

# WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

## **Direct**

Direct democracy is a political system where the citizens vote on all major policy decisions. It is called direct because, in the classical forms, there are no intermediaries or representatives. Current examples include many small civic organizations (like college faculties) and town meetings in New England (usually in towns under 10,000 population). Critics note that it sometimes emphasises the act of voting more than other democratic procedures such as free speech and press and civic organisations. That is, these critics argue, that democracy is more than merely a procedural issue.

All direct democracies to date have been relatively small communities; usually city-states. Today, a limited direct democracy exists in some Swiss cantons that practice it in its literal form. Direct democracy obviously becomes difficult when the electorate is large--for example some 30,000 or more citizens were eligible in Athenian democracy. However, the extensive use of referenda, as in California, is akin to direct democracy in a very large polity with over 20 million potential voters. Modern direct democracy tries accommodate this problem and sees a role for strictly controlled representatives. It is characterised by three pillars; referendums (initiated by governments or legislatures or by citizens responding to legislation), initiatives (initiated by citizens) and recall elections (on holders of public office).

## **Representative**

Representative democracy is so named because the people select representatives to a governing body. Representatives may be chosen by the electorate as a whole (as in many proportional systems) or represent a particular district or constituency), with some systems using a combination of the two. Some representative democracies also incorporate some elements of direct democracy, such as referenda.

## **Liberal**

Liberal democracy is a representative democracy (with free and fair elections) along with the protection of minorities, the rule of law, a separation of powers, and protection of liberties (thus the name liberal) of speech, assembly, religion, and property. Conversely, an illiberal (not liberal) democracy is one where the protections that form a liberal democracy are either nonexistent, or not enforced. The experience in some post-Soviet states drew attention to the phenomenon, although it is not of recent origin. Napoleon for example used plebiscites to ratify his imperial decisions.

- Directions:**
- 1. Highlight.**
  - 2. Create a definition in your own words for each kind of democracy.**
  - 3. Draw a simple stick figure cartoon showing how each kind of democracy might work.**
  - 4. What is a democracy?**