



☞ Dear students: - Copy the note and do the given homework on your exercise book!

Subject: Civics (revision on unit 1)

Grade & section: 12(A – D)

Unit: 1

Main Topic: DEMOCRACY

Sub topic/s: THEORITICAL APPROCHES OF DEMOCRACY

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MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2020

Definition and Ways of Exercising Democracy

- ❖ The word democracy comes from two Greek words “Demos”-people and “kratein”- to govern or to rule. Therefore, democracy can be literarily defined as People rule or rule by the people. Further;
- ❖ Democracy is government of the people, or government of the majority. According to Abraham Lincoln who has been the president of the USA, democracy can be defined as **“the government of the people, by the people and for the people”**.
- ❖ In other words, democracy is a government comes from the consent of the people which is exercised by the people and for the purpose of the people’s own interests.
- ❖ Democracy can be also defined as a form of government in which the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens, acting under procedures of majority rule direct democracy.
- ❖ In theory, one of the defining characteristics of democracy is that the great mass of citizens can directly or indirectly participate in political decision making and policy making process of a state. Accordingly, there are two broad ways of exercising democracy: Direct and indirect way of exercising democracy.
- ❖ Direct way of exercising democracy implies a form of government in which the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens acting under procedures of majority rule. For instance, citizens direct participation in referendum and local meetings/discussions.

- ❖ On the other hand indirect way of exercising democracy is a way of exercising democracy in which citizens exercise their rights and freedoms and discharge their obligations not in person but through representatives chosen by them.

TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2020

Major Theoretical Approaches of Understanding Democracy

- ❖ On the basis of how we confront, with and view democracy, we can identify two theoretical approaches of understanding democracy. These are: the procedural and substantive views.
- 1. Procedural view of Democracy:** This procedural view of democracy focuses on the procedures that enable the people to govern themselves; such as meetings to discuss issues, voting in elections, running for public offices.
 - ❖ The questions that the procedural approach to democracy seeks to address are.
 - (a) Who should participate in decision making?
 - (b) How much should each participant's vote count? And
 - (c) How many votes are needed to reach a decision?
 - ❖ The theoretical answers to these questions include:
 - ✓ Everyone should participate in government decision making process, as possible as directly, and through representation.
 - ✓ All votes should be counted equal.
 - ✓ An equality majority of the participants' i.e. 50+% or the so called simple majority or qualified majority (70%). This is the principle of majority rule.
 - 2. The Substantive view of Democracy:** The substantive view of democracy, on the other hand, emphasizes on the substance of government policies, laws, rules and regulations. According to this view democracy, the public of a democratic government should at least guarantee such human and democratic rights as, for example, the right to life, liability secularity, property, freedom of religion, conscience, thought, expression, assembly, movement, peaceful demonstration, the right to petition, as well as cultural rights, economic rights and forms of rights and freedoms. Therefore, the principles of universal participation, political, social, economic and legal equality, majority rule and the provisions of fundamental human and democratic rights, among others, essentially characterize democracy and should be incorporated in state substances.

Fundamental Principles of Democracy

- ❖ Citizens should understand basic principles of democracy and be familiar with the tools in their applications to specific situations. There are a number of universal principles of democracy which are discussed below:
- ❖ **Sovereignty of the People:** Is the idea that the only legitimate source of government authority is the consent of the governed/the people. Consent is given by the people through their regularly elected representatives and through the approval of all constitutional changes. Popular sovereignty also means that the people have the right to withdraw their consent when the government fails to fulfill its obligations under the constitution.
- ❖ **Supremacy of the Constitution:** Constitution is above all laws and organs of a state. It dictates all laws and governmental or non-governmental acts to be under the constitution. Thus constitution is important for officials or citizen to take extra care not to violate any provision of a constitution. It is also important to keep in mind that if an act is found to be against the constitution, the act will be without effect or void.

Example, refer article 9 of the FDRE constitution.

- ❖ **Rule of Law:** It is about both government and citizens are and must be, subject to the laws of a country. Government decisions and actions shall be made according to the established laws of the country rather than by arbitrary actions.
- ❖ **Separation of Powers:** The legislative, executive, and judicial powers of a government should be separated and exercised by different institutions. If a government follows federalism, powers and functions should be distributed between the central government and regional states in a sovereign manner.
- ❖ **Check and Balance:** Powers given to the different bodies of a government are balanced so that no branch can completely dominate others. Many of the powers of one branch are shared and checked by those of the other branches. For instance, the legislative branch certain powers, which make it possible to check the exercise of power by the executive and judicial branches.
- ❖ **Majority Rule and Minority Rights/Political Tolerance:** Democratic societies are politically tolerant. While majority of the people rule in a democracy, the rights of the minority must be protected. People who are not in power must be allowed to organize and speak out. Minorities are sometimes referred to as the opposition because they may have ideas which

are different from the majority. Individual citizens must also learn to be tolerant of each other. A democratic society is often composed of people from different cultures, racial, religious and ethnic groups who have viewpoints different from the majority of the population.

❖ **Secularism:** Individuals as well as groups should have freedom of conscience i.e the right to decide for themselves what to believe. Freedom of conscience would be endangered if government supported some religions but not others. Government should do only what is necessary to keep the peace and prevent one religious group from violating the rights of others. To achieve this goal government should not interfere with religion in any way. For example, the following are included in Article 11 of FDRE Constitution:

(a) state and religion are separate;

(b) there shall be no state religion; and

(c) the state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs.

❖ **Accountability:** In democracy, elected and appointed officials have to be accountable to the people. They are responsible for their actions. Officials must make decisions and perform their duties according to the will and wishes of the people, not for themselves.

❖ **Transparency:** A government to be accountable; the people must be aware of what is happening in the country. This is referred to as transparency in government. A transparent government holds public meetings and allows citizens to attend. In a democracy, the press and the people are able to get information about what decisions are being made, by whom and why.

❖ **Regular/periodic, free and fair elections:** Electing their representatives in government is one way that citizens can express their will in their own country.

❖ Democracy insists that these elected officials are chosen and peacefully removed from office in a free and fair manner. Intimidation, corruption and threats to citizens during or before an election are against the principles of democracy. In a democracy, elections are held regularly every so many years. Participation in elections should not be based on a citizen's wealth as well as other status of individuals. For free and fair elections to occur, most adult citizens should have the right to stand for government office (All inclusive-election or universal suffrage). Additionally, obstacles should not exist which make it difficult for people to vote.

❖ **Citizens' participation:** One of the most basic signposts of a democracy is citizen participation in government. Participation is the key role of citizens in democracy. It is not only their right, but it is their duty. Citizen participation may take many forms including standing for election, voting in elections, becoming informed, debating issues, attending

community or civic meetings, being members of private voluntary organizations, paying taxes, and even protesting. Participation builds a better democracy.

- ❖ **Protecting and Sustaining of Human Rights:** Human rights are those values that reflect respect for human life, and dignity too. In other words, human rights have been defined as “generally accepted principles of fairness and Justice” or “universal moral rights that belong equally to all people simply because they are human rights”. People are entitled to exercise these rights. However, human right can be restricted if they interfere with the rights of other people.
- ❖ **Multi – Party System:** It refers to a political system that legally allows and has more than one party politics to participate in elections. In multiparty democracy, people of different views and various ethnic groups will co-exist in the same state to live together, improve their development, and promote their prosperity and welfare.
- ❖ **Equality:** The constitution contains prominent statements of the value placed up on equality in constitutional government. Basically there are three forms of equality. These include:
 - (a) Political equality-it is central to the idea that all people who attain the status of adulthood have equal political rights. For example, each adult citizen is to have an equal right to vote and to run for and hold political office.
 - (b) Social equality-it is central to the idea that there should be no social hierarchy at individual and collective level. That is all individuals as well as groups of individuals should have equal rights/privileges and duties. For example, in the case of Ethiopia, all Ethiopian citizens, and nations and nationalities have and must have social equality without any discrimination. Otherwise there would not be tolerance which is one core value of democracy.
 - (c) Economic equality-means all citizens of a given country deserve equal and fair assessment to the national resources services, etc.

Democratization and Actors in Democratization Process

- ❖ Democratization refers to the institutionalization of democratic ideals and principles and their effective functioning; and a full-scale transition from authoritarian regime and its replacement by democratically elected regime. Democratization is a conclusive and extended process, which involves the emergence or presence of the formal elements of a democratic political system such as the recognition of basic civil and political rights, multiparty system, electoral system and etc. Democratization in this sense, involves the full-scale transition from authoritarian regime and its replacement by democratically elected regime. It involves the rupturing all the links and connections of authoritarian leaders, party or army to the state apparatus. In this sense, democratization represents a true rupture and a political transformation.
- ❖ Democracy is a process. Building up of democracy is not an overnight program it needs not only time but different actors must also involve building democracy and democratic culture. Thus, in this lesson you will look at the roles of different actors in the democratization process. Different actors can contribute their part in the democratization process which may include the following: Media organizations, civil societies, political parties, government, citizens, etc.

- 1. Media:** Responsible and independent media can encourage governments and citizens to be informed, to discuss and debate, and to express their positions on domestic and global affairs. In this way, the global communications revolution and the global wave of democratization are mutually reinforcing: a free press is a vehicle for democratization; democratization promotes the open society in which a free press can flourish. However, in this age of instant information and near total communication, the media have become not only the major venue for dialogue and debate within and among States, but also, definitively, an international actor with a distinct role on the international stage. The media can help keep international politics open, responsive and accountable.
- 2. Civil Societies:** The democratization process has involved not only a change from single party rule to multi-party contest, but also a general opening of space for social and political activities, including for civil society. The prospect for democratic consolidation depends on the development of a robust civil society. The prospects for democratic consolidation are strengthened by the growth and development of a powerful civil society, reflected in the presence of vigorous organizational vehicles for popular participation.

- 3. Political Parties:** Political parties fall under the umbrella of 'non-state actors' because of the theoretical significance normally attributed to political parties in democratic consolidation. To speak of democracy is to speak of a system of competing parties. One justification for dealing specifically with parties is that although parties are, in principle, private, voluntary organizations based on supporters and separate from the state, they are distinguished from other civil society groups by their very function in the political system. Political parties are private organizations producing public goods by means of their functions: nominating candidates and seeking office control in order to implement policy.
- 4. Interest Groups:** Interest groups, as associations on the basis of the free will of individuals, play a prominent role in the process of democratization. Consistent with the freedom of association granted to citizens in democracies, democratic states are characterized by the emergence and operation of several kinds of interest groups. Interest groups are organizations or groups of people, which are autonomous from government or political parties with the objective of influencing government. In democracies we find several interest groups who are attempting to promote and influence the policies of government. In fact interest groups are regarded as essential transmission belts between people and government. They play an important role in helping people interact with government, which is often remote and difficult for the individual to influence. Interest groups, bridge the gap between the citizen and government. Through interest groups, citizens communicate their wants on policy goals to government leaders.
- 5. Public Opinion:** Public opinion is of a crucial importance for democracy. Are you wondering why? Public opinion is made up with citizens or specific groups that reflect on their community and express their criticisms, their proposals or their agreement to influence the construction of political will. It is not possible to talk about only one, but of several public opinions because in a plural society, there are always several stands. Public opinion is then a tool to control the politicians that lead the country. On the one hand, this is important for the opposition as the latter is only potentially active in front of the government through this public opinion. Indeed, what important changes would an opposition bring if it was only able to express criticisms in closed rooms? It is when the opposition represents its stands and opinions, finds itself obliged to react, otherwise it is running the risks of disaffection or destitution, from its citizens. Moreover, public opinion serves the whole population in its effort to display criticisms and its incitements to well defined actions.