

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY ?

A Simple Definition

One simple factor common to all democracies : the government is chosen by the people. Thus a simple definition : democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are elected by the people.

This simple definition is not adequate. It reminds us that democracy is people's rule. But if we use this definition in an unthinking manner, we would end up calling almost every government that holds an election a democracy. That would be very misleading. Every government in contemporary world wants to be called a democracy, even if it is not so. That is why we need to carefully distinguish between a government that is a democracy and one that pretends to be one. We can do so by understanding each word in this definition carefully and spelling out the features of a democratic government.



Features of Democracy

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

Who are **the rulers** in this definition ? Which officials must be elected for any government to be called a democracy ? Which decisions may be taken by non—elected officials in a democracy ?

What kind of **election** constitutes a democratic election ? What conditions must be fulfilled for an election to be considered democratic ?

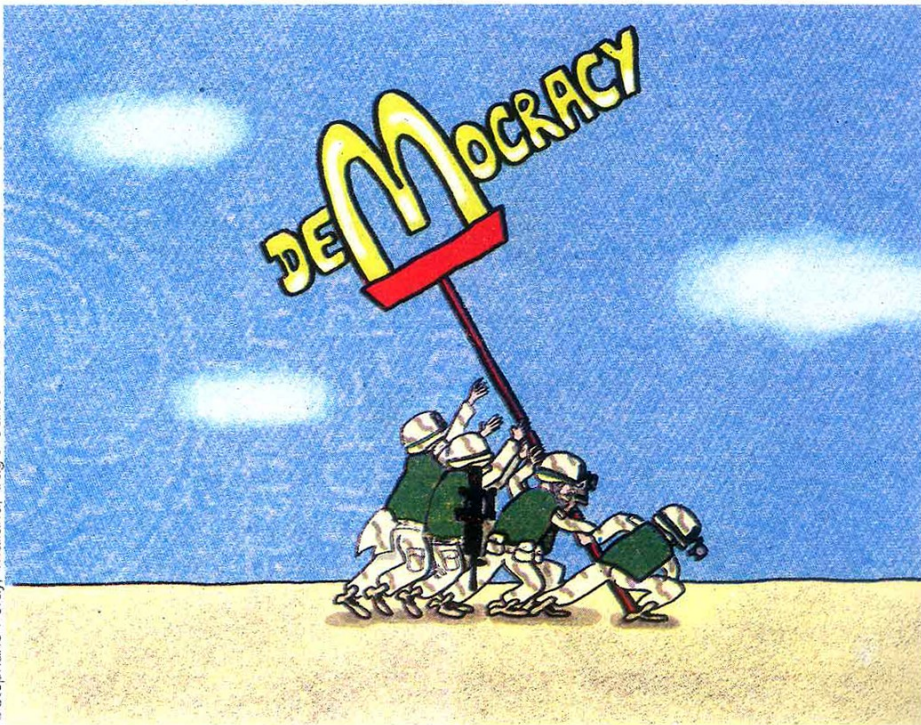
Who are **the people** who can elect the rulers or get elected as rulers ? Should this include every citizen on an equal basis ? Can a democracy deny some citizens this right ?

Finally, what kind of a **form of government** is democracy ? Can elected rulers do whatever they want in a democracy ? Or must a democratic government function with some limits ? Is it necessary for a democracy to respect some rights of the citizens ?



This cartoon was drawn when elections were held in Iraq with the presence of US and other foreign powers. What do you think this cartoon is saying? Why is 'democracy' written the way it is?

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Democracy — where tear and fair elections must be held — is being forced on Iraq by the US and its allies. There are no “free” and “fair” elections. On the other hand American Forces, on the name of promotion of Democracy are trying to make way for American Multinational Companies in countries who are not allowing them. Here the symbol M stands for McDonald's (With the expansion of McDonald's into many international markets, the company has become a symbol of globalization and the spread of the American way of life. Its prominence has also made it a frequent topic of public debates about obesity, corporate ethics and consumer responsibility.<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McDonald's>), with the arrival of American forces in Iraq, they have cleared the way for McDonald's and other MNCs also.



Syria is a small west Asian country. The ruling Ba'ath Party and some of its small allies are the only parties allowed in that country. Do you think this cartoon could apply to China or Mexico? What does the crown of leaves on democracy signify?

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The cartoon suggests that there is no true democracy in Syria. Yes, it would suit China and Mexico also where no opposition parties are allowed to contest election. Crown of leaves — It is a symbol of victory. In Greece the reward to the winner was this crown. Here the crown suggests that 'democracy' has won and demands justice, but the one party rule is denying this right to the people of Syria.



Worry Not. All I am doing is trying to Restore Democracy with FREE and FIRE Elections – Musharraf

Major Decisions by Elected Leaders

General Pervez Musharraf overthrew a democratically elected government in 1999 and declared himself the Chief Executive, changed his designation to President, held a referendum in 2002 that granted him five year extension. In August 2002 he issued a 'Legal Framework Order', which amended the constitution and allowed President to dismiss the national or provincial assemblies. National Security Council dominated by military officials to supervise the work of the civilian cabinet. Elections were held for national and state assemblies, but the final power rests with military officers and General Musharraf himself.

read
the
cartoon

This cartoon was drawn in the context of Latin America. Do you think it applies to the Pakistani situation as well? Think of other countries where this could apply? Does this happen sometimes in our country as well?

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This cartoon suggests that 'democracy' is in the hands of the rich. They control the country. If there is no awareness among the people, they can be easily influenced by the use of money, as well as their votes. Thus, affecting the Election results as well as Government Policies with the help of Money. This is the case in our country. Our country laws restrict the free use of money in elections, but overall we can say that Money plays an important role in deciding the outcomes of elections, even in our country.

Yes, it applies to Pakistan. Other countries are Myanmar, Iraq, where

read
the
cartoon

This cartoon was titled 'Building Democracy' and was first published in a Latin American publication. What do moneybags signify here? Could this cartoon be applied to India?

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Pakistan under General Musharraf should not be called a democracy. People may have elected their representatives to the national and provincial assemblies but those elected representatives are not really the rulers. The power to take final decision rests with army officials and with General Musharraf, and none of them are elected by the people.



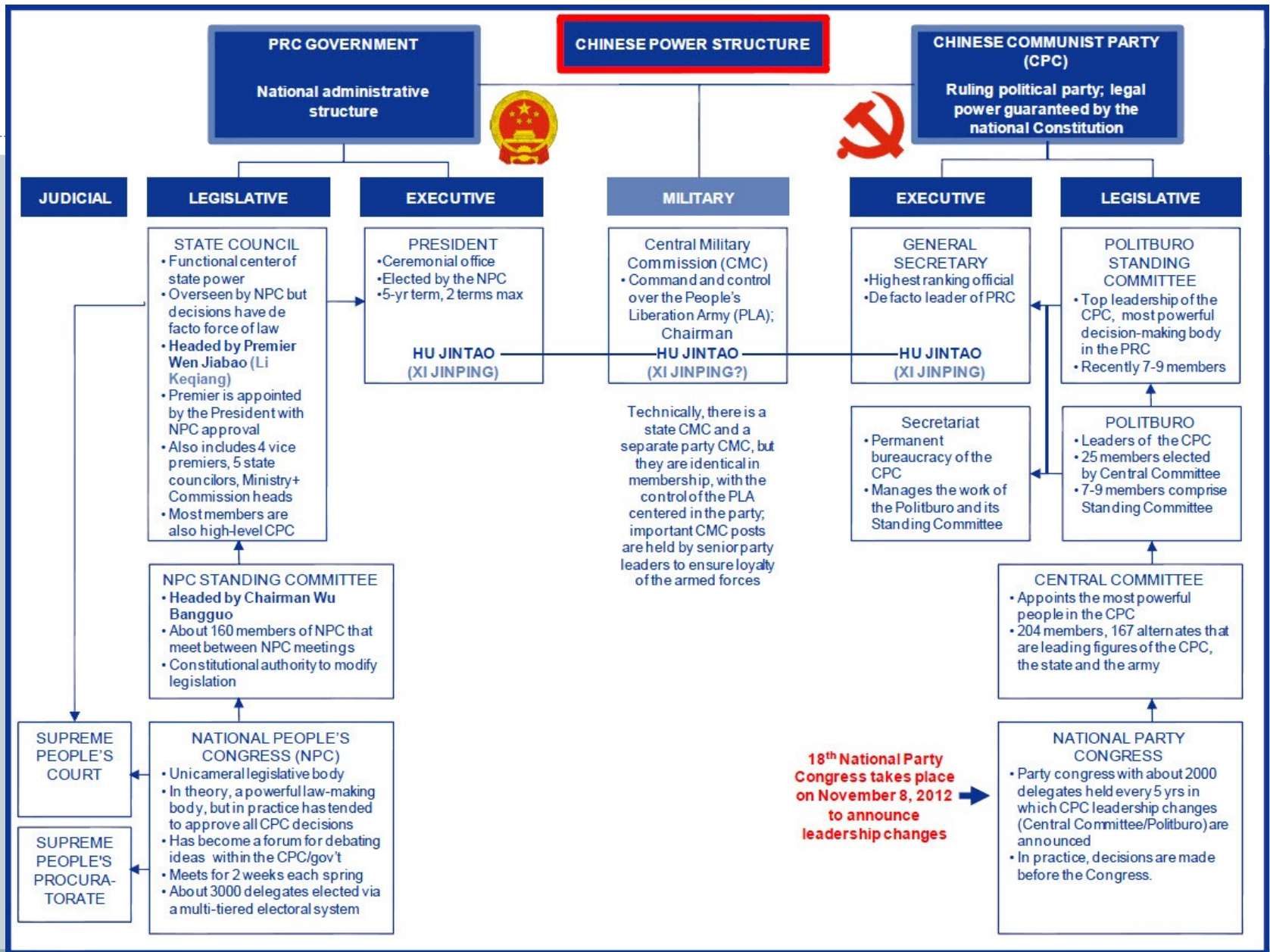
DEMOCRACY

The illusion that you are important in the grand scheme of things when in fact you are only relevant just before the election.

Fiv4Fiv.com

This happens in many dictatorships and monarchies. They formally have an elected parliament and government but the real power is with those who are not elected. This cannot be called people's rule.

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



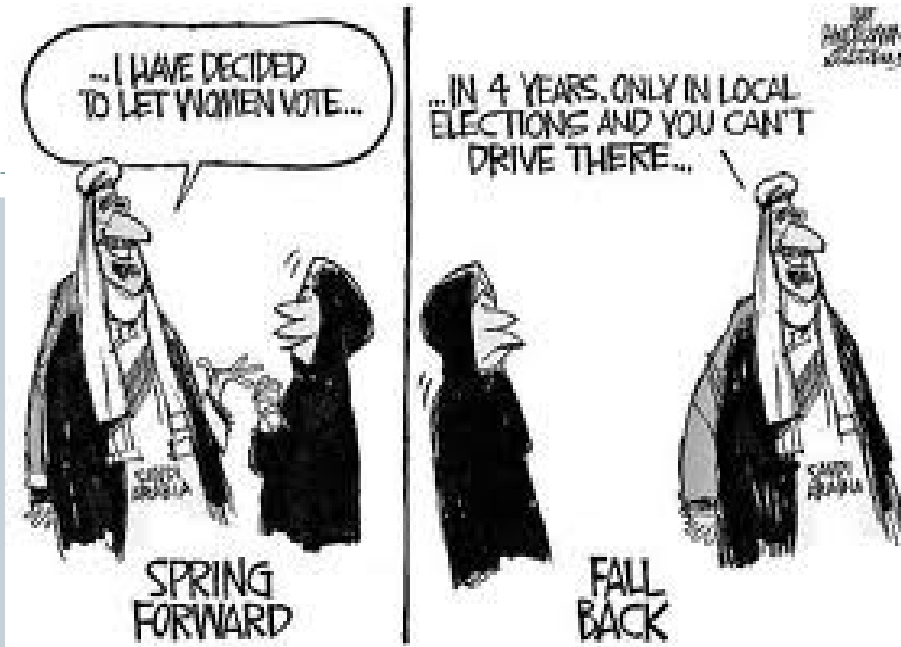


Since its independence Mexico holds Presidential elections regularly, has never been under military or dictator's rule. In Mexico until 2000 every election was won by PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), opposition parties did contest elections. The PRI was known to use many dirty tricks to win elections. All those who were employed in govt. offices had to attend its party meetings. Teachers of govt. schools used to force parents to vote for the PRI. Media largely ignored the activities of opposition political parties except to criticize them. Sometimes the polling booths were shifted from one place t another in the last minute, which made it difficult for people to caste their votes. The PRI spends a large sum of money in the campaigning for its candidates.

In China the elections do not offer the people any serious choice. They have to choose the ruling party and the candidates approved by it. In Mexican example, people seemed to really have a choice but in practice they had no choice. There was no way the ruling party could be defeated, even if people were against it. These are not fair elections.



The elections must offer a real choice between political alternatives. And it should be possible for people to use this choice to remove the existing rulers. So, **a democracy must be based on a free and fair election where those currently in power have a fair chance of losing.**



One person, one vote, one value

The struggle for democracy is linked to the demand for universal adult franchise. This principle has not yet come to be accepted almost all over the world. Yet there are many instances of denial of equal right to vote :

In Saudi Arabia women do not have the right to vote

In Estonia people belonging to minority find it difficult to get the right to vote.

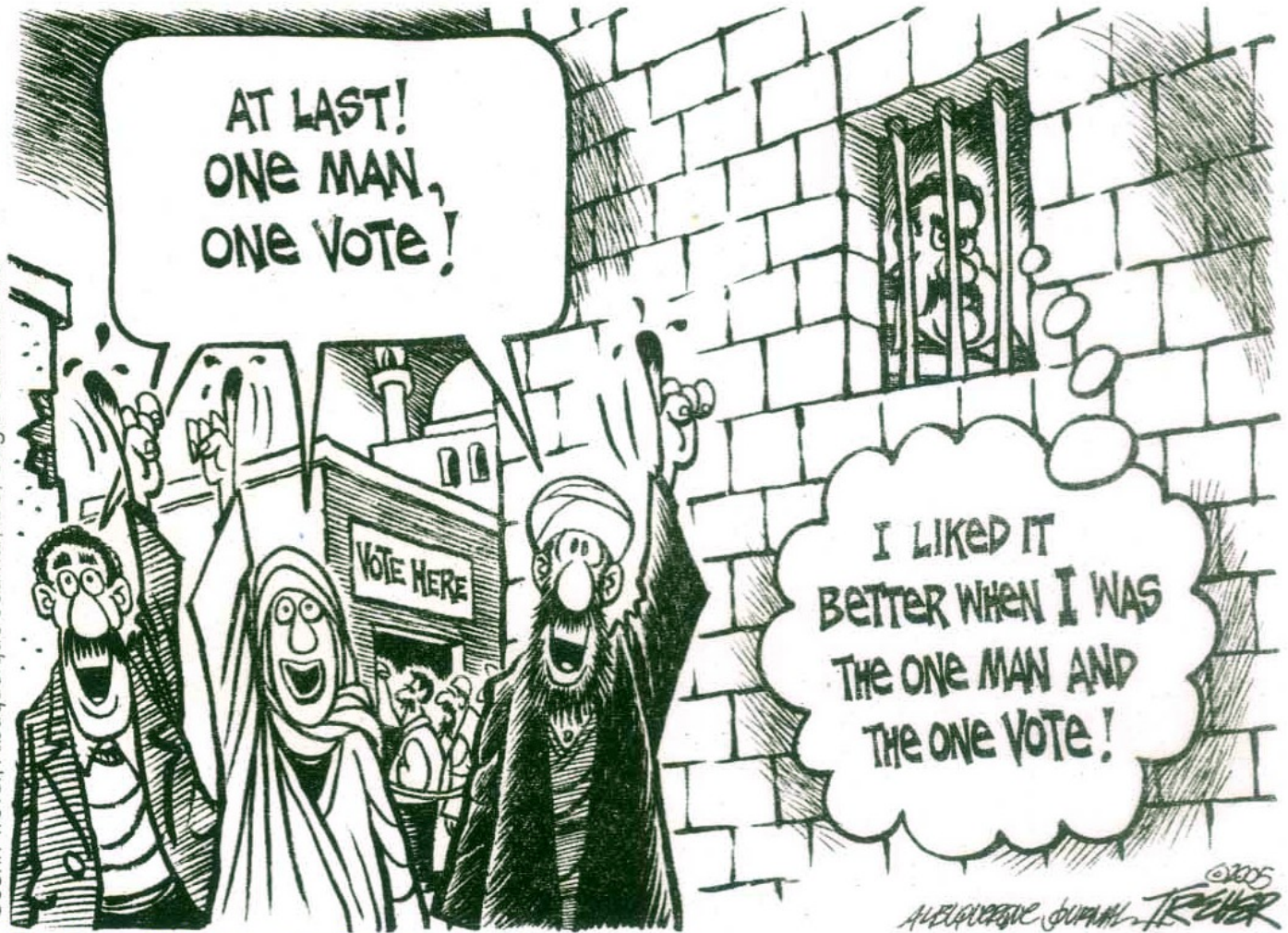
In Fiji, vote of an indigenous Fijian has more value than that of an Indian-Fijian.

The above examples give us the third feature of democracy : **in a democracy, each adult citizen must have one vote and each vote must have one value.**

read
the
cartoon

This cartoon is about the Iraqi election held after Saddam Hussain's regime was overthrown. He is shown behind the bars. What is the cartoonist saying here? Compare the message of this cartoon with the first cartoon in this chapter.

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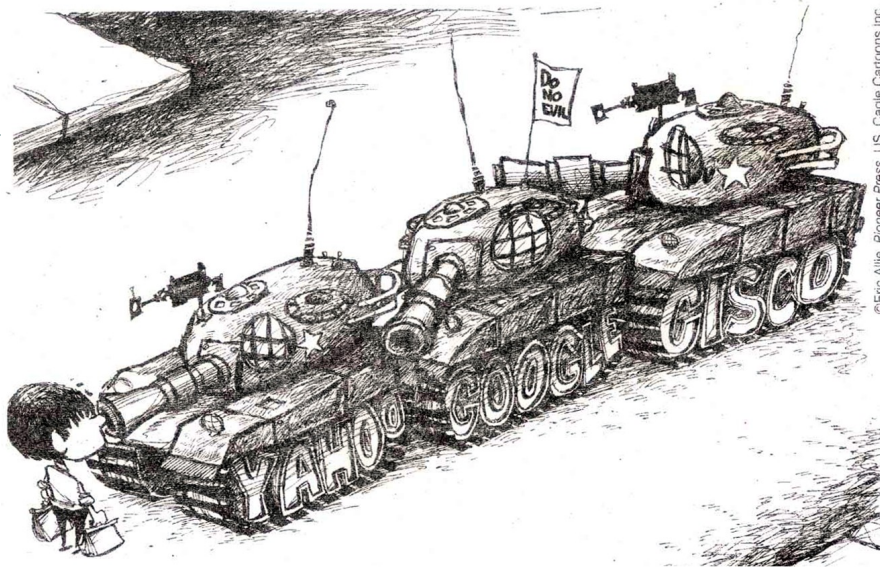


The cartoon shows the end of dictatorship in Iraq where Saddam ruled unchecked. People rejoice at elections being held. But the first cartoon shows that people do not have a real choice. They are forced to vote, by the powerful US and its allies.

Rule of law and respect for rights

Since its independence in 1980, Zimbabwe is ruled by Robert Mugabe, leader of ZANU-PF. Elections have been held regularly, President Mugabe is popular but also uses unfair practices in elections. Over the years his government has changed the constitution several times to increase the powers of the President and make him less accountable. Opposition party workers are harassed and their meeting disrupted. Public protests and demonstrations against the government are declared illegal. There is a law that limits the right to criticize the President. Television and radio are controlled by the government and give only the ruling party's version. There are independent newspapers but the government harasses those journalists who go against it. The government has ignored some court judgments that went against it and has pressurized judges.





Chinese government blocked free flow of information on the Internet by placing restrictions on popular websites like 'Google' and 'Yahoo'. The image of tanks and an unarmed student reminds the reader of another major event in recent Chinese history. Find out about that event. Refers to the massacre that took place at Tianmen Square where hundreds of students were ruthlessly killed.

The example of Zimbabwe proves that Popular governments can be undemocratic, popular leaders can be autocratic. In a democracy there should be sufficient room for normal political activity, the state should respect some basic rights of the citizen. They should be free to think, to have opinions, to express these in public, to form associations, to protest and take other political actions. Everyone should be equal in the eyes of law. These rights must be protected by an independent judiciary whose orders are obeyed by everyone.

A democratic government cannot do whatever it likes, simply because it has won an election. It has to respect some guarantees to the minorities. Every major decision has to go through a series of consultations.

A democratic government rules within limits set by the constitutional law and citizen's rights.

Simanca
www.caglecartoons.com/espanol



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This cartoon is from Brazil, a country that has long experience of dictatorship. It is entitled "The Hidden Side of Dictatorship". Which hidden sides does this cartoon depict? Is it necessary for every dictatorship to have a hidden side? Find this out about the dictators discussed in the first chapter and if possible, about Abacha in Nigeria and Marcos in Philippines. The hidden side of dictatorship is massacre or killing of innocent people. Anybody who opposes the policies of a dictator is killed. Since the dictators control the media, the public never comes to know the number of people killed.



©Cam Cardow, The Ottawa Citizen, Canada, Cagle Cartoons Inc.

This cartoon was published in Canada just before its parliamentary elections of 2005. Everyone, including the cartoonist, expected the Liberal Party to win once again. When the results came, the Liberal Party lost the elections. Is this cartoon an argument against democracy or for democracy?

This cartoon is definitely in favor of democracy. In an indirect way it is telling the public not to be fooled and exercise their voting rights wisely, which they did by ousting the Liberals in the elections.



Summary Definition

From the examples of Pakistan, China, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Estonia, Fizi and Zimbabwe, we worked out four features of democracy as a form of government. Accordingly, democracy is a form of government in which :

Rulers elected by the people take all the major decisions;

Elections offer a choice and fair opportunity to the people to change the current rulers;

This choice and opportunity is available to all the people on an equal basis ; and

The exercise of this choice leads to a government limited by basic rules of the constitution and citizens' rights.

'Indian democracy is based upon corruption'



“THE BEST ARGUMENT AGAINST DEMOCRACY IS A FIVE-MINUTE CONVERSATION WITH THE AVERAGE VOTER.”

Winston Churchill
Friday, Aug 24, 2012 05:00 pm

Why Democracy ?

Arguments against Democracy

Leaders keep changing in a democracy, leads to instability.

Is all about political competition and power play, no scope for morality.

So many people have to be consulted in a democracy that it leads to delays

Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people. It leads to bad decisions.

Democracy leads to corruption.

Ordinary people don't know what is good for them ; they should not decide anything.

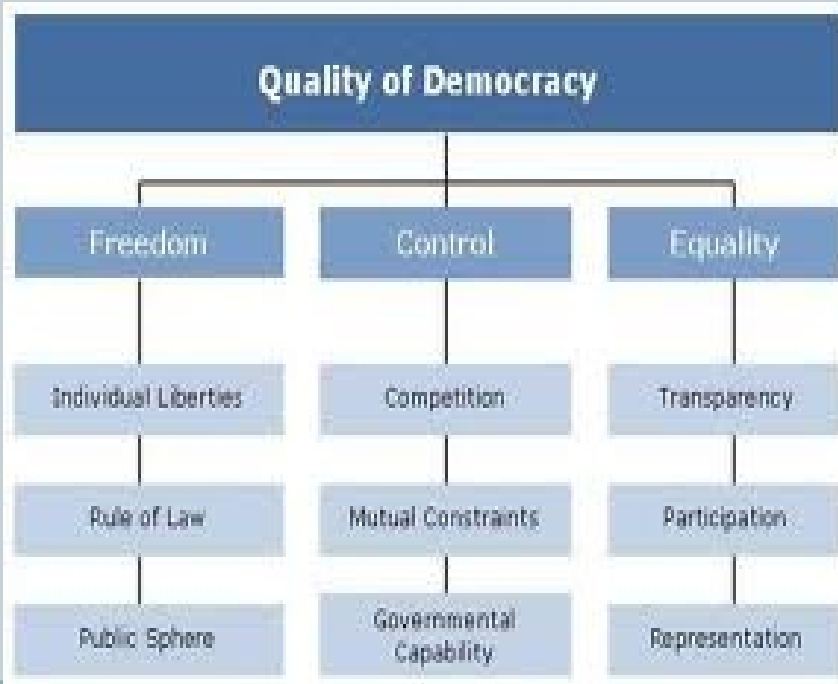
These arguments show that democracy of the kind we see may not be the ideal form of government. But that is not a question we face in real life. The real question we face is different better than other forms of governments that are there for us to choose from ?

Arguments for Democracy

Democracy is better than any other form of government in responding to the needs of the people. A democracy requires that the rulers have to attend to the needs of the people. **A democratic government is a better government because it is a more accountable form of government.**



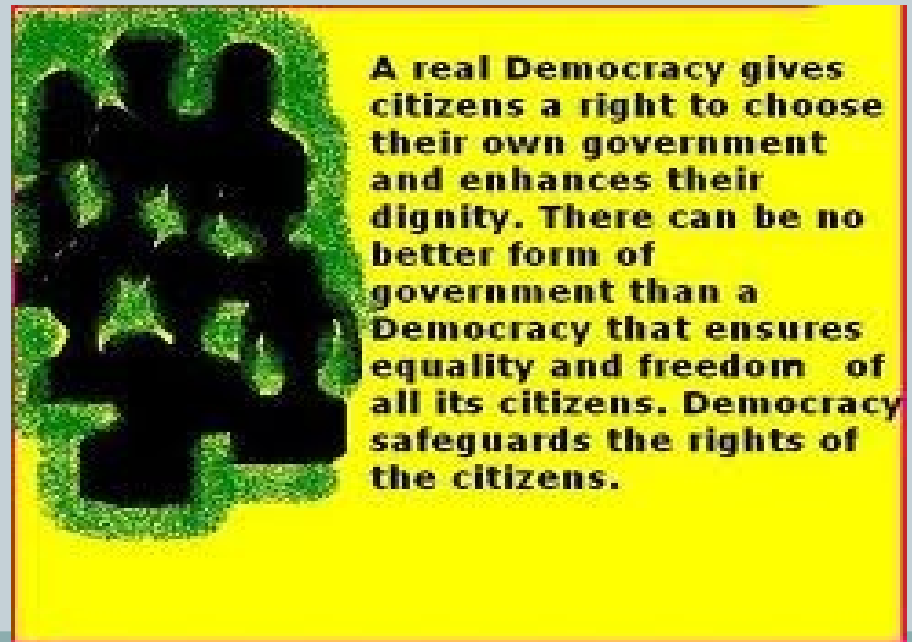
Democracy is based on consultation and discussion. A democratic decision always involves many persons, discussions and meetings. When a number of people put their head together, they are able to point out possible mistakes in any decision. This may take time, but there is a big advantage in taking time over important decisions. This reduces the chances of rash or irresponsible decisions. **Thus democracy improves the quality of decision making.**





Democracy provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts. In any society people are bound to have differences of opinions and interests. These differences are particularly sharp in a country like ours which has an amazing social diversity. Democracy provides the only peaceful solution to this problem. In Democracy, no one is a permanent loser. Different groups can live with one another peacefully. In a diverse country like India, democracy keeps our country together.

Even if democracy does not bring about better decisions and accountable government, it is still better than other forms of government. **Democracy enhances the dignity of citizens.** Democracy is based on political equality, or recognizing that the protest and the least educated has the same status as the rich and the educated. People are not subjects of a ruler, they are the rulers themselves. Even when they make mistakes, they are responsible for their conduct.

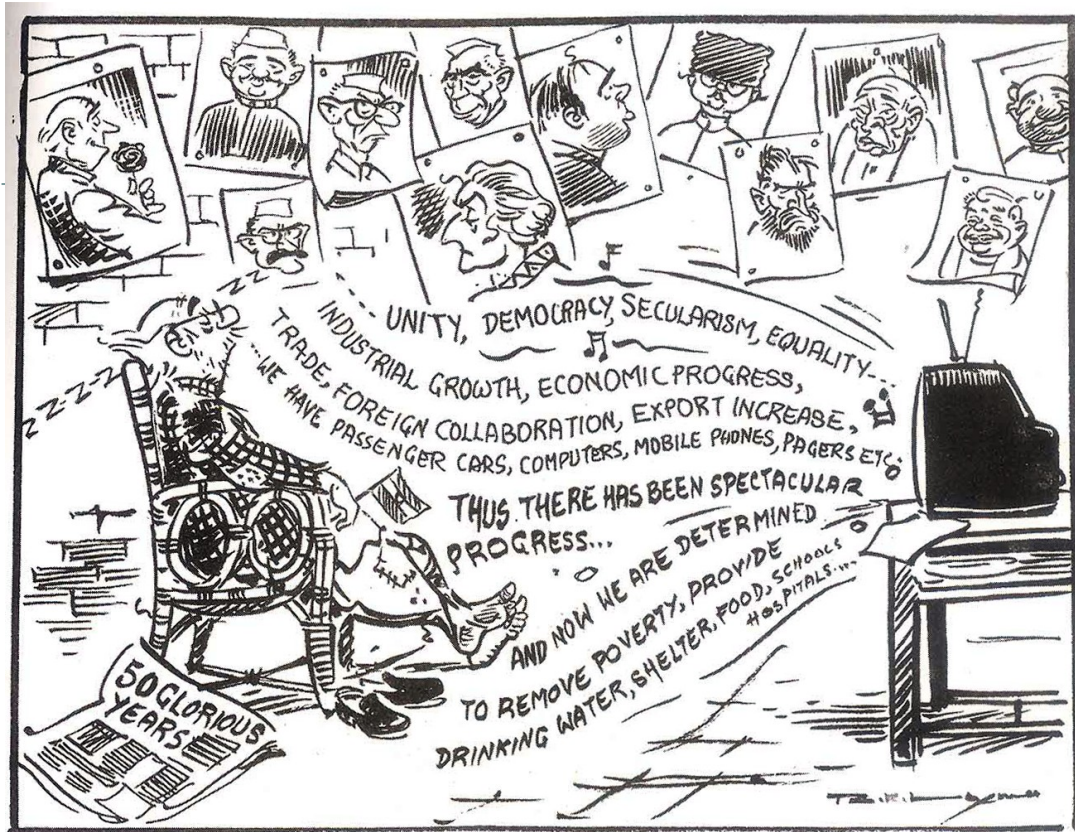


Democracy is better than other forms of government because it allows us to correct its own mistakes. No form of government can guarantee, no mistakes. But in democracy it cannot be hidden for long. There is a space for public discussion on these mistakes. And there is room for correction. Either the rulers have to change their decisions, or the rulers can be changed. This cannot happen in a non-democratic government.

mistake



Democracy cannot get us everything and is not the solution to all problems. But it allows a way of correcting its mistakes and offers more dignity to all citizens. That is why democracy is considered the best form of government.



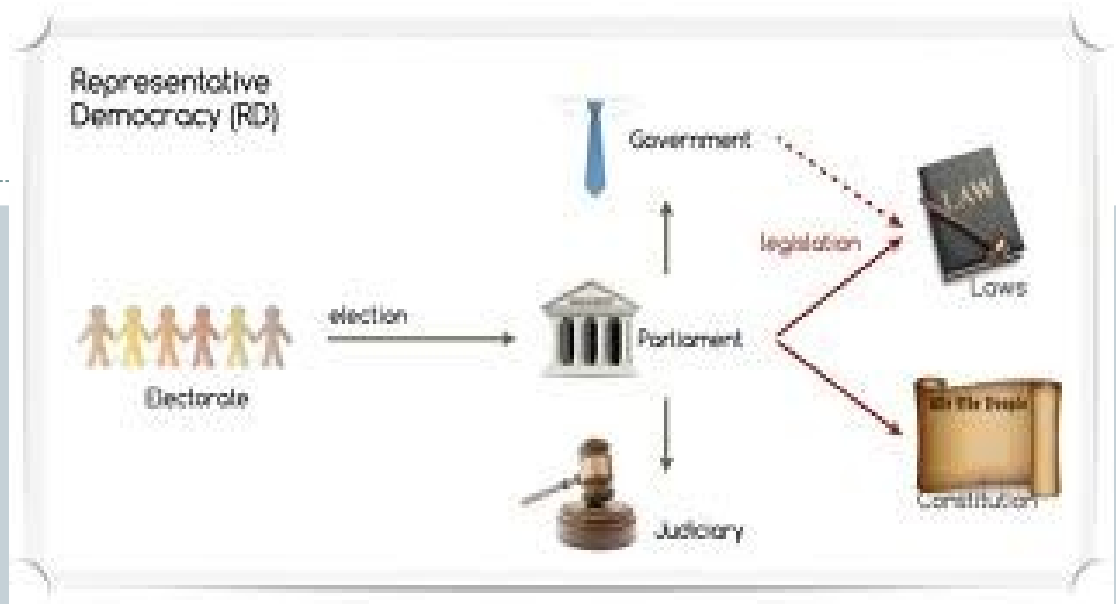
This famous cartoon by R.K. Laxman comments on the celebrations of the fifty years of the independence. How many images on the wall do you recognize? Do many common people feel the way the common man in this cartoon does?

The cartoon does reflect the opinion of the general public. For fifty years leaders have made promises, made tall claims of achievements — still basic facilities are still denied to the common man — poverty is not eradicated, there is shortage of water, power, shelter, schools, hospitals — the basic necessities of life. The common man is bored by promises which are never fulfilled, actions do not match the promises.

whaddya mean by



“representative
democracy?”



Broader Meanings of Democracy

The most common form that democracy takes in our time is that of a representative democracy. In the countries we call democracy, all the people do not rule. A majority is allowed to take decisions on behalf of all the people. Even the majority does not rule directly. The majority of people rule through their elected representatives.

Modern democracies involve such a large number of people that it is physically impossible for them to sit together and take a collective decision.

Even if they could, the citizen does not have the time, the desire or the skills to take part in all the decisions.

This gives us a clear but minimal understanding of democracy. But it does not allow us to distinguish between a democracy and a good democracy. It does not allow us to see the operation of democracy beyond government.

If we take the ideals of democracy seriously, then no country in the world is a democracy. Yet an understanding of democracy as an ideal reminds us of why we value democracy. It enables us judge an existing democracy and identify its weakness. It helps us to distinguish between a minimal democracy and a good democracy. Democracy can apply to many spheres of life and that democracy can take many forms.



There can be various ways of taking decisions in a democratic manner as long as the basic principle of consultation on an equal basis is accepted. The most common form of democracy in today's world is through people's elected representatives. But if the community is small, there can be other ways of taking democratic decisions. All the people can sit together and take decisions directly. This is how Gram Sabha work in a village.

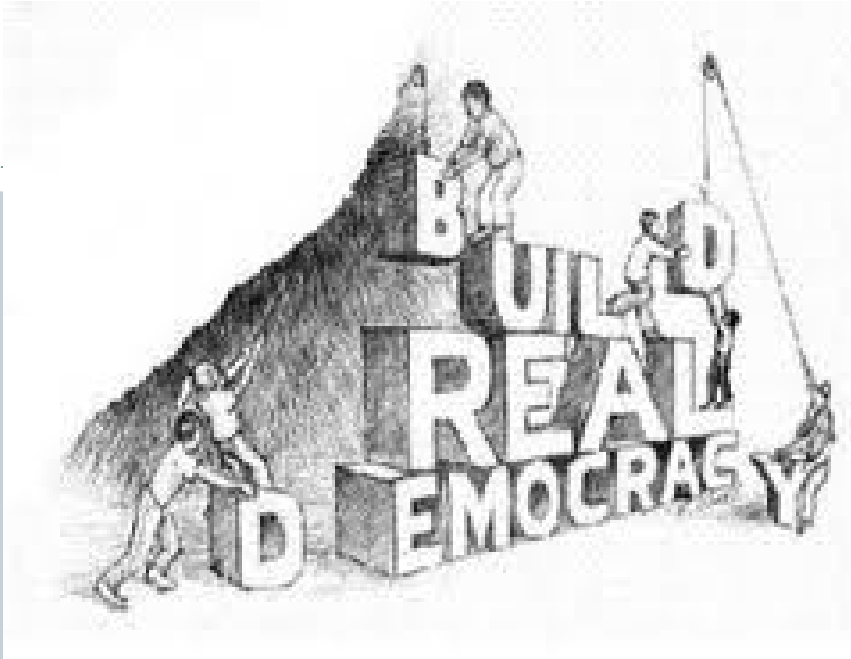
SIGNS OF DEMOCRACY



**SHARED
RESPECT**



**SHARED
POWER**



Every democracy has to try to realize the ideals of a democratic decision making. This cannot be achieved once for all. This requires a constant effort to save and strengthen democratic forms of decision making. What we do as citizens can make a difference to making our country more or less democratic. This is the strength and the weakness of democracy : the fate of the country depends not just on what the rulers do, but mainly on what we, as citizens do.

Other forms of government like monarchy, dictatorship or one-party rule do not require all citizens to take part in politics. But democracy depends on active political participation by all the citizens.



it improves the quality of decision making by consulting various people and institutions

it enhances the dignity of citizens by providing equality, fundamental rights and freedom

is a better government as it is a more accountable form of government
it allows one to correct its own mistakes

it provides a method to deal with differences and conflicts

arguments for democracy

What is Democracy?
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arguments against democracy

Democracy is all about political competition and power play

There is no scope for morality

Leaders keep changing in a democracy

This leads to instability

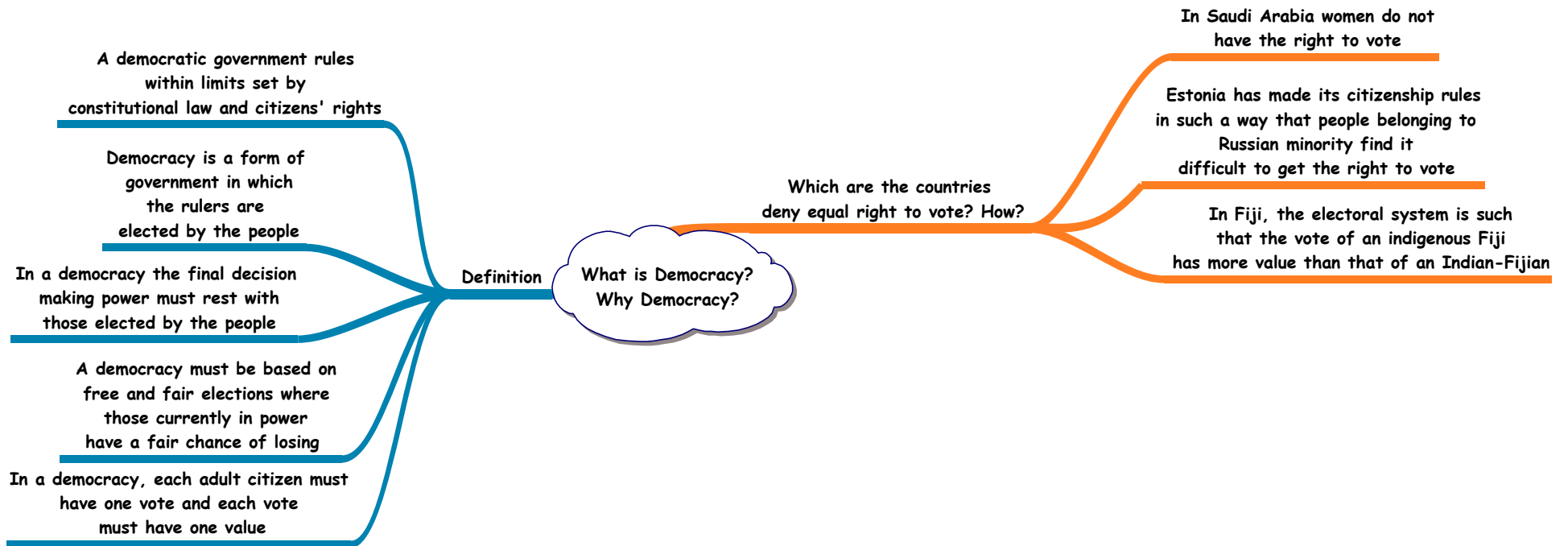
Elected leaders do not know the best interest of the people

it leads to bad decisions

Democracy leads to corruption for it is based on electoral competition

Ordinary people don't know what is good for them; they should not decide anything

So many people have to be consulted in a democracy that it leads to delays



Chapter 2

What is Democracy? Why Democracy?

❖ Democracy

It is a government where the rulers are directly elected by the people.

❖ Features of a Democratic Government

- The rulers are elected by the people.
- Free and fair elections.
- Opposition parties function freely.
- People enjoy certain fundamental rights and have the freedom of expression.
- Based on the principles of political equality.
- Principle of universal adult franchise is followed. Every adult citizen is entitled to vote and each vote has one value.
- Every citizen, irrespective of their caste, religion or educational background, can contest elections and hold any public office.
- The constitutional law and citizen's rights set limitations on the functioning of a democratic government.

❖ Need of Democracy

- Represents people's needs.
- Democracy is for the people and is answerable to the people.
- Helps in making correct and ideal decisions as it is based on consultations and deliberations.
- Promotes unity in diversity.
- Guarantees equal rights for the rich and the poor; the educated and the uneducated.

❖ Arguments Against Democracy

- Leads to instability as leaders keep changing.
- Morality is compromised because democracy is all about power games and political competitions.
- Causes delays owing to lengthy discussions and debates.
- Often bad decisions affect people as the leaders may not know what is best for the people.
- Political competitions and struggles for gaining power leads to corruption.

Contribute to this Revision Note:

If you find anything of importance missing from this note, email it to us at revision-notes@meritnation.com, and we'll add it to this note under your name!

