

What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

- Meaning and Features of Democracy
- Importance of Democracy
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What is Democracy?

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

- Myanmar where the army rules, Dictator Pinochet's rule in Chile, or President Nkrumah's rule in Ghana was not democratic. They were not chosen by the people.
- Hereditary kings, like the king of Nepal or Saudi Arabia, are also not democratic rulers. They rule because they were born into noble families.

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

- In Pakistan, President Musharraf had the power to dismiss national and state assemblies; so the final powers rest with the army and the General himself. We cannot call it a democracy. Now Pakistan has an elected government.

Democracy must be based on a free and fair election where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing.

For example, in Mexico elections have been held every six years since 1980. But the same party, PRI, has won the elections. Obviously, there has been rigging and malpractices, with freedom denied to the opposition. This is not what a democracy should be.

In a democracy, people's will is ascertained by each adult citizen having one vote and each vote has one value. Democracy is based on the fundamental principle of political equality.

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

- A democratic government cannot do what it likes after winning the elections. It has to respect certain basic rules and is accountable not only to the people but also to other independent officials.

The Pillars of Democracy are The Sovereignty of the people, Government based upon the consent of the government, Majority rule, Minority rights, Guarantee of basic human rights, Free and Fair elections, Equality before the law, Constitutional limits on government, Values of tolerance, Pragmatism, Cooperation and Compromise.

Why Democracy?

Points Against

There has been a criticism of democracy by various people. The charges are that:

- It creates instability by changing its leaders frequently.
- Democracy is about power play and political competition. There is no scope for morality.
- So many people have to be consulted before any issue is resolved. It leads to delay.
- Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people.

- It leads to corruption for it is based on electoral corruption.
- Ordinary people do not know what is good for them, so decision-making should not be left to them.

Alternative to Democracy

To overcome political instability and legislative gridlock associated with democratic rule, expansions of executive power and limits on democratic freedoms are been looked for.

An exceptional example is that of Russia's transition from unstable democracy in the 1990s to economic growth and political stability.