**Democracy**

**Etymology**

democracy, literally, *rule by the people*. The term is derived from the Greek *dēmokratia*, which was coined from *demos* (“people”) and *kratos* (“rule”) in the middle of the 5th century BCE to denote the political systems then existing in some Greek city-states

**Excerpt from the Britannica Chatbot**

**What is democracy?**

Democracy is a system of government in which laws, policies, leadership, and major undertakings of a state or other polity are directly or indirectly decided by the “people,” a group historically constituted by only a minority of the population (e.g., all free adult males in ancient Athens or all sufficiently propertied adult males in 19th-century Britain) but generally understood since the mid-20th century to include all (or nearly all) adult citizens.

**Where was democracy first practiced?**

Studies of contemporary nonliterate tribal societies and other evidence suggest that democracy, broadly speaking, was practiced within tribes of hunter-gatherers in prehistoric times. The transition to settled agricultural communities led to inequalities of wealth and power between and within communities and hierarchical nondemocratic forms of social organization. Thousands of years later, in the 6th century BCE, a relatively democratic form of government was introduced in the city-state of Athens by Cleisthenes.

**How is democracy better than other forms of government?**

States with democratic governments prevent rule by autocrats, guarantee fundamental individual rights, allow for a relatively high level of political equality, and rarely make war on each other. As compared with nondemocratic states, they also better foster human development as measured by indicators such as health and education, provide more prosperity for their citizens, and ensure a broader range of personal freedoms.

**Find the following words in the text here above (in the chronological order)**

1. Inventé (pour les mots seulement) – b) siècle – c) citoyens – d) chasseur – e) cueilleur – f) établi (du verbe s’établir à un endroit) – g)richesse – h) empêche – i) faire la guerre – j) encourager – k) santé – l) plus large

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What do you think is worth remembering from the text here above?

All of the above, actually!

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**Watch the video** from Open University and try to explain briefly what are the drawbacks of democracy according to Plato. What are the advantages according to Derek Matravers?

Inconveniences

The leaders we get are those the most skilled at getting elected – the person elected is the most popular, not the most skilled at solving problems – the best captain is not necessarily the one who takes care of the people per-se but the one who can get people back home to safety – the democracy selects the person who is willing to care of people not the most skilled – the second issue is that people do not have the time to be educated enough to make the right decision, the right choice to steer a country/community in the right direction. Informed decisions require an informed population.

Advantages

Everyone’s voice counts equally – carries forward the will of the people (what people want) – Burke stated that we should elect the best people to ‘think’ for us rather than ‘represent’ us – the alternatives seem horrible – Amarthya Sen showed democracies allow for a higher HDI.

What does EM Forster’s quote ‘*So, two cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism.’* mean?

A cheer means an ovation – variety means inclusion in 2025 – to permit criticism is at the foundation of democracy when it guarantees freedom of speech!

Who said and when was it said ? : ‘’Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed **it has been said** that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.’’ What does it mean ?

Winston Churchill, in front of the American Congress in 1943.

Woe = Malheur

Democracy is the best form of government because the alternatives which have already been tried are all worse!

What are the fundamental principles of a democracy in your opinion?

Freedom of speech – Freedom from want – freedom from fear – freedom of worship (FDR and Norman Rockwell) – Freedom of people to decide for the people – all men are created equal – ‘government of the people, for the people, by the people’ – Liberty, Equality, Fraternity

Which foundational documents guaranteeing democracy can you think of?

The US Declaration of independence (Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness), the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the French Declaration of Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Magna Carta.

**Democracy in 2025 in the English-speaking world**

**In the USA**

3 branches of state

Checks and balances

Power to the people?

What kind of democracy is the USA?

Political representation

**In the UK**

3 branches of state

Balancing of power

Power to the people?

What kind of democracy is the UK?

Political representation

**Elsewhere in the English-speaking world…**

**Do you know which countries have the following institutions?**

Storemont? Westminster? Holyrood? Congress? Senate? House of Representatives? House of Commons?

House of Lords?

**Democracy in music and art**

Which songs can you think of, which are defending or dealing with democracy?

A visit to the museum - <https://www.mfa.org/exhibition/power-of-the-people-art-and-democracy#field--name-body--127061>