

# Democracy



Figure 1: People line up to vote in Sierra Leone, a country in Africa.

## Introduction

The word democracy describes a form of government. The word comes from two Greek words that mean “rule by the people.” In a democracy the people have a say in how the government is run. They do this by voting, though there are usually rules about who can vote. Democracies are different from dictatorships. In a dictatorship one person called a dictator makes all the rules.

## Types of Democracy

There are two main forms of democracy. In a direct democracy all the voters come together in one place to make laws and decisions. Often there are too many people for a direct democracy to work. In those cases, the people elect representatives, or other people to speak for them. This is called a representative democracy. The elected representatives make the laws and decisions.

## History

The first democracies were in ancient Greece more than 2,000 years ago. Those did not last long, however. After that kings and other rulers had all the power in their countries. In about the 1200s, however, some rulers began to allow certain citizens to be part of the government.

By the 1600s and 1700s some people began to think that all people had certain rights. These included the right to participate in their government. In the British colonies of North America the colonists felt that the king did not allow them to participate enough. They fought a war to gain their freedom. When they won the war they established the United States as a republic.

A republic is a form of democracy in which the citizens vote for the people who make the laws. They also vote for the leader of the country, who is often a president. Many other countries became republics as well. Other countries kept their kings or queens but still became democracies. Monarchies with democracy are called constitutional monarchies. In such countries the people vote for representatives. The king or queen is the head of the country, but they have little real power.

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