

Chapter 2 What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

1. Here is some information about four countries. Based on this information, how would you classify each of these countries. Write 'democratic', 'undemocratic' or 'not sure' against each of these.

(a) Country A: People who do not accept the country's official religion do not have a right to vote.

(b) Country B: The same party has been winning elections for the last twenty years.

(c) Country C: Ruling party has lost in the last three elections.

(d) Country D: There is no independent election commission.

Answer:

(a) Undemocratic

(b) Not sure

(c) Democratic

(d) Undemocratic

2. Here is some information about four countries. Based on this information, how would you classify each of these countries. Write 'democratic', 'undemocratic' or 'not sure' against each of these.

(a) Country P: The parliament cannot pass a law about the army without the consent of the Chief of Army.

(b) Country Q: The parliament cannot pass a law reducing the powers of the judiciary.

(c) Country R: The country's leaders cannot sign any treaty with another country without taking permission from its neighbouring country.

(d) Country S: All the major economic decisions about the country are taken by officials of the central bank which the ministers cannot change.

Answer:

(a) Undemocratic

(b) Democratic

(c) Undemocratic

(d) Undemocratic

3. Which of these is not a good argument in favour of democracy? Why?

(a) People feel free and equal in a democracy.

(b) Democracies resolve conflict in a better way than others.

(c) Democratic government is more accountable to the people.

(d) Democracies are more prosperous than others.

Answer:

(d) Democracies are more prosperous than others.

This is not a good argument as the prosperity of a country cannot be determined through its form of government but through its economic condition. For example, a democratic country like

India is still a developing country, while a country following monarchy rule is economically strong.

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4. Each of these statements contains a democratic and undemocratic element. Write out the two separately for each statement.

(a) A minister said that some laws have to be passed by the parliament in order to conform to the regulations decided by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

(b) The Election Commission ordered re-polling in a constituency where large-scale rigging was reported.

(c) Women's representation in the parliament has barely reached 10 percent. This led women's organisations to demand one-third seats for women.

Answer:

(a) Democratic: Passing of the laws by the Parliament.

Undemocratic: Conforming to the regulations decided by the World Trade Organisation.

(b) Democratic: The order to re-poll by the Election Commission.

Undemocratic: large scale rigging was reported

(c) Democratic: Demand by Women's Organisation to reserve one-third seats for women.

Undemocratic: Women's representation in parliament is less than 10 percent.

5. Which of these is not a valid reason for arguing that there is a lesser possibility of famine in a democratic country?

(a) Opposition parties can draw attention to hunger and starvation.

(b) Free press can report suffering from famine in different parts of the country.

(c) Government fears its defeat in the next elections.

(d) People are free to believe in and practice any religion.

Answer:

(d) "People are free to believe in and practise any religion" is not a valid reason because there are lesser chances for famine to take place in a democratic country. This is because practicing of religion is not at all related to famine.

6. There are 40 villages in a district where the government has made no provision for drinking water. These villagers met and considered many methods of forcing the government to respond to their needs. Which of these is not a democratic method?

(a) Filing a case in the courts claiming that water is part of the right to life.

(b) Boycotting the next elections to give a message to all parties.

(c) Organising public meetings against the government's policies.

(d) Paying money to government officials to get water.

Answer:

(d) Paying money to government officials to get water is an undemocratic method.

7. Write a response to the following arguments against democracy.

(a) Army is the most disciplined and corruption-free organisation in the country. Therefore

the army should rule the country.

(b) Rule of the majority means the rule of ignorant people. What we need is the rule of the wise, even if they are in small numbers.

(c) If we want religious leaders to guide us in spiritual matters, why not invite them to guide us in politics as well. The country should be ruled by religious leaders.

Answer:

(a) Though the army the most disciplined and corruption-free organisation in the country, however, it cannot be justified that they should rule the country. Primarily, because they do not form a democratic government i.e. are not elected by the people. Secondly, people will not be allowed to voice their opinion or expression as all their fundamental rights would be curtailed. Also, there would be no assurance that the army cannot turn into a ruthless dictator at any point of their rule, making the life of the people difficult. For example, the people of Chile suffered under the rule of General Augusto Pinochet.

(b) Such a thing would be against the principle of the Universal Adult Franchise, wherein every person above the age of 18 yrs in our country irrespective of religion, caste, sex, socio-economic background, etc. has the right to vote. Everyone has the right to participate equally in the formation of the government. Therefore ignoring some sections of society would be unfair. Moreover, wise men need not be necessarily good administrators.

(c) Those who say that the country should be ruled by religious leaders are making a very risky statement. Because in a multi-religious country bringing religion into politics can cause serious conflict among the people. Moreover, religious leaders can bring trouble to the country due to their mutual conflicts of ideologies. Besides, many even do not have any experience in administration. Thus, it is very necessary for them to run their own religious institutions and need not meddle in the political affairs of the country.

8. Are the following statements in keeping with democracy as a value? Why?

(a) Father to daughter: I don't want to hear your opinion about your marriage. In our family children marry where the parents tell them to.

(b) Teacher to student: Don't disturb my concentration by asking me questions in the classroom.

(c) Employee to the officer: Our working hours must be reduced according to the law.

Answer:

(a) The statement made is an undemocratic statement as the girl is being denied an opportunity to voice her opinion and choose her partner. As per our Constitution, every citizen who is 18 or above has the right to marry according to his/her choice.

(b) The statement made is undemocratic as the student is being denied the right to ask questions/clear his doubts. The best the teacher can do is to ask the student to ask his query at the end of the lecture; however, stopping him from doing so is incorrect.

(c) The statement made is a democratic statement because here the employees are asking for their fundamental rights. Within the norms of the company, the employees are always entitled to ask or request their office for something.

9. Consider the following facts about a country and decide if you would call it a democracy. Give reasons to support your decision.

(a) All the citizens of the country have the right to vote Elections are held regularly.

(b) The country took a loan from international agencies. One of the conditions for the given loan was that the government would reduce its expenses on education and health.

(c) People speak more than seven languages but education is available only in one language, the language spoken by 52 percent people of the country.

(d) Several organisations have given a call for peaceful demonstrations and nationwide strikes in the country to oppose these policies. The government has arrested these leaders.

(e) The government owns the radio and television in the country. All the newspapers have to get permission from the government to publish any news about the government's policies and protests.

Answer:

(a) Two important features of democracy are regular elections and universal adult franchise.

(b) Undemocratic: because it is undemocratic action to reduce expenses at the cost of the people.

(c) The national language can be a single language because such a concept will bring about national integrity but other languages also should be encouraged to cultivate in their respective regions.

(d) Democracy provides people the right to strike or the right to free speech and demonstrations.

(e) A very important part of democracy is the freedom of the press. Therefore, the total control of media shows that there is no freedom of speech and expression and the right to speak against the government.

Thus, though the country is democratic in some manners, it is also undemocratic in some ways.

10. Write an essay on 'Democracy and Poverty' using the information given in this report but using examples from India.

Answer:

Democracy and poverty have been inextricably linked in India ever since her birth. The political independence of our country had been achieved through the mass participation of the rural poor in the national movement. However, and unfortunately, since then this rural poor mass of the Indian population has seen its influence shrink in national politics.

A decade by decade, India has cultivated its resources and added to its national financial wealth, the rich have grown richer, and the poor have grown abysmally poorer. We have the

distinction of being the largest democracy in the world, but we are also one of the world's poorest countries, with gaping economic cleavages within our society.

The inequality of income is a concern that gets reflected directly in the operation of the democratic process of our republic. Research has firmly established the fact that though the majority of Indian voters come from the rural Indian hinterland, their influence on their elected representatives and on the whole, on the process of national policymaking is shrinking with each passing year. On the other hand, the richer sections of our society, though they do not necessarily vote or have any discernible concern for their civic responsibilities, exercise leverage on the policymaking in this country grossly disproportionate to their actual size in the population.

Moreover, the culture of corporate funding of political parties has fast spawned its offspring in the realms of the government establishment. It has made political parties and their leaders less dependent on their actual electorate and has allowed them to ignore the real concerns of the public like agrarian reforms, fine-tuning of the Public Distribution System, agricultural subsidies, and educational reforms.

To encapsulate, as we take pride in us being the largest democracy in the world, it is also necessary to recognise and act on the fact that the phenomenon of gross economic inequalities is putting a major limitation on its workability.