



# Good Citizenship in the 21st Century Democratic Society

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## Abstract

Being a citizen, does not mean we should just let things happen to us, gone are the days when people think in hierarchies; currently, the people of a country think in networks, and expect governments to be another node within that network. This 21<sup>st</sup> century is undergoing a far-reaching change. Today, we are understanding what good citizenship under democracy means, while creating new ways to employ it. Therefore, a good citizen in this democratic society should possess freedom and be able to rely upon themselves. Moreover, they must use their liberty and rights responsibly, respect liberty and rights of others, value the differences, respect equality, obey the rules, do not solve the problems by using violence, realize that they are part of the society, be responsible for the community at large, have public mind and be enthusiastic to take responsibility or be part of social development.

**Keywords:** Good Citizenship, 21st Century, Democratic Society.

## Introduction

For the past 80 years under democratic regime, Thailand had undergone the coup d'état for 13 times and had issued 20 constitutions; thus, the question had arisen to inquire for the reason of democratic failure in Thailand while it succeeds in other countries. However, as a matter of fact, the countries with firm democratic regime in the present time which are considered as the democratic prototype countries such as USA, England, France and German; once encountered problems and failure. The factors of successful democratic regime in those countries are “system” and “people”. Above all, in democratic regime, even the constitution is effective but if people do not know how to utilize and do not follow the constitution; problems will ultimately arise.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the democratic prototype countries tend to solve these problems by developing the sense of “citizenship” in people or create the Civic Education in order to make the democratic form of government successful.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the solution to Thailand's democratic problems is not solely the drafting of constitution but solving at the citizen level in order to empower them to participate in the administration and to make them aware of the national problems that the need to be solved. In the other words, it can be said that in the democratic form of government, citizens, as the owner of the country, must capable of governing themselves so that the democracy can be considered as successful.<sup>3</sup>

However, there are factors that impede the citizenship in democracy which are the patron-client culture or the reliance upon the superior especially the politicians, the inferior-superior culture, the sectarian, the concealment due to the fear that ones' opinions may displease the superior or may affect their work and personal life as well as the ignorance to the importance and necessity of being part of social and nation establishment.

The problems and weaknesses of Thailand's Democracy arise from the populations who tend not to be the citizens. This can be seen from the populations who lack of the sense of “citizenship”; furthermore, they are only the people who stay beneath the patronage system,

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<sup>1</sup>Parinya Tewanaruemitrkul. (2012). Civic Education. 1st Edition. Bangkok. Nanmeebooks Publication Co., Ltd.

<sup>2</sup>The Education Reformation of 2nd Decade Policy Subcommittee in the Education of Good Citizenship Establishment (2011) The Citizenship Establishment Educational Strategy 2010 – 2018. Bangkok: Office of Educational Quality and Standard Development Policy, Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education.

<sup>3</sup>Anek Laothammatas. 2011. Public Politics. (3rd Edition). Bangkok: King Prajadhipok's Institute.

or the authority of the new ruling class, which come from the election. Most importantly, this leads to the disharmony of the society. The populations do not accept the differences and do not respect liberty and rights of each other. Consequently, different opinions lead to disunion. Political parties and elections turn to be the elements that make societies, communities or even families become disharmonious. Besides, each person tends to employ his rights as he wishes without concerning about the responsibility toward the society.

Therefore, in this article, I, the author, am going to analyze about good citizenship in the 21st century democratic society by dividing content into 4 topics: (1) The meaning of “citizen” (2) The characteristics of good citizens of the nation and global community (3) What are the characteristics of good citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century democratic society? (4) Conclusion

### **1.1 The meaning of “citizen”**

Democratic regime is the form of public government by the citizens and for the citizens. If the citizens with differences beneath the principles of liberty, rights and equity, who are considered as the owners of the country, lack of the sense of citizenship, which requires “the conscience of being a citizen” in mind; the genuine development of democracy, thus, will not be successful. Therefore, in order to make the people correctly realize and understand their role as the citizens of the country, we must understand the true meaning of the word “citizen”, which is different from the meanings of the words “inhabitant” and “populace” in which people usually misunderstand and misuse.<sup>4</sup>

In Thai to Thai dictionary by Ploeng Na Nakorn, the word “inhabitant” means the people who live in particular country, but doesn’t mean the ordinary people who live in a country and being governed.

“Populace” means a person of the country who owns the nationality, and has liberty and rights. Besides, the constitutional law also protects him. This word gives the meaning of “having rights”.

“Citizens”, on the contrary, if translated alphabet by alphabet, means the power of the city or the country. The word “citizen” means the primary member of the nation or the country who is faithful toward the government. Moreover, the citizen has rights to be

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<sup>4</sup>Documents Production Group, Office of Public Relations, The Secretariat of the House of Representatives. “Rights, Liberty and Civic Duty of the Citizens in Democratic Regime” Bangkok: Publishing Department of The Secretariat of the House of Representatives, 2013.

protected. The citizenship, thus, means the status of people who can have rights, privileges and roles of the citizens.

Citizens are the people who live in particular country with the role of being “the mainstay” of the nation in various aspects. This gives the sense of “having the conscience of rights, civic duty and responsibilities” towards oneself, one’s family and the nation as a whole; besides, good citizens must mutually have responsibility toward the community at large.<sup>5</sup> According to Larry Gerston (Larry Gerston, 2002 : 116), “citizens are the people who engage in public affairs together with other members in the society or community in order to solve the problems in which all members in particular society or community are encountering”.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, “citizens”, in democracy, mean the members of the society who have freedom and are able to rely on themselves. Citizens employ liberty and rights according with responsibility. Moreover, they value liberty and rights of others; they respect differences, equality and regulations. They do not solve problems with violence and realize that they are part of the society. Furthermore, they have mutual responsibility towards the society, have public conscience and are enthusiastic to take responsibility or drive the society forward and solve social problems in different levels range from family, community country, ASEAN and global community.

In conclusion, the word “citizen” differs from the words “populace” and “inhabitant” in the sense that “citizen” depicts the alacrity in protecting one’s own rights. This includes the political participation by expressing one’s liberty and rights in giving opinions. Citizenship has the meaning that reflects role, duty and responsibilities in which the members of the society have toward the nation. The term “citizen” differs from the term populace that gives the sense of being the follower who acts according to others’ orders. Thus, the significant alteration relies upon the conversion of the commoners to the citizens who have rights to set the direction of the country.

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<sup>5</sup>Module 1 Democracy to Citizenship [Online] Available : <https://sites.google.com/site/khruperm/hnwy-kar-rei-nru-thi-1-pra-thip-tiy-su-khwam-pen-phlmeuxng> [2017, December 4]

<sup>6</sup>Gerston, Larry N. 2002. Public Policymaking in a Democratic Society: A Guide to Civic Engagement. New York: Center for Civic Education.

## 1.2 The characteristics of good citizens of the nation and global community

Every society needs good and quality citizens. To behave as good citizen means a person must realize his responsibilities toward community, nation and global community as well as his role toward himself and shared community, which are the abilities to think, perform and solve problems efficiently; besides, ones must be the mainstay in increasing the progress and stabilities of the nation and global community. To be a good citizen, one must behave according to the social norms and customs, and must also possess virtues, which are the guidelines in conducting one's life in order to develop the society sustainably.<sup>7</sup>

1. Obey the laws and comply with social regulations. If every citizen complies with social rules, regulations and laws; for instant, do not violate others' rights or do not infringe on the laws. Consequently, the government doesn't need to spend its budget in preventing, suppressing and arresting the wrongdoers to receive the punishment. Furthermore, the society will be more organized and peaceful; everyone will live together harmoniously without distrusting and harboring evil thoughts towards each other.

2. Be reasonable and listen to other people's opinions. Everybody possesses the freedom of opinion exchange. The rational exchange of opinions will lead to coalition that brings about the mutual understanding.

3. Accept public opinion. When the conflicts arise during the operation of activities that involve diverse opinions and there is the need to resolve problems by using majority vote; besides, the public opinion agrees to act accordingly since the result come from the opinions of majority.

4. Be the leader with democratic spirit and think of the common interest. Ones with democratic spirit must make a sacrifice when needed for the sake of the common interest and to maintain democratic society. This affects the stability and progress of particular organization. Ultimately, such benefit would return to the members of the society; for instance, to vote in the election, to apply for the election commission or to join the community service associations.

5. Respect others' liberty and rights. One must respect other people's rights and liberty; for example, an individual has rights to express his opinion and also has freedom of speech. Anyhow, his speech must not vilify others

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<sup>7</sup>Vichai Phu yothin and colleagues. Civic Duty, Culture and Conducts of Life in the Society. Bangkok: Aksorn Charoentat

6. Be responsible for oneself, society, community and nation. In living together in the society, there must be some works that require teamwork; therefore, the responsibilities must be divided so everyone can substantially complete his given task.

7. Participate in political activities. In democratic society, everyone must take part in the political activities such as voting in the referendum or in the elections.

8. Have a hand in preventing and solving economic, social or political problems. Ones can keep an eye on the issue of youth conspiring in the nightclubs, ignore rumors or wicked words that smear other people, do not see the person with different opinions as an enemy as well as support the peaceful solutions toward any conflicts.

9. Keep faith in virtue and morality, and behave according to the moral principles. Everyone should keep morality in mind as the rule that regulates one's behavior; even there is no penalty.

### **1.3 What are the characteristics of good citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century democratic society?**

The administration in democratic system is the administrative regime that everyone is involved in the administration. This regime will be successful if the citizens are groomed with the mindset of citizenship that allows self-government; thus, the significant characteristics of citizenship in democratic regime is to be the person that is capable of expressing one's roles and responsibilities toward the society. Besides, ones must make benefits for the society and help each other, which will lead to the development of the society and nation to be democratic society. There are 7 fundamental principles in creating citizenship in democratic system and I agreed with Asst. Prof. Parinya Tewanaruemitrkul about these principles of "citizenship in democratic system"

#### **1. Be responsible for yourself and be self- dependence.**

Democratic system is the administrative regime in which the citizens possess ultimate authority in the country; therefore, the citizens are considered as the owners of the country. When the citizens are the owners of the country; consequently, they are responsible for their own lives and also have liberty and rights in their own country in the same way as the house's owner who possesses liberty and rights in his own house. Democratic regime, thus, leads to the establishment of liberty and rights principles, and also allows the citizens to have freedom; that is to say, possessing their own lives. Thereupon, "citizen", in democratic system, is liberated or considered as the freeman who is self-dependence, responsible for himself and refuse to fall beneath any authority or patronage system. A child will genuinely become "adult" and "citizen", or a member of the society once he's responsible for himself.

## **2. Respect equality.**

Democracy is the system of government in which the supreme authority is in the hands of the citizens; therefore, in democracy, even the citizens are different in terms of financial status, educational background or occupations; they are all equivalent since they are the owners of the country. Consequently, all citizens must respect the principles of equality and think of everybody as equal; that is to say, to perceive everyone horizontally is to think of everyone equally no matter how rich or poor they are, they all have the prestige of being the owners of the country.

## **3. Respect the difference**

Once the citizens become the owners of the country, they all have liberty in their own country. Democracy gives freedom and respects the diversity of the citizens. Consequently, the citizens can be different in terms of occupations, lifestyles, religions as well as political opinions; therefore, to eliminate the disharmony caused by differences, the citizens in democratic society must accept and respect other people's differences. As a result, everyone can live together harmoniously despite the disparity. Besides, violence must not be used against whoever thinks differently. Even though ones may not agree with some ideas, they must accept that those differences with no questions towards such opposite beliefs or opinions. "The citizens", thus, are able to discuss about politic even though they choose different political parties or have dissimilar political opinions.

## **4. Respect others' rights**

In democracy, every citizen is the owner of the country; everyone possesses liberty and rights. However, if they employ rights for their own sake, are egocentric without considering other people's rights or don't care whether their deeds will cause any trouble; this will ultimately leads to disharmony. Democracy will turn to anarchy because everyone perceives himself as the center of the universe and the nation will finally be demolished. Therefore, rights in democracy must be confined; in other words, ones must not violate other people's rights with their own rights.

## **5. Obey the rules**

In democracy, there are regulations or laws, which are used in government to avoid doing things arbitrarily or forcibly. Beneath these rules, everyone is equal. Anyhow, even there are rules but if people do not act accordingly, these rules are worthless. In the other words, democratic regime will be successful if the citizens follow the rules and accept the result of going against the rules. In case of any conflicts, citizens must solve the problems in the mean of democracy without using any violence.

## **6. Possess responsibility towards the society**

Apart from respecting others' liberty and rights, and being responsible for other people, the citizens in particular society must employ their liberty and rights by concerning the well being of the society. Since the subsistence of the society depends on the behaviors of the citizens. Thus, "citizenship" is conscience of being the owner of the society. Citizens aren't able to employ their liberty and rights arbitrarily and gradually destroy the society. If the citizens employ their rights by concerning about the society and take part in solving the social problems, the society, hence, becomes better.

## **7. Democracy is the administration carried out by the citizens with the regulations or laws that are set up by the citizens or their representatives.**

In order for the democratic regime to be successful, the citizens must understand the fundamental principles of this regime, which include the principles of democracy or the administration by the citizens, and the legal state or the administration by laws, the understanding of election, the participation in political issues which means the citizens should be aware of what is going on and participate in the political activities at different levels range from the national level to the regional level. Besides, they must take part in other activities as well. In case of disagreement, the citizens must obeys the rules and regulations, and use the democratic means in solving problems without violence.

The understanding in democracy and the participation of the citizens in governing the country will be successful if people possess the sense of "citizenship", which means that they must have the fundamental understanding of democracy both the principles democracy or the administration by the citizens, and the legal state or the administration by laws. Besides, they must have knowledge about election and the participation in political activities. They must follow the political news and participate in the political activities at different levels range from the national level to the regional level. Moreover, the citizens should carry out the political activities in democratic regime in the right way; in the other words, they must accept the difference, respect others' rights and learn to work with other people.

## **Citizen**

- Be responsible and able to rely on oneself :** Citizens means being the member of the society who is responsible for oneself; besides, the citizen must be able to rely on oneself without being dominated by others or being under anyone's patronage system.

- **Respect other people's rights** : Citizens must not use their rights to infringe other people rights
- **Value differences** : Citizens must accept differences and respect whoever is different from them.
- **Respect the principles of equality** : Citizens should perceive everyone as equal; in the other words, they should see every human being horizontally not vertically.
- **Obey regulations and laws** : Citizens must obey regulations and laws, and must not solve problems using violence. Furthermore, they must accept the result that arisen from the violation of laws. Besides, they must do their duties as assigned by the law; for instance, paying taxes.
- **Be responsible for the society and community at large** : Citizens must realize that they are part of the society, thus, they must take part in solving the social problems by their own selves without causing any problems.

Therefore, the citizens of the quality democratic countries must practice the conscience of citizen, which will leads to the creation of citizenship with the characteristics as previously stated. Consequently, if the populations have turned to be “citizens”, “the society of citizens” will arise and the democratic regime will genuinely be the administration of people, by people and for people.

## Conclusion

Citizens are the people who live in particular country with the laws and regulations that govern their behaviors in order for them to live harmoniously together. Moreover, the citizens have their hands in establishing good practices and are responsible for the society beneath the state laws that act as the tools to govern citizens and citizenship. However, we must simultaneously comprehend the words “citizen”, “role” and “duty”. Therefore, we have to understand that each citizen has his roles and duties in which he must be responsible for; besides, he must behave according to the state power without causing any troubles for himself and public.

Therefore, “citizens” in democracy mean the members of the society who possess freedom and are able to rely upon themselves. Moreover, they must use their liberty and rights responsibly, respect liberty and rights of others, value the differences, respect equality, obey the rules, do not solve the problems by using violence, realize that they are part of the society, be responsible for the community at large, have public mind and be

enthusiastic to take responsibility or be part of social development. Lastly, they must take part in solving social problems in different levels include family level, community level, nation level, ASEAN level as well as global community level.

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