

POL 101 Sec-1 Fall 2020 Final Exam Total Marks: 25 Time: 80 minutes Task: Read the text below titled "Challenges to Democracy: Old and New" and answer the questions beneath the text.

Challenges to Democracy: Old and New

Three decades ago, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and overthrow of military regimes in different countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, we were all talking about the "third wave" of democracy. Bilateral and multilateral organisations were busy providing technical expertise to emerging democracies to advise them about strategies to strengthen their fledgling democratic institutions. It was assumed at that time that transition to democracy will lead overtime to democratic consolidation or deepening of democratic experiences, if we strengthen horizontal and vertical accountability of institutions such as the parliament, judiciary, human rights commission, anti-corruption commission, election commission, political parties, free media, civil society, etc. But after years of production of strategy documents and training of parliamentarians, judges, government officials, NGOs and political leaders in the form of workshops and study tours to observe good democratic practices, we sadly realised that, in many of these emerging democracies, the process of democratic institutionalisation or consolidation has not happened. Instead of functioning as an accountability institution, the parliament is becoming a rubber stamp of the executive. The judiciary is losing its independence. The election commissions, the anti-corruption commissions and the human rights commissions are not able to stand up to the pressure of the executive. Political parties are not practicing democracy internally, nor are they promoting democracy in the country. Instead, they have turned into instruments of patronage distribution to supporters and intimidators of opponents. We then discovered that no amount of technical advice or funding will actually improve the functioning of these institutions. The key to democratic consolidation is "political will". But we had no easy answer as to how we can create that political will, which would enable us to foster democratic practices. Experts and observers of democracy had started writing about backsliding of democracies from the mid-1990s. From the early part of the current century, surveys, conducted by various national and international organisations, found that in many of the emerging democracies, though regular elections are taking place and there is no military rule, checks on the powers of the executive have been limited. In many countries, the executive branch has interfered with the independence of the judiciary and bypassed the parliament. Elections are not free and fair, and the regimes in power are using various methods, some blatant and some subtle, to manipulate the electoral outcome in their favour, so that the voters are not given a choice to elect their representatives in truly competitive elections. Political parties have failed to represent the interests of the citizens and have been captured by powerful special interest groups. Party politics and electoral processes are getting mired in black money, criminalisation and political dynastic rule. Once elected to office, regimes are increasingly becoming autocratic, suppressing fundamental freedoms, flouting rule of law, indulging in a game of "winner takes all" and demonising all critics and criticisms. Concerns about the future of liberal democracy reached a new height after the election of Trump in the USA, Modi in India and Bolsonaro in Brazil. The Varieties of Democracy (V. Dem) Institute, which has been carrying out annual surveys of countries measuring levels of democratisation and autocratisation, suggests in its latest report that we are now entering a "third wave of autocratisation"; that for first time since 2001, the majority of the countries in the world are undergoing some form of autocratisation. Almost 35 percent of the world's population now live in autocratising countries and the number of liberal democracies has declined from 44 in 2008 to 29 in 2018. The V. Dem report identifies three new challenges for democracy. First, more and more governments are trying to control or manipulate the media, and civil society; the rule of law, and the credibility of the electoral process is eroding. Second, there is toxic polarisation in public spaces where society is getting divided into distrustful and antagonistic camps; political leaders

are using hate speech and respect for opposite views, and public reasoning is declining. Third, digitalisation is enabling the spread of disinformation and compromising the electoral processes even in "consolidated" democracies such as in the USA. The V. Dem report identifies media censorship and repression of civil society as early warning signals of heightened autocratisation. The sudden onslaught on fundamental rights in two long established democracies have underscored the relevance of the old adage that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty", that the future of democracy cannot be left in the safe keep of the rulers, even popularly elected rulers; that all democracies are works in progress and we need to constantly fix democracy deficits as soon as they emerge and not let them mount to a level when significant sections of the population feel disenfranchised and think that democracy is not working for them. Answer the following two questions. Your answers must reflect the above text. Do NOT plagiarize. Write in your own language. Question #1: According to the author, why democracy has not been institutionalized in some countries? Also, write down what were the "old" challenges to democracy and what are the "new" challenges? (10 Points for this answer) Question # 2: As per author's view, why is democratization turning into autocratisation? Do you think the author's observation and suggestions are relevant to Bangladesh as well? Substantiate your viewpoints with elaboration and examples. (15 Points for this answer).