

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 15 marks

Explicate the feature of representative democracy.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 elected delegation replaces direct rule → practical form for large modern states
- R2 second-best to direct democracy, yet most workable → rests on consent and trust

Body flow

Locke: consent/trust → **Mill:** ideal modern form → defining feature = delegated decision-making by elected reps → checked by free elections + accountability → rule of law + rights (speech, assembly, religion) → **Montesquieu:** separation of powers/checks → **Tocqueville:** associations + pluralism keep participation alive → two models: trusteeship + **Burke's** enlightened representation

Counter-view

same delegation → elite capture, weak accountability between elections, underrepresentation

Conclusion routes

- R1 features make delegated rule both workable and accountable
- R2 limits met through transparency, inclusivity, stronger accountability

Representative democracy is the system in which citizens elect representatives to make laws & policies on their behalf. It is the practical form democracy takes in large, complex modern states, where direct assembly of all citizen is impossible.

Though often called the second best form after direct democracy, it remains the most workable way of applying democratic principles.

John Locke grounds it in consent and trust: representatives hold authority as a trust and must act for the public good. JS Mill, in *Considerations on Representative Government*, treats it as the ideal form of modern democratic government.

Its defining feature is delegated decision-making by elected representatives, held in check by regular, free and fair elections and continuous accountability to the electorate.

Montesquieu's separation of powers prevents tyranny through checks & balances, while Tocqueville shows that voluntary associations keep participation alive between elections.

Representation itself follows two models: Locke's trusteeship model and Edmund Burke's enlightened representation, where members exercise independent judgment on national questions rather than merely serving factional interests.

The same delegation, however, invites elite capture, weak accountability between elections and underrepresentation of marginalised groups - limits that transparency, inclusivity and stronger accountability must address.