

OUTCOMES OF DEMOCRACY

CHAPTER COVERAGE

- ◆ Qualities of Democracy
- ◆ Basic Elements of Democracy
- ◆ Comparative Analysis between Democracy and its Alternatives

Outcomes of Democracy

Political Outcome	Economic Outcome	Social Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Accountable◆ Responsible◆ Legitimate Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Economic Development◆ Economic Inequality◆ Elimination of Poverty, Dignity & Freedom of the Citizen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Social equality◆ Gender equality◆ Ban on untouchability◆ Accomodation of social diversity



HOW DO WE ASSESS DEMOCRACY'S OUTCOMES

Democracy is a better form of government when compared with dictatorship or any other alternative.

It was said that democracy was better because it :

- (i) **Promotes equality among citizens**
- (ii) **Enhances the dignity of the individual**
- (iii) **Improves the quality of decision-making**
- (iv) **Provides a method to resolve conflicts, and**
- (v) **Allows a room to correct mistakes**

Over a hundred countries of the world today claim and practice some kind of democratic politics : They have format constitutions, they hold elections, they have parties and they guarantee rights of citizen. While these democratic elements are common to most of them, these democracies are very much different from each other in terms of their social situation, their economic achievements and their cultures. Clearly, what may be achieved or not achieved under each of these democracies will be very different.

Sometimes we expect everything and anything from democracy. Our interest in and fascination for democracy often pushed us in taking a position that democracy can address all socio-economic and political problems. If some of our expectations are not met, we start blaming the idea of democracy or we start doubting if we are living in a democracy. It can only create conditions for achieving some things. The citizens have to take advantage of those conditions and achieve those goals. Moreover, democracy is just not related to many other things that we value. Democracy is not a magical remedy for all our social ailments.



ACCOUNTABLE, RESPONSIVE AND LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT

They are some things that democracy must provide. In a democracy, we are most concerned with ensuring that people will have the right to choose their rules and people will have control over the rulers. Whenever possible and necessary, citizens should be able to participate in decision making that affects them all. Therefore, the most basic outcome of democracy should be that it produces a government that is accountable to the citizen, and responsive to the needs and expectations of the citizens.

Is the democratic government efficient ? Is it effective : Some people think that democracy produces less effective government. It is of course true that non-democratic rulers do not have to deliberate in assemblies and worry about majorities and public opinion. So, they can be very quick and efficient in decision making and implementation. Democracy is based on the idea of deliberation and negotiation. So, some delay is bound to take place.

The democratic government will take more time to follow procedures before arriving at a decision. But because it has followed procedures, its decisions may be both more acceptable to the people and more effective. So, the cost of time that democracy pays is perhaps worth it.

Democracy ensures that decision making will be based on norms and procedures. So a citizen, who wants to know if a decision was taken through the correct procedures, can find this out. She has the right and the means to examine the process of decision making. This is known as transparency. This factor would often be missing from a non-democratic government. We can expect that the democratic government develops mechanism for citizens to hold the government accountable and mechanisms for citizens to take part in decision making whenever they think fit. If we wanted to measure democracies on the basis of this expected outcome. We would look for the following practices and institutions; regular free and fair election; open public debate on major policies and legislations and citizens' right to information about the government and its functioning. The actual performance of democracies shows a mixed record on this. Democracies have had greater success in setting up regular and free elections and in setting up regular and free elections and in setting up conditions for open public debate. But most democracies fall short of elections that provide a fair chance to everyone and in subjecting every decision to public debate. Democratic government do not have a very good record when it comes to sharing information with citizens. All one can say in favour of democratic regimes is that they are much better than any non-democratic regime in these respects.

In substantive terms it may be reasonable to expect from democracy a government that is attentive to the needs and demands of the people and is largely free of corruption. The record of democracies is not impressive on these two counts. Democracies often frustrate the needs of the people and often ignore the demand of majority of its population. The routine tales of corruption are enough to convince us that democracy is not free of this evil. At the same time there is nothing to show that non-democracies are less corrupt or more sensitive to the people.

There is one respect in which democratic government is certainly better than its alternatives : democratic government is legitimate government. It may be slow, less efficient not always very responsive or clean. But a democratic government is people's own government. This is why there is an overwhelming support for the ideal democracy all over the world.



ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

If we consider all democracies and all dictatorship for the fifty years between 1950 and 2000, dictatorship have slightly higher rate of economic growth.

Evidence shows that in practice many democracies did not fulfill this expectation. The inability of democracy to achieve higher economic development worries us. But this alone cannot be reason to reject democracy. The difference between less developed countries with dictatorships and democracies is negligible. Overall, we cannot say that democracy is a guarantee of economic development. But we can expect democracy not to lag behind dictatorship in the respect.

➤ ECONOMIC OUTCOME OF DEMOCRACY

Within democracies there can be very high degrees of inequalities. In democratic countries like South Africa and Brazil the top 20 per cent people earned more than 60 per cent of the national income, leaving less than 3 per cent for the bottom 20 per cent population. Countries like Denmark and Hungary are much better in this respect.

Rates of economic growth for different countries, 1950-2000

Type of regimes and countries	Growth rate
All democratic regimes	3.95
All dictatorial regimes	4.42
Poor countries under dictatorship	4.34
Poor countries under democracy	4.28

Inequality of income in selected countries

	% share of national income	
	Top 20 %	Bottom 20 %
South Africa	64.8	2.9
Brazil	63.0	2.6
Russia	53.7	4.4
USA	50.0	4.0
United Kingdom	45.0	6.0
Denmark	34.5	9.6
Hungary	34.4	10.0

➤ REDUCTION OF INEQUALITY AND POVERTY

Democracies are based on political equality. All individuals have equal weight in electing representatives. A small number of ultra-rich enjoy a highly disproportionate share of wealth and incomes. Not only that, their share in the total income of the country has been increasing. Those at the bottom of the society have very little to depend upon. Their incomes have been declining. Sometimes they find it difficult to meet their basic needs of life, such as food, clothing, house, education and health.

In actual life democracies do not appear to be very successful in reducing economic inequalities. The poor constitute a large proportion of our voters and no party will like to lose their votes. The situation is much worse in some other countries. In Bangladesh more than half of its population lives in poverty. People in several poor countries are now dependent on the rich countries even for the food supplies.

➤ ACCOMMODATION OF SOCIAL DIVERSITY

Democracies usually develop a procedure to conduct their competition. This reduces the possibility of these tensions becoming explosive or violent. No society can fully and permanently resolve conflicts among different groups. But we can certainly learn to respect these differences and we can also evolve mechanisms to negotiate the differences. Democracy is best suited to produce this outcome. Non democratic regimes often turn a blind eye to or suppress internal social differences. Ability to handle social difference, divisions and conflicts is thus a definite plus point of democratic regimes. But the examples of Sri Lanka reminds us that a democracy must fulfil two conditions in order to achieve this outcome :

- (i) It is necessary to understand that democracy is not simply rule by majority opinion. The majority always needs to work with the minority. So that governments function to represent the general view. Majority and minority opinion are not permanent.
- (ii) It is also necessary that rule by majority does not become rule by majority community in terms of religion or race or linguistic group, etc. Rule by majority means that in case of every decision or in case of every election, different persons and groups may be can form a majority. Democracy remains democracy only as long as every citizen has chance of being in majority at some point of time. If someone is barred from being in majority on the basis of birth, then the democratic rule ceases to be accommodative for that person or group.



DIGNITY AND FREEDOM OF THE CITIZENS

Democracy stands much superior to any other form of government in promoting dignity and freedom of the individual. Every individual wants to receive respect from fellow beings. Often conflicts arise among individuals because some feel that they are not treated with due respect. The passion for respect and freedom are the basis of democracy. Democracies throughout the world have recognised this, at least in principle. This has been achieved in various degrees in various democracies. Democratic regimes do not always value the liberty of its citizens in practice.

- (1) Yet, for societies, which have been built for long on the basis of subordination and domination, it is not a simple matter to recognize that all individuals are equal.
- (2) Take the case of dignity of women. Most societies across world were historically male dominated societies. Long struggle by women have created some sensitivity today that respect and equal treatment of women are necessary ingredients of a democratic society. That does not mean that women are actually always treated with respect. But once the principle is recognised, it becomes easier for women to wage a struggle against what is now unacceptable legally and morally.
- (3) In a non-democratic set up, this unacceptably would not have legal basis because the principle of individual freedom and dignity would not have the legal and normal force there.
- (4) The same is true of caste inequalities.
- (5) Democracy in India has strengthened the claims of the disadvantaged and discriminated caste for equal status and equal opportunity. There are still instances of caste-based inequalities and atrocities, but these lack the moral and legal foundation. Perhaps it is this recognition that makes ordinary citizen value their democratic rights.
- (6) People believe that their vote makes a difference to the ways the government is run and to their own self-respect.
- (7) Expectations from democracy also function as the criteria for judging any democratic country.
- (8) Democracy examination never gets over. As it passes one test, it produces another test. As people get some benefits of democracy they ask for more and want to make democracy even better. The fact that people are complaining is itself a testimony to the success of democracy.

GLOSSARY

1. **Outcome** : Result, consequences or output.
2. **Characteristics of Democracy** : Promotes equality, enhances the dignity of the individual, improves the quality of decision making, provides methods to resolve conflicts, accommodates correct mistakes.
3. **Alternative forms of government than democracy** : Monarchy military rule by religious leaders.
4. **Elements/constituents of democracy** : Formal constitution, election, political parties, constitutional rights.
5. **Monarchy** : The government ruled by the monarch or king of the country i.e., monarch or king is the head of the country.
6. **Dignity** : The word denotes privileged position, honourable rank or importance given to any particular post or personating.
7. **Outcome of democracy** : Political equality and political justice social equality and social justice, economic equality and economic justice, dignity to the individual.
8. **Measures for democratic outcome** : Regular free and fair elections, open public debate on major policies, right to information given to the people.
9. **Economic Development** : It refers to the growth advancement of the country in the way of providing better facilities and services to the individual.
10. **Transparency** : Right or means to examine the process of decision making.
11. **Accountable** : Responsible, answerable, legitimate to the individual / post and their needs and expectations.
12. **Poverty** : It is a socio economic phenomenon which in general terms is the denial of opportunities to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living.
13. **Inequality** : Absence of equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal status at any level, social economic or political is known as inequality.
14. **Measures to sustain democracy** :
 - ◆ Unity in diversity
 - ◆ Tolerance power among people
 - ◆ peaceful co-existence
 - ◆ International peace and understanding
 - ◆ Historical background of the country.
 - ◆ Feeling of nationalism and patriotism
 - ◆ Non-alignment
15. **Civil Liberties** : These are privileges or rights thought to be valuable in themselves and important for the functioning of democratic.