

1 The History of Democracy

How did we arrive at democracy as a form of government?

1.1 Early Democracy

There are some scattered evidence of democracy in the early days.

Arguably, the first democracies occurred when small tribes made group decisions prior to the agricultural revolution. There is also scattered evidence of democratic decisions in Mesopotamia and the Indian sub-continent.

1.1.1 The Seeds of Mycenae

We begin by talking about Ancient Greece. Democracy started off in Ancient Greece, although it wasn't a true democracy since many groups of people (women, slaves, etc.) could not vote.

The Mycenaean civilization (1750 BCE - 1050 BCE) was relatively ordinary. In particular:

- There was moderate, but not exceptional, wealth.
- Power was centralized among a few individuals.
- This civilization had a written language, but a predominantly illiterate population. This is due to the many symbols associated with this language.

For unknown reasons, the civilization collapsed in the 12th century BCE; the city-states were destroyed without explanation.

1.1.2 The (Greek) Dark Ages

A certain amount of loss occurred in this period. In particular:

- A population where some people could read or write became a population where no one could read or write.
- Technological advances were lost.

That being said, this was also a period of relative equality; there was so little money that even the aristocracy had little wealth.

Athens was ruled by 9 Archons. 6 functioned primarily as judges while three (Eponymous Archon, Polemarch, Archon Basileus) were in charge of domestic, foreign, and religious affairs, respectively. Since these judges were effectively running the country, this was known as a **kritocracy**.

One of the first set of written laws was the **Code of Draco** (620 BC). It was said that this set of law was written in blood as these laws were more like a set of punishment – it was very *draconian*, hence the name. This was seen as one step towards democracy. *Note* that this also implies that, during this time period, some literacy came back.

1.1.3 Athens in Crisis

Athens reached a point of crisis when large numbers of its citizens were debted into slavery. Solon was appointed *sole Archon* and charged with enacting reforms on society.

1. Repealed (most of) the Code of Draco.
2. Freed slaves who had been Athenian citizens.

3. He did *not* redistribute wealth or abolish Archonships. He allowed them to keep their money.
4. Established the **Athenian Assembly**.

The Athenian Assembly was open to all male citizens of Athens. You would have the ability to vote or veto laws that were put into place.

1.1.4 Tyranny and Democracy

Shortly after Solon left Athens, Peisistratos enacted a coup and ruled Athens. He targeted the aristocracy, reduced their power, and redistributed much of their wealth. After his death, the Assembly had political control.

The resulting *democracy* in Athens was limited and unstable. Athenians attempted to use democracy as a weapon in political conflicts.

1.1.5 Roman Democracy

Roman democracy began gradually, with the nobility gradually ceding voting rights to (free) male citizens.

The collapse of Roman democracy was foreshadowed by Gaius Marius's decision to allow individuals to control private armies and the Senate's inability to govern a large region effectively.

1.1.6 Democracy and Islam

The Prophet Muhammad (570 - 632) was both a religious and political leader. In addition to founding the religion of Islam, he united Arabia under a single government.

The Quran does not dictate how political leaders are to be chosen, but says that the affairs of the faithful are to be decided by mutual consultation amongst themselves.

When Muhammad died, Abu Bakr succeeded him via election, though future leaders were determined **hereditarily**.

Al-Mansur (714 - 775) ordered the translation of many Greek texts, including the Platonic and Aristotelian critiques of democracy. We note that, in the Islamic world, these critiques were taken seriously; in particular, writings by people like Plato, who critiqued democracy for essentially being a tool to elect populist leaders instead of the knowledgeable, were taken seriously.

1.1.7 Religious Crisis in Europe

There was one main religion in Europe; other religions were prosecuted or else shunned. Essentially, 16th century witnessed religious, moral, and political crisis in Europe.

Martin Luther's 95 theses triggered the Protestant Reformation, and the Pope's refusal to allow Henry VIII to divorce Catherine of Aragon led to the formation of the Anglican Church.

1.1.8 English Civil War

This religious crisis essentially led to the civil war. Here, this occurred between the royalists and parliamentarians. It culminated with the execution of King Charles I.

Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679) supported the monarchy, but nevertheless held that legitimacy arose from the people, not God. Hobbes believed that the people themselves made democracy legit.

John Locke followed Hobbes; Locke believed very much in democracy, as opposed to Hobbes, who believed more in the monarchy. Locke believed very strongly in the right to life, liberty, and right to property. Note that the Declaration of Independence was based on this (life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness).

1.1.9 The Iroquois Confederacy

The Iroquois Confederacy was formed by 1450 by the **The Great Peacemaker** to unit five nations (Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca) in present-day New York, Pennsylvania, and Canada. After 1722, the Tuscarora nation was added as well.

The constitution of the Confederacy was known as the **Great Law of France**. The Iroquois Confederacy had two bodies of government, similar to what we have in the United States.

1.1.10 American Democracy

The American Democracy was founded with elements from Greek, Roman, English, and Iroquois civilizations. At first, women and slaves could not vote. By modern standards, America was not a democracy. Many political scientists believed that America was really only a democracy after the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

1.1.11 French Revolution

This revolution itself had moments of nominal democracy. In practice, nearly all elections were faked in order to support whichever group held power at the time. Therefore, it wasn't a democracy, but it was the result of the revolution which caused the instability of the monarchy.

1.1.12 Haitian Revolution

This was the most successful revolution of the time, and occurred during the same time as the French Revolution. In this revolution, Black Haitians were liberated from slavery and French colonial rule. Dessalines declared Haiti a free republic for Haitians – though his troops referred to him as *Emperor of Life*. After his death, Haiti was split into a monarchy and a republic.

1.2 Facism and Colonialism

European colonialism began in the 16th century. By 1914, Europe had effective political control over 84% of the global population. The rise of facism in Europe upended democracies and monarchies. After World War II, many colonial empires collapsed; democracy and communism both took hold. After the fall of the Soviet Union, democracy became the predominantly acceptable version of government.

1.2.1 Democracy Under Threat

As of 2017, 57% of countries are democracies of some kind. 13% are autocracies and 28% have elements of both democracy and autocracy. Note that $\frac{1}{3}$ of countries are considered to be less democratic than they used to be, including the United States.