



WHAT DOES DEMOCRACY MEAN?



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Expemo code:
1A5P-G1L8-JX6H



1

Warm up

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. What is the political system in your country?
2. What are the main challenges your government has in ruling the country?
3. Do you support your country's government? Why/why not?

2

Focus on vocabulary

Read the following definitions. Work in pairs and try to understand the meaning.

- I suggested what I thought were really good ideas, but the sales manager completely **disparaged** them. I was really upset.
- Members get special **privileges** such as free drinks before 6pm, access to high-speed wifi and a discount of 30% on rooms.
- The board just **appointed** her to the role of CEO. She's very nervous, but excited.
- Yeah, he's really growing up and will be **eligible** for his own passport next year.
- The way they were shouting and being rude to everyone **embodied** everything I hate about sports fans.
- After a break of ten years, they're going to **revive** the summer festival this year.
- I tell you, when she walked into the party, she looked like the **epitome** of beauty. Everyone was looking at her.
- I think it's best to treat salespeople with a healthy **scepticism** as it's rare that they have your best interests at heart.



Now, match the words from the sentences to the definitions below. Were your guesses correct?

appoint (v)

disparage (v)

embody (v)

epitome (n)

revive (v)

eligible (adj.)

privilege (n)

scepticism (n)

1. _____ the ideal example of a particular thing
2. _____ having the right or the qualifications to do something
3. _____ select someone for a job that involves a high level of responsibility
4. _____ a special right or an advantage for someone that other people do not have
5. _____ say that someone or something has no importance
6. _____ represent a particular idea
7. _____ an attitude that generally believes things are not true until they have been questioned and examined carefully
8. _____ start doing something that had previously stopped

Work in pairs and discuss the following questions.

1. What are you **eligible** to do in your country when you turn 18 that you couldn't do before?
2. If you could **revive** an old tradition in your country, what would it be? And why?
3. Who or what do you usually treat with **scepticism**?
4. Who or what do you usually **disparage** when people talk about them? Why?
5. What **privileges** do you have in life? Why?



**3 Focus on legal vocabulary**

Watch the video and match the following vocabulary to the definitions.

anarchic (adj.)

constituent (n)

lawsuit (n)

assembly (n)

juror (n)

legislature (n)

civic (adj.)

lawmaker (n)

magistrate (n)

1. _____ a group of people who have the power to decide on laws and if they should be changed
2. _____ a politician who helps to form the legal system of a country
3. _____ a legal complaint against someone that can be taken to court
4. _____ one of a group of citizens chosen to decide legal verdicts
5. _____ the official who acts as a judge in the lowest courts of law
6. _____ a group of people who have been chosen by a larger group to make decisions for them
7. _____ connected to the matters of a town or city
8. _____ without having anyone in control of a place
9. _____ a person who lives in a particular place and can vote

4 Understanding the video

You are going to watch a video on what democracy really means in Athens. Decide if the following statements about the video are True (T) or False (F).

1. In ancient Athens, elections were a significant aspect of the democratic system. _____
2. In ancient Athens, there was a general assembly more than twice a month. _____
3. The Boule was a governing council of around 6,000 members. _____
4. Members of the Boule had to show the general public that they were the best people for the job. _____
5. There were rules which were aimed at making it impossible to create political parties. _____
6. The definition of 'ordinary citizens' included all members of the public who lived in Athens. _____





Now, watch the video again and answer the following questions with no more than four words.

1. What is the meaning of the "principle of ho boulomenos"? → _____
2. What was an "ecclesia"? → _____
3. What was "sortition" a process of? → _____
4. How is "aristocratic" rule defined? → _____
5. If someone does something "on your behalf" what does that mean? → _____
6. If someone says you "shouldn't hold your breath", what does that mean? → It's not a good idea to _____

5**Reading for gist**

Read the following sentences and place them in the correct gaps 1 - 7 in the article. There are more sentences than gaps.

- (A) The focus of this is not to persuade people of what is true, it is to make facts lose their power.
- (B) Understanding the details of government policy on all of these matters and what it means for society is something very few are able to do.
- (C) Other parties exist, but two main parties get most of the votes.
- (D) It's also good for the economy, and generally reduces violence against other nations.
- (E) It's easy to see why governments that find themselves in this situation tend to fail.
- (F) Studies also show that algorithms result in people being grouped into 'bubbles'.
- (G) The majority of people are primarily concerned with earning an income, feeding their families and maintaining their relationships.
- (H) It receives much less attention as a result.





Does democracy work?

Modern challenges

- I. Democracy is usually seen by its supporters as the best, and possibly only, way to govern a country. It gives people freedom to voice their opinions, to live in the way that they want to live and promotes equality. _____¹ The leaders, at least in theory, serve the people. Not vice versa.
- II. Yet there are problems and challenges which are difficult to overcome. One of them is having knowledgeable citizens who can intellectually engage with the current issues. _____² Even with the wealth of information we have, it is difficult for the average individual to grasp the entire breadth of problems facing a country: economics, immigration, taxes, healthcare, welfare, to name a few. Most people only have the brain space to react to these topics on the level that it affects them. _____³ So if the public is uneducated on the intricacies of political issues, it's much easier to mislead them.
- III. Many politicians realise this and employ the knowledge to do what they want, rather than putting the interests of the people first. A classic trick is to announce something that is likely to be unpopular when something else much more interesting is happening, such as the World Cup, or a natural disaster. _____⁴ There's also the tactic called 'firehosing'. This involves releasing a lot of false and confusing information at the same time leaving people unsure of what to believe. _____⁵ The truth can easily be dismissed and it allows leaders to create the narrative that they want, using the information that serves their purposes.
- IV. Many democracies in the world, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have a two-party system. _____⁶ The split is usually between left-wing and right-wing political ideologies. In the United States, both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party are quite far to the right in political ideology, leaving little choice for Americans in real terms. Other countries in the world officially have multi-party democracies, but still operate more like a two-party system in reality. So there's no real alternative for voters. Other parties can gain power, but usually a vote for a third party is lost and can even end up handing power to the party you like least. This can lead to politics becoming more like a football match than a well-constructed argument; with each side wanting their team to 'win' rather than actually engage in critical thought about the issue at hand.
- V. In recent years, social media has had a large effect on democracies. Many feel that it has increased polarisation and undoubtedly helped to spread disinformation. _____⁷ This means we're less likely to see opinions and ideas that we don't agree with and have our own opinions of the world reinforced rather than challenged. At the same time, social media does not offer a good platform for debate. The instant nature of it doesn't offer a natural home for thoughtful dialogue. While these challenges remain, there isn't any current viable option to replace democracy and in terms of offering freedom of speech and thought, it still remains far superior to autocratic forms of government.

Sources: *TheGuardian.com*, *Wikipedia.org*, *FinancialTimes.com*





6 Optional extension/vocabulary

Find vocabulary in the article on page five that has the same meaning as the following definitions.

1. _____ the state of having the same rights, status and advantage for all people (n, para. I)
2. _____ be able to understand a topic (v, para. II)
3. _____ the complicated details of a subject (n, para. II)
4. _____ say something is not important (v, para. III)
5. _____ a set of ideas that an economy or policies are based on (n, para. IV)
6. _____ the state of two groups having very different opinions on a subject (n, para. V)
7. _____ able to be done or completed successfully (adj., para. V)
8. _____ having total power over a group of people (adj., para. V)

7 Talking point

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. Do you believe that most people in your country are well-informed about the government? Why/Why not?
2. Do you think it is important for there to be freedom of speech in a country? Why/Why not?
3. Do you trust the media to report accurately on the government in your country? Why/Why not?
4. What do you think the biggest problems affecting your country are? How confident are you that your government can deal with them?
5. Do you think the Athenian idea of people being selected for government positions by lottery is a good one? Why/Why not?
6. Have you seen any examples of firehosing in your country or others? If so, what are they?