
SELECTED DEFINITIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Adapted from Grey, Robert D. 1997. *Democratic Theory and Post-Communist Change*.
New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Appendix 2.1.

Definitions of democracy come in all shapes and sizes. Here are a variety of other definitions for your perusal:

Democracy is "government by the people; that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised either directly by them. . . or by officers elected by them."

--*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1933

"Democracy [is] not majority rule: democracy [is] diffusion of power, representation of interests, recognition of minorities."

--John Calhoun, as paraphrased by Roper 1989,63

"Democracy is the form of state within which the distribution of power in the state is determined *exclusively* by the social factors of power, but is not shifted in favor of anyone class through the application of material means of coercion."

--Otto Bauer, quoted in Meyer 1957 [1986], 65

"Democracy is a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process."

--Schattschneider 1960, 141

"[A] social decision function $F(D_1, D_2, \dots, D_n)$ is called a *democracy*, if the function can be expressed only by voting operators-without any resort to negations and constants-and the function is nondictatorial, where nondictatorial is defined as follows: . . . ' A social decision function $F(D_1, D_2, \dots, D_n)$ is called *nondictatorial*, if there is no individual whose preference is always adopted by the society ."

--Murakami 1968, 28-29

A democratic regime is one ". . . in which *the peaceful rivalry for the exercise of power exists constitutionally*." (italics in original) The phrase "exercise of power" implies temporary control.

--Aron 1969,41

A definition of the ideal:

"Government by the people, where liberty , equality and fraternity are secured to the greatest possible degree and in which human capacities are developed to the utmost, by means including free and full discussion of common problems

and interests."

--Pennock 1979, 7

And of the practice:

"Rule by the people where 'the people' includes all adult citizens not excluded by some generally agreed upon and reasonable disqualifying factor. . . . 'Rule' means that public policies are determined either directly by vote of the electorate or indirectly by officials freely elected at reasonably frequent intervals and by a process in which each voter who chooses to vote counts equally. . . and in which a plurality is determinative."

--Pennock 1979,9

"The competitive electoral context, with several political parties organizing the alternatives that face the voters, is the identifying property of the contemporary democratic process. . . . [D]emocratic systems [are] . . . characterized by competitive elections in which most citizens are eligible to participate."

--Powell 1982,3

"[D]emocracy is a form of institutionalization of continual conflicts . . . [and] of uncertainty , of subjecting all interests to uncertainty . . . "

--Przeworski 1986,58

A democratic regime is "first and foremost a set of procedural rules for arriving at collective decisions in a way which accommodates and facilitates the fullest possible participation of interested parties."

--Bobbio 1987,19

"Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections. There are parties: divisions of interest, values and opinions. There is competition, organized by rules. And there are periodic winners and losers."

--Przeworski 1991, 10

"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."

--Schmitter and Karl 1991, 76

Definition of Democracy:

- (a) The right to vote
- (b) The right to be elected
- (c) The right of political leaders to compete for support and votes
- (d) Elections that are free and fair
- (e) Freedom of association
- (f) Freedom of expression
- (g) Alternative sources of information

(h) Institution for making public policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences.

--Dahl 1971, 3