

What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

Q1. Here is some information about the 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:** The Ruling party has lost in the last three elections.
- d. Country D:** There is no independent election commission.

Answer.

- a. Country A: Undemocratic
- b. Country B: Not sure
- c. Country C: Democratic
- d. Country D: Undemocratic

Q2. 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. Country P: Undemocratic
- b. Country Q: Democratic
- c. Country R: Undemocratic
- d. Country S: Undemocratic

Q3. 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 is not a good argument in favour of democracy, as there are many countries such as Sri Lanka, India that have been elected to democracy but are not prosperous where other countries such as China or Saudi Arabia which have communist and monarchical rule respectively, are more prosperous. The prosperity of any country depends on the right policies of the government. It also depends on the availability of natural resources along with the form of government. Democracy cannot guarantee prosperity.

Q4. 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 parliament has barely reached 10 per cent. This led women's organisations to demand one-third seats for women.

Answer.

- a. Democratic element – A minister said that some laws have to be passed by the parliament. Undemocratic element – conform to the regulations decided by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).
- b. Democratic element – The Election Commission ordered re-polling in a constituency. Undemocratic element – large-scale rigging was reported.
- c. Democratic element – women's organisations to demand one-third seats for women. Undemocratic element – Women's representation in parliament has barely reached 10 per cent.

Q5. 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 practise any religion.

Answer.

Option D, The statement, 'People are free to believe in and practice any religion,' is not a valid reason for arguing that there is a lesser possibility of famine in a democratic country.

Q6. 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 need. 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 not a democratic method.

Q7. Write a response to the following arguments against democracy:

- a. The 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. The Army is a disciplined organization. However, it is unfair if the army is not elected by the army's citizens, and therefore it would be an undemocratic practice.
- b. The rule of the majority is not the rule of the ignorant. Wisdom is subjective, and the government is run by people who know law and order.
- c. Religion and politics are two different things. While religion can guide someone to religious matters, it cannot be a guide to anyone for politics, which is an important segment of a nation.

Q8. 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 does not hold with democracy as a value, since the daughter is not allowed to express her opinion.
- b. The statement does not hold with democracy as a value, because students are not allowed to ask questions that are their right.
- c. The statement keeping with democracy as law, as the employee gives his opinion for his authority under the law.

Q9. Consider the following facts about a country and decide if you would call it a democracy. Give reasons to support your decision.

1. All the citizens of the country have the right to vote. Elections are held regularly.
2. The country took loans from international agencies. One of the conditions for giving loan was that the government would reduce its expenses on education and health.
3. People speak more than seven languages but education is available only in one language, the language spoken by 52 per cent people of that country.
4. Several organisations have given a call for peaceful demonstrations and nationwide strikes in the country to oppose these policies. Government has arrested these leaders.
5. 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.

1. This is democracy because only a democratic setup allows the right to vote and elections in regular time periods.
2. A democratic country has to look after the welfare of its people. The condition of reducing expenditure on health and education is against the welfare of the people.
3. In a democracy, education is available in all languages because it is a basic right. The official language can be the language of most people.
4. In democracy, people have the right to express their opinions in a peaceful manner. This is undemocratic behaviour.
5. It is undemocratic in nature because freedom of the press and media is a must in a democracy. If the government owns radio and television then freedom of the press is violated.