

# DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS

FOSTERING DEMOCRATIC CULTURE  
THROUGH EDUCATION



Netherlands Institute for  
**Multiparty Democracy**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) works to strengthen inclusive, democratic political systems worldwide. To that end, we work with the entire political sector in a country, from aspiring politicians to political leaders, and from national to local level.

Our approach is unique and characterized by dialogue: we bring actors from across the political spectrum together. We work on their knowledge and competences, and empower them to cooperate in a constructive manner on issues that affect them, their country as well as the broader region.

Every democracy needs democrats and transparent and accountable leaders. Together, they shape the functioning of the democracy and translate the formal rules and structures into practice and behaviour. Because many developing democracies







lack an extensive democratic tradition, their politicians – and civil society – often struggle with demonstrating democratic behaviour. That is why democracy education is a core element of our work.

Over the past fifteen years, NIMD has gained a lot of experience in implementing democracy education activities, particularly through setting up Democracy Schools

around the globe. In these schools, established politicians, future leaders from different political parties, and civic society leaders come together to build relationships and learn about human rights, equality, ethics in politics, social justice and other democratic principles.

What the participants all have in common is their high potential to make a democratic impact on politics in their countries.

## PARTICIPANTS

The NIMD Democracy Schools provide a safe space where participants from different social and educational backgrounds can come together to exchange ideas and learn to respect other opinions. The primary target audience for the schools is (aspiring) politicians. In addition, many schools also invite civic leaders to participate. This allows both groups to better understand each other and, at the same time, brings different insights and experiences to the classroom, enhancing the overall learning experience.

# 1336

graduates in 11 countries in 2017

The participants are recruited in different ways, depending on the exact target audience of the school. In some countries, like Georgia and Honduras, it is an open application process where candidates can apply by sending in their résumés. In other countries, participation is more exclusive and candidates are recommended by political party leaders. This is the case in, for instance, Tunisia and Myanmar.

# SCHOOL OF POLITICS IN TUNISIA

NIMD started working in Tunisia in 2012 together with Demo Finland to support Tunisia's transition after the fall of the Ben Ali regime.

The core aim of the programme has been building the capacity of parties and politicians to work effectively in their new democracy. To achieve this, NIMD and Demo Finland set up a School of Politics in 2012, together with their local implementing partner, Centre des Études Méditerranéennes Internationales (CEMI).

At the school, politicians work together in a multiparty setting to learn the skills and knowledge that they need to work together in a multiparty democracy. The best participants are selected for a second level training programme, which focuses on more advanced skills.

By the end of 2016, 240 politicians had completed the programme. Even after the training, participants continue to meet and work together across party lines to improve the democratic system in Tunisia.



## SCHOOL SET-UP

The Democracy Schools prepare the participants for a career in politics or civil society. Contrary to stand-alone training sessions where one or two topics are discussed, the NIMD Democracy Schools offer comprehensive longer-term courses covering a whole range of different topics related to democracy.

Each school is tailor-made to meet the needs of its context and the needs of the participants. This results in a broad range of school set-ups and curriculum choices.

In general, the participants meet on a regular basis over a period of 2 to 12 months. The outreach can be national, regional or even local, depending on what's required.

Participation is free of charge, however not exempt from responsibilities. In order to graduate, participants must attend (the majority of) classes and actively participate during the sessions.

# THE SIX ELEMENTS THAT ARE COMMON TO ALL OUR DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS

## MULTIPARTY COMPOSITION

Each Democracy School is non-partisan by nature. It is an impartial platform targeting a broad range of political actors; the parties involved are both parliamentary and non-parliamentary, and they include both opposition and governing parties.

## GENDER PARITY

NIMD actively supports the political participation of women. Therefore, each school strives for gender parity among its participants.

## SAFE SPACE

The schools are impartial and guarantee that all participants and their views will be respected. This is done through agreed codes of conduct, limited (or no) communication to the media, and practical things like safe and appropriate locations.

## KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ATTITUDE

In order to become democratic leaders, participants need a solid theoretical foundation. They also need to embrace democratic values and practice their skills. The schools focus on all these elements to make sure that the participants are as well-prepared as possible for their future roles.

## DIVERSITY

NIMD always strives for a good mix of ethnic, regional, religious and other diversity identities in the group of participants. This is important, not only because it provides all groups the opportunity to learn, but also because it creates mutual trust and understanding that can pave the way for new inclusive policies for the country.

## INTENSIVE TAILOR-MADE COURSES

All the schools offer comprehensive in-depth courses. To ensure that the schools really respond to local needs, they are hosted by NIMD's national country offices or implementing partners. The curricula, teachers and case studies are tailored to the local audience and developed on the basis of a solid needs assessment.

# DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS

## BURUNDI: LOCAL OUTREACH

NIMD has been engaged in Burundi, in partnership with the Burundi Leadership Training Programme (BLTP), since 2008. In addition to supporting high level dialogue activities between political parties, an essential part of the programme is the Democracy Schools. These schools have been implemented at the lowest administrative level, the colline (hill), since 2011.

The schools train community members, including grassroots leaders, politically engaged citizens, members of local government, and local police forces, selected on the basis of their engagement with civil society, local governance and political activities.

Learning together in classrooms, the groups first acquire theoretical knowledge

on topics ranging from community organization, to everyday politics and power, and shared responsibility in the community. Next, mixed groups of participants work on practical issues in their community, and come up with solutions to problems such as neighbourhood security, or lack of clean drinking water. By involving both civilians and police as participants, the activities also build a culture of cooperation, engagement and trust between these groups.

Around 900 alumni meet at regular reunions to discuss how they have followed up on what they learned in the Democracy Schools. In each class, a minimum of 30% are women, while young people also make up 30% of the participants.



# SCHOOL OF POLITICS IN MYANMAR (MYSOP)

The Myanmar School of Politics (MySoP) focuses on strengthening the democratic role and capacity of politicians and political parties at the regional and state levels. The approach used is a combination of dialogue and capacity strengthening.

The core courses focus on improving politicians' capacities, constructive, policy-oriented political engagement and multi-party collaboration. These 20-day learning retreats for state level politicians include intensive modules on political theory, policy making, country comparisons, gender equality, human rights and political skills such as speechwriting, debating and campaigning.

Since 2014, MySoP has been working with politicians and political parties in Myanmar's five eastern States and regions. Core courses have been organized for leadership-level politicians from Tanintharyi Region, Mon State, Shan State (South, North and East), Kayah State and Kayah State.

MySoP alumni from 31 political parties include State MPs, State Ministers, a State Attorney-General, a State Deputy Speaker, a Chief Minister, and Union MPs. Alumni activities include long weekends where core course alumni gather to further increase their knowledge and capacity on the issues of programmatic parties, intraparty democracy and dialogue.

## THE CURRICULUM

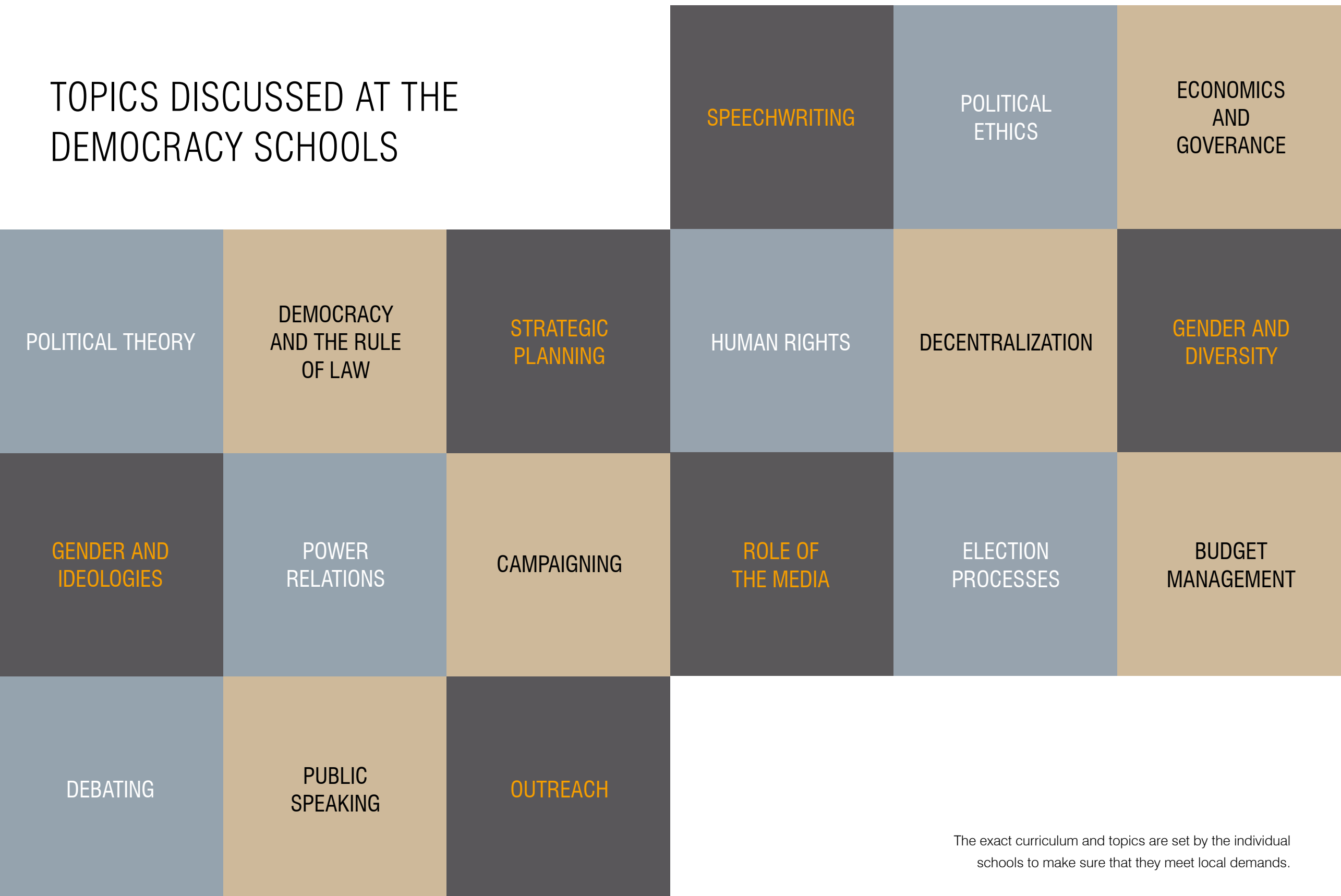
The Democracy Schools apply adult learning techniques and a learning-by-doing approach. This means that theory is combined with practical exercises.

In general, the NIMD schools offer three types of activity: lectures (including lectures from guest speakers/politicians from abroad), practical sessions (interactive), and out-of-class learning (group assignments).

So, for example, after a lecture on political communication in which the theory and the dos and don'ts are explained, the participants are invited to practice public speaking and speech writing in class, and have to implement an actual media campaign. This out-of-class learning opportunity offers a guided first-hand experience of applying their new knowledge.



# TOPICS DISCUSSED AT THE DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS



The exact curriculum and topics are set by the individual schools to make sure that they meet local demands.

# BEYOND THE SCHOOLS: ALUMNI NETWORKS

The emphasis within the Democracy Schools on working together across party lines means the participants get to know each other well, trust each other and are interested in each other's points of view. This lays the foundations for a broad and strong network of alumni.

It is common for participants to build relationships that they then utilise to address issues jointly, regardless of political affiliation. The Democracy Schools actively support this by organizing different types of alumni

activities. The schools also often offer small grants to alumni who want to organize activities themselves, such as a political debate or a lecture.

Another important reason for maintaining active relationships with the alumni is that it provides the schools with a pool of volunteers, who often give back to their school by acting as mentors and coaches to new participants or by supporting the organization and coordinating activities.

## BOOTCAMPS GEORGIA

In Georgia, Democracy School alumni from various career backgrounds come together to represent their regions in a joint annual event, the Democracy Bootcamps. With a different theme each year, these bootcamps draw public attention towards important but often less discussed issues, putting them on the agenda of policy-makers, civil society and Democracy School alumni.

Through their attendance, the alumni help to strengthen the fabric of the emerging

NIMD-supported grassroots networks and address a specific perennial issue in the realm of Georgian politics.

In addition, the bootcamps also have team-building elements, which make them an intense networking space. So, for the alumni, it is the perfect opportunity to meet and work together with the people of different geographic and professional backgrounds. It is where contacts are shared, agreements on cooperation are made and joint plans are crafted.



# TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

Democracy is about peaceful conflict resolution and collaboration and, perhaps more importantly, about inclusive development and everyone playing by the same rules.

Our Democracy Schools focus specifically on developing this culture. We teach (future) leaders from political parties and civil society the knowledge and skills that they need to be democratic leaders.

Fostering democratic culture is a crucial part of NIMD's approach. In addition to

the Democracy Schools, we also host informal gatherings such as periodical Political Cafes (informal tea house and cous cous meetings), international peer-to-peer exchange visits for multiparty delegations, and trust building activities (dialogue platforms).

Through all of these activities, we invest in the next generation of political leadership. This is a crucial investment in order to achieve real political transformation towards more inclusive democracies.

## DEMOCRACY SCHOOLS HONDURAS

Honduras is facing serious difficulties in the quality of its democracy. The country is affected by corruption, organized crime, a lack of trust in its institutions, and (extreme) poverty. The political parties recognize the importance of training for their members, and therefore requested NIMD to start a Democracy School programme in the country.

The first Democracy School opened in 2015, with two-thirds of the participants coming from political parties and one-third from civil society networks. The school

aims to equip the students with the skills to 'listen in order to learn', 'engage in dialogue to come up with proposals' and 'participate to be able to build'.

These might seem easy-to-reach goals. However, in the reality of Honduras, the participants are facing daily challenges when it comes to putting their knowledge and skills into practice.

25% of the alumni were candidates for a position as Member of Parliament, Mayor or Councillor during the November 2017 general elections.



**DEMOCRACY STARTS WITH DIALOGUE.**



