

# What is the Majority Rule?

## The Principle of the Majority Rule

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#### 1. The necessity of the Majority Rule.

The practical necessities of running a government also prescribe how consent is to be given. Government has jobs to do. Laws must be made and enforced. The security of the nation must be assured. People's rights must be defended. All of this requires action, sometimes urgent action. This means it is not possible to get the consent of every person, to every act that the government undertakes.

If the unanimous consent is unavailable, what number is correct? If it is not possible to get 100 percent, then how about 95 percent? 80 percent? 75 percent?

All of these numbers would be unfair. If it requires 80 percent of the people to agree to, say, the election of a president, then any 20 percent of the people have the power to override the wishes of the other 80 percent. But what makes the 20 percent so special. If we are all equal, then the wishes of half of us plus one, should override the wishes of any number fewer than that.

When more than half is sufficient to decide, we have "majority rule." This is the basis and the method of democracy. We cannot proceed by unanimous consent. Once we admit that, we go to a natural alternative policy, majority rule. That is the kind of rule that gives the same, or equal, weight to the opinion of each equal citizen.

## **2. The background of the Majority Rule. <Democracy and the Majority Rule>**

Democracy is commonly understood to be the principle of majority rule. As is well known, however, the original meaning of democracy is rule by the people, the word being derived from the Greek words rule(kratos) and people(demos). This concept is connected with the doctrine of popular sovereignty, which means giving power to the people. This is concisely summed up in the famous words of Abraham Lincoln: "government of the people, by the people, for the people." If the sovereignty is of the people, it must be exercised by the people. Otherwise, the doctrine of popular sovereignty is no more than a mere declaration.

The concept of 'the people' was relatively obvious when the ruler was a king or a few nobles. Rule by the people meant culmination of rule by a king, or rule by a few nobles. It can be said that modern political history since the Puritan Revolution has been of continuous struggles between the people and one or a few rulers. The only merit of the people in those struggles was the fact that they were a numerical majority.

The people have, at least theoretically, seized power after long struggles. But it doesn't mean that the people rule the former 'king' or the former 'nobles'. Such classes have already disappeared. The people rule the people. Does this mean that self-rule of the people exists? This statement would only be rhetoric which is logically fallacious and empirically false. The rule is a phenomenon not within a people but between people. In the words of Mill, "the people who exercise the power are not always the same people with those over whom it is exercised; and the self-government spoken of is not the government of each by himself, but of each by all the rest. The will of the people, moreover, practically means the will of the most numerous or the most active part of the people; the majority, or those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority." (Mill, 1859: 269)

Since 'the rule of the people' is an ambiguous term, we must turn to more diversified notions, such as majority or minority, which present the conflicting sectors in between people. Popular sovereignty necessarily requires rule "by" the people. But since it is difficult to get people to vote unanimously, we consider conveniently the majority opinion as the people's opinion. Democracy therefore has been characterized as government by the majority in contrast to by one or a few, and identical with 'majority rule'.

The argument seems rational that majority rule is better than minority rule or one man rule, providing that man is equal. As Aristotle put it, wisdom of many is likely to be better than that of minority or one. 50% plus one seems therefore to be the most reasonable and obvious solution, since it seems impossible to get the sense of all the people.

## **3. Is the Majority Rule possible only in democratic political system?**

That is not always like that way. until now, we learned the answer to the question "why

do we need the Majority Rule?" and in the point of that the Majority Rule is the best democratic way of decision-making, we saw also that is the fundamental principle of democratic political system.

But on the other hand, the Majority Rule is not always possible only in democratic political system. This question will be answered well when we think about the limitation of the Majority Rule relatively.

Historically, once the Majority Rule became the means of justifying of the power of a dictator in autocratic state. for example, "withdrawing decision in The league of Nations of Hitler or "union decision between Austria and Germany". Also in our own history, we can see "the yu-sin" system in park jung hi poeiod or the political power in jun doo hoan and no tea woo period.

#### **4. The Limitation of the Majority Rule.**

##### **a. The internal limitation.**

It is difficult to transform democracy into a procedure, or a framework of majority vote without changing its normative foundations. It means that the theory of democracy in procedural term is no longer democratic because, while 51% of the people voted for something, they're still able to force the other 49% to comply. For a government to force people to do something is tyranny. That's why majority rule is the tyranny of the majority. in other words, the majority itself can be a kind of arbiter.

##### **b. The limitation in opinion-collective procedure.**

There is another theoretical problem, that is to find methods for bringing the will of the majority as a collective choice. How do you know it is the will of the majority? Does a majority voting tell the truth? To state in technical terms, in what way can preferences for the majority be consistently derived from the preferences of its members?

o This rule was found to have serious deficiencies, in addition to the fact it may allow a majority to suppress a minority as mentioned above. When more than three alternatives are introduced, voting between pairs of alternatives sometimes fails to produce a clear result in a group.[\*1]

o Kenneth J. Arrow introduced the 'general impossibility theorem', which shows that the rationally collective preference of a group cannot always be derived from the "transitive" preferences of its individual members. His concept of 'cyclical majority' demonstrated that a majority may prefer alternative a to alternative b whereas a (second) majority

prefers b to c; meanwhile, a (third) majority prefers c to a.[\*2]

[\*1] In South Korea's 1987 presidential election, two liberals(Daejoong Kim, Yongsam Kim) faced the heir(Taewoo Noh) of a military dictatorship. The liberals got a majority of the votes but split their supporters, so the conservative won under a plurality vote-counting rule. In the US system, it is also possible that, in a three way race, a candidate who would be either of the other two if they ran alone, would still lose the election.

[\*2] Consider, for example, the simple case where three individual X, Y, Z are asked to vote for three alternative states of the world, a, b, and c. Now suppose X prefers a to b and b to c. Y also prefers b to c but instead prefers c to a, whereas Z like Y prefers c to a but like X prefers a to b. It is easily checked that a wins over b by the two votes of X and Z (a majority), b wins over c by the two votes of X and Y (a majority), but unfortunately, a does not therefore win over c because only X votes for it. Instead c wins over a by the two votes of Y and Z (a majority). In this simple case of three voters and three alternative options, the democratic method of majority choice leads to a stalemate.(Blaug, 1985: 7)

### **c. The external limitation. (about application)**

The Majority Rule is not available about a judgement in science fact or an absolute value like the real, the good, the beauty. Actually the problem is originated from the internal limitation of the Majority Rule. The majority Rule is just means of decision-making for the best choice. Therefore the result by this rule is best reasonable. but the result is not the truth.

## **5. Conclusion.<the preconditions for right running of the Majority Rule>**

The Majority Rule is not always right. It is true that this rule is the best rational way unifying the opinions between majority and minority in decision-making. But the Majority Rule will play its own role under the preconditions below, as a principle of democracy.

- (1) Consideration characters of the subject in application.
  - There are some restrictions in application of the Majority Rule.  
(explained above)
- (2) Discussion, Persuasion, Compromise should be the priority.
  - Opinions are changable.
  - Circumstances are also changable.
  - Minority can be respected and the better(3rd) result can be made.
- (3) Conditions giving the same, equal weight to the opinion of each equal member.
  - Equality should be considered.  
(Q. How about in reality? In case of jung,ju yong and you!!)
  - Every member has same and equal value and personality.

- (4) Members should try to get best results not by number or power but by reason or truth
- The opinion of majority is not right objectively but reasonable.
  - Respect for the opinion of the minority.
  - Guarantee of active attendance of every member.
  - Problem of mobocracy (a trap of the Majority Rule).

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