

Democracy

WORKSHEET A

Karen

Democracy is the best form of government that has been created so far in human history. A system in which everyone is able to vote and therefore have a say in how the country is run is fairer than one where power is in the hands of a small group of people. Living in a democracy means you have more control over your own life. It's infuriating when people – often young people – say there's no point in voting because it doesn't change anything. That's so obviously not true. The parliaments we elect are always passing laws that affect people's lives, either for better or worse. And when people say the candidates are 'all the same', it just shows they're not paying enough attention. Sure, we might think our political parties are too similar, but if you can be bothered to study their proposals you'll always see there are differences you can base your choice upon.

We should take a look at the history books and remember that huge numbers of people around the world have fought and died for democracy. We should value our vote and think hard about how best to use it. There's no excuse for apathy.

Andy

What do we actually mean by 'democracy'? Going out and voting once every few years – is that it? In most so-called democracies the important decisions are taken by a small group of people at the top of the political party in power – we, the voters, don't have any *direct* influence.

Also, you can't say we live in a full democracy when the information we receive at election time is so limited. For a start, the party with the most money can usually get its message across more easily than its opponents. And then there's the media, which has a lot of influence and is generally biased in favour of one party, making sure most voters *don't* see the full picture.

Actually, though, I'm not sure how well democracy can address what is the probably going to be the biggest issue in future – the environment. If industrialised countries like ours don't start slowing down their consumption of the world's resources, we're probably heading for catastrophe. Would people vote to avoid that, or are most of us too selfish and too addicted to our current lifestyle? Sometimes I think the only solution will be if we are *forced* to change, which suggests a more authoritarian form of government. It's not a comfortable thought.

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Exercise 1

Here are some simple definitions for words that appear in the text on Worksheet A. Find the words they refer to and fill in the gaps.

Karen

1. If you _____ a _____ (phrase) in a situation, your opinion has some influence (even if, sometimes, that influence is only very small).
2. If something or someone is _____ (adjective), it makes you angry.
3. _____ (verb): to choose someone by voting, so that they represent you or hold an official position.
4. To _____ (verb) a law means to introduce it and make it official. In most democracies this usually involves a vote in parliament.
5. If you do not _____ (verb) to do something, you don't do it, either because there seems to be no good reason or because it involves too much effort.
6. _____ (noun): a plan or suggestion (especially a formal one that a group has to consider).
7. _____ (noun): the feeling of having no interest in a situation, or of not wanting to make any effort to change it.

Andy

8. ___ - _____ (adjective): used for showing that you think the word used to describe something or someone is not suitable.
9. _____ (adjective): preferring one person, thing or idea to another, in a way that is unfair.
10. If you ___ the _____ (phrase), you are aware of all the aspects of a situation, not just some aspects.
11. If you _____ (verb) an issue or problem you deal with it, for example by thinking carefully about it, or by doing things to improve the situation.
12. A country that is _____ (adjective) has a lot of industry.
13. _____ (noun): disaster.
14. If you are _____ (adjective) to an activity you are unable to stop doing it (or, in the case of a harmful drug, unable to stop taking it).
15. _____ (adjective): controlling everything and forcing people to obey strict rules and laws.

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WORKSHEET C

Exercise 2

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't say (D).

1. Karen thinks people should vote.
2. Andy is certain that democracy can solve all the world's problems.
3. Karen has voted recently.
4. Andy thinks the media generally treats all political parties equally.
5. Karen thinks political parties are generally all the same.
6. Andy says everyone in a democracy has the same amount of influence over important decisions.
7. Andy thinks political parties have too much money.
8. Karen thinks no other system of government is as good as democracy.

Exercise 3

Answer the questions about the text.

1. What argument does Karen make against the idea that voting doesn't change anything?
2. According to Andy, in what way does wealth help a political party?
3. In Karen's opinion, why do some people say that candidates in elections are all the same?
4. According to Andy, what is the problem with the media?
5. What does Karen suggest people should do in order to understand the differences between political parties?
6. In Karen's opinion, what past events have contributed to there being 'no excuse for apathy'?
7. What makes Andy think that a more authoritarian form of government might be necessary in future? Do you think that is something he is looking forward to? Explain your answer.
8. In criticising 'so-called' democracies, what does Andy say about decision-making? How does that compare with what Karen says about *other* forms of government?