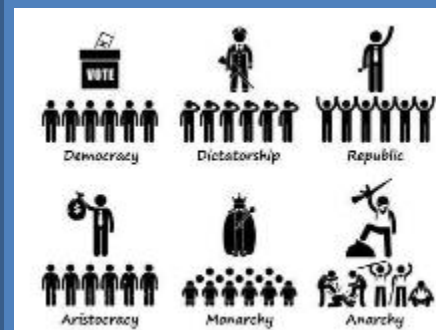
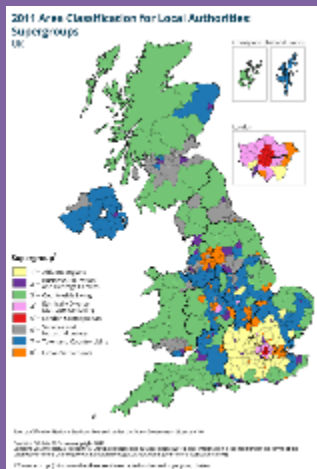




ECED7001: Political Influences in Inequality & Diversity

Theme 2: An Introduction to Political Theory – Key Concepts

Part 3

Democracy

- We all know what we mean by the phrase democracy don't we?
- As with 'politics' this concept has its roots in Ancient Greece
- The word is formed from two Greek words
- *Demos* – meaning 'the people', and
- *Kratos* – meaning 'to rule'
- Therefore, in its literal sense it means **rule by the people**
- Thus, in Ancient Greece, all **citizens** were expected to play a role in the running of the city/state (Athens in the first instance)
- However, those who were considered a citizen only included 'free men'
- Thus, Ancient Greek democracy did not include women, children or slaves.



Democracy

- Plato (c. 448-348 BCE) criticised Athenian democracy on two counts;
- As a normative ideal he questioned whether democracy was the ideal system of rule
- He promoted the social reproduction of talents and abilities i.e. those 'born to rule' were best placed to rule because of their background
- 'Those inborn' have 'carefully fostered talents' necessary for good government
- For Plato, the most 'just' form of government was the **aristocracy**, headed by a 'philosopher king'
- *Aristos* - the best + *Kratos* – rule literally rule by those best suited

Any observations?



(Schofield & Griffith, 2016)

Democracy

- Plato's (c. 448-348 BCE) second criticism was, as follows;
- As a political system Plato felt that democracy was flawed because it meant that the 'masses' of free men could be influenced by **demagogues** [see later in this Theme]
- He argued that the masses care nothing for the past behaviour of the man who enters public life.
- 'He need only proclaim himself a friend of the people, and he will be honoured' meaning that the democratic city 'has embraced **anarchy**'

Any observations?



Mass Democracy

- It is important to recognise that **democracy** in this sense meant that every **free man** could vote on every issue
- Plato's pupil Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE) saw this as **mass democracy** and argued that this was a dangerous form of government, for the following reasons;
- **Mass democracy**, by its very nature, undermines the rule of law.
- That is to say that, in a functioning state, the laws must be supreme
- It is the supremacy of the law that stops people in power doing anything they want and becoming **tyrants**
- However, in a **mass democracy**, the will of the people is **sovereign** and not the law and not the state.
- If the majority of the people decide that someone should die then they are killed regardless of whether the death penalty exists in law or not
- Society is no longer run according to a set of established laws but simply at the 'whim of the people'.

Mass Democracy

- Aristotle posited a distinction between two forms of democracy;
- **Direct** democracy – where everyone has a say in the final decision (also known as a **referendum** -)
- Probably the most elaborate and complete form of direct democracy in the contemporary world can be seen in Switzerland
- Although, **citizen's initiatives** are used in the **federal states** of Germany and elsewhere in the world
- In Britain they are used rarely used..

What examples can you think of?



- As Plato argued this means that the mass vote can be swayed by populist arguments and a simple majority wins



Guided Study: Are Plato & Aristotle's criticisms of democracy evident in the Brexit debate? Share your thoughts using the 'Democracy and Brexit' forum on Moodle.



Mass Democracy

- Aristotle posited a distinction between two forms of democracy;
- **Representative** democracy – where the electorate chose who to lead them from a ‘wise elite’
- This wise elite can then balance the wishes of the populace against the rule of law
- This can also be seen as balancing ‘what is popular’ against ‘what is right’
- For example it can be argued that this balancing is evidenced in the UK in terms of the debate regarding the [death penalty](#) in the UK (Ibbotson, 2019)
- Most modern systems of government that we consider to be democracies are some form of **representative** democracy

Representative Democracy

- N.B. Most 'democratic' systems are a combination of forms of democracy
- Forms of representative democracy include;
- **Constitutional monarchy – Government** is carried out by elected representatives in some form of **parliament**; the **head of state** is the monarch
- Examples include Morocco, UK, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and Japan
- **Constitutional democracy - Government** is carried out by elected representatives in some form of **parliament**; the **head of state** is often a President either chosen by the parliament or directly elected by the people
- Examples include Germany and India

Representative Democracy

- **Presidential democracy** – the **head of state** is directly elected and is also the head of **government** with other branches of government beneath them (e.g. the Senate)
- Examples include Nigeria and the USA
- **Authoritarian democracy** – also known as an **oligarchy**. Whilst there may well be elections and representative bodies, de facto government, is carried out by an elite
- Russia is often given as an example but this definition is complex
- **Religious democracy** – also known as a **theocracy**. In these cases, whilst there may be elected representative bodies the system of laws is also governed by observance of a religious code
- Pakistan and Afghanistan can be seen as examples of this form

Federal Democracy

- One further complexity to the 'map of democracy' is the concept of **federal** democracy
- In most cases power is shared by a central government and states or provinces that are given considerable self-rule, usually through their own legislatures.
- Central Government usually controls defence, international diplomacy and trade and macro-economics
- States often control education, policing etc. This is why, for example some States in the USA have the death penalty and others don't
- Since the various forms of devolution that were granted to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the UK has some elements of **federalism**

Electoral Systems

- As well as having different forms of democracy, nation states will also have differing electoral systems
- The variety is staggering but we will briefly look at several key examples;
- **'First past the post'** in this system, also known as single vote: single member, the person who obtains the majority of votes in a constituency is elected as its representative
- This can lead to inequalities of representation depending on a number of variables including the size and [location of the constituency](#), the demography of the constituency etc.
- It also means that parties which might have support spread across the whole nation does not stand a chance of winning a constituency
- It is interesting to note that versions of this electoral system only exist in the UK and countries that were previously part of Empire (e.g. U.S.A, India).

Electoral Systems

- **Second ballot** system – in this case, if a candidate wins a clear majority in a constituency then they become the representative.
- However, if there is not a clear majority in the first round of ballots then a second ballot is held between the first and second placed candidates
- Thus forcing those who voted for other candidates to choose between the two most popular candidates from round 1
- France has had second ballot elections since the revolution in 1789.

Electoral Systems

- **Proportional representation** refers to any electoral system which seeks to have elected representatives that reflect the opinions of the whole population rather than dominant parties
- There are many forms of [proportional representation](#) but they include;
- The **Party List** system – in which the electorate vote for a party and seats are then allocated according to the proportion of votes that each party gets
- Variations of the party list system can be seen in the Netherlands, Brazil and Turkey

Electoral Systems

- The **single transferrable vote** system – this allows electors to list the candidates in an order of preference.
- If no one wins the required number of votes then the candidate with the lowest number of first choice votes is eliminated
- Their second choice votes are then given to those candidates and so on
- This continues until a candidate wins the required number of votes
- Versions of this system are used in Eire, Malta, and Australia.

Electoral Systems

- The **additional member** system – is a blending of the first past the post system and the party list system (as if things weren't complex enough!)
- Voters have two ballot papers, on one they vote for their constituency representative and on the second they vote for a Party.
- Party list votes are used to appoint Regional representatives
- It is a 'proportional compromise'
- Versions of this system are used in Germany and New Zealand
- It is also the system used in elections to the Senedd.

Electoral Systems

- One system that we won't need to trouble ourselves with in future elections is the D'Hondt system
- This is used to allocate seats in the European Parliament.
- Here is an explanation of how the system works from another source



1. BBC News

Democracy as a Normative Concept

- We have seen that the notion of democracy is complex and contested
- Direct democracy / representative democracy
- Types of democratic structures
- Types of electoral systems
- All have their proponents and their critics
- Therefore it can be argued that there is no such thing as an essential, absolute 'democracy'
- But, instead a plurality of 'democracies', each with its strengths and weaknesses

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