Democracy

Democracy is one of the cornerstones of modern life in most countries around the world. People wouldn't have a say in who runs their state or local government without it. The key idea is that everybody who meets the criteria gets an equal vote in the outcome. The word democracy comes from the Greek words for people (*demos*) and rule (*kratos*).

The Ancient Greeks are often considered the first civilisation to embrace the idea of democracy. Even they had some strange ideas. The first democracy began in Athens. All adult citizens were required to take part in the government. If they refused, they could be fined. Nowadays, a citizen is anybody who lives in a particular place. Back then, they defined a citizen as any free men. That meant that women, children and slaves weren't allowed to take part in the government or vote.

There were three different layers to the Ancient Greek system. All of them were equally important.

The Ekklesia (sometimes called the Assembly) was a group of about 5,000 men who met throughout the year. There wasn't a police force, and so the rules and laws decided in the Ekklesia were important. They allowed people to have a voice and raise their concerns. This meant that they could make a difference in the way Athens was governed.

The Boule (also called the Council) was a group of 500 men. These men were randomly chosen and served for a year. They met every day and would decide which issues needed to be raised in the Assembly. Citizens could bring their issues to the Boule to be taken forward.

Ruling over everyone was the Dikasteria. This was a bit like the courts of today, except it was filled with 500 jurors and no judge. The jurors were chosen each day randomly from citizens over 30 years of age. The members of the Dikasteria were responsible for deciding if people were guilty of crimes or not, and how to punish them. Unfortunately, this meant that they could possibly be influenced by power. The jurors of the Dikasteria voted in secret to try to avoid this.

These days, the majority of countries across the world are governed with a

democracy. This is only recent, though. It wasn't until 2002 that the number of democracies in the world overtook the number of autocracies (a country ruled by an unelected leader)*.

Source: https://ourworldindata.org/democracy

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What was another name for the Council?

2. How many different groups were there in the Ancient Greek democratic system?

3. In a democracy, do some people have more votes than others?

4. What might happen to somebody if they refused to take part in the government?

5. Who couldn't vote?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S How did the Ancient Greeks try to avoid the members of the Dikasteria being influenced?

V Which Greek words were used to form the word "democracy".

E The author has used brackets in several places. What impact does this have on the reader?

E Why has the author included a source link at the end of the document?

P Do you think a democracy is a good way to run a country? Explain why you think this.