
What is democracy? Why democracy?

Question 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.

Answer (a) Undemocratic

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

Answer (b) Not sure

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

Answer (c) Democratic

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

Answer (d) Undemocratic

Question 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.

Answer (a) Undemocratic

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

Answer (b) Democratic

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

Answer (c) Undemocratic

(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 (d) Undemocratic

Question 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: Option '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 which opted for democracy but not prosperous where other countries such as China or Saudi Arabia which have communist and monarchy rule respectively are more prosperous. The prosperity of any country depends on the correct policies of government. It also depends on the availability of natural resources not with the form of government. Democracy can't guarantee prosperity.

Question 4 Each of these statements contains a democratic and an 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).

Answer (a): A minister said that some laws have to be passed by the parliament – Democratic element
to the regulations decided by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). – Undemocratic element

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

Answer (b): The Election Commission ordered re-polling in a constituency – Democratic element
large-scale rigging was reported – Undemocratic element

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

Answer (c): This led women's organisations to demand one-third seats for women. Democratic element
Women's representation in the parliament has barely reached 10 per cent. – Undemocratic element

Question 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 practise any religion.

Answer: Option 'd' is not a valid reason for arguing that there is a lesser possibility of famine in a democratic country. This is because practising a religion has nothing to do with preventing famine.

Question 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 need.

Which of these is **not** a democratic method?

- (a) Filing a case in the courts claiming that water is part of right to life.
- (b) Boycotting the next elections to give a message to all parties.
- (c) Organising public meetings against government's policies.
- (d) Paying money to government officials to get water.

Answer: Option 'd', which advocates paying the government officials money, is an undemocratic method.

Question 7 Write a response to the following arguments against democracy:

- (a) Army is the most disciplined and corruption-free organisation in the country. Therefore 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 democracy is the government elected by the people, from among the people themselves. The Army is integral in protecting the country, but it is not elected by the people; hence, it cannot form a democratic government. The second statement is not true as all people are intelligent to some extent. The third statement is dangerous because bringing religion into politics can cause serious conflict.

Question 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.

Answer (a): This statement of father is undemocratic as every adult has right to choose their life partner. The father does not have right to impose their choice on daughter.

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

Answer (b): This statement also is not under democratic setup. The student have right to ask question. This is undemocratic if his right is denied.

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

Answer (c): The third statement is democratic as it calls for a rule of law which is beneficial for the employees.

Question 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 right to vote. Elections are held regularly.

Answer (a): This is democracy as only democratic setup allows right to vote and also election at regular time period.

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

Answer (b): A democratic country has to look after the welfare of its people. The condition of reducing of expenses on health and education is against the welfare of the people.

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

Answer (c): In democracy, education is available in all languages as it basic right. Official language can be the language of majority of people.

(d) Several organisations have given a call for peaceful demonstrations and nation-wide strikes in the country to oppose these policies. Government has arrested these leaders.

Answer (d): In a democracy people have right to express their opinion in peaceful manner. It is undemocratic behaviour.

(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 government's policies and protests.

Answer (e): This is undemocratic nature as in democracy freedom of press and media is must. If government own radio and television then freedom of press violated.

Question 10: In 2004 a report published in USA pointed to the increasing inequalities in that country. Inequalities in income reflected in the participation of people in democracy. It also shaped their abilities to influence the decisions taken by the government. The report highlighted that:

- If an average Black family earns \$ 100 then the income of average White family is \$ 162. A White family has twelve times more wealth than the average Black family.
- In a President's election 'nearly 9 out of 10 individuals in families with income over \$ 75,000 have voted. These people are the top 20% of the population in terms of their income. On the other hand only 5 people out of 10 from families with income less than \$ 15,000 have voted. They are the bottom 20% of the population in terms of their income.
- About 95% contribution to the political parties comes from the rich. This gives them opportunity to express their opinions and concerns, which is not available to most citizens.
- As poor sections participate less in politics, the government does not listen to their concerns – coming out of poverty, getting job, education, health, car and housing for them. Politicians hear most regularly about the concerns of business persons and the rich.

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

Answer:

Attempt this question on your own.