

What is Democracy? Why Democracy? | Easy Notes

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Introduction:

In civics, we generally study about the political system, institutions, people's rights and freedom. Similarly, Last year, you learnt about the basic principles in the [preamble](#), Laws and Indian Constitution. So you would have an idea what forces help in running the government. This year, you have to understand what kind of government works in different places. Also, the meaning and significance of the most effective form of government.

What is Democracy?

- [Democracy](#) is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people.
- It has several minimal **features**:–
 1. **Decision making power:** The *decision making power* rests in the hands of those leader who are elected by the people of the country.
 2. **Different choices and fair opportunity:** Elections in a democratic country are conducted in a *free and fair* manner. Whereby, leaders frequently win or lose the votes.
 3. **Choice on equal basis:** In democracy, each adult citizen enjoys voting rights which are based on the principle of *"one vote, one value."*
 4. **Rule of Law:** Lastly, a democratic government *rules within the limits* set by constitutional law and citizens' rights.
- To understand these features better, let's read some **examples of different countries**:–

Pakistan:

- In October 1999, **General Pervez Musharraf** led a military coup and overthrew a democratically elected government.
- After that, he declared himself the 'Chief Executive' of the country. (Remember, people did not elect him.) Later, he changed his designation to President.
- In 2002, he held a referendum that granted him a five year extension. However, according to human rights organizations and democracy activists, the referendum was based on malpractices

and fraud.

- In the same year, he issued '**Legal Framework Order**'.
 - This order made such amendments in the constitution that placed the military officers on the top and gave the President the right to dismiss the national and provincial assemblies.
 - Moreover, the elected representatives had limited powers and they could not take final decision.
- Thus, we can say, there was an absence of the first feature of democracy.

China:

- China conducts regular elections (in every five years).
- It has a parliament, called Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui (National People's Congress).
- The N.P.C has the power to appoint the president of the country.
- For contesting elections, candidates are required to fulfill the criteria which is as follows:-
 - The membership of the Chinese Communist Party or eight smaller parties allied to it.
- There is only 'the Communist party' that forms the government and rules the country.
- So, in China, there is no electoral competition which must be there in any democratic country.

Mexico:

- Mexico holds elections after every six years to elect its President.
- Here, different political parties could contest elections.
- However, PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) is the only party which successfully won several elections.
 - **Note:** In Spanish, **PRI** stands for **Partido Revolusjo-narjo Institus-jo-nal**.
- The reason for performing well in every elections was the use of dirty tricks.
 - All the government officials and Media had to work in favor of PRI.
 - **For example:** Teachers used to force parents to vote for the PRI and Media often ignored the activities of opposition parties.
 - Even a last minute shift in the polling booths was used as a trick to not let those people vote who were reluctant to vote PRI.
- Hence, again this system does not contain the second feature of democracy.

Saudi Arabia, Estonia and Fiji:

- Until 2015, in Saudi Arabia women did not have the right to vote.
- Estonia has made its citizenship rules in such a way that people belonging to Russian minority find it difficult to get the right to vote.
- In Fiji, the electoral system is such that the vote of an indigenous Fiji has more value than that of an Indian-Fijian.

Zimbabwe:

- In Zimbabwe, Africa, ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front) led the government under the leadership of [Robert Mugabe](#) from 1990 to 2013.
- Again from 2018 to till now, the country is governed by the same party under [Emmerson Mnangagwa](#)

(current President of Zimbabwe).

- Actually, some of the earlier party leaders led the freedom struggle and became popular.
- President Mugabe was one of them who later used unfair practices in elections and successfully won in every election.
- In addition to that, his government changed the constitution several times to increase the power of the President and make it less accountable.
- Moreover, the government harassed opposition parties, media and pressurised judges.
- Since, a country does not have the fourth feature i.e. rule of law and respect for rights, it is non-democratic country.

Why Democracy?

Many people believe that democracy has all those features which any citizen would require to live a dignified life. Yet, not all people admire a democratic form of government and therefore, give arguments against it.

Arguments against Democracy:

1. **It creates instability:** Leaders keep changing in a democracy. This leads to instability.
2. **Lack of morality:** Democracy is all about political competition and power play. There is no scope for morality.
3. **Delays in decision making:** It requires consultation of many people that leads to delays.
4. **Faulty decision making of leaders:** Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people. It leads to bad decisions.
5. **Promotes Corruption:** Democracy leads to corruption for it is based on electoral competition.
6. **People lacking in right decisions:** Due to ignorance, ordinary people often don't know what is good for them; they should not decide anything.

Arguments for Democracy:

1. **Accountable form of government:** The Democracy is better than any other form of government in responding to the needs of the people.
2. **It improves the quality of decision making:** Democratic decisions always involve many persons, discussions and meetings which reduces the chances of rash or irresponsible decisions.
3. **Accommodate social diversity:** Democracy provides a peaceful method to deal with differences and conflicts.
4. **Enhance the dignity:** Democracy helps in enhancing the dignity of citizens as it has principles like freedom and rights.
5. **It provides room for correction:** It is better form of government because it allows us to correct its own mistakes. There is a space for public discussion on these mistakes.

Hence, It is clear that Democracy is not a solution but yet it has those features which can create a condition for the better functioning of government. Thus, we can conclude it is a better form of government.

Broader Meanings Of Democracy:

We discussed the minimal features of democracy. Now let's discuss the **types of democracy**.

Direct Democracy or Popular Democracy

1. People participate in meeting and govern the country directly.
2. It is possible only in a small country (in terms of population).
For Example: Greek city-state of Athens.

Representative Democracy or Indirect Democracy

1. People elect the representatives who govern the country on the behalf of people.
2. This form of government is common in big countries (in terms of population) like India.

Category

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