

Can Iraq be a Democracy?

Tony White
Transactional Analyst

Australia as a world leader in the evolution of democracy

Australia has been a leader in the world in the evolution of democracy as a political system. However our earlier history was far from democratic. Chase et al(1999) state, "In 1870, Western Australians gained the right to elect 12 of the 18 members of the Legislative Council. Yet of the 15,474 men in the Swan River Colony, only 3000 with property qualifications were given the vote. While there were 9,610 females, some owning property, none could vote."(P3)

In 1889 the Constitution Act gave the colony a fully elected Legislative Assembly. Women were still denied the right to vote. The right for women in this state (Western Australia) to have the vote began in 1900 after a long and at times acrimonious battle with those men in authority. This was a remarkably progressive achievement and shows how much democracy is in the heart and minds of Australians. The only places in the world that gave women the right to vote around that time were:

Wyoming USA - 1869

Colorado USA - 1893

New Zealand - 1893

South Australia - 1894

Idaho USA - 1896

Western Australia - 1900

Also in 1902 women (non-indigenous) in the nation of Australia were given the vote in Federal elections. In addition Australia was the first nation in the world that allowed women to sit in their national parliament.

What is a democracy?

Democracy literally means rule by the people (from the Greek *damos*, "people," and *kratos*, "rule"). Britannica(2003) states that democracy is, "a form of government in which the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens, acting under procedures of majority rule, usually known as direct democracy...."

Often ancient Greece is seen as the birth of democracy. This to my mind is a dubious assertion at best if not just down right wrong. In that society women and slaves had no political rights or the vote. You cannot call a society a democracy if half of its population did not have the vote as was the case in Australia until the

early 1900s. It would seem that a more appropriate name for such political systems would be a patriarchal democracy (or for the sake of brevity called a "Patocracy").

I would even go further and state that a democracy must have all or at least the great majority of adults able to vote, PLUS those adults must also have other legal and social rights for the great majority of its members. For instance women were given the vote in 1900 (in WA) but it was not until 1920 that they were permitted to hold any real position of political power. It seems reasonable to conclude that a society is not truly democratic when at least half of its adult members cannot hold any real political power.

So prior to 1900 Australia was a patocracy and over the past 100 years we have evolved into what is now known as a modern democracy. That includes the vote for all adults as well as other legislative and social reforms in that time. This has included such changes as:

1920: Women allowed to sit in the State legislative Assembly and Legislative Council

1923: Women allowed to practice law (Women's Legal Status Act)

1926: First basic wage for women

1950: Female basic wage set at 75% of male's wage

1957: Women admitted as jurors as an equal to men (Jury Act)

1966: Married women permitted to be permanent government employees

1987: Equal Employment Opportunity Act

1992: Sex discrimination Act

Over the past 100 years, the above and other reforms have permitted us to evolve into what we are now. So it could be said that Western Australia evolved from a patocracy to a democracy between 1900 to about 1950.

A Developmental model of democracy

The above is suggesting a developmental model for the evolution of society. To sum it up one can cite the following equation:

Democracy = Patocracy + Feminism.

In this equation feminism is defined as women demanding and fighting for suffrage and equal political rights. Thus males loose some of their political power to females when a patocracy shifts to a democracy. In Maslow's heirarchy of needs this could be seen as a self actualised position. That is because the great majority of members in this culture (Australia) have experienced a long period of basic security and thus the society can evolve in to a patocracy and then into a democracy. If this should change - for instance there is a consistent series of terrorist attacks in this country then there is a change in the position on Maslow's

hierarchy of needs for the society.

Maslow's Hierarchy of needs is as follows:

- * Self-actualisation desires and yearnings.
- * Esteem hankerings.
- * Social yearnings.
- * Safety adherence.
- * Physiological, steady competence needs.

It works from the bottom up. First an individual (or a society) must have their basic physiological needs met. People need food, water and shelter. If these are met consistently over time then the individual/society begins to 'need' other things. Next comes a sense of safety, then a need for a social world, then a need for self esteem and finally a desire to self actualise.

It is being suggested here that societies follow the same hierarchy. A modern democratic society is probably at the level of esteem needs or self actualisation needs. We can of course move back down the hierarchy. The most obvious ways is if our basic safety or physiological needs are seriously threatened. Two examples would be war and sickness. This can explain one of the reasons why we are so sensitive to such things as AIDS and SARS. If there is a hugh epidemic of SARS then our society would devolve down from a democracy. You can not have a society which views men and women as politically equal if you do not have a society in the first place.

This then leads us to a further set of equations:

Democracy + war/sickness = patocracy

Patocracy + war/sickness = some non-democractic political structure (Feudalism, theocracy, monarchy, autocracy, and so on)

Thus we are left with a hierarchy of political structures:

Democracy

Patocracy

Non-democractic structures (e.g. Feudalism, theocracy, monarchy & autocracy).

It may indeed be possible to formulate a hierarchy in the non-democractic structures but that is the content of another article. (It should also be noted here that this is a culturally biased article. I am sure that there are many who live in say a theocracy like Iran who would believe that their society is the most evolved).

Devolution of society

As you can see I have identified the crucial link here between democracy and feminism (as I have defined it for the purposes of this article). You cannot have a

society where the great majority of adult members have the vote and equal political rights (Democracy) without women being organised to demand such rights for themselves (Feminism).

As I mentioned before societies can devolve as much as they can evolve. In societies where one's basic security and safety needs are in serious doubt then feminism rapidly moves down the list of relevant political agendas. In a war situation or if terrorist attacks become apparent on a regular basis then personal physical survival becomes the main focus of large numbers of individuals in a population. In such a situation the powerful in a society will simply assume control and for humans it seems safe to say that is the males who are both physically stronger and more warlike. A clear current example of this is Afghanistan who has been in a war setting for many years. In that country one hears of these 'warlords' who rule much of the country. One does hear of too many 'warladies'. History of course is also littered with similar scenarios. There have been a few instances where a woman/women have been in control in a society that has little basic physical security for its constituents, However I think it would be safe to say that at least 95% of the time it has been men.

Indeed if one needs more evidence for this we need not look any further than our own backyard. Since the Bali Bombing, Australians have allowed new laws which significantly increase the powers of the security services to arrest, search and interrogate people without our legal representation. These laws have now been passed with very little protest. This is in reaction to a terrorist(s) attack that did not even occur on Australian soil. Our society has begun to devolve in the direction from a democracy to an autocracy. What laws would Australians permit if there was 3 or 4 sequential terrorist attacks directly on Australian cities?

So for a patocracy to develop into a democracy there must be feminism or the females in a society must demand first suffrage and secondly demand laws that allow women to carry positions of true political power. This can only happen when large numbers of members of a society develop a sense of personal security over a number of decades. Therefore democracy and thus feminism are products of an affluent and secure society.

Iraq & Afghanistan

Obviously other nations have evolved in different ways to how we have. One example of this is how other societies have treated half of their members (women) and their political rights. Most notorious in recent times have been the Taliban. As we know the Taliban emerged as a force for social order in 1994 in southern Afghanistan. The social policies of the Taliban were extreme by current standards and included the near total exclusion of women from public life (including employment and education), the enforced wearing of the Burkha and so forth.

In Iran there have been similar social regulations. Consider this quote from Christiane Regelbrugge(2002):

"When the Iranian Revolution was over, Ayatollah Khomeini wasted no time in changing social laws, especially concerning the dress of women. The mandate of "hijab" requires every woman, regardless of religion to wear dark clothing that covers her whole body."

"Lastly, women know that male government leaders are very unlikely to release the strict enforcement of veil wearing, simply because it is the most apparent symbol of Muslim State Law. It is the last thing they would want to surrender.....This is easy to understand, as incredibly conservative leaders attempt to keep their values alive in a progressively liberal world."

Recent world events have demonstrated that Iraq has been of a similar vein in its treatment of women and others in a somewhat less than democratic way. For instance the mandate of 'hijab' has applied there as well. (The word 'hijab' comes from the Arabic word 'hajaba' which means to hide or conceal from view).

In addition I recently heard a television report which I assume to be true (but to check, one really needs a degree in Egyptology). It was stated that in Egypt there has not been a female leader for the past 2,000 years. Furthermore at this point Kuwait is a fully fledged patocracy. In that country men have the vote and women do not. The point of all this however, is that it seems a good proportion of these middle eastern cultures are very male dominated and this leads us to the problem at hand.

Due to the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq the United Nations and the US led "coalition of the willing" are now in the process of installing some form of modern democracy in these two countries. This is a very risky exercise as we in Australia (and those on the UK and USA) have spent the last 100 years evolving our particular type of democracy which is very very different to the political evolution of Afghanistan and Iraq.

If I recall correctly there are a group of indigenous Australians who had a political system installed on them 200 years ago by our British ancestors. The installed system was very different from the political system which they had evolved and now we have the "Sorry" book which some choose to sign. If we are not careful, in two generations there will be another "Sorry" book to sign for some Arabic cultures.

Conclusion - Can Iraq be a democracy?

My short answer to this question is, No. There is no way you are going to get a democracy in such a society, at the most you are going to get some form of patocracy. However even this is presumptuous as it is the powerful democratic nations of the world that are suggesting such a thing. In my view the only right that

our societies have, is that nations like Iraq do not evolve in such a way where they become a physical threat to our society. For instance if they choose to be an Islamic State then so be it. However I do understand that those two things - Islamic State & physical threat to democratic societies - are not always mutually exclusive. And that is when all the 'grey' areas begin to appear. If I knew the answer to those 'grey' areas then I would be a very rich person!

However Egypt and Saudi Arabia have coexisted at least relatively peacefully side by side with westernised democracies for a number of years. Some political structure like they have may be far more workable for countries like Afghanistan and Iraq.

Britannica(2003) states of Egypt:

"On Sept. 11, 1971, a new constitution for Egypt was approved by referendum. It proclaimed the Arab Republic of Egypt to be "a democratic, socialist state" with Islam as its state religion and Arabic as its national language. It recognised three types of ownership—public, cooperative, and private."

In addition Britannica(2003) states that Saudi Arabia is:

"... a Muslim and an Arab state,"

"Saudi Arabia's government is based on the law of Islam, the Shari'ah, derived from Muhammad's pronouncements and practices and from the traditions of Islam's first adherents. Muslim law prescribes civil as well as religious rights, duties, obligations, and responsibilities for both ruler and ruled. Law is revealed and not created, and it is interpreted by the *Ulam* (Æ, or learned religious men.

The person of the king combines legislative, executive, and judicial functions. As prime minister he presides over the Council of Ministers. This council is a legislative body, although it is also responsible for such executive and administrative matters as foreign and domestic policy, defence, finance, health, and education, which it administers through numerous separate agencies. Appointment to and dismissal from the council are prerogatives of the king. Major policy decisions are made by consensus, and opinion is sought primarily within the royal family...."

So it would seem that Saudi Arabia is a complex mixture of a theocracy, a monarchy and a patocracy. In Arabic countries there most often seems to be an inextricable link between religion and politics. Therefore all such countries must be a theocracy to some degree. In westernised democracies religion and politics are usually deliberately kept quite separate.

It seems to me that the Iraqi people are more likely to gain long term political stability if they are looking at a political structure that is more along the lines of other arabic or middle eastern nations rather than endeavouring to take on the political structure of a westernised democracy. At this point the nearest thing they will get to a democracy, is a patocracy and that will need to be combined with some form of theocracy.

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