



EUNOIA JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC1 Promotional Examination 2023
General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
Higher 1

GENERAL PAPER

8881/02

Paper 2

20 September 2023

INSERT

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Insert contains the passages for comprehension.

Passage 1. *Thomas Carothers writes about the flaws of democracy.*

- 1 In trying to explain the dispiriting descent of American politics into pervasive paralysis, conflict, and sheer mediocrity, it is hard not to wonder if many of the ills result from intrinsic shortcomings of the democratic model itself. This outlook is gaining appeal not just because of what is happening in the United States, but because so many other democracies are encountering similar problems while authoritarianism appears to be enjoying a global surge of self-confidence. 5
- 2 One of democracy's significant flaws is elite capture of political power. The distorting and often corrupting role of money is often an issue in democracies. The large sums of money needed to run for elections means campaigns are funded by wealthy individuals and corporations. There is then little surprise that politicians who go on to take office make policies that manifestly reflect the interests of the wealthy, often at a cost to the populace. Examples of such policies include tax breaks that have contributed to the rapid expansion of a class of superrich citizens in recent years. Politicians also introduce rules and practices that make it easy for lobbyists to excessively influence policies. 10 15
- 3 Another flaw is pain aversion. Democratic politicians are averse to imposing near-term pain for long-term gain because of their need to keep voters happy for the next election. For example, quite a few politicians speak at length about the urgent need to restrain government spending in order to ensure future sustainability. When nearing an election, however, most are unable to refrain from signing off on even more spending on the infrastructure and services the electorate expects. 20
- 4 Yet another flaw is division and conflict. Competitive elections foment and sometimes intensify divisions in society. This undercuts a strong sense of national unity and purpose; it even generates conflict. Competing parties tend to accentuate differences between them rather than to emphasise common ground in their quest to win. They also often caricature and even demonise their opponents and tend to appeal more to emotion than reason in their quest for votes. The aspiration of competing ideas leading to productive compromises has never seemed further than in the polarised societies of today. 25
- 5 Lastly, relying on ordinary citizens to choose leaders condemns democracies to choices that reflect chronic voter ignorance and irrationality. There is reason to be sceptical of voters' ability to vote well as they are in the dark about many facts, such as major global issues, and are too easily swayed by extremely specific and often minor factors, like current petrol prices. Multiple studies have also shown that many voters are not even able to accurately associate specific policy proposals with particular parties or candidates. This suggests that, rather than exercising independent thought on issues to determine policy preferences, voters end up jumping on the bandwagon of voting based on their attachment to a political party. Voting is thus a blunt tool for choosing the leaders a society needs most. 30 35
- 6 Democracy may have its strengths, but its flaws are particularly fatal in today's world. At a time when societies are increasingly diverse and the need to come together to tackle problems has never been more urgent, it is time we reconsidered our faith in democracy as it is practised today. 40

Passage 2. *Naouma Kourti writes about why democracy is important.*

- 1 Despite its flaws, democracy is needed now more than ever. Democracy's critics claim that the system is too slow to decide due to endless discussions, whilst authoritarian systems can act quickly. The Covid crisis has weakened this line of argument. The initial delay of democracies to react paid off in the long run with much better and more humane measures. History is replete with examples of why speed of action should not be confused with efficacy. People in democracies may complain about too much debate, but, as a result, knowledge and data are made available to them and are not hidden by cumbersome rules and processes. This knowledge is essential for people to understand or challenge decisions made. 5
- 2 In fact, it is precisely the vigorous, open debates that arise from a pluralism of opinions that is a strength of democracy as this leads to the co-creation of better policies. The need for democracy and co-creation of policies is much higher during crises such as those our societies are confronted with now, including climate change, demographic changes, and inequality. No party on its own can offer adequate and holistic solutions. Coalitions offer a way to arrive at widely accepted decisions in crisis times. 10
15
- 3 Democracy is valuable because it is about much more than the process of regular elections alone. Democracy gives rise to a political system that adapts to changing conditions in society, thus helping societies thrive. Democratic processes foster the emergence of new movements and introduce innovation, both of which set up societies to face crises that are to come. 20
- 4 The world has entered a turbulent new phase in which the democratic system is the only guarantee for a successful transition to a new bright era. No autocracy in this world can keep up with the many and complex challenges: what is crucial is not so much the decision-taking capacity but establishing a continuous co-creation process. This is only possible under the democratic system. 25

Passage 3. *A young person reflects on the power of his vote in a democracy.*

- 1 Last year I turned 18 and, for the first time in my life, I will be eligible to vote in an election. My peers and I are frequently chastised for being apathetic or too inadequately informed to deserve a vote. These (often older) critics could not be more wrong. We are actually highly capable of voting responsibly as we have ready access to news sources and also discuss contentious issues everywhere from our classrooms to our living rooms. 5
- 2 In addition, young voters know that democracy is a numbers game, and that we comprise about the same proportion of the electorate as baby boomers. This means sitting out important elections will only leave young people's futures in the hands of others. Our votes signal what matters to us, and voting is the only way that governments will modify policies to better meet our current needs. It then makes sense that young people seize the opportunity to march to the ballot box. Doing so makes more of a difference to our lives than marching on the streets in support of issues that matter to us – from healthcare costs and student debt, to gun control and racial justice. 10 15
- 3 The power that young voters wield in a democracy should not be underestimated.

Copyright Acknowledgement:

Reading Passages © Thomas Carothers; *Is Democracy the Problem?*; 16 January 2019; <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/01/16/is-democracy-problem-pub-78137>

© Naouma Kourti; *Why democracy is needed now more than any other time*; 24 January 2022; <https://apolitical.co/solution-articles/en/why-democracy-is-needed-now-more-now-than-any-other-time>

© Mihir Kesavan; *Thoughts of a Young First-time Voter*; 6 October 2020; <https://www.nvfs.org/thoughts-of-a-young-first-time-voter/>