

# History of Democracy

The ancient Greeks were the first to create a democracy. In the year 507 B.C., the Athenian leader Cleisthenes introduced a system of political reforms that he called *demokratia*. The word “democracy” comes from two Greek words that mean people (*demos*) and rule (*kratos*). Democracy is a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives. But was democracy always the same?

**In ancient Greece**, democracy consisted of three separate institutions: ***the ekklesia***, a sovereign governing body that wrote laws and dictated foreign policy; ***the boule***, a council of representatives from the ten Athenian tribes and the *dikasteria*; ***the popular courts*** in which citizens argued cases before a group of lottery-selected jurors.



The Greek historian Herodotus wrote, “There is, first, that most splendid of virtues, equality before the law.” Athens in the middle of the fourth century there were about 100,000 citizens. Out of all those people, only male citizens who were older than 18 were a part of the *demos*, meaning only about 40,000 people could participate in the democratic process. Groups such as women, slaves and *metoikos* (resident aliens) **cannot participate** in the democratic process. In other words, there is no such thing as complete equality.

Ancient Greek democracy, unlike today’s modern democracies, was based on ***direct democracy***. In this system, citizens participated in the decision-making process themselves, not through the representatives they elected. In Athens, male citizens gathered in a popular assembly called the *ekklesia*, voted directly on laws and made the basic decisions of the state. In contrast, in the *representative democracy system* practiced in many countries today, the people elected the people who would govern them, and these representatives made decisions on behalf of the people.

Athenian democracy was severely weakened after **the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC)**. Defeat to Sparta in the war shook Athens' political and economic power. During this period, democracy briefly ended, and an oligarch called the "**Thirty Tyrants**" was established. Although democracy was restored, Athens never regained its former political power. Athenian democracy effectively ended with the conquest of Athens by King Philip II of Macedon in 338 BC.



After the decline of Athenian democracy, Sparta had a great influence on the political tradition of Europe, starting from **Ancient Rome** and continuing until the eighteenth century. **Democracy in Rome**, unlike representative democracy in the modern sense, was a system in which the people participated in government through representatives they elected, rather than directly. However, this democracy was a form of government with clear differences and limited participation between social classes, rather than a structure in which all citizens had equal rights.

The government structure of the Roman Republic was a mixed system, with democracy emerging as a blend of aristocratic and monarchical elements. There were three main institutions: **The Senate** was an aristocratic body that generally consisted of the noble class (patricians) and made important decisions such as foreign policy, war, and financial affairs, and over time, plebeians also began to take part in some duties; **The Comitia Centuriata** was the most important popular assembly in the Roman Republic, organized according to military classes, where citizens voted on laws and elected high state officials. **Magistrates** are high-ranking officials elected by the people in the Roman Republic and responsible for the administration of the state, the provision of justice and the command of the army.

The Roman Republic's understanding of democracy was not a system that encompassed the entire people. Only male citizens could participate in the decision-making process. In addition, public participation was limited, and mostly the elected aristocrats and wealthy classes held political power.

With the democracy of the Roman Republic, the foundations of the separation of powers idea were laid. However, this democratic structure, unlike egalitarian democracies in the modern sense, was limited and covered only the rights of certain social classes. The Roman Republic, M.D. when it was terminated by Emperor Augustus in 27, this democratic structure, in which the people participated directly along with the Republican period, was replaced by imperial rule.





The first democratic movements in Europe began to be seen in England towards the end of the Middle Ages. Another important event in the history of democracy is the **Magna Carta**. Together with the Magna Carta, the principle of the rule of law was laid down and it was declared that no ruler could be above the law. Magna Carta, especially with its principles such as the protection of fundamental rights of individuals, the right to a fair trial and the limitation of taxation powers, has been an important turning point in the development of modern democracies. In addition, it has laid the foundation for the formation of the British parliament and has been a step that strengthens the people's right to participate in government.

For most of the Middle Ages, political authority came from religion. Leaders turned to religion, claiming divine right from God. But in the 1600s a series of political and scientific discoveries began challenging this state and these discoveries led to Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that sought to improve society through fact-based reason and inquiry.

The Enlightenment is most identified with its political accomplishments. This era is marked by three political revolutions, which together lay the basis for modern, republican, constitutional democracies: The English Revolution (1688), The American Revolution (1775-83), and The French Revolution (1789-99). The Enlightenment project of re-making the political world is in accord with the models we allegedly find in our reason. The political revolutions of the Enlightenment, especially the French and the American, were informed and guided to a significant extent by prior political philosophy in the period.

We owe this period the basic model of government founded upon the consent of the governed; the idea of the political ideals of freedom, and equality; the idea of a list of basic individual human rights to be respected and realized by any legitimate political system; the idea and promotion of toleration of religious diversity as a virtue to be well respected in a well-ordered society; the conception of the basic political power as organized in a system of checks and balances.

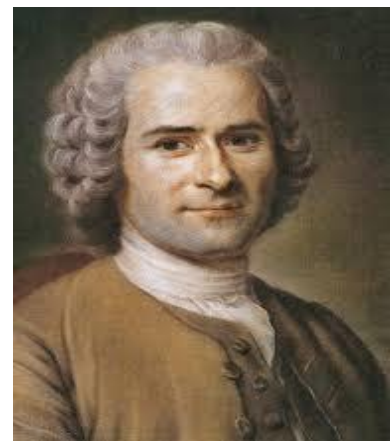


Philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke introduced the idea that no ruler should have unlimited power. Both argue that leaders derive their authority from the people of the country.



JOHN LOCKE

ROUSSEAU



JEAN-JACQUES

Locke argues in his book *Second Treatise of Government* that, in order to understand the nature and source of legitimate political authority, we must first understand our relations in the state of nature. Locke argues that we are in relation to each other and we exist naturally in a state of equality. We also exist naturally in a condition of freedom, insofar as we may do with ourselves and our possessions as we please, within the constraints of the fundamental law of nature. Locke says that we rationally contracted together a political authority, enforcing a single, clear set of laws, for the sake of guaranteeing our natural rights, liberties and possessions.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's political theory (*On The Social Contract*) presents a contrast to the Lockean liberal model. Though commitment to the political ideas of freedom and equality constitutes a common ground for Enlightenment political philosophy, Rousseau argues that pure democracy is the only form of government in which human freedom can be realized. According to Rousseau, human freedom is possible only through the governance of "the general will" which is the will of the body politics, formed through the original contract, concretely determined in an assembly in which all citizens participate.

Rousseau's political theory, which in some respects presents a revived classical model modified within the context of Enlightenment values, in effect poses many of the enduring questions regarding the meaning and interpretation of political freedom and equality in the modern state.

# The Principles of Democracy

*What do democratic principles mean?*

Democratic principles are ideas that most people believe are essential for a democracy to thrive.

Let's take a look at these democratic principles:

## 1- Participation of Citizens



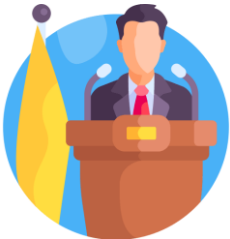
By its very definition, democracy allows the people a voice in charting the course of their government and their future.

Participation is not just voting on election day, although this is surely its most notable form. But equally important are public debate, town meetings, and peaceful protests, among other things.



## 2- Equality

All people should be treated equally and without discrimination and be given equal opportunities. This means that they are not discriminated against because of their ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation.



## 3- Transparency

Government must be open to the public about its actions. It must allow the public to give input before new laws are passed.

## 4- Accountability

Government must be accountable to the people for its actions, including the laws that are passed and how these laws are implemented. Our taxes are used for government spending and all budgets and financial statements should be presented to parliament and be available to the public.



## 5- Free and Fair Elections

Elections must happen in a free and fair way, without intimidation, corruption or threats to the public before or during the election.



### **6- Freedom of Economy**

In a democracy, a person should be able to decide what they want to do with their life. As long as they follow the rules, it's not the government's place to tell them what they must study or what job they must take or what they must grow. Economic freedom is important in order to develop strong communities and strong national economies.



### **7- The Rule of Law**

Laws are enforced equally, fairly and consistently and no one is above the law. This means that everyone, including government officials, must obey the law. It also means that governments cannot punish people unless they have broken the law.



### **8- Human Rights**

All people living in a democracy should have guaranteed rights, such as freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion, the right to work and education and the right to organize and take part in peaceful protests.

