





## Unit 3: Democratic Government

### Unit Themes

Unit 3 encourages learners to make use of the knowledge and skills they developed in the first two units to explore the role of government.

In Chapter 5, learners analyse the difference between democratic and authoritarian government and assess the advantages and disadvantages of democracy.

In Chapter 6, learners look in more depth at the elements and structures of democratic government. These include the ideas of separation of powers, checks and balances and the concept of good governance. Chapter 6 also looks at the specific roles of the three branches of government as well as their relationships to each other.





## Unit 3: Learning Goals

### Knowledge

[Exercises]

**By the end of this unit you will have increased your understanding of:**

- the outcomes of democracy;
- the characteristics of authoritarian government;
- the differences between democratic and authoritarian governments;
- the arguments against democracy;
- the arguments in favour of democracy;
- the parliamentary and BSPP eras in Myanmar's history;
- the basic concept of government;
- the characteristics of good governance;
- separation of powers and checks and balances;
- the role of the legislative branch of government;
- the role of the executive branch of government;
- the role of the judicial branch of government.

### Skills

[Activities]

**By the end of this unit you will have developed your ability to:**

- create a democracy tree;
- create an authoritarianism tree;
- put leaders on a spectrum;
- find solutions to problems;
- debate issues with an opinion line;
- carry out a formal debate;
- create a budget;
- fill out a good governance report card;
- plan and carry out a debate about limiting leaders' power;
- role-play passing a bill in parliament;
- role-play the approval of a bill;
- role-play a judicial review of a bill.

### Values

[Reflections]

**By the end of this unit you will have reflected on:**

- which aspects of democracy are most important;
- experiences of authoritarianism;
- your views on leadership;
- whether democracy's advantages outweigh its disadvantages;
- the benefits of living in a democracy;
- whether democracy is the best system or not;
- the relationship between governments and people;
- your understanding of good governance;
- your experience of people having too much power;
- a law that you think is needed;
- the values and characteristics of a good leader;
- your experiences of injustice.

# 5.1 DEMOCRATIC AND AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENT

## 5.1.1 THE RESULTS OF DEMOCRACY

### PREVIEW

What are the results of democracy?

So when we get democracy, what happens after that?

To 'get' democracy is not the same as to get a job, or get a degree. Democracy is a process, not a result.

But some countries are democracies, and some countries are not. Those countries that are, must have become a democracy at some point, right?

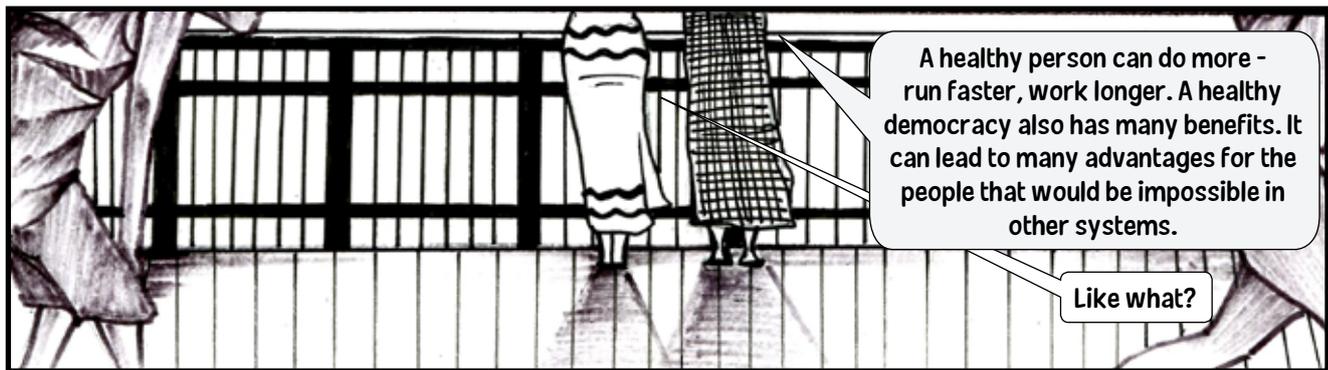
The word democracy is not like the word 'adult'. When we go from being 17 to 18, legally, we 'become' an adult; we can vote, drive a car, and other things. Democracy is not like that.

What is democracy like, then?

Democracy is more like the word 'healthy'. If we eat well, exercise and take care of ourselves, we will be more healthy. If we don't, we will be less healthy.

So what are the benefits of a healthy democracy?

Democracy is the same. The stronger the elements of democracy are, the more democratic the country is.



A strong democracy requires equality, free and fair elections, accountability, transparency, participation, tolerance and compromise, and the rule of law. This creates a system where people can take part in decisions that affect them.

Democracy also has effects on politics, the economy and society.

### **A. POLITICS**

Democracy is based on people's right to choose their rulers. Therefore, the most basic outcome of democracy is *government that carries out the decisions of the people*. A democratic government must listen to the needs and concerns of the people. It must also be accountable to them if it doesn't. As a result, the political results of democracy are leaders, decisions and actions that meet the needs of the people.

### **B. THE ECONOMY**

Some people claim that democracy improves the economy. Other people argue that rich countries are more democratic because they are richer. Democracy gives people the right to own property and to start a business, as well as other economic freedoms. When lots of people are involved in business, this can improve the economy. However, this does not always help people get out of poverty.

### **C. SOCIETY**

Democracies are based on political equality. All individuals have the same right to elect representatives. Furthermore, tolerance and compromise, participation and the rule of law can lead to more social equality, but not always. Democracy can only 'fix' poverty, racism and gender inequality if the citizens want to. If citizens demand social change, democratic governments have the power to share wealth and empower marginalised groups.

## Exercise

Choose the best answer.

- Which of these is a political outcome of democracy?
  - a government that is accountable to the people
  - a government that is always popular
  - a government that makes laws that everyone agrees with
- Which of these is an economic outcome of democracy?
  - poverty always increases
  - freedom to own a business
  - everyone always gets richer
- Which of these is a social outcome of democracy?
  - total gender equality
  - all citizens have the same rights to elect representatives
  - an end to discrimination



## Focus on Myanmar

### Quotes about the Results of Democracy

The most basic democratic rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of justice, right to vote for representatives freely do not come easily. They are the result of a long struggle.

U NU (1956), Progressive Battle , published in “Democracy is “, Htey Maung, Pg 37 (Myanmar version 2013)

Democracy requires more than just a democratic constitution. It takes more to gain the real elements of democracy such as freedom of speech, participation, free and fair elections and accountability. These will come from nowhere except the minds of the people.

U NU (1951), published in “The famous leaders speeches” (Myanmar version 2012)

Democracy does not turn poor people into rich people in one day. It cannot solve the problem of poverty **automatically**. However, it is an idea that shows the people the best way to make themselves free from poverty.

Thakin Ba Thoung (1954), “Defining Democracy”, Published by Knowledge Exchange Movement (Burma), (Myanmar Version 2012) pg 17-18

## Exercise

- What does Soe Thi Ma say about democratic rights?
- What does U Nu say about the elements of democracy?
- What does Thakin Ba Thoung say about democracy and poverty?

## The Fruits of Democracy

1. In groups, draw a tree with nine roots and nine fruits.
2. Put the requirements (roots) and results (fruits) of democracy on the tree.
  - For the roots: think about the seven elements of democracy. What does democracy need to function effectively? For example, democracy needs accountability so that representatives cannot ignore the needs of the people.
  - For the fruits: think about what happens as a result of these 'roots'. For example, if there is accountability, then representatives make decisions that meet the needs of the people.
3. Discuss the relationship between the roots and the fruits.
  - Did you think of any ideas that were both roots and fruits? Which ones?
  - Are some of the roots more important than the others? Why?
  - Are some of the fruits more important than the others? Why?
  - What is the relationship between the roots and the fruits?
  - Can you think of any other roots or fruits to add to the tree?
4. Which of the seven elements of democracy did you include in your democracy tree?



## Activity

## Discussion

1. Which of the roots of the democracy tree can you see in your community?
2. Which of the fruits of the democracy tree can you see in your community?
3. Which of the roots of the democracy tree are weak in your community?
4. Which of the fruits of the democracy tree are weak in your community?

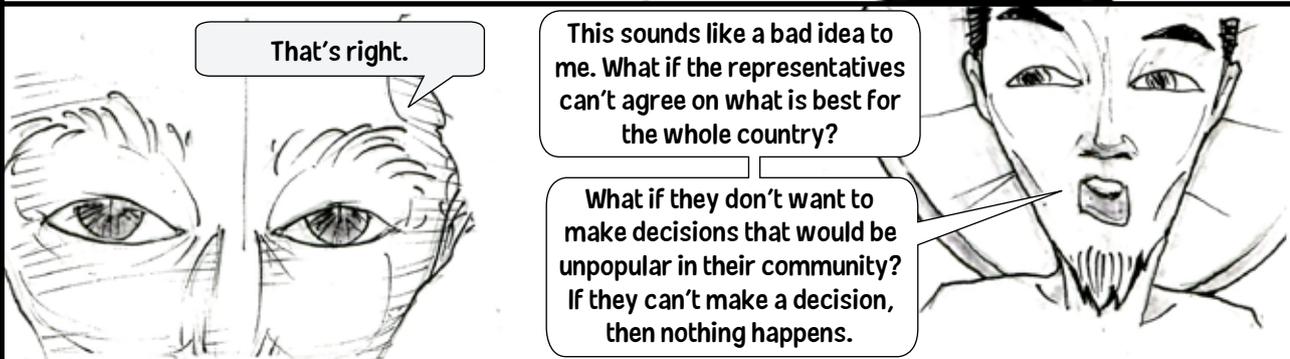
## Reflection

1. Which of the roots of the democracy tree are most important to you? Why?
2. Which of the fruits of the democracy tree are most important to you? Why?
3. Do you value democracy? Why?

## 5.1.2 AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENT

### PREVIEW

What are authoritarian governments like?



## A. AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENTS

In an authoritarian government, the government holds all power. The government is controlled by an individual leader or a small group of people. They make all the important decisions. Many authoritarian governments allow people to vote for representatives. However, those representatives often have little or no power to make important decisions.

Even if there are elections, the people don't have much chance to change the government. This could be because:

- there is only one option in the election;
- the government controls the election process so that they always win.

In either case, the government is not based on the consent of the people. Without political equality and free and fair elections, there is very little accountability and transparency in authoritarian governments. This often results in a lot of corruption and abuses of power.

Under an authoritarian government, citizens do not have the right to take part in decision-making. Authoritarian governments do not allow citizens to challenge or question the government's decisions. Citizens' organisations are often banned. This stops citizens from participating and making sure that the government is accountable. Authoritarian leaders think it is important to make decisions quickly and effectively. They often see discussion and compromise as wasting time.

The rule of law is often weak in authoritarian governments. The people who have the power (government, police, and wealthy businessmen) often ignore the law. It is difficult for ordinary citizens to protect themselves from rights abuses.

## Exercise

Are the statements true or false? If false, explain why.

- There are never elections in an authoritarian government.
- Accountability and transparency are weak in authoritarian governments.
- Authoritarian government is based on tolerance and compromise.



**Stalin's Russia and Mao's China: Authoritarian**

**B. THE OUTCOMES OF AUTHORITARIANISM****POLITICAL**

In authoritarian systems, the government is not accountable to the people. This makes it easier for leaders to ignore the needs of the people, or commit abuses of power. Citizens cannot participate in decision-making, so decisions do not address their needs and concerns. Political decisions mostly benefit the people in power and their supporters.

**ECONOMIC**

Transparency, accountability and the rule of law are much weaker under authoritarian governments. As a result, it is harder to control corruption. Also, citizens cannot be sure that their property or business will be safe. People are less confident to do business in authoritarian systems. This can have a negative effect on the economy. Poverty is also a big problem in many authoritarian countries, because the needs of the poor are ignored.

**SOCIAL**

Equality is weaker in authoritarian systems. There is often a big gap between rich and poor. Tolerance and compromise is much weaker under authoritarian governments. Minorities and marginalised groups have no way to express their needs and concerns. Sometimes, authoritarian governments blame their problems on minority groups. This can lead to discrimination and violent conflict. There are often rights abuses against minorities and marginalised groups. Citizens cannot rely on the rule of law to protect them from these violations.



Choose the best answer.

## Exercise

1. Which of these is a political outcome of authoritarianism?
  - a. Political decisions benefit the people in power.
  - b. Political decisions involve a lot of people.
  - c. Political decisions are made by consensus.
2. Which of these is an economic outcome of authoritarianism?
  - a. There is no poverty in authoritarian governments.
  - b. People are less confident to do business.
  - c. Authoritarian government usually improves the economy.
3. Which of these is a social outcome of authoritarianism?
  - a. The rights of marginalised groups are protected by the rule of law.
  - b. There is more equality in society.
  - c. There is often discrimination against minorities.



## Focus on Myanmar

### Quotes about Authoritarianism

“If the people let the government ignore their needs and concerns, representatives will think that they are kings. This will ruin democracy and lead to authoritarianism. It will cause the people to lose their freedom.”

General Aung San, 1947, Published in ‘the speeches of Leaders’, Min Poue Nya Pg 170 (Myanmar version, 2012)

If the government is influenced by authoritarian ideas, they will start choosing officials and representatives from the top. The people will not be able to choose them. These officials and representatives will bully the people into doing what they want. If this happens, the country will become authoritarian. People will lose their independence and the country will not develop. This is why it is so important to become a strong democracy.

General Aung San, 1947, Published in General Aung San Speeches in Sanpay Baintman People flyer (Myanmar Version 1971)

The government is a servant of the people. It should be an organization that knows what the people want and makes decisions based on their own knowledge. I want to be a real representative. Not the kind of representative that goes around making promises and trying to get as many votes as possible. But a representative that makes decisions based on his own judgment.

Lt General Nay Win, 1963, Papa Conference, published in *Democracy is*, Htey Maung, Pg 52 (Myanmar version 2013).

Answer the questions.

## Exercise

1. What does Aung San say are the causes of authoritarianism?
2. What does Aung San say are the results of authoritarianism?
3. According to Ne Win, how should representatives make decisions?

## Activity

### The Fruits of Authoritarianism



- In groups, draw a tree with nine roots and nine fruits.
- Put the requirements (roots) and results (fruits) of authoritarianism on the tree.
  - For the roots: think about which of the seven elements of democracy are absent in an authoritarian government. What is authoritarianism based on? For example, if there is no accountability, then leaders can do whatever they want.
  - For the fruits: think about what happens as a result of these 'roots'. What are the consequences of lack of accountability? For example, without accountability, there will be more corruption and abuses of power.
- Discuss the relationship between the roots and the fruits.
  - Did you think of any ideas that were both roots and fruits? Which ones?
  - Are some of the roots more important than the others? Why?
  - Are some of the fruits more important than the others? Why?
  - What is the relationship between the roots and the fruits?
- Can you think of any other roots or fruits to add to the tree?

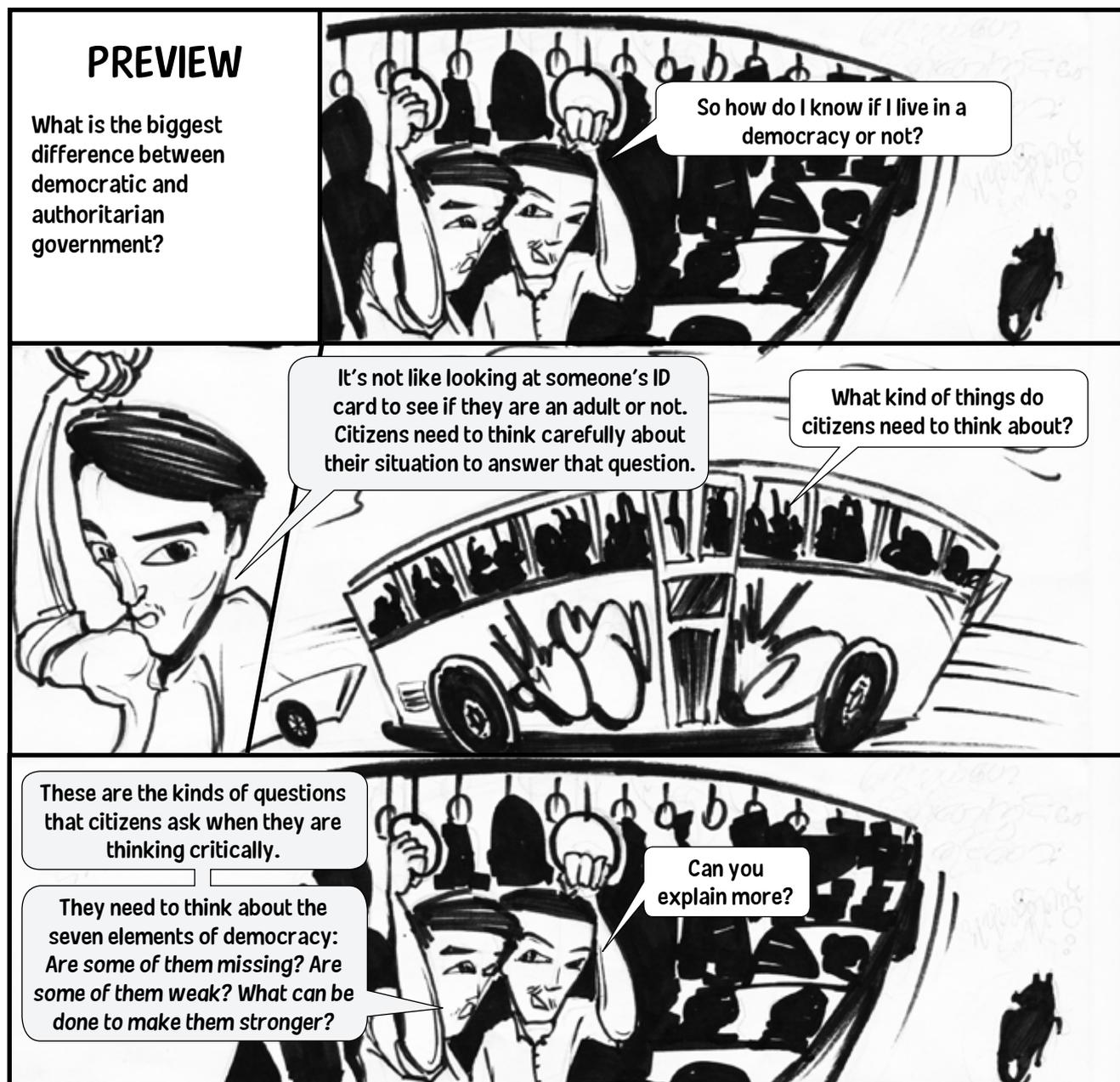
## Discussion

- Which of the roots of the authoritarianism tree can you see in your community?
- Which of the fruits of the authoritarianism tree can you see in your community?
- How do these roots and fruits affect daily life in your community?
- Are these roots and fruits changing? How?

## Reflection

- Do any of the roots and fruits of the authoritarianism tree affect you personally? In what way?
- How does it make you feel when people make decisions that affect you without your consent?

### 5.1.3 DEMOCRATIC AND AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENT



The difference between democratic and authoritarian governments can be seen in the daily life of citizens. The way that citizens speak, work and participate are all affected by the kind of government they live under.

In a democratic system, the seven elements of democracy are in place. This makes sure that citizens can participate in decision-making. However, in an authoritarian system, these elements are limited. This stops citizens from being involved in decision-making and keeps power in the hands of the government.

**Exercise**

Put the characteristics of democratic and authoritarian governments in the table.

1. Citizens have no way to replace bad leaders.
2. Citizens have the right to form political parties and organisations.
3. Government is not chosen by the people.
4. Government and the police are free to use power how they want.
5. Citizens have the right to access official information.
6. Anyone has the right to run for office.
7. Citizens have the right to replace representatives if they do a bad job.
8. The government and police's use of power is limited by the law.
9. Forming organisations is limited or banned.
10. Everyone has the right to express their ideas and opinions.
11. Views that do not agree with those in power are not listened to.
12. Running for office is either banned or limited to only some people.
13. The people choose the government in regular elections.
14. Access to information is limited.

Element	Democratic	Authoritarian
a. Equality	<i>Example answer: 6. Anyone has the right to run for office.</i>	<i>Example answer: 12. Running for office is either banned or limited to only some people.</i>
b. Free and fair elections		
c. Accountability		
d. Transparency		
e. Participation		
f. Tolerance and Compromise		
g. The Rule of Law		



## Focus on Myanmar

### U Thant on Democracy and Authoritarianism



Burma (Myanmar) is a strong supporter of democratic ideas and a democratic system of government. We in Burma think that a free, democratic government is the best system for the development of the people. We value the democratic way of life and basic freedoms such as freedom of speech and expression, freedom of work, freedom of association and freedom of religion.

However, we are aware that other people have different opinions about democracy.

We believe that the government should serve the people. The government is there to provide freedom and the things that individuals need to live a good life. Others believe that individuals are there to serve the government. We must also remember that democracy is not working well in many countries. Often, democracy is just a mask that powerful groups use to control the people.

The truth is that democracy is a very difficult system. It is difficult because it requires people with diverse ideas and concerns to find a solution to their problems. On the other hand, authoritarianism is an easy system. It only needs to use force or violence to solve its problems. It uses this force to make all people obey the decisions of the government. Tolerance and compromise is not necessary.

Democracy does have some disadvantages. However, it has two very important advantages. Firstly, democratic societies use peaceful and reasonable dialogue to solve their problems. They do not use force or violence. Secondly, democracies change their leaders through free and fair elections. No violent revolutions are necessary in a democracy.

U Thant, (1964), the Third Secretary-General of the United Nations, (1961-1971), "A Burmese View of World Tensions"

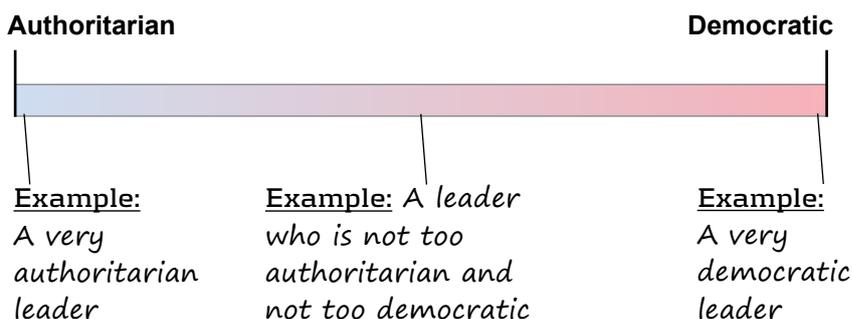
Answer the questions.

1. What are the challenges of democracy that U Thant mentions?
2. What difference between democracy and authoritarianism is mentioned in the text?
3. What are the advantages of democracy that U Thant mentions?

1. Think of a leader in your community. Are they more democratic or authoritarian?
2. Think of some more leaders. Put them on the spectrum. Give reasons for why you put them there.

## Exercise

## Activity



A speech bubble icon containing the word "Discussion" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The bubble is light gray with a white outline and a drop shadow.

## Discussion

1. What examples of democratic leadership can you see in your community?
2. What examples of authoritarian leadership can you see in your community?
3. What would you like to change about the leadership in your community?

A horizontal arrow icon pointing to the right, with a gradient from light blue to light purple. The word "Reflection" is written inside the arrow in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

## Reflection

Do you respect democratic or authoritarian leaders more? Why?

# 5.2 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DEMOCRACY

## 5.2.1 ARGUMENTS AGAINST DEMOCRACY

**PREVIEW**

What are the disadvantages of democracy?

Now I am confused. At first, I liked the idea of democracy. Then I thought it would be too complicated.

Then, you scared me by talking about authoritarianism. Can't you just tell me which system is the best one?

No. Democracy makes sure that the people make their own decisions. It does not make sure that these decisions will be good ones.

What do you mean?

For example, when you go to a doctor, would you be happy if your treatment was decided by all the patients voting?

Of course not!

Some people say the same thing about democracy.

They ask whether ordinary citizens are the best people to make important decisions.

What other reasons do those people give?



“The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.”

- Winston Churchill

Common arguments that people make against democracy include:

**1. LEADERS CHANGE TOO FREQUENTLY IN A DEMOCRACY.**

Some policies take a long time to start working. This might be unpopular if people want to see the benefits straight away. A ruling party might not be able to complete their **reforms** if they lose the next election. The new government would need to start again with a new set of policies. Some say that this is wasteful and slows down development.

**2. DEMOCRACY IS ALL ABOUT POLITICAL COMPETITION. THIS CAN CAUSE CONFLICT IN SOCIETY.**

The competition that is necessary for representative democracy to work can sometimes cause conflict in a community. The criticisms, disagreements and arguments between candidates can become very angry. This can disturb the peace of the community.

Also, there might be conflicts between the supporters of different parties or representatives. Sometimes supporters are not tolerant of each other's views. In extreme situations, this can lead to violence.

**3. A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE TO BE CONSULTED IN A DEMOCRACY, SO IT CAN TAKE A LONG TIME TO MAKE DECISIONS.**

Democracy is based on equality, participation and compromise. This means decisions can take a very long time. Supporters of democracy say that this avoids bad decisions. Critics of democracy say that it is too difficult to make important decisions quickly. This can lead to delays or **deadlock**.

**“Parliamentary  
democracy is not  
suitable for Burma at  
present.”**

**- General Ne Win**



**4. ORDINARY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHAT IS GOOD FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY; THEY SHOULD NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING IMPORTANT DECISIONS.**

In large and diverse societies, some issues are very complicated. Making good decisions about these issues can be hard. Citizens might not understand the issues very well. Very few citizens are experts, and some have not even had basic education.

Citizens with jobs and families do not have the time to research and consider all of the options in a debate. Critics of democracy say that allowing citizens to make these kinds of decisions leads to bad decisions.

**5. MINORITIES CAN BE EXCLUDED FROM DECISION-MAKING IF THEY LOSE AN ELECTION.**

Making important decisions by majority vote can leave the losers feeling resentful and powerless. This can be a big problem when this group is a large minority, e.g. more than 30%. It can also be a problem if the majority ignores the needs and concerns of ethnic, racial or other minorities.

**6. LEADERS ONLY CARE ABOUT BEING POPULAR, NOT DOING WHAT IS BEST FOR THE COMMUNITY.**

In a democracy, some politicians do everything they can to win an election. This includes offering quick, attractive solutions to get people's votes. However, these solutions are not always what the community or country really needs.

Sometimes, slow, difficult or expensive changes are necessary to solve a community's problems. However, if a candidate proposes these changes, they might become unpopular. Then they might lose the election. Democracy can lead to doing what people want, not than what people need.

## Exercise



Read the examples (a – f, bottom) and match them with the list of disadvantages of democracy (below) from the previous page.

1. Leaders change too frequently in a democracy.

Example answer: C

2. Democracy is all about political competition. This can cause conflict in society.
3. A lot of people have to be consulted in a democracy, so it can take a long time to make decisions.
4. Ordinary people don't know what is good for the whole country; they should not be responsible for making important decisions.
5. Minorities can be excluded from decision-making if they lose an election.
6. Leaders only care about being popular, not doing what is best for the community.

## Examples of the Disadvantages of Democracy

**A. IN THE CENTRAL SPORTS CLUB, 75% of members are football players and 25% are chinlone players. Football and chinlone teams participate in competitions, and new members join the teams each year. Each member pays 20,000 kyat per year to the club. Once a year, the club has a budget meeting. All members decide by majority vote how to spend the club's money. Every year, the chinlone group loses the vote, so all the money goes to the football players. Now the chinlone players are getting angry, because their money is being spent on football and they get nothing.**

**B. THERE IS A REFERENDUM on whether a country should change its voting system. The government suggests a very complicated new voting system. Most people do not understand it. However, many well-educated politicians tell them that it is better. At the next election, many people are confused and do not know how to vote.**

**C. MA SANDAR WAI has just returned from studying political science at a university in Singapore. She goes back to her township, and runs for election. She is competing against Daw Thet Phyu, who has been living in the community for a long time. Ma Sandar Wai promises a lot of big changes. Daw Thet Phyu says that the community should not make big changes. She believes it is better to continue with slow, steady changes. Ma Sandar Wai wins the election. However, she loses the next election because all of her ideas cost too much money to be completed.**

**D. THE LOCAL COUNCIL IS DISCUSSING where to build a new road in the town. The rules of the council say that anyone in the community who has an idea or a**

**concern can express this to the council. The rules also say that if more than two council members disagree with a decision, then it cannot be made. Because the new road is a very controversial issue, after two months of discussions they still are not able to make a decision.**

**E. THERE ARE A LOT OF YOUNG PEOPLE in the community. Ko Htet Hsan knows that they all love mobile phones and the internet. Before the election, he promises to make mobile phones cheaper and improve internet access in the town. His opponent, U Win Oo, says that if he is elected, he will make sure that all the holes in the street are fixed and street lighting improved. Because of all of the young people's votes, Ko Htet Hsan wins the election. Soon after this, several young people are badly injured because they are looking at their phones while walking on the streets.**

**F. DURING AN ELECTION, the XX Party is competing against the YY Party. The competition between the two parties' supporters is very aggressive. Both parties are nervous because one or two votes would decide who wins the election. Someone from the XX Party takes pictures of a YY Party member very drunk in a beer station. He says that after, he drove home and crashed his car into a house. Later, someone from the YY Party told a journal the XX Party members were illegally gambling in casinos on the border with China. After the YY Party hears about this, they go to the XX Party office to express their anger. Both parties start shouting at each other. After this there is a fight between the two parties' supporters.**

## Excitement in Boretown

## Activity

Read the text then follow the instructions.

Boretown is a small town and there is nothing to do. A group of citizens decided to hold elections to choose someone to be in charge of Boretown and make it better. This person would be given the power and responsibility to make changes.

There were only two candidates. One was the local teacher, Daw Khin Khin Nwe, who had talked about making changes in the town for years.

Daw Khin Khin Nwe said that she would ask people what they thought would be needed. She thought it would take time to make a plan for all the changes and even longer to implement them well.

A lot of people were disappointed. They had thought that Daw Khin Khin Nwe would come up with ideas for a big shopping centre with a cinema and a concert hall.

Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win, the other candidate, talked about the new swimming pool and cinema that everyone wanted, and the concert hall so all the famous singers would come to Boretown. The people were very happy about these ideas..

Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win won the election.

Ko Kyaw Kyaw Win soon built a swimming pool – in his garden. He then built himself a cinema and concert hall. The people in Boretown became upset. But what could they do? After all, they had voted for him.

The people asked Daw Khin Khin Nwe for help. She said that it was their responsibility because they voted for him. “But this is unfair”, the people said. “I know”, said Daw Khin Khin Nwe, “so now we have to do something...”



In groups, discuss how the story could continue, focusing on three questions:

1. What could the people of Boretown have done beforehand?
2. What can they do now?
3. How can something like this be prevented in the future?



## Focus on Myanmar

### Quotes about the Dangers of Democracy

The words 'people' and 'democracy' and so on are used freely, but not honestly. They are used by clever politicians to trick the people into giving them power. They say that they will use the power to serve the people, but they use that power to serve themselves. They use that power to make the situation of the people worse.

Aung San (1947), Address at AFPFL Convention (23/5/1947)

Of all the political systems to rule a country, democracy is the most difficult system. For democracy to be successful, citizens must have enough knowledge and intelligence. If they do not, democracy will lead to **chaos**.

U Thant, (1964), the Third Secretary-General of the United Nations, (1961-1971), "A Burmese View of World Tensions"

If citizens ignore their duties, the government will become corrupt... If someone ignores their personal responsibilities, this will harm themselves and the people around them. However, if citizens ignore their civic responsibilities, this will harm the whole country.

Ba Pe (1953), 'Civics for High Schools', KEM Burma Pg 18-20 (Myanmar Version)



### Exercise

1. Why does Aung San say democracy is dangerous?
2. Why does U Thant say democracy is dangerous?
3. According to U Ba Pe, why is it important that citizens fulfil their responsibilities?

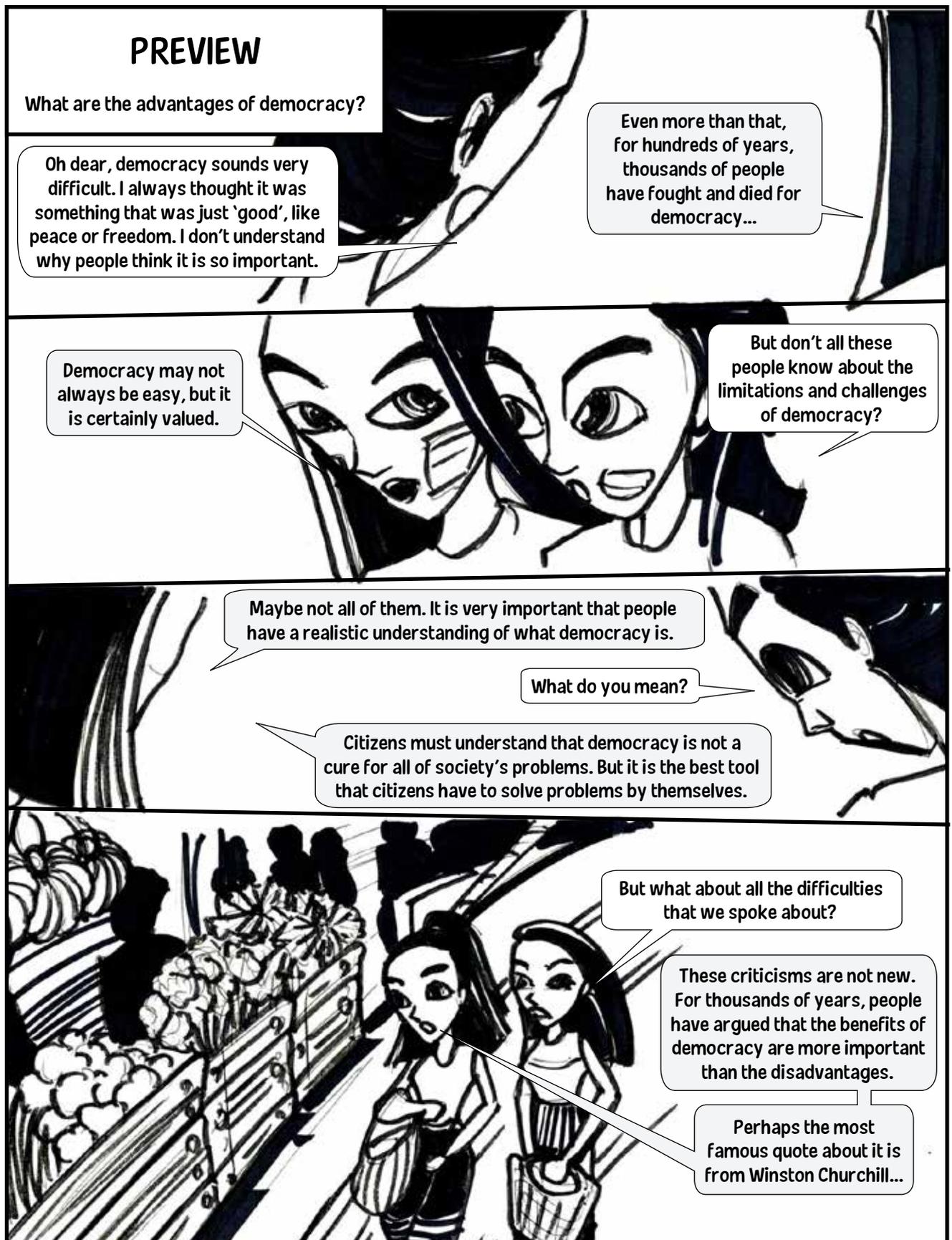
### Discussion

1. Can you see any of these disadvantages of democracy in your community? Give examples.
2. Can you think of any other arguments against democracy?

### Reflection

Do any of these problems of democracy affect you personally? In what way?

## 5.2.2 ARGUMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY





“Democracy is the worst form of government, except all the others that have been tried.”

- Winston Churchill

Common arguments that people make for democracy include:

**1. A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IS A MORE ACCOUNTABLE FORM OF GOVERNMENT**

Democratic accountability prevents leaders from abusing their power or ignoring the needs of the people. In a democracy, leaders who don't meet the needs of the people will be replaced by leaders who can. Leaders who break the law will be punished the same as everyone else.

This makes sure that leaders and representatives must fulfil their responsibilities (both to the people and the law) and will get punished if they don't.

**2. DEMOCRACY IMPROVES THE QUALITY OF DECISION-MAKING**

Democracy is based on discussion and compromise. A democratic decision involves different people, discussions and meetings. When more people are involved, there are more people to identify possible mistakes or dangers in a decision. This takes time, but it can stop governments making bad decisions that negatively affect citizens.

**3. DEMOCRACY IS THE BEST SYSTEM FOR PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS.**

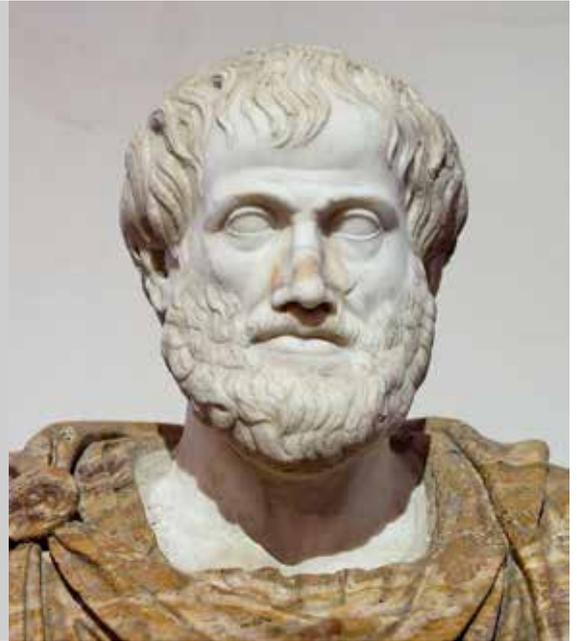
Democracy is based on participation, equality, and the rule of law. Without these basic requirements, democracy can not work.

- Participation is linked to the right to freedom of speech, association and freedom of assembly.
- Equality is linked to the right to be free from discrimination.
- The rule of law is necessary for protecting all human rights.

In many countries, if people have more human rights, they demand more democracy. If they get more democracy, they demand more human rights.

“In a democracy the poor will have more power than the rich, because there are more of them, and the will of the majority is supreme.

- Aristotle



#### **4. DEMOCRACIES ARE USUALLY MORE PEACEFUL**

Democracies are based on tolerance, compromise and equality. This means that it is less likely that minorities will be excluded from decision-making. Democracy can create unity if minorities are included in decision-making. This makes it less likely that minorities will try to separate themselves or use violence to achieve their goals.

Democracy makes sure that citizens resolve their differences through elections, peaceful dialogue and legal processes.

#### **5. IT PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE PART IN GOVERNMENT**

Democracy is based on the idea that any eligible citizen has the right to be a representative. This means that the best leadership can rise to the top, whatever their social or economic background is. This often leads to greater representation of women and minorities in government.

#### **6. DEMOCRACY MEETS THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE BETTER THAN OTHER SYSTEMS.**

Democratic governments need to have the support of the people to stay in power. This means they must pay attention to the needs and concerns of the people.

Democracy is based on communication between the government and the people. The people have a responsibility to express their needs. The government has the responsibility to listen.

## Exercise



Read the examples (a – f, bottom) and match them with the list of advantages of democracy (below) from the previous page.

1. A democratic government is a more accountable form of government.

Example answer: D

2. Democracy improves the quality of decision-making.
3. Democracy is the best system for protecting human rights.
4. Democracies are usually more peaceful.
5. Democracy provides equal opportunities to take part in government.
6. Democracy meets the needs of the people better than other systems.

## Examples of the Advantages of Democracy

A. A TOWNSHIP had a lot of health problems. The local government used to make decisions about the health budget in a very autocratic way. It bought a lot of expensive machines and medicines that the people didn't need. A new leader was elected because he said that he would change the health system. He wanted new community health councils to make important decisions. On these health councils 25% of the members would be government workers, 25% would be doctors and nurses and 50% would be citizens. The new community health councils discussed the issues then made good decisions about the best way to provide health care to their community.

B. MA NYEIN OO was born into a poor family. Since she was a child, she worked at a teashop to support her family. During this time, she faced a lot of discrimination because of her ethnicity and her religion. Later, she started an organisation that supported teashop workers and provided them with education. She gained lots of skills and experience through this and she was elected to the local government. As a representative, she made policies that improved the lives of people in her community.

C. IN A COMMUNITY there are two different ethnic groups. The Exes are the majority and the Zees are the minority. Each year, the local government has to decide on how to spend its budget for festivals and celebrations. Some members of the Zees asked if they could explain their concerns. They wanted to explain why their festivals are so important to them. Both groups sat together and agreed on a budget that allowed them to celebrate both groups' festivals.

D. U WIN SOE was elected as representative for his township. He promised that he would build new wells so that everyone had enough clean water. However, after he was elected, he spent most of his time making business deals. He lost the next election and was replaced by Daw Kyi Kyi Hlaing who built the wells immediately after she was elected.

E. A TOWNSHIP had a big ethnic minority population. These people could not speak the national language well. They didn't go to local clinics because they could not speak with the doctors. As a result, they had many health problems. A representative from this community raised this issue in the local government. He said that the government was denying their citizens the right to health care. The local government agreed, and made a law that said that there should be 'community helpers' in each clinic and hospital. These community helpers would translate into the minority language. As a result, members of the minority community started going to local clinics and their health improved.

F. A large rural township had very few secondary schools. In this township, families did not allow their daughters to travel alone. They also could not afford transportation to the schools. As a result, many girls were not able to go to school. There was an election coming up and one candidate travelled around speaking to the people. She discussed their needs and concerns and she heard the reasons why the girls didn't go to school. She promised to solve this problem if she got elected. She won the election. She made sure that there were free buses for students who lived far away. After this, all of the girls who lived in the area could go to school.



## Focus on Myanmar

### Quotes about the Advantages of Democracy

Democracy in Myanmar is like the song of Win Oo: 'an unfinished picture'. Democracy is not a picture that is completed by just one person. It is a picture that becomes more beautiful when more people take part in the drawing.

U Maung Myint, (2012), "Democracy", Hnin Si Ni Journal Volume II, 7/5 July

Freedoms of expression, assembly and association help people to understand the issues that they are facing by talking about them and learning from each other. These rights also help the government to understand the needs and concerns of the people better.

U NU (1956), Progressive Battle, published in "Democracy is", Htey Maung, Pg 38 (Myanmar version 2013)

In a democracy, citizens can fully enjoy their human rights. All citizens, regardless of race, **origins** and religions are equal before the law. Citizens all have equal opportunity, whether in government, business or employment. This means that men and women get equal payment for equal work.

U NU (1958), June 29 National Conference of Anti-Fascist People Freedom League (AFPFL), published in "Democracy is", Htey Maung, Pg 40-41 (Myanmar version 2013).

Answer the questions.

1. Why does U Maung Myint say that democracy is like an *unfinished picture* in the first quote?
2. What is the advantage of democracy that U Nu mentions in the second quote?
3. What is the advantage of democracy that U Nu mentions in the third quote?

## Exercise

### Opinion Line

1. Read the statements. Think about whether you agree or disagree with them.

"The people are affected by important decisions, so the people should be responsible for making them."

"Most people are not capable of making good decisions about important issues."

2. One end of the class is 'strongly agree'. The other end is 'strongly disagree'. The middle is where you don't have an opinion. When you hear a statement, go and stand according to your opinion.

## Activity

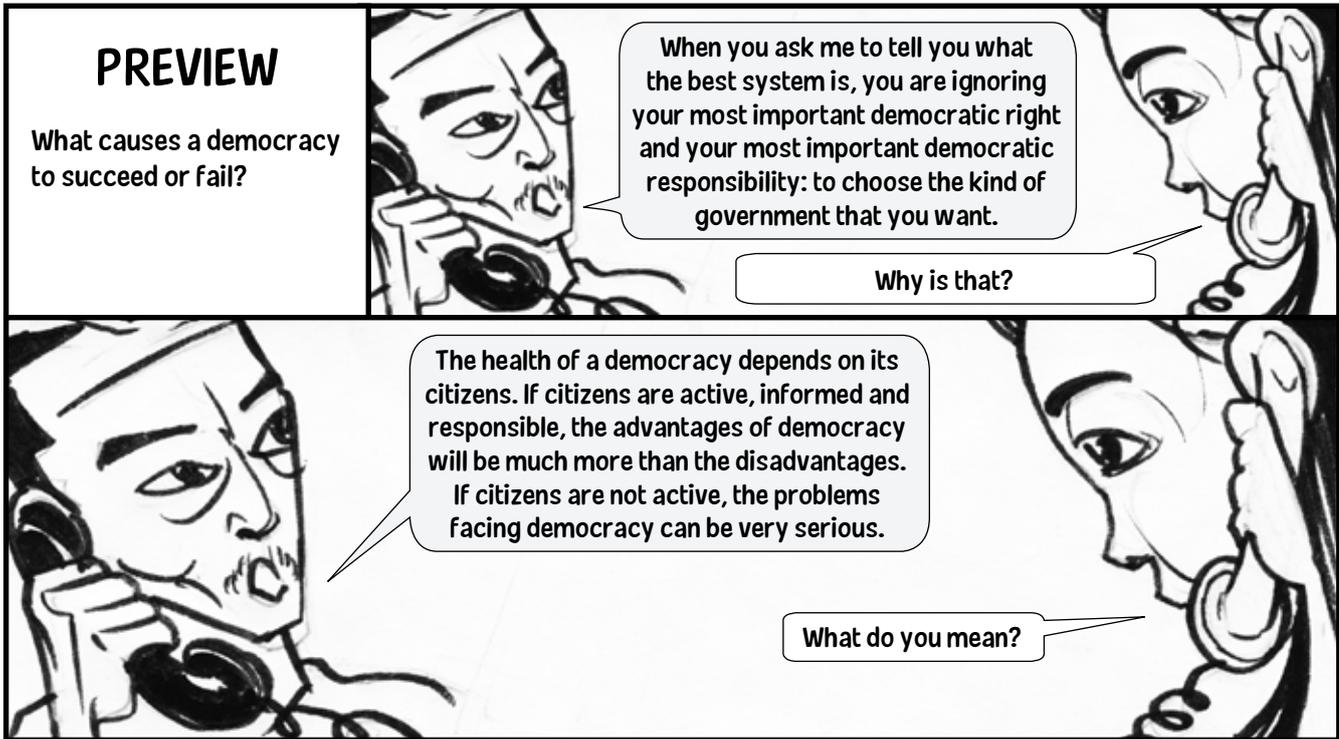
1. Why is democracy good at meeting the needs of the people?
2. Can you think of any other arguments for democracy (not discussed in this chapter)?

## Discussion

## Reflection

Do you think the advantages of democracy are more important than the disadvantages of democracy? Why?

### 5.2.3 DEMOCRACY VS AUTHORITARIANISM



Critics and supporters of democracy both use the same argument – that in a democracy, the people are responsible for making important decisions. Critics say this is a weakness of democracy, while supporters say it is a strength.

The success of a democracy does not depend only on its leaders. It depends mainly on its citizens. This is both the strength and the weakness of democracy.

This is perhaps the biggest difference between democracy and other kinds of government. Authoritarian governments do not require citizens to participate. In a democracy, citizens have both a right and a responsibility to take part in decision-making and other democratic activities.

Sharing in decision-making means sharing in the responsibility. The people cannot ignore their responsibilities, or just follow orders without thinking. If they do, critics of democracy are proved to be right.

If citizens are active, informed and responsible, democracy will work. If they are not, democracies can lead to bad leadership, the exclusion of minorities and deadlock. In the end, the citizens themselves decide if a democracy is successful or not.

Are the statements true or false? If false, explain why.

- The amount of citizen participation is one of the biggest differences between democracy and authoritarianism.
- Democratic citizens have the same amount of responsibilities as citizens do in authoritarian countries.
- It is the citizens who are responsible for the failure or the success of a democracy.

## Exercise



## Focus on Myanmar

### The Parliamentary Era (1948 – 1962)



Myanmar's government was based on the British parliamentary system. The voters elected members of parliament. The parliament was divided into two houses: The Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Nationalities.

The Chamber of Nationalities had representatives from ethnic minority and workers' groups. The Chamber of Deputies was more powerful because it chose the prime minister.

The two houses met together to elect the president. They also appointed judges, approved changes to the constitution, passed laws, and made important decisions about war, peace, and foreign relations.

During this period, people discussed politics freely, and there were independent newspapers. People organised unions of peasants, workers, women, and youth. These groups started to participate in politics and share their opinions.

However, this was a very unstable period in the country. Communists and some of the ethnic groups started to fight against the government. There was also a lot of conflict in the parliament. The different parties did not work together well and it was often difficult to make decisions.



Answer the questions.

- How was the prime minister chosen in the parliamentary era?
- In what ways was democracy strong during this period?
- In what ways was democracy unstable during this period?

## Exercise



## Focus on Myanmar

### The BSPP Era (1962 – 1988)



By 1957, fighting between the government, ethnic groups and communist groups was getting worse. In May 1958, the ruling party (the AFPFL) split into two groups. U Nu led the 'clean' faction. Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein led The 'stable' faction.

In March 1962, a military **coup** removed U Nu from power. General Ne Win said that the parliamentary system was not good for the country. He said that political leaders did not care about what is best for the country. He said they were only trying to get rich.

General Ne Win's military government made strict rules for university and school students. They changed the curricula and taught only Myanmar in place of ethnic minority languages. In 1962, students protested against the coup. As a response, the student union building of Yangon University was destroyed. After this, political parties and civil society organisations were also controlled much more strictly.

Newspapers and journals were controlled by the military. This made it difficult to criticise the new government.

In 1974 a new constitution was written. According to the new constitution, Myanmar would be a 'single party government'. That means that there was only one legal political party: the Burma Socialist Program Party. All other parties were illegal. The only people who were allowed to be in government were BSPP party members. The government was controlled by the president and the prime minister.

#### Burma Council Bars Parliamentary Rule

RANGOON, Burma, May 8 (AP) — Gen. Ne Win, chairman of the ruling Revolutionary Council, says parliamentary democracy is not suitable for Burma at present because the ups and downs of political life has obliged party leaders to "amass fortunes."

Mr. Win said this eagerness of the politicians to line their nests while they could worked against the building of a socialist state.

## Exercise

1. What reasons did Ne Win give for taking over the government?
2. In what ways was democracy weakened during this period?
3. Would you say that the 1974 constitution created a democratic or an authoritarian government? Why?

## Debate on Democracy

**"Democracy is the best form of government."**

1. Decide whether you want to argue for or against the statement. Form groups for and against the statement.
2. Choose three debaters to present your groups' arguments, and as a group, prepare these arguments.
3. Hold the debate.
  - Group 1, speaker 1 presents their arguments for two minutes.
  - Group 2, speaker 1 presents their arguments for two minutes.
  - Group 1, speaker 2 replies to group 2's arguments and presents their arguments for two minutes.
  - Group 2, speaker 2 replies to group 1's arguments and presents their arguments for two minutes.
  - Group 1, speaker 3 replies to group 2's arguments and presents their arguments for two minutes.
  - Group 2, speaker 3 replies to group 1's arguments and presents their arguments for two minutes.
4. As a class, vote on which side presented the best arguments.

## Activity

1. What do you think are the most important advantages of democracy?
2. What do you think are the most important disadvantages of democracy?

## Discussion

Has this chapter changed your mind about democracy? How?

## Reflection