

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

Discuss the following statements about democracy. Some of the them are complicated, so the discussion questions will guide you.

1. “Democracy is a system in which no one can choose himself, no one can invest himself with the power to rule, and therefore, no one can arrogate to himself unconditional and unlimited power.”

- Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*

DISCUSS: Why should no single person have unlimited power?

2. “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

- Article 21(3) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

DISCUSS: Suffrage is the right to vote. Why must everyone have the right to vote? Why must each vote count equally?

3. “Democracy as a political culture generally implies the simultaneous operation of several elements, two of which are fundamental: government by the majority (either directly or through representatives), and the protection of individual or minority rights.”

- Israelite Rubinstein and Chaim Adler, *The Development of Democratic Culture in a Society with Powerful Traditional Forces: The Case of Israel*

DISCUSS: Is the majority always right? Can the majority sometimes trample over the rights of individuals and minorities?

4. “Democracy is a political system in which different groups are legally entitled to compete for power and in which institutional power holders are elected by the people and are responsible to the people.”

- Tatu Vanhannen, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries*

DISCUSS: Do the groups with the best ideas always win power in a democracy?

5. “Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.”

- Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, *What Democracy Is . . . And Is Not*

DISCUSS: What are the merits of competition? What are the merits of cooperation?

6. “Participation in a democracy is not a matter of subservience to power or blind loyalty to the state but is a willingness to be responsible for the state and to engage at all levels in the decisions that will chart its course.”

- Shirley Engle and Anna Ochoa, *Education for Democratic Citizenship*

DISCUSS: Why is blind loyalty dangerous?

7. “Democracy makes the sustained achievement of social goals more likely; and social progress makes more likely the survival and development of democracy.”

- UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*

DISCUSS: How would you define social progress?

8. “Democracy is not simply a theory of self-interest that gives people license to pursue their own goals at the expense of others; the common good is a central feature of democracy.”

- Michael W. Apple and Jeffery Beane, *Democratic Schools*

DISCUSS: Why is the common good a central feature of democracy?

