Lebanese Society, 2006

The Social Component	Population
Maronites	652200
Orthodox	176657
Catholics	127664
Protestants	75928
Druze	185916
Shiites	1,166,455
Sunnis	1141695

Source: Compiled by the author based on: Monthly Magazine article

Lebanon's system of government is based on a set of interrelated institutions. Following Lebanon's independence on October 22, 1943, the state was governed by a legal arrangement that functioned as a social contract known as the

National Pact. This pact took the form of an unwritten customary agreement between President Bechara El Khoury, a Maronite Christian, and Prime Minister Riad Al Solh, a Sunni Muslim.

In other words, consensual democracy was implemented through the distribution of authority and responsibilities among the three presidencies: the Presidency of the Republic, the Presidency of the House of Representatives, and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. This arrangement aimed to provide the major social communities with a sense of inclusion and reduce political marginalization and frustration that might affect particular groups (Abdelaziz, 2015, p. 86).

b. A Critical Reading of Consociational Democracy

Researcher Basem Saloukh argues that, in the Lebanese context, consociational democracy does not guarantee neutral institutions capable of managing conflict in deeply divided societies over the long term. Instead, political elites may exploit this framework during critical stages of state formation to justify their control over state institutions and resources.(Omar & Zawawi, 2020, p. 58).

Furthermore, the post war growth period extending from the 1990s to the present has been accompanied by the marginalization of labor issues within the economic agendas of successive governments.

The following table presents poverty rates in Lebanon according to UNDP data for 2007.

Table 02: poverty rates in Lebanon according to UNDP data for 2007

Province	Poverty Rate at Province Level (%)	Poverty Rate at National Level (%)
Beirut	2.1	10.3
Mount Lebanon (including the suburbs of Beirut)	27.3	39.9
Bekaa	13	12.7
South	15.6	10.5
Nabatiyah	4.4	5.9
North	38	20.7

Source: United Nations Development Programme, 2007.

c. Democratic Culture as a Foundation for Social Cohesion in Lebanese Society

Gabriel Almond argues that political stability in heterogeneous states cannot be explained solely through the variables of political culture and the structure and functions of the political system. However, under participatory

democracy, governance becomes based on power sharing and broader representation of all communities and political groups.

In this context, participatory democracy becomes both a necessity and a priority. Within neoliberal governance models, new approaches have emerged to create more open and deliberative spaces for participation. As Bernard Manin states, the value of deliberation does not lie merely in broad discussions concerning public issues or deliberative processes.

He further argues that participatory democracy contributes to the realization of several principles (Salamey, 2009, p. 87):

- Promoting interaction between the executive authority and citizens through the activation of participation and the establishment of top-down participatory mechanisms as a societal value.
- Recognizing civil society as a countervailing force capable of balancing governmental authority.
- Expanding citizen participation, which contributes to reducing excessive centralization of power.
- Aligning governance with contemporary models and concepts related to democracy, human rights, and the requirements of political maturity.
- Emphasizing the normative dimension of democracy as a value and the mature individual as a political actor.

Political culture is based on three implicit assumptions. First, differences in political culture exist not only between societies but also among individuals within the same society. Second, these differences produce varying effects on political behavior and on the effectiveness of existing institutions. Third, the components of political culture, including values, beliefs, and attitudes, change gradually over time, particularly in urban environments and across successive generations (Linder & Lutg, 2002, p. 08).

Social justice must also be guaranteed within democratic systems, despite the frequent neglect of this dimension. Numerous attempts to establish democratic institutions have failed because governments overlooked the economic needs of society. Strong democracy can flourish only in a society that provides meaningful economic opportunities for all citizens and ensures access to education, healthcare, and housing (Inglehart, 1993, pp. 15-29).

d. Critique and Analysis of Lebanon's Experience in Building Social Cohesion and Consensus Democracy

Lebanon has a history marked by armed conflicts and political instability. The 15-year civil war, which ended in 1990, left significant human,

physical, economic, and psychological impacts. Lebanon has a long tradition of power sharing. However, unresolved issues associated with this formula have led to recurring challenges. The UN Common Country Assessment of 2007 highlights the severe political polarization in the country, the need for dialogue and national reconciliation, and the importance of good governance.

the political complexities, programmes should remain conflict sensitive, incorporate comprehensive risk analysis, and maintain adaptable objectives. These include (Frost, 2002, pp. 63-64):

- Capacity development for parliamentarians, parliamentary committees, and human resources.
- Preparation of a National Human Rights Action Plan in close cooperation with the Human Rights Parliamentary Committee.
- Development of cooperation agreements and protocols with foreign parliaments and support for study visits for Members of Parliament and staff.
- Publication and distribution of various studies and periodic reports.
- Conducting research and organizing workshops to support relevant draft laws, including those related to administrative decentralization and political parties.
- Organizing pilot public consultations involving parliamentarians, local government officials, and civil society organizations from selected districts.
- Providing training and administrative support in language skills, logistics, and information technology.
- Strengthening the institutional capacities of Parliament to address critical reform issues, including major civil peacebuilding challenges.

As a result, the country has repeatedly shifted between war and peace, as well as between stability and instability. These conditions have affected the constitutional and institutional structure of the Lebanese political system. Within this framework, Lebanon has faced a political challenge associated with power distribution under a sectarian political system.

Among the most significant factors contributing to the instability and limited continuity of consensual democracy in Lebanon are the following (Fattah, 2010, p. 20):

- The negative association of plural societies with historical legacies, together with occasional intolerance toward them, leads such societies to rely on historical events, sometimes dating back centuries, to justify contemporary political and social disputes.

- The absence of a culture of intellectual pluralism and political consensus, reflected in limited acceptance of social and cultural diversity.
- The presence of narrow political perspectives and limited political agendas among certain sects, which pursue their interests without adequate consideration of the associated risks. This results in private interests prevailing over the public interest and sectarian priorities taking precedence over national priorities.
- The absence of distributive justice in the allocation of economic and social resources, reflected in unequal distribution among regions, provinces, and sectarian groups within the state.
- The lack of a clear political and strategic vision among internal actors involved in sectarian conflict, combined with the use of sectarianism as an instrument of political competition and conflict among the components of the same political society.

Conclusion

The conditions necessary for building democracy and achieving good governance cannot be reduced to procedural arrangements alone; they require addressing deeper structural questions about the nature of political community itself. No state can establish a genuinely democratic system unless its citizens first reach a working consensus on what binds them together as a political unit. Yet in many emerging democracies, this foundational question remains unresolved and actively contested.

Building durable democratic foundations therefore demands that states develop a set of core principles capable of commanding broad acceptance across all segments of society. Such principles must clarify the origins and character of the political community while articulating the political and cultural values that hold its members together. In much of the Arab world, these foundational principles have been shaped, and in many cases complicated, by the accumulated weight of a deeply ambivalent political history.

The first is the existence of strong institutions capable of protecting citizens from the arbitrary exercise of political power. Freedom is not self-sustaining; it requires institutional scaffolding. A democratic society must therefore be organised through a layered structure of institutions: formal state bodies such as the judiciary, alongside independent civil institutions established and maintained by citizens themselves, including political parties, professional associations, and a free press.

The second condition is the presence of effective mechanisms for participation and accountability, ensuring that political authority remains subject to both institutional oversight and ongoing public scrutiny. Power, in a democratic system, must answer to something beyond itself.

The third condition concerns access to information. Citizens who lack reliable knowledge of how their political system functions cannot develop the critical judgment needed to make informed choices between competing parties and policy alternatives. Informed participation is not possible without informational access.

The fourth condition extends this logic further. Citizens require not only an independent press and a functioning system of mass communication, but also an educational system oriented toward civic awareness, democratic values, and the cultivation of responsible citizenship. Democracy, ultimately, must be learned as well as lived.

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