Chapter : Democracy

A. UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRACY

Introduction:

Why Are We Studying Democracy?

Democracy helps us understand the source of political legitimacy and how people participate in governing themselves. It also explains how elections, rights, equality, justice and the rule of law shape democratic government.

Two Broad Views of Democracy

PROCEDURAL DEMOCRACY	SUBSTANTIVE DEMOCRACY
Focuses on procedures or means, especially elections and political participation.	Focuses on outcomes such as equality, rights, justice and the common good.

What Is Democracy?

DEFINITION

Democracy is a combination of two Greek words: 'demos' meaning people and 'kratos' meaning power. It stands for rule by the people, which gives true legitimacy to the government.

Two Different Views of Democracy

(i) Procedural Democracy

Procedural democracy focuses on the procedures or means used to attain democracy. It argues that regular, competitive elections based on universal adult franchise and plural political participation would produce a democratically elected government.

Illustration: Regular Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections in India.

(ii) Substantive Democracy

Substantive democracy focuses on outcomes based on democratic principles such as social equality, rights, justice and the rule of law. It emphasises the common good rather than the benefit of limited individuals.

Illustration: Protection of Fundamental Rights and measures promoting social justice in India.

B. TYPES OF DEMOCRACY

Introduction:

Democracy can be classified on the basis of how people exercise political power. In Direct Democracy, citizens participate directly in decision-making, whereas in Indirect Democracy, they exercise power through elected representatives.

Types of Democracy

DIRECT DEMOCRACY	INDIRECT DEMOCRACY
Citizens participate directly in decision-making.	Citizens exercise power through elected representatives.

(i) Direct Democracy

Direct democracy is based on direct and unmediated citizen participation in government rule. All adult citizens take part in decision-making so that different viewpoints are discussed and the best possible decisions are taken.

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Mechanisms of Direct Democracy

- **Initiative:** Gives people the power to propose legislation, which should be discussed by the legislature.
- **Recall:** Enables people to remove elected policymakers if their performance is not up to the mark.
- **Plebiscite:** An important question is put before citizens for their approval or disapproval.

Illustration:

How Does Direct Democracy Work?

In Switzerland, citizens can use popular initiatives to propose changes and referendums to vote on laws or important public questions.

In some states and local jurisdictions in the United States, voters can initiate a recall election to remove an elected public official before the end of the term.

The 2016 United Kingdom referendum on continued membership of the European Union illustrates citizens voting directly on an important political question.

KEY IDEA: Direct democracy enables citizens to participate directly in specific public decisions.

(ii) Indirect Democracy

In indirect democracy, people exercise power through their elected representatives. It is also called representative democracy. Popular participation in policymaking is limited, largely to voting at periodic elections.

Illustration:

How Does Representative Democracy Work?

In India, citizens elect representatives to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. These representatives participate in law-making and, in the parliamentary system, government formation.

KEY IDEA: Citizens govern through representatives chosen by them.

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C. KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY DIMENSION	QUICK REVISION
MEANING	Democracy = Rule by the people; it gives legitimacy to government.
TWO VIEWS	Procedural: focuses on means. Substantive: focuses on outcomes.
DIRECT DEMOCRACY	Citizens participate directly; mechanisms include initiative, recall and plebiscite.
INDIRECT DEMOCRACY	Citizens exercise power through elected representatives.
CENTRAL LEARNING	Elections are essential, but democratic quality also depends on rights, equality, justice and the rule of law.

D. UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE

Prelims PYQ – Democracy (2017)

Q.42. Democracy's superior virtue lies in the fact that it calls into activity

(a) the intelligence and character of ordinary men and women.
(b) the methods for strengthening executive leadership.
(c) a superior individual with dynamism and vision.
(d) a band of dedicated party workers.