

Democracy's two faces

Purpose

- Examine the group's attitudes to democracy
- Give the participants a chance of airing mixed feelings in two *Four corners* talks (see Method Bank)

1. Four corners: positive aspects of democracy

What do you see as the positive side of democracy?

1. Everyone can participate
2. The rulers are supported by a majority
3. Decisions are better
4. Something else

(Someone may ask for definitions and explanations; they should be told that the participants are free to interpret the alternatives as they see fit.

Those who choose "Something else" tend to have negative reasons – none of the other corners suits them. On closer thought, perhaps they may come up with a positive aspect.)

2. Four corners: negative aspects of democracy

What makes democracy difficult or a problem? For example, what might be the negative consequences of an attempt to make your own group (workplace, association, municipality, country) democratic?

1. Chaos
2. No one takes responsibility
3. Poorer decisions
4. Something else

3. Summary

Draw the participants' attention to which corners attracted the most and the fewest of them in each of the two exercises.

Comments

- In examining the positive aspects of democracy the 'Everyone can participate' corner usually attracts the largest number and 'The rulers are supported by a majority' corner a much smaller number.
- This exercise can be used to advantage as the introduction to longer, more systematic work on democracy issues. If relatively few of the participants adhere to the alternative 'The rulers are supported by a majority' (the core of a conventional Western perception of democracy), this should be a subject for further reflection later on.