

The Democracy Index by “The Economist Intelligence Unit”

What is it and how to use it to compare governments?

What is Democracy?

Students learn a fairly simple definition for Democracy. They learn democracy means that the people have a say in government. In other words, the people tell the government what to do. In reality, the definition of a democratic country is not so easy.

“Democratic countries” that are not really democratic

There are some countries that claim to be democratic, but those countries do NOT appear very democratic when someone looks carefully at those countries. For example, a country may claim to be a democratic country because the country allows people to elect the leaders, but that country is not very democratic because of a number of reasons. Here are some examples of reasons why a country that claims to be democratic may not really be democratic:

- Countries that allow only one candidate on the election ballot. Do the people really have a choice of leaders?
- Countries that elect their leaders for life with no possible way of removing from office. What if the people made a bad decision and decide they want a different leader now?
- Countries that allows the leader to have too much power. That powerful leader, usually a dictator, can arrest and put into jail anybody who disagrees with the leader.

So then, what is a real democracy?

While not everyone agrees on the definition of democracy, most people believe that a democratic country should include the following parts:

- A. A national government where more than one political party could be elected to office. For example, here in the United States, we have Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, the Green Party, plus many other political parties that may try to get people elected to office.
- B. All adults should be allowed to vote in national elections.
- C. National elections that are regularly held every few years with no voter fraud. For example, here in the United States, we hold elections every two years for U.S. Representatives, every four years for President, and every six years for U.S. Senators.
- D. The ability of political parties to campaign, or urge, voters to vote for them in the election.

The Democracy Index by “The Economist Intelligence Unit”

A group called The Economist Intelligence Unit created a new way of measuring how democratic a country is based on a definition of democracy. The definition of democracy used by The Economist Intelligence Unit looks at five parts:

- A. Fair and regular elections—How often does a country hold elections?
- B. Protecting the rights of all people—Does more than one political party have a chance to be elected to office?
- C. How well the government works—Does the government actually pass laws and do what the people want it to do?
- D. Political participation—Do people of the country actually vote in the elections?
- E. Political culture—Is the government fair or corrupt? Do leaders have too much power?

The Economist Intelligence Unit created a 60 question survey which measures democracy in each country. Each question on the survey asks about one of the five parts of the definition of democracy. So there are several questions for each of the five parts of the Democracy definition. Groups of experts from each country answer each of the 60 questions for that country. Since 167 countries are included in the results, there are a lot of experts answering lots of questions!

The Economist Intelligence Unit figures out scores for each part of the Democracy definition for each country. Once all of the scores are figured, The Economist Intelligence Unit averages the five scores for each country. The final average score for a country becomes that country's Democracy Index score.

Let's try to calculate the Democracy Index score for a couple of countries by completing Exercise #1 on your worksheet.

Ranking the countries based on their Democracy Index score

The Economist Intelligence Unit uses the final Democracy Index scores for 167 countries to determine a ranking, or order, of those countries. For example, use the numbers from Exercise #1 and figure out which country--the United States or Canada--is more democratic. Does that result surprise you?

Types of governments

The Economist Intelligence Unit uses the Democracy Index scores to label each of the 167 countries as one of four different types of governments:

- A. Full democracies—Countries that score between 8 and 10 are considered as a full democracy. The governments of those countries truly use democracy.
- B. Flawed democracies—Countries that score between 6 and 7.9 are considered as countries which use democracy in general, but have some problems and cannot be called true democratic countries.
- C. Hybrid regimes—Countries that score between 4 and 5.9 usually have several problems which mean the country is not really a democratic country. Often government leaders are corrupt and bad with too much power to be considered a democratic country.
- D. Authoritarian regimes—Countries that score below 4 are not considered to be democratic countries at all. Many of these countries live with dictators ruling the country and there are few, if any, elections in those countries. If there are elections, the election process is not fair to all people.

Now complete Exercise #2 on the worksheet. Be sure to determine if each country is a full democracy, a flawed democracy, a hybrid regime, or an authoritarian regime.