

10th – Challenges to Democracy



Concept of Challenges: Democracy is the dominant form of government in the contemporary world. However, democracy faces serious challenges all over the world though not in the form of a challenger or rival. A ‘challenge’ is not just any problem. People usually call only those difficulties ‘a challenge’ which are significant, and can be overcome. In other words, a challenge is a difficulty that carries within it an opportunity for progress. Once people overcome a challenge, they go up to a higher level than before. Different countries face different types of challenges. Mostly, three types of challenges are faced by every country. These are:

1. **Foundational Challenge:** The countries which are not under democratic government face the first challenge i.e. **foundational challenge** of making the transition to democracy and then instituting democratic government. This involves bringing down the existing non-democratic regime, keeping military away from” controlling government and establishing a sovereign and functional state. Nepal is a very good example of foundational challenge to democracy where monarchy was replaced by democratic system.

2. **Challenge of Expansion:** Most of the established democracies face the second challenge i.e. challenges of expansion. It involves applying the basic principle of democratic government across all the regions, different social groups and various institutions. Issues like ensuring greater power to local governments, extension of federal principle to all the units of the federation, inclusion of women and minority groups, etc fall under this challenge. This also means that no decisions should remain outside the arena of democratic control. Countries like India, the USA, etc face this kind of challenge. In India, challenge of expansion of democracy are

- Certain socio-economically backward groups have yet to get the political powers.
- Some North-Eastern states have not yet fully integrated with the mainstream India.

3. **Deepening of Democracy:** - The third challenge of deepening of democracy is faced by every democracy in one form or another. This involves strengthening of the institutions and practices of democracy. Ordinary people have different expectations from democracy in different societies. Thus, this challenge takes different meanings and path in different countries of the world. This challenge usually means strengthening those institutions that help people’s participation and control. This requires an attempt to bring down the control and influence of the rich and powerful people in making governmental decision. Thus, it is clear that different countries face different kinds of challenges to democracy. These challenges depend on what stage of social development is present in a country. Solutions to these challenges also depend on a particular country’s unique situation. There is no pre-prescribed method to tackle the challenges faced by a democracy.

Political Reforms: -Generally, all the suggestions or proposals about overcoming various challenges to democracy are called democratic reform or political reform. There is no universal list of desirable reforms. Problems vary from country to country and hence, solution should also be country specific. However, people can develop some proposals for reforms at the national level. But the real challenge of



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reforms may not lie at the national level. Some of the crucial questions need to be thought at the state or local level also.

Guidelines for Political Reforms: - Some broad guidelines that can be kept in mind while developing ways and means for political reforms in India are:

- Law has an important role to play in political reform. Carefully developed changes in law can help to discourage wrong political practices and encourage good ones. But legal constitutional changes by themselves cannot overcome challenges to democracy. For example, in cricket, a change in rules for LBW decision helped to reduce negative batting tactics, and the quality of cricket is also improved. This is to be done mainly by the players, coaches and administrators, similarly, democratic reforms are to be carried out mainly by political activists, parties, movements and politically conscious citizens.
- Any legal change must carefully look at what results it will have on politics. Sometimes, the results may produce opposite effects. For example, many states have banned people who have more than two children from contesting Panchayat elections. This has resulted in denial of democratic opportunity to many poor and women, which was not intended.
- Democratic reforms are to be brought about principally through political practice. Therefore, the main focus of political reforms should be on ways to strengthen democratic practice. It should also focus to increase and improve the quality of political participation by ordinary citizen.
- Any proposal for political reforms should think not only about what is a good solution, but also about who will implement it and how.

Right to Information: An Example of Best Political Reform The best laws are those which empower people to carry out democratic reforms. The Right to Information Act is a good example of a law that empowers the people to find out what is happening in government and acts as a watchdog of democracy. Such a law helps to control corruption and supplements the existing laws that banned corruption and imposed strict penalties.

Redefining Democracy: The definition of democracy will be redefined if the following qualification will be added to it

- The rulers elected by the people must take all the major decisions.
- Election must offer a choice and fair opportunity to the people to change the current rulers. This choice and opportunity should be available to all the people on an equal basis.
- The exercise of this choice must lead to a government, limited by basic rules of the Constitution and citizens' rights.
- Democracy offers some political, social and economic rights to its citizens.
- Power sharing between governments and social groups is necessary in a democracy as it is the spirit of democracy.
- Democracy cannot be the cruel rule of majority, and a respect for minority voice is necessary for democracy.
- Democracy eliminates discrimination based on caste, religion and gender.

