

CHV2O Unit 1: Citizenship and Government

Activity 3: Definition of Democracy

Overview

In this Activity, you are encouraged to consider democracy in a broader scope that includes some of the legal, political, social, and economic issues that surround the creation and maintenance of a democratic state. You will consider some of the opinions about democracy expressed by important figures of modern history.

Lesson

Broadening the Definition of Democracy

"Democracy refers to a society in which the authority of the government comes from and depends upon the consent of the people, and in which citizens have the opportunity to make informed decisions with regards to leadership selection, the creation of government policies and the passage of laws."

This standard definition highlights the importance of the "consent of the people" and the need for "informed and effective" citizen participation in leadership selection, the development of policies and the creation of laws. There are several other fundamental beliefs and values associated with democratic citizenship (e.g., rule of law, human dignity, freedom of worship, respect for rights of others, work for common good, sense of responsibility for others, freedom of expression). Democracy is a complex form of self-government that is multi-faceted in meaning and precious to citizens in many different ways.

Consider what these important individuals have said about democracy:

"Canada will be a strong country when Canadians of all provinces feel at home in all parts of the country, and when they feel that all Canada belongs to them." - Pierre Elliott Trudeau (former Prime Minister)

"Authentic democracy is possible only in a state ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct concept of the human person." - Pope John Paul II

"Parliament is more than procedure - it is the custodian of the nation's freedom." - John Diefenbaker (former Prime Minister)

"Democracy is essentially anti-authoritarian -- that is, it not only demands the right but imposes the responsibility of thinking for ourselves." - John Dryden (author)

"Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." - Reinhold Niebuhr (author)

Assignment

1. What does Democracy mean?
2. What did Reinhold Niebuhr say about democracy and what did he mean by that statement?
3. You have considered some of the opinions about democracy expressed by some of the more important figures of modern history; it is time to express your own personal beliefs and values relating to democracy. Explain in your own words, 2 features of democracy that you believe to be valuable to citizens.