

What is Democracy? Why Democracy?International Indian School, Dammam  
Democratic Politics) L-2 What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

1. What is democracy? What are its main features? \*

Democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people.

The main features of democracy are as follows:

- In a democracy, the final decision making power must rest with the people.
  - A democracy must be based on free and fair elections where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing.
  - In a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and each vote must have one value.
  - A democratic government rules within limits set by the constitutional law and citizens rights.
2. List the merits and demerits of democracy. (or) What are the arguments for and against democracy?

Merits: ( Arguments for democracy)

- \* A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.
- \* Democracy is based on consultation and discussion. This reduces the chances of rash or irresponsible decisions. Thus democracy improves the quality of decision making.
- \* Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts. Different groups can live with one another peacefully. In a diverse country like India, democracy keeps the country together.
- \* Democracy enhances the dignity of the citizens. It is based on the principle of political equality. The rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated are given the same status. People are the rulers themselves.
- \* Democracy is better than other forms of government because it allows us to correct its own mistakes.

There is room for public discussion on the mistakes committed by the government. Either the rulers have to change their decisions or the rulers can be changed.

Demerits: (Arguments against democracy)

- \* Leaders keep changing in a democracy. It leads to instability.
- \* Democracy is all about political competition and power-play. There is no scope for morality.
- \* So many people have to be consulted in a democracy that it leads to delays.
- \* Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people. It leads to bad decisions.
- \* Democracy leads to corruption for it is based on electoral competition.
- \* Ordinary people don't know what is good for them. They should not be given the right to take decisions.

What is Democracy? Why Democracy

3. What is meant by 'representative democracy'? Why does this form of government become necessary in our times?

Ans. The most common form that democracy takes in our times is that of a representative democracy (indirect democracy).

In this type of democracy the administration is run by the people's representatives. These representatives are elected by the people on the basis of universal adult franchise. The representatives make laws on behalf of the people.

Indirect democracy/Representative democracy becomes necessary in our times because -

- \* Modern democracies involve such a large number of people that it is physically impossible for them to sit together and take a collective decision.
- \* Even if they could, the citizen does not have the time, the desire or the skills to take part in all the decisions.

4. Why is democracy the most popular/prevalent form of government?

Democracy is better than other forms of government because-

- \* It offers better chances of taking good decisions.
- \* It respects peoples wishes and responds to their needs.
- \* Democracy alone provides a peaceful way to deal with conflicts and differences.
- \* It enhances the dignity of the citizens.
- \* Even if it makes mistakes it allows a way of correcting its mistakes.
- \* It is based on political equality and rule of law and respects the basic rights of citizens.

5. With the help of case studies and examples from different countries, explain the features or (bring out the significance) of democracy-

- In Pakistan General P. Musharraf led a military coup in 1999.
- He overthrew a democratically elected government and declared himself the 'Chief Executive' of the country.
- In 2002, he held a referendum that granted him a 5 year extension as President.
- In 2002, again he issues a Legal Framework Order. According to this order, the President can dismiss the national or provincial assemblies, which are elected bodies.

Thus the power to take final decision rests with army officials, and General Musbaraff, and none of them are elected by the people - This cannot be called people's rule -

"In a democracy the final decision making power must rest with those elected by the people".

- In China, elections are held every 5 years for electing the country's parliament (National People's Congress) which has the power to appoint the president of the country.

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# What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

- But before contesting elections, a candidate needs the approval of the Chinese Communist Party.
  - The government is always formed by the Communist Party.
- Thus in China, people do not have any real choice, as they have to choose the ruling party and the candidates approved by it.
- Since it independence in 1930, Mexico holds elections every six years to elect its President.
  - The country has never been under a military or dictatotr's rule.
  - Until 2000, every election was won by the PRI which was known to use many dirty tricks to win the elections.
  - Teachers forced parents to vote for PRI.
  - Media ignored the activities of the opposition except to criticize them.
- There was no way the ruling party could be defeated, even if people were against it. These are not fair elections.

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"A democracy must be based on free and fair elections where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing".

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- 'Democracy is closely linked to Universal Adult Franchise'- Yet there are many instances where equal right to vote is denied. For eg.
- In Saudi Arabia women do not have the right to vote.
- In Estonia the citizenship rules are such that it is difficult for the Russian minority to get the right to vote.
- In Fiji, the vote of an indigeneous Fiji has more value than that of an Indian Fijian.

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Democracy is based on the fundamental principle of political equality. There can be no discrimination among citizens on the basis of caste, class, sex, religion, language, place of birth etc.

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"In a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and each vote must have on value".

Since independence, Zimbabwe has been ruled by ZANU-PF. Elections have been held regularly and always won by ZANU-Pf.

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- Its leader, President Mugabe is said to use unfair practices in elections.
- His government has change the constitution several times to increase the powers of the President and make his less accountable.
- Opposition party workers are harassed. Public protest and demonstrations against the government are declared illegal.
- Television and radio are controlled by the government. The government harasses those journalists who go against it.
- The e3xample of Zimbabwe shows that popular governments can be undemocratic. Popular leaders can be autocratic .

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In a democracy, the state should respect some basic rights of citizens. The people should be free to have opinions and to express them, to form association, to protest etc. These rights must be protected by an independent judiciary. Every office bearer has to be accountable and respect the constitution and the law.

"A democratic government rules within limits set by constitutional law and citizens' rights".

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