

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

Comment on the Deliberative democracy in 150 words.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 legitimacy from quality of reasoning, not counting of votes → voice over choice, debate over voting
- R2 democracy as reasoned judgement among free, equal citizens → laws valid only through free deliberation

Body flow

reject **Bentham's** aggregate democracy (sums preferences → majoritarianism) → **Aristotle**: collective deliberation beats isolated experts → **Habermas**: communicative action, better argument over power → **Cohen**: deliberation as legitimacy + handling moral disagreement → **Rawls**: public reason, reasons others can accept → qualitative participation → substantive democracy, informed citizens

Counter-view

power inequalities + dominant speech styles exclude weaker groups → time-consuming → fails to address real power relations

Conclusion routes

- R1 reason, not numbers, makes democracy substantive
- R2 promise holds only if inequality and exclusion are overcome

Deliberative democracy locates legitimacy not in the counting of votes but in the quality of reasoning behind a decision. It critiques voting-centric democracy, giving priority to voice over mere choice and to debate over voting.

Laws are legitimate only when they emerge from free and reasoned deliberation among equal citizens who give and respond to reasons.

This sets it apart from Bentham's aggregate democracy, which merely adds up preferences and may produce majoritarianism. Aristotle had already held that ordinary people deliberating together reach better decisions than isolated experts. Habermas, argues through communicative action that agreement should rest on the better argument, not on power.

Joshua Cohen treats deliberation as the source of legitimacy and the best way to handle moral disagreement. John Rawls asks citizens to justify decisions through public reason others can reasonably accept.

Critics note that power inequalities and dominant speech styles can exclude weaker groups, that deliberation is time-consuming and that it often fails to address real power relations. Its promise holds only when inequality & exclusion are overcome.