



Social Issues

Democracy – or a lack of democracy



Definition:

Democracy is the free and equal right of every person to participate in a system of government, often practiced by electing representatives of the people by the people.

When there is a lack of democracy it means that an individual or group in a position of power is excluding others from participating in a system of government. This can happen when, for example, a country is ruled by a dictator or autocrat.

Examples:

- If a country is ruled by a dictator then there is a lack of democracy
- If one person makes a decision on behalf of a community group without consulting the others then there is no democracy

Why the situation occurs?

When there is a lack of democracy it is usually the result of one or more individuals taking all of the decision-making and power for themselves. They may do this for financial or political motives and will ensure that they have all of the controlling powers.

These people can then control the armed forces, commercial interests, state companies, the press and other media, finances, etc.

In the worse situations, if a dictator comes to power and democracy is abolished, then that leader can cause irreversible damage to the country and its people. For example, Hitler was a dictator who led his supporters to wage war on the rest of Europe and then the world, discriminating against other races and committing mass genocide.

In a local community, for example, it would not be democratic for a few people to make important decisions about local amenities or resources, without consulting the rest of the inhabitants.

When there is democracy, the citizens of a country have the right to elect their leaders and participate in the governing of a country. In the local communities when democracy is in action, all of the members of a community can contribute to the decisions made that will affect the inhabitants. As Scouts we learn to work with others and to think of others.

How you can make a difference?

Tackle the issue - learn what democracy really means. Identify examples of democratic practices in your school, community, Scout group and country. Identify examples of non-democratic practice. How can we become more democratic? Why is democracy important? Learn about how democratic practices were established in your country and communities.

Use the materials and tools provided to follow the process of:

1. Identifying the problem
2. Developing Awareness and Empathy
3. Taking action
4. Measuring the change

Resources and Links:

Workshop 3: A traditional African folk-tale for democracy and peace education from the booklet "Building Peace Together" (A World Organization of the Scout Movement publication)

http://www.scout.org/wsrc/peaceworkshops/workshop3_e.pdf (English)

World Organization of the Scout Movement publication: The Essential Characteristics of Scouting:

http://www.scout.org/wsrc/ll/docs/EssChar_E.pdf (English)

http://www.scout.org/wsrc/ll/docs/EssChar_F.pdf (French)

Australian New South Wales "Discovering Democracy professional development" website which promotes civics and citizenship education in government and non-government schools:

<http://www.abc.net.au/civics/democracy/default.htm>