<https://www.livescience.com/20919-democracy.html>

What Is Democracy? Definition & History

Compared to dictatorships, oligarchies, monarchies and aristocracies, in which the people have little or no say in who is elected and how the government is run, a democracy is often said to be the most challenging form of government, as input from those representing citizens determines the direction of the country. The basic definition of democracy in its purest form comes from the Greek language: The term means “rule by the people.” But democracy is defined in many ways — a fact that has caused much disagreement among those leading various democracies as to how best to run one.

The Greeks and Romans established the precursors to today’s modern democracy. The three main branches of Athenian democracy were the Assembly of the Demos, the Council of 500 and the People’s Court. Assembly and the Council were responsible for legislation, along with ad hoc boards of “lawmakers.”

Democracy also has roots in the Magna Carta, England's "Great Charter" of 1215 that was the first document to challenge the authority of the king, subjecting him to the rule of the law and protecting his people from feudal abuse.

Democracy as we know it today was not truly defined until the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, during which time the U.S. Declaration of Independence was penned, followed by the U.S. Constitution (which borrowed heavily from the Magna Carta). The term evolved to mean a government structured with a separation of powers, provided basic civil rights, religious freedom and separation of church and state.