

Democracy

Democracy is a form of government which is chosen by the people to work for their welfare and can be voted out by them.

Broader definition for Democracy

- It gives us a clear but minimal understanding of democracy and helps us to distinguish democracies from non- democracies.
- In a democracy every citizen must be able to play an equal role in decision making.
- A democratic decision involves consultation with and consent of all those who are affected by that decision.
- This can apply to a government or a family or any other organization. Thus, democracy is also a principle that can be applied to any sphere of life.
- In the countries which we call as democracy, all the people do not rule. A majority is allowed to take decisions on behalf of all the people. Even the majority does not rule directly. The majority of people rule through their elected representatives.

This becomes necessary because:

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

Features of Democracy

- Rulers elected by the people take all the major decisions.
- Elections offer a choice and fair opportunity to the people to change the current rulers.
- This choice and opportunity is available to all the people on an equal basis.
- The exercise of this choice leads to a government to be limited by basic rules of the constitution and citizens' rights.

Terminology

- **Democracy:** A form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people.

- **Universal Adult Franchise:** Any person who is above 18 years of age has the right to vote, irrespective of caste, colour, status, religion, etc.
- **Constitutional monarchy:** A government headed by a king or queen whose powers are limited by a constitution.
- **Non- democratic Government:** A form of government in which people do not elect their rulers and have no right in decision-making.
- **Minimal democracy:** A system of government in which citizens give teams of political leaders the right to rule in periodic elections.
- **Representative democracy :** A type of democracy founded on the principle of elected officials representing a group of people, as opposed to direct democracy.
- **Corruption :** An inducement to do wrong by bribery or other unlawful means.
- **Poverty :** Condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing and shelter are not being met.
- **Accountable government :** The government elected by the people and therefore responsible to them.
- **Dictatorship :** Under dictatorship all the powers are vested in a single person or in a group of people.

Transperhere Two Tales of Democracy

(i) Chile Salvador Allende was the President of Chile, a country in South America.

(ii) He was the founder leader of the socialist Party of Chile. He led the popular unity coalition to victory in the presidential election in 1970.

(iii) Allende was opposed to foreign companies taking away natural resources like copper from the country.

(iv) He had taken several policy decisions to help the poor and the workers.

(v) The landlords, the rich and the Church opposed his policies.

(vi) Some political parties in Chile also opposed his government.

Military Coup of 1973

(i) On the morning of 11th September, 1973, the military took over the Seaport.

(ii) The Defence Minister was arrested by the military when he arrived at his office.

(iii) The military commanders asked the President to resign but Allende refused to resign or leave the country.

(iv) The military surrounded the President's house and started bombing it, President Allende died in the military attack.

(v) A government elected by the people was overthrown by the military through conspiracy and violence.

(vi) General Augusto Pinochet led the Coup.

(vii) Pinochet became the President of the country and ruled it for the next 17 years.

(viii) From a Government elected by the people, the power shifted to the military officers.

(ix) The Government of USA was unhappy with Allende's policies, so they funded activities that led to the coup.

(x) A military dictatorship was established in Chile.

(xi) Pinochet's Government tortured and killed several of those who supported Allende and those who wanted democracy to be restored. These included General Alberto Bachelet of the Chilean Air Force and many others who had refused to join the Coup. General Bachelete's wife and daughter were put in prison and tortured.

(xii) More than 3,000 people were killed and many more were reported missing.

Restoration of Democracy in Chile

(i) Pinochet's military dictatorship came to an end after he decided to hold a referendum in 1988.

(ii) The people's vote was a decisive 'no' to Pinochet continuing in power.

(iii) After the referendum, Pinochet first lost his political powers and then his military powers.

Political Freedom was Restored in Chile

- (i) Four presidential elections have held, in different political parties have participated.
- (ii) The elected government ordered inquiries into Pinochet's rule, the inquiries showed that Pinochet's Government was not only brutal but also very corrupt.
- (iii) In January 2006, General Bachelet's daughter was elected President of Chile.
- (iv) She became the first woman to be a Defence Minister in Latin America.
- (v) In the elections, she defeated one of Chile's richest man.

Poland

- (i) In 1980, Poland was ruled by the Polish United Workers Party, one of the many communist parties that ruled in several countries of Europe at that time.
- (ii) In these countries no other political party was allowed to function.
- (iii) The people were not allowed to choose the leaders of the communist party or the government.
- (iv) Those who spoke against the leaders or the party or the government were put in prison.
- (v) The government in Poland was supported and controlled by the Soviet Union (USSR) a vast and powerful communist state.
- (vi) On 14th August, 1980, the workers of the Lenin Shipyard in city of Gdansk went on a strike.
- (vii) The strike began with a demand to take back a crane operator, a woman worker, who was unjustly dismissed from service.
- (viii) The strike was illegal because trade unions independent of the ruling party were not allowed in Poland.

- (ix) A former electrician of the Shipyard Lech Walesa joined the strikers. Walesa soon emerged as the leader of the striking workers.
- (x) The strike began to spread across the whole city. The workers wanted the right to form independent trade unions. They also demanded the release of political prisoners and an end to censorship on the press.
- (xi) The workers led by Walesa signed a 21-point agreement with the government that ended their strike.
- (xii) The government agreed to recognise the worker's right to form independent trade unions and their right to strike.
- (xiii) A new trade union called Solidarity was formed. It was the first time that an independent trade union was formed in any of the communist states.
- (xiv) Within a year Solidarity swept across Poland and had about one crore members.
- (xv) The government led by General Jaruzelski imposed Martial Law in December 1981.
- (xvi) There were widespread corruption and mismanagement in Poland.
- (xvii) Thousands of Solidarity members were put in prison.
- (xviii) Freedom to organise, protest and express opinions was once again taken away.
- (xix) This led to another wave of strikes again organised by Solidarity in 1988.
- (xx) This time, the Polish Government was weak as, the support from Soviet Union was uncertain and the economy was in decline.
- (xxi) Another round of negotiations took place with Walesa and resulted in an agreement in April 1989 for free elections.
- (xxii) Solidarity contested all the 100 seats of the Senate and won 99 of them.

(xxiii) In October 1990, Poland had its first presidential elections in which more than one party could contest.

(xxiv) Walesa was elected President of Poland.

Common Features between the Poland and Chile

(i) The people could not choose or change their rulers.

(ii) There was no real freedom, express one's opinions, form political associations and organise protests and political action.

(iii) The three democratic governments were different in their approach towards social and economic matters.

(iv) Allende preferred government control on big industries and interference.

(vi) Michelle stands somewhere in the middle on this issue. the economy.

(v) Walesa wanted the market to be free of government interference.

(vii) Power was exercised by governments elected by the people and not by the army, unelected leaders or any external power.

(viii) The people enjoyed some basic political freedoms.

Democracy

(i) Democracy is a form of government that allows people to choose their rulers.

(ii) Only leaders elected by people should rule the country.

(iii) People should have freedom to express views, freedom to organise and freedom to protest.

(iv) Democracy has expanded throughout the twentieth century. It did not spread evenly in all parts of the world.

(v) Democracy was established first in some regions and then spread to other regions. While a majority of countries are democratic today, there are still large parts of the world that are not democratic.

Justifications against Democracy

- Democracy is all about political competition and power play. There is no scope for morality.
- Leaders keep changing in a democracy. This leads to instability.
- 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 as it is based on electoral competition.
- Ordinary people don't know what is good for them; they should not decide anything.

Justification for Democracy

- Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens.
- Democracy improves the quality of decision-making.
- Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts.
- Democracy is better than other forms of government because it allows us to correct its own mistakes.
- A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.

The Changing Map of Democracy

(i) Some countries like Britain were already democratic in 1900.

(ii) Some became democratic in the 1950s, like India.

(iii) Democracy expanded rapidly between 1975 and 2000.

End of Colonialism

(i) For a very long time, most countries of Asia and Africa were colonies under the control of European nations.

(ii) Many of these countries became democracies immediately after Second World War in 1945.

(iii) India achieved independence in 1947 and established itself as a democracy.

(iv) Ghana was a British colony known as Gold Coast, it became independent in 1957 led by Kwame Nkrumah.

(v) After independence Nkrumah became the first Prime Minister and then the President of Ghana.

(vi) Like Ghana other African nations after independence also became democracies. But they could not remain democracies for long.

(vii) After 1980, democracy was revived in Latin America.

(viii) The disintegration of the Soviet Union accelerated this process. Poland too became democratic.

(ix) The Soviet Union broke down in 1991. The Soviet Union comprised fifteen Republics, and all the Soviet republics became independent and most of them became democracies.

(x) Pakistan and Bangladesh also made a transition from army rule to democracy in the 1990s.

(xi) In Nepal, the king gave up many of his powers to become a constitutional monarch to be guided by elected leaders.

(xii) By 2005 about 140 countries are holding multi party elections.

(xiii) Myanmar was one of the countries where the people could not express their views freely.

(xiv) In November, 2010, pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Ki released from house arrest

after 15 years. Pro-Junta Party (Ruling Party) won the election with landslide victory. It was the first election in 20 years.

(xv) For the first time, Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Ki stood for Parliament and won the election and took oath. She now has an official voice in the Myanmar Parliament.

Democracy at the Global Level

(i) International Organisation : There are many international organisations which partially perform the functions of an International Government though there is no single world government.

(ii) Examples of international organisations are:

(a) United Nations (UN), is a global association of nations of the world to help co-operation in international law, security, economic development and social equity.

(b) The United Nations has six main organs, viz, General Assembly, the Security Council, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Trusteeship Council.

(c) The United Nations has succeeded in achieving its primary objective. It has prevented large scale wars in many areas.

(d) There are seventeen specialised agencies at the United Nations. Some of the important agencies are International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) etc.

(e) UN Security Council is an organ of the United Nations and is responsible for maintaining peace and security among countries. The council has five permanent members-US, Russia, UK, France and China.

(f) International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank give money to governments.

(g) Present UN Secretary General is Ban Ki-Moon (South Korea).

Are These Institutions Democratic?

No these international institutions are not truly democratic because they are dominated by the rich and powerful countries. Smaller and third world countries have very little say in these organisations. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, USA appears to be the only super power. The American dominance affects the working of the international organisations.

Democracy Promotion

(i) USA is a big and powerful country and is also a democracy.

(ii) It is a self appointed guardian of democracy and interferes in the internal affairs of other countries in the name of strengthening and promoting democracy and dismantling non-democratic forms of government like dictatorship of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

The US alleged that Iraq possessed secret nuclear weapons, but when a UN team went to Iraq to search for such weapons, it did not find any. Still the US and its allies invaded Iraq, occupied it and removed Saddam Hussein from power in 2003. This war against Iraq was actually to gain control over the petroleum products of Iraq. The war was not authorised by UN Security Council and then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan said that the US war on Iraq was illegal.

5. What are the difficulties people face in a non-democratic country? Give answers drawing from the examples given in this chapter.

Answer:

The following are the difficulties people face in a non-democratic country.

No freedom for people to elect their leaders.

No freedom of speech and expression.

Censorship of press.

Single-party rule.

No say in government policies.

No freedom to form unions.

People suffer violence and oppression without any legal redress.

For example, Pinochet's military dictatorship in Chile tortured and killed several of those who wanted democracy to be restored. Another example is the communist government that ruled in several countries of East Europe in the 1980s. In these countries, people could not freely choose leaders. Those who spoke against the government were put in prison.

6. Which freedoms are usually taken away when a democracy is overthrown by the military?

Answer:

When democracy is overthrown by the military, the people of the country are deprived of many freedoms.

First of all, they lose the freedom of speech and expression and cannot say anything against the military government.

Secondly, they are not allowed to form political parties and workers' unions.

Thirdly, the people are deprived of their right to choose their own leader or change them.

7. Which of the following positions can contribute to democracy at the global level? Give reasons for your answer in each case.

a. My country gives more money to international institutions. Therefore, I want to be treated with more respect and exercise more power.

b. My country may be small or poor, but my voice must be heard with equal respect because these decisions will affect my country.

c. Wealthy nations will have a greater say in international affairs. They cannot let their interests suffer just because they are outnumbered by poor nations.

d. Big countries like India must have a greater say in international organisations.

Answer:

a. No, it does not contribute towards democracy at a global level because every democracy's basic principle is equality. Every country or its people should enjoy equal status and rights irrespective of it being poor or rich. Also, the amount of money the country contributes towards international institutions is not the yardstick that determines the power a country can have globally.

b. Yes, it does contribute towards democracy because it promotes a fundamental right-the right to freedom of speech and expression. When every person of the country utilises his/her right to express and be heard, he/she automatically supports democracy.

c. No, it does not lead the democracy at the global level because at a universal level, all the countries whether rich or poor are equal. There should be no distinctions between the countries and all should be treated at par. Also, wealthy nations are not entitled to special treatments.

d. No, it does not support democracy because geographical areas or the size of the country cannot be the criteria to determine the superiority of that country.

8. Here are three opinions expressed in a television debate on the struggle for democracy in Nepal. Which of these do you agree with and why?

Guest 1: India is a democracy. Therefore, the Indian government must support the people of Nepal who are struggling against the monarchy and democracy.

Guest 2: That is a dangerous argument. We would be in the same position as the US was in Iraq. Remember, no outside force can promote democracy.

Guest 3: But why should we bother about the internal affairs of another country? We should be worried about our business interests there, not about democracy.

Answer:

The opinion of Guest 1 can be easily agreed with.

Being a democracy, India has to support the democratic aspirations of the Nepali people. The Government of India is within its rights to declare support for those who are struggling for the establishment of a democratic government. However, there has to be recognition of the fact that no country can supplant democracy in another country. The push has to come from the people of that particular nation.