



Learning Unit 7

Equality and Democracy

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Equality and Democracy

Introduction



Target Group

Youth/ Young People



Competencies to be acquired

1. Learners will be able to understand the concept of equality
2. Learners will define discrimination and protected characteristics
3. Learners will know the difference between equality and fairness
4. Learners will know the definition of democracy and its association with equality
5. Learners will be able to give examples of different democracies

Equality

- Equality is **the assurance that at the fundamental level all human beings are of equal importance and worth and should consequently receive equal treatment, rights and opportunities.**
- Equality permits that no individual should have an inferior quality of life or fewer opportunities due to the way they were born, where they were born, their background, their beliefs or their life choices.



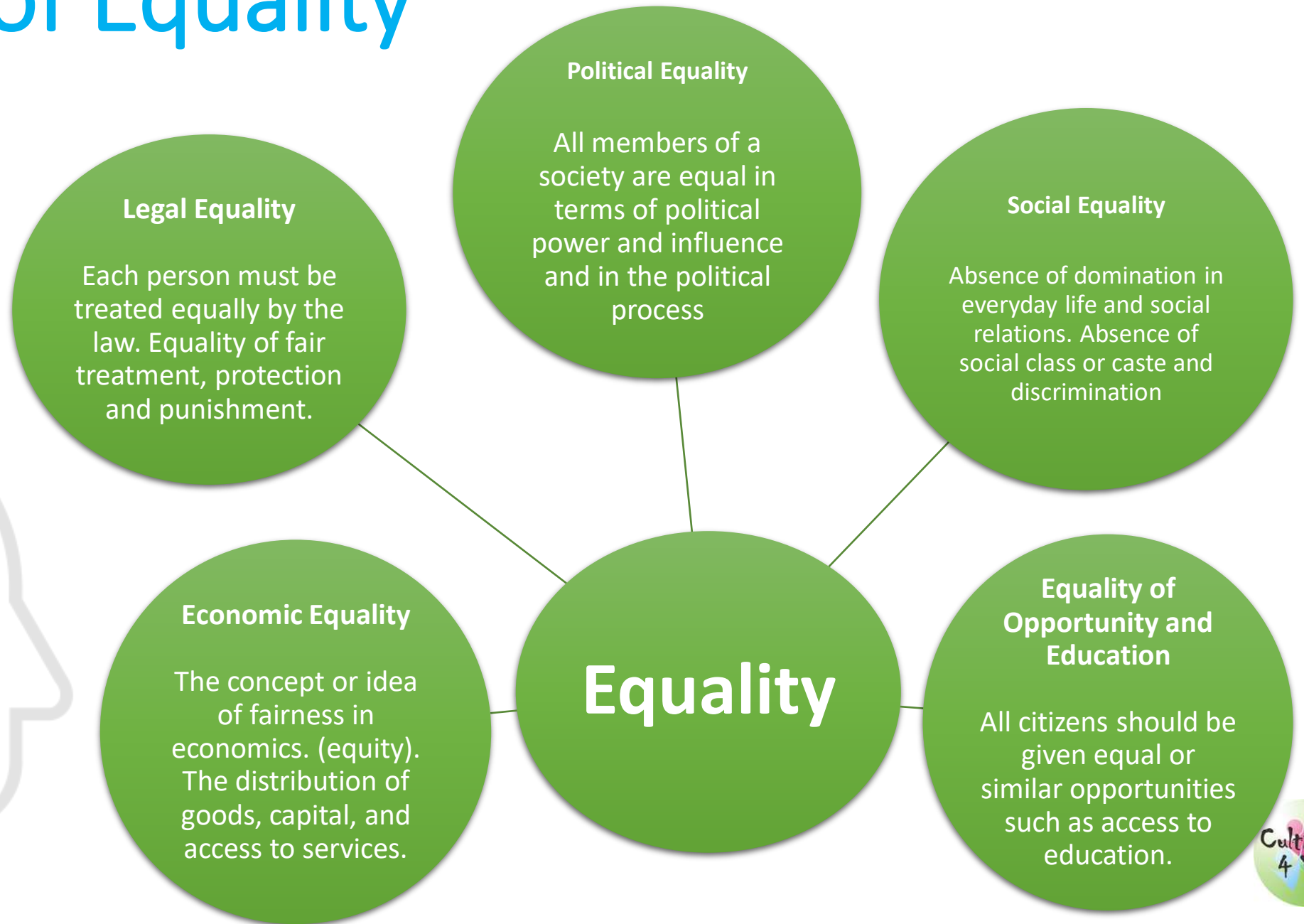
A Short History of Equality

Equality emphasizes that all human beings are of equal value at a fundamental level and so should receive equal respect and concern. Although this notion is generally accepted and applied today, especially in international and European law, the concept of equality was revolutionary both in political practice and philosophical thinking when it first emerged.

*If we consider that most countries in antiquity were **monarchies** (governed by royals) or had some form of birth associated hierarchy, we can appreciate why it was widely believed that certain people should receive more respect or voice than others.*

Although many societies still have monarchs (United Kingdom for example) or some form of birth hierarchies in government, most European countries apply equality in political practice and their judiciary systems. They are therefore considered **egalitarian** societies; societies that implement the principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities.

Types of Equality



Discrimination



Protected Characteristics



Discrimination

• **Discrimination** is defined as ‘the act of making unfounded distinctions between human beings or groups based on a particular group they belong to and treating them in a worse way than you would others’ (Oxford Dictionary). This may include

- Prejudice
- Disadvantage
- Harassment or victimization
- Lack of understanding or lack of an attempt to understand
- Failure to make reasonable adjustments
- Lack of participation for individuals with certain characteristics.



Types of Discrimination

Direct Discrimination

When an individual is treated worse or unfairly due to a certain characteristic. This is easy to detect

Indirect Discrimination

When there is a rule, policy or practice applied to everyone but has a worse effect on some people with protected characteristics

Harassment

Aggression or intimidation towards an individual with a protected characteristics

Victimisation

When someone is treated unfairly or bullied for reporting or complaining about discrimination.

Protected Characteristics

All societies globally have participated or participate, in various type's discrimination at some point in history. For this reason there are a variety of general **protected characteristics** established to safeguard the rights of these groups which have been vulnerable to discrimination.

Protected Characteristics

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity

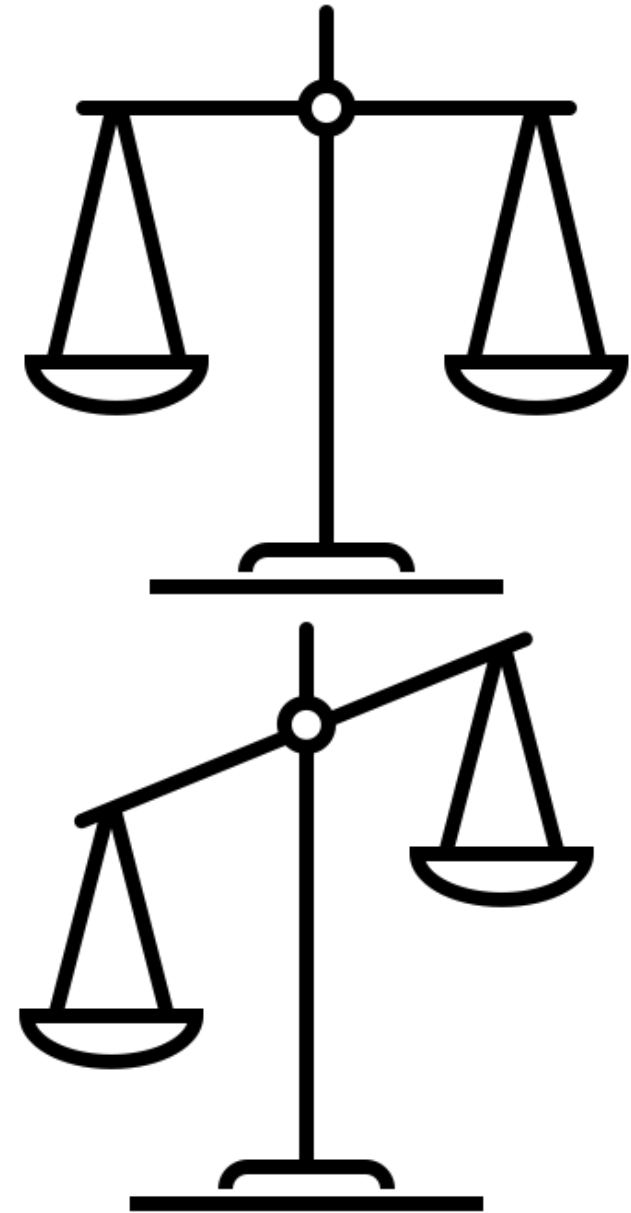
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Are Equality and Fairness the same thing?

There is a crucial difference between the two.

Equality has to do with treating each individual in the same way and providing each individual with the same access and resources regardless of their needs.

Fairness however, also described as 'equity', has to do with the needs each individual has in order for them to be equal to their counterparts.



For example, Figure 1 shows three individuals watching a game. They are all given the same number and size of boxes to stand on in order to watch the game, thus they are being treated equally. Due to their height however, person C is unable to watch the game, even with the help of the box provided meaning the help provided was insufficient to meet his needs. Figure 2 depicts fair treatment; each person receives a different amount of help because they each receive only what they need to see beyond the fence. Ironically, the differentiation between fairness and equality raises questions on how equal equality really is.

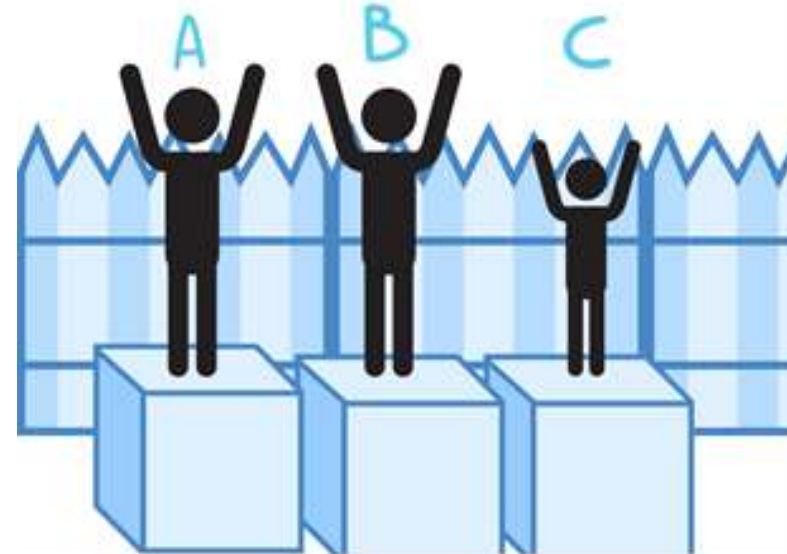


Figure 1

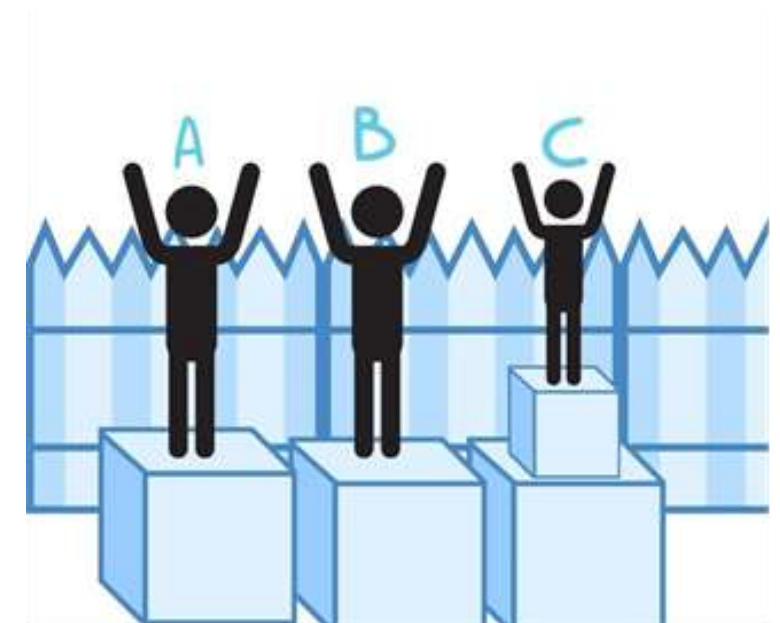


Figure 2

2. Democracy



Democracy a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives. The **political equality** of all citizens is an essential principle of democracy. There are no second-class citizens in a democracy.



The word originates from the two Greek words '**demos**'; which means people and '**kratia**' which means power of rule thus meaning '**rule of the people**'. Democracies therefore place the decision-making process largely in the hands of the people it governs.

Ancient Athenians established what is thought to be the first democracy around 508-507BC, however today we know it was a **flawed democracy**, due to the fact that it did not see all people equally.

Women, slaves, people who did not own land and children were not allowed to vote and did not have the same rights as men governing.

Democracy derives its moral strength from two core values:

Individual Autonomy:

Independence in ones actions and thoughts. To be able to take control over ones own situation.

Equality:

The idea that all citizens should have equal voice and opportunity.

According to American political scientist Larry Diamond, democracy consists of four key elements:

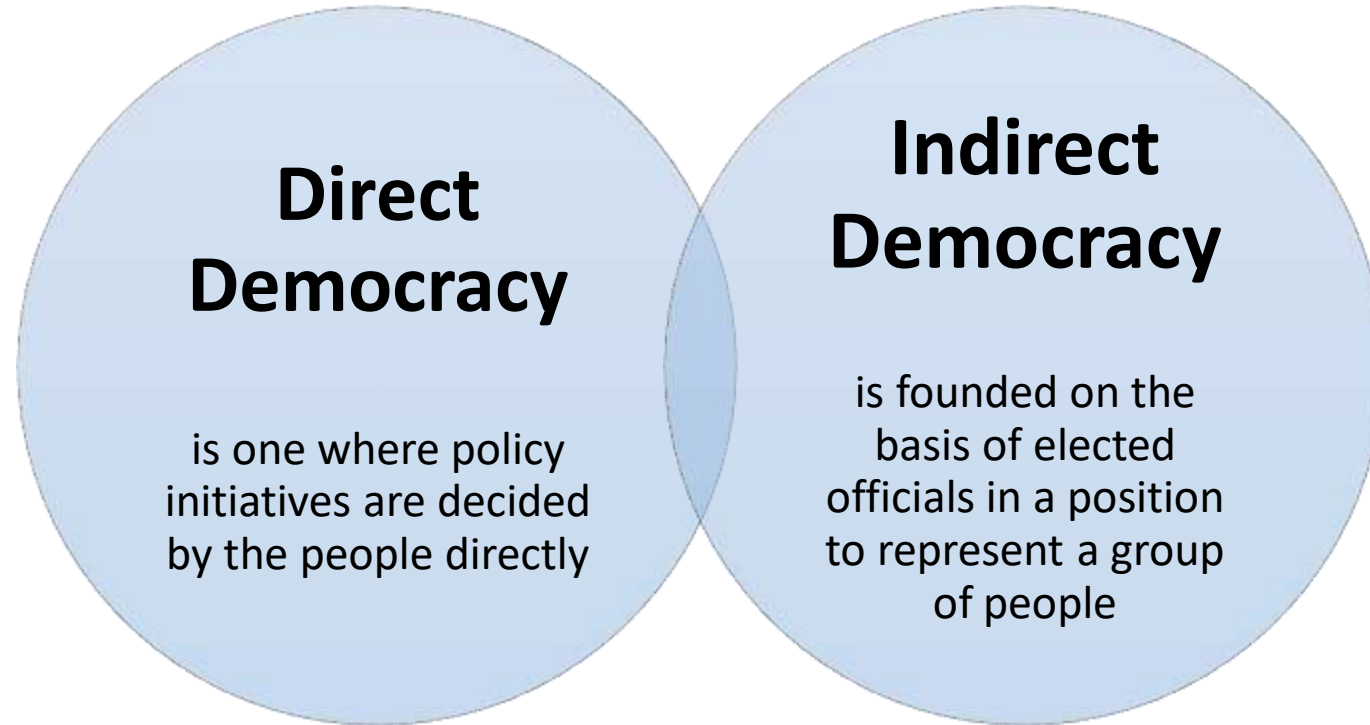
- a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections
- the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life
- protection of the human rights of all citizens
- a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.



Democracy in the modern World



In today's societies, there are generally two types of democracy, direct and indirect.



Today, most democracies around the world are indirect, however this is not the only defining element of a democracy, especially if we consider that **no two democracies are the same.**

Majority, Minority and Democracy

Properly practiced, democracies should not only adhere to the 'rule of the majority' but should also protect and represent **the minorities** in a society for this reason there is the 'rule of majority' vs the 'decisions by consensus.'

Rule of Majority: principle that the greater number (in opinion/vote/existence) should exercise greater power.

Consensus Decision-Making: Decision making through seeking to reach an agreement between parties as opposed to majority rule.

Some examples of the differing elements of democracies around the world are:

**Presidential vs
Parliamentary
Democracies**

**Federal or Unitary
Democracies**

**Proportional Voting
Democracies or
Majoritarian
Systems**

**Democracies which
are also monarchies**

Problems with Democracy

Because democracy concerns itself with maintaining equality, fair rule and representation of all citizens, it is a constant state of improvement as societies change with time. Throughout the last few decades, democracies around the world have faced criticism over some of its consequences and effects.

Youth and the Vote

In many countries across the world **young people do not have the legal right to vote** even though many other rights such as driving, being able to get married or drinking are legal before the age of 18.

Majority vs. Minority

Societies which use the electoral system (voting) often result in minorities not obtaining adequate numbers to be properly represented in government. If these societies are not backed up by **human rights**, policies and decisions taken by majority may be harmful to minorities

Nationalism

many countries across Europe have seen a rise in right wing politics which use nationalist rhetoric to target minority groups or 'non-native' people such as refugees, migrants, religious minorities etc. They often accomplish this through appealing to the support of people using the democratic notion of 'majority opinions and demands'.

