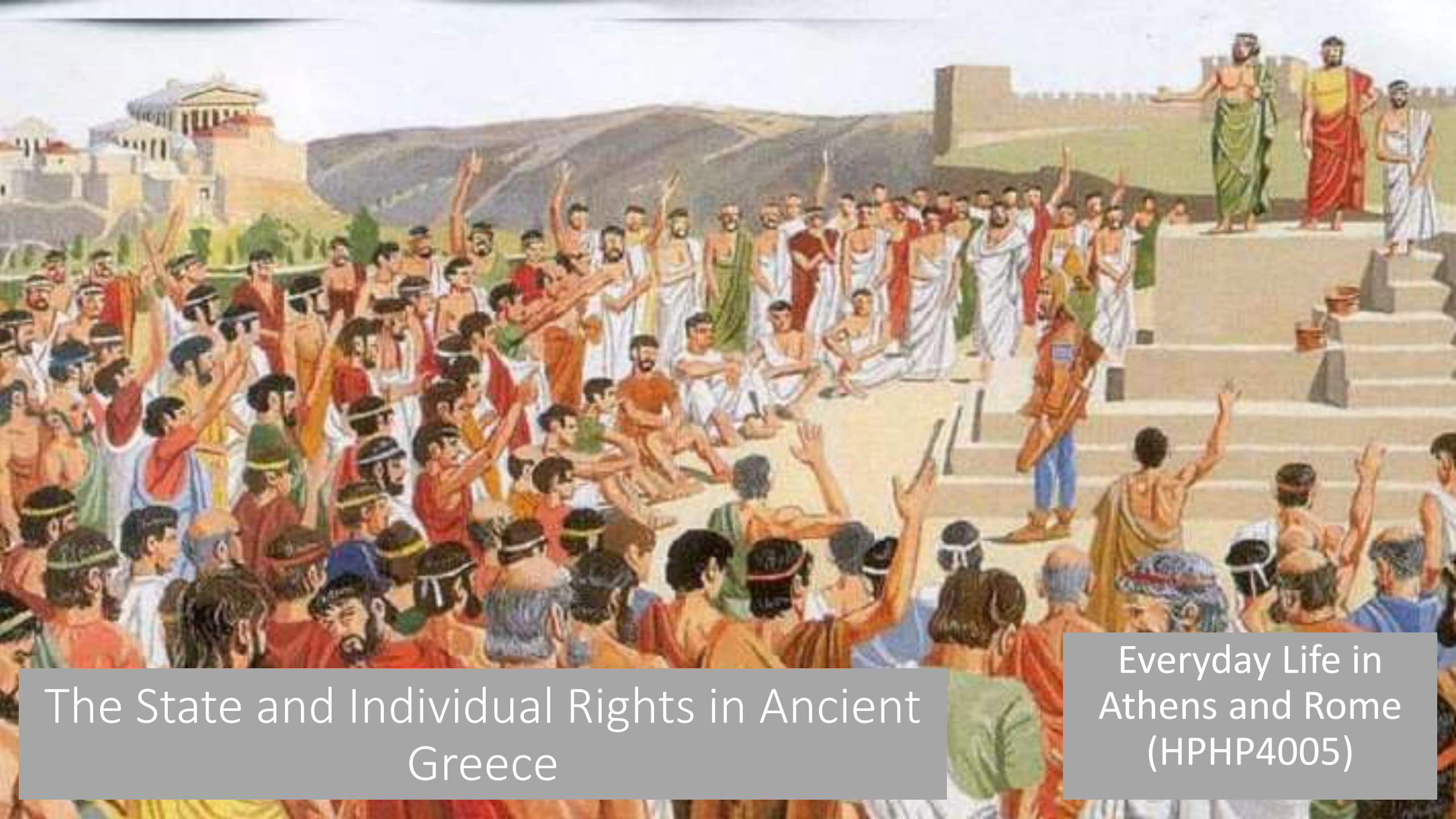




The State and Individual Rights in Ancient
Greece

Everyday Life in
Athens and Rome
(HPHP4005)

What is a democracy?

Merriam-Webster definition of democracy

- **1a:** government by the people (especially: **rule of the majority**).
- **1b:** a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them **directly or indirectly** through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.

Can you see any problems with these definitions?

- **Rule of the majority?** What about constitutional protections (individual rights; protections for minorities, etc.)?
- Most modern “democracies” are **representative – i.e. indirect**. Are direct democracies more “truly democratic”?

Ancient Greek notions of Demokratia (δημοκρατία)

Contrast:

- *monarkhia* = one person's rule.
- *oligarkhia* = a few people's rule.
- *tyrannis* = despotic rule; tyranny
- *aristokratia* = rule of the "best"



DEMOCRACY IS A GREEK WORD
COMPOSED OF TWO PARTS:
DEMOS THE PEOPLE
KRATOS RULE
THE RULE OF THE PEOPLE



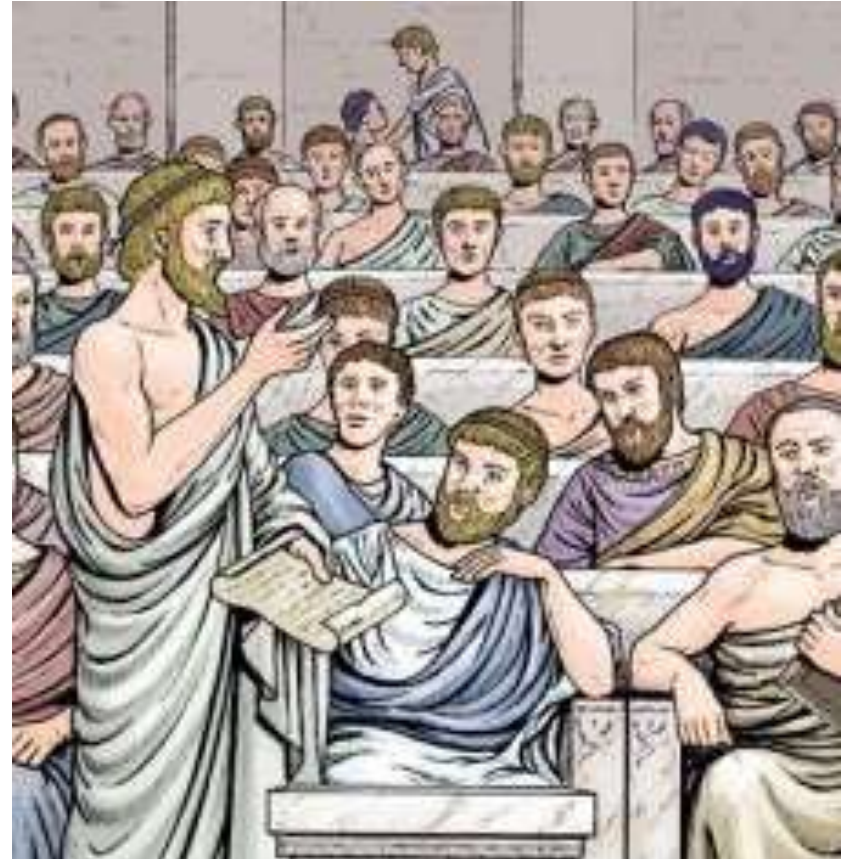
Aristotle *Politics* 1290b: 17-20

“Democracy is when there is a majority of free, poor men who have authority to rule, while oligarchy is when it is in the hands of the wealthy and well-born, who are a minority.”

Ancient discourse

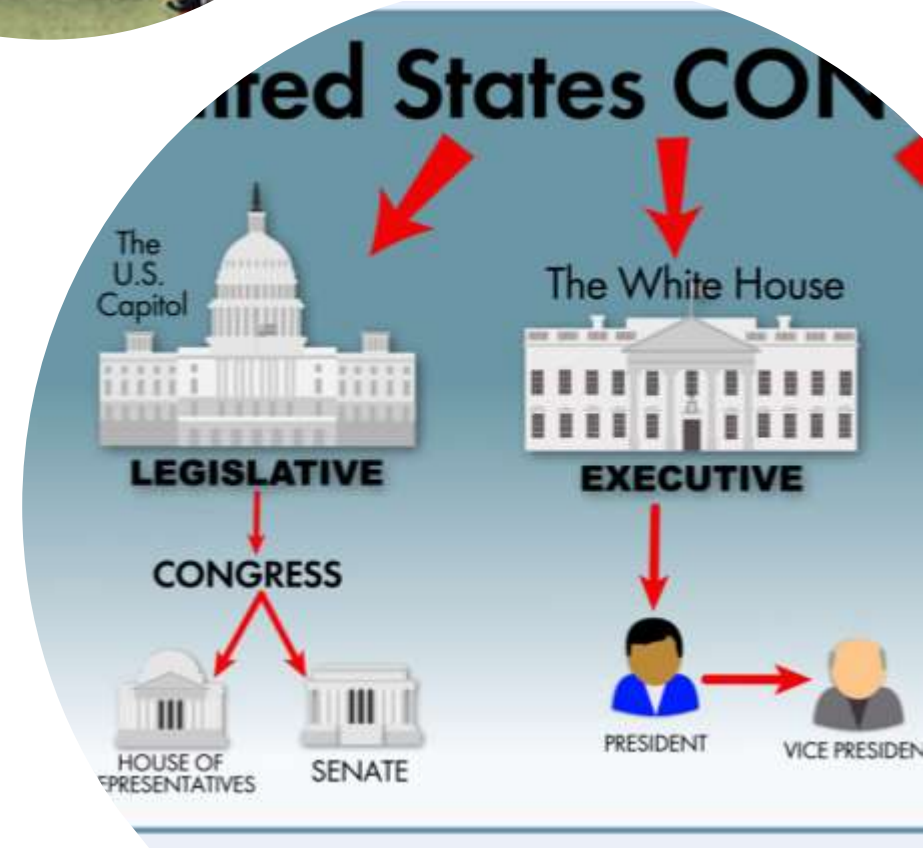
- Often quite sneery:
 - Many elite thinkers hostile (Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, etc.).

“...in every area the Athenians grant precedence to the worthless, the poor, and the common people over the competent...” – **“The Old Oligarch”** *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.4.



What might ancient Greeks have made of modern “democracies”?

- **Parliamentary systems:** a form of elected oligarchy or aristocracy?
- **Presidential systems:** forms of elected tyranny or “mixed constitutions”?
 - Consider USA: the **President** (*basileus*); **Congress** (oligarchs); the **voters** (democratic element)?

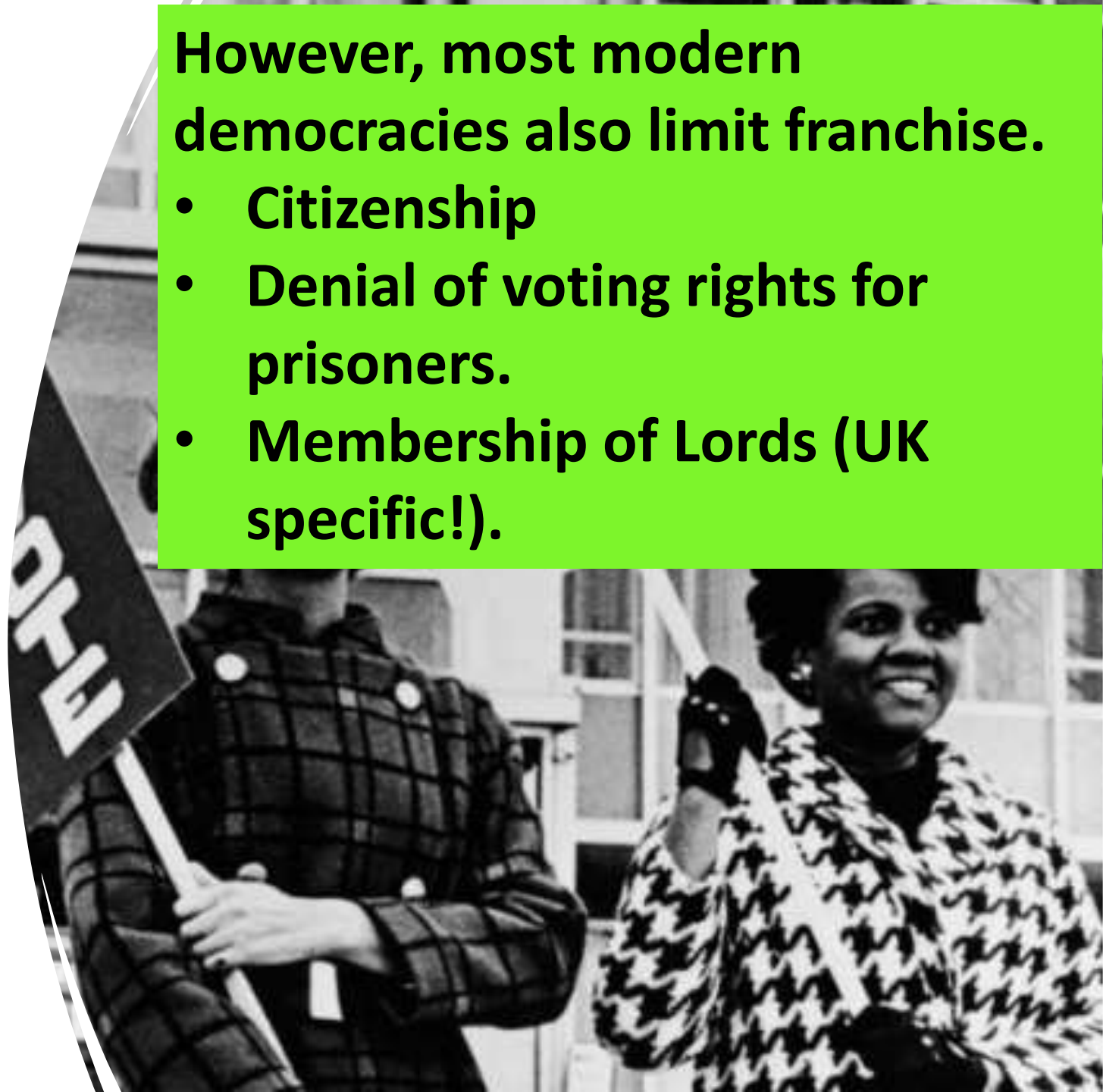


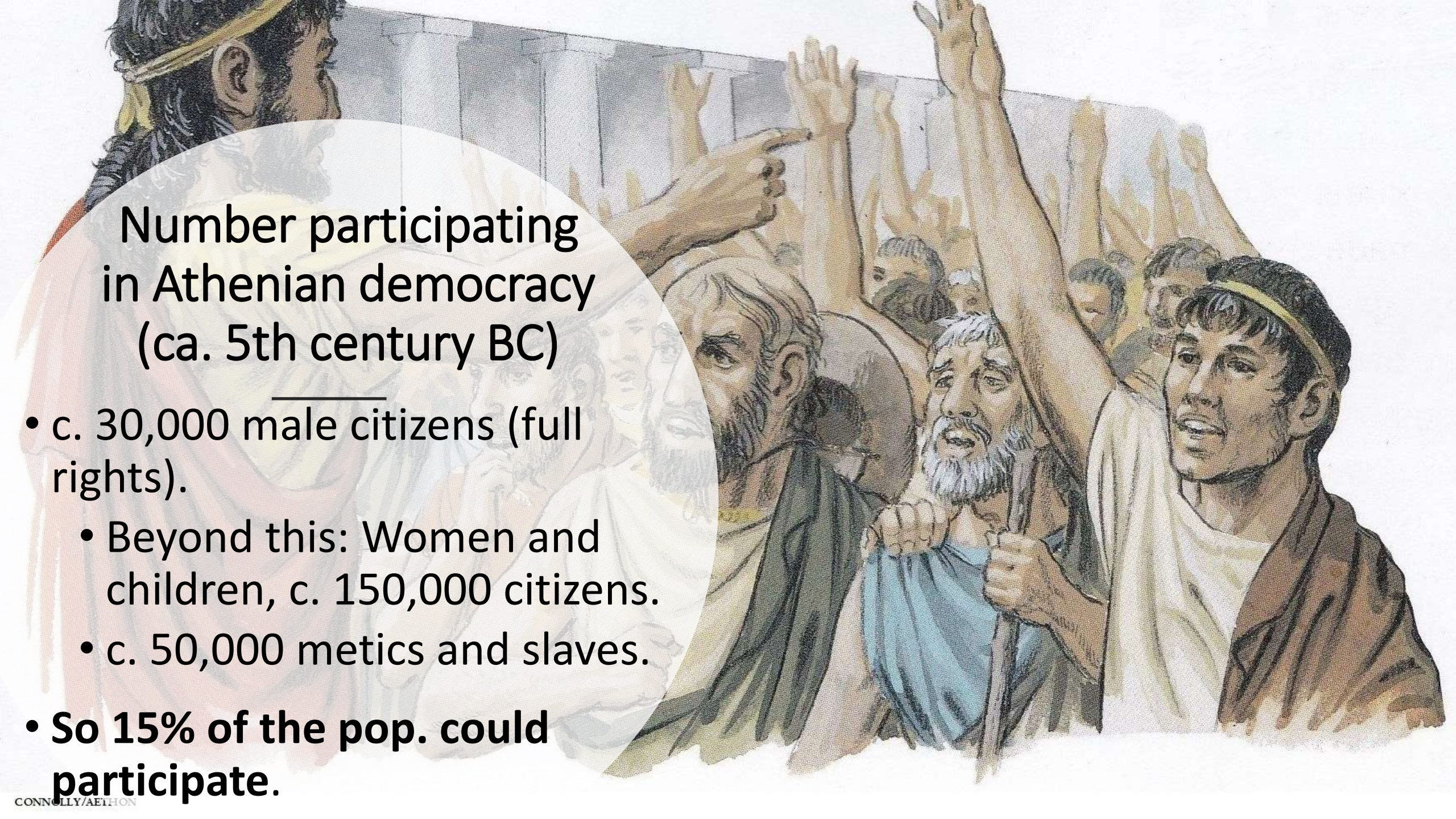
Modern Criticisms of Ancient Athenian Democracy

- Participation by male citizens.
 - Over 18-20 years of age.
- Suffrage more restricted for others.
 - Female citizens – No vote!
 - Metics (resident foreigners) – No vote!
 - Slaves – No vote, few “rights”!

However, most modern democracies also limit franchise.

- Citizenship
- Denial of voting rights for prisoners.
- Membership of Lords (UK specific!).



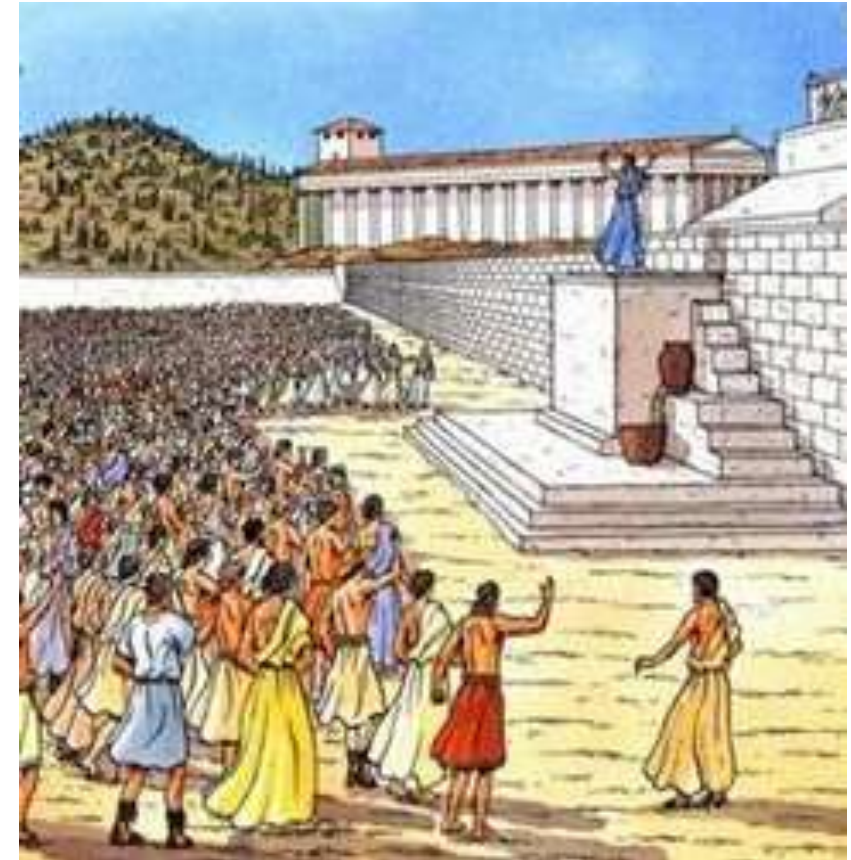
An illustration depicting a scene from ancient Athens. In the foreground, a young man with dark hair and a yellow headband looks upwards with an attentive expression. Behind him, an older man with a white beard and a blue tunic holds a wooden staff. To the left, another older man with a grey beard and a dark cloak is visible. In the background, a large crowd of people is gathered, with many hands raised in the air, suggesting a public assembly or a vote-taking process. The setting appears to be an open public space with classical architectural elements like columns in the distance.

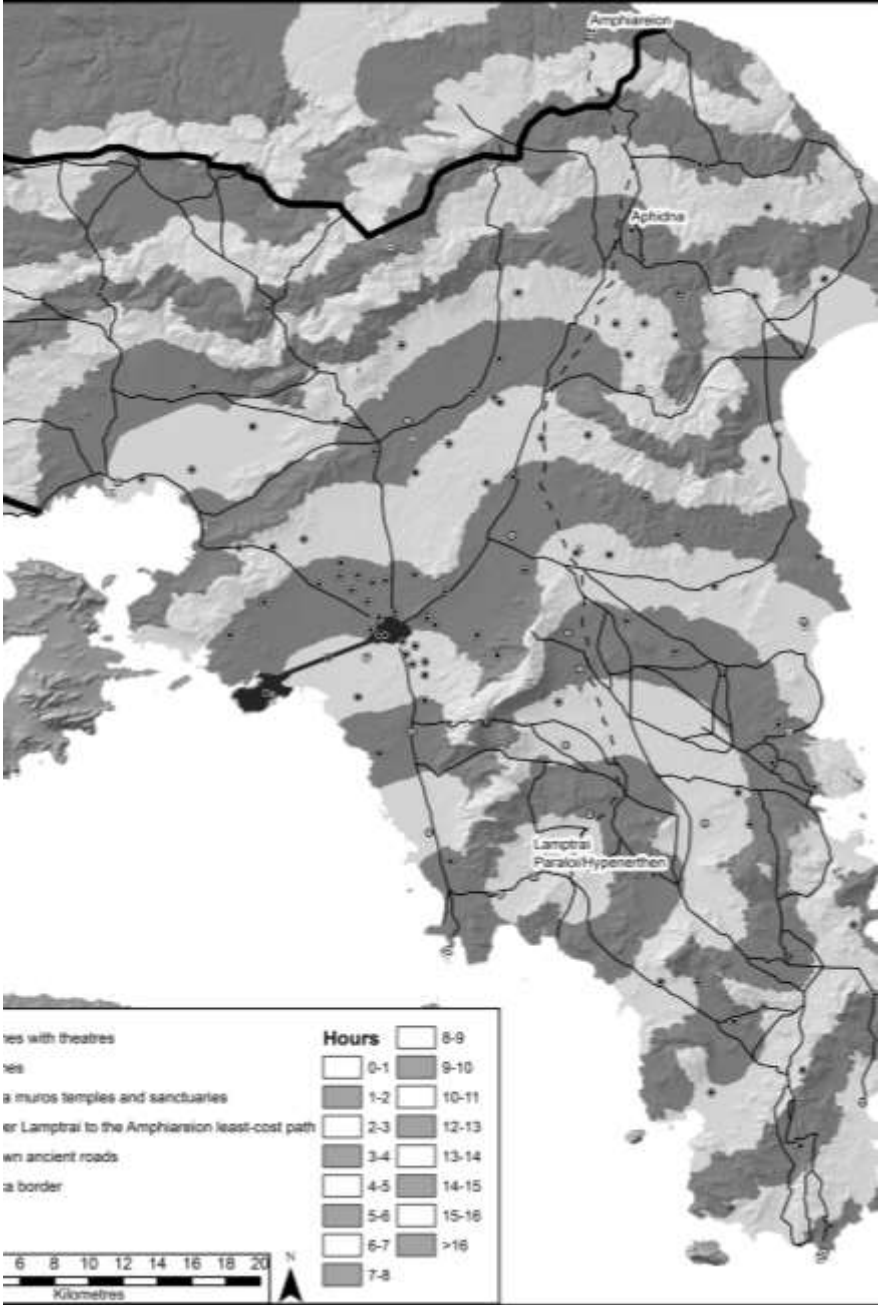
Number participating in Athenian democracy (ca. 5th century BC)

- c. 30,000 male citizens (full rights).
 - Beyond this: Women and children, c. 150,000 citizens.
 - c. 50,000 metics and slaves.
- **So 15% of the pop. could participate.**

Number who might actually participate?

- Assembly needed 6,000 men to be quorate.
- So, at a minimum, **1 in 7 citizens**.
- Overall, if only 6,000 present – **1 citizen making a decision per 37 people**.
- **Compare** 650 MPs in UK for pop. of 67 million.
 - So roughly **1 person per 103,000 people making decisions**.





- An hour or a few for those in central Attica.
- Perhaps most of the day for those at edges.

Type of transport	Speed (km/h)	Load (kg)
Human pedestrian	4-5	n/a
Human porter	2.5-3	30-60
Pack donkey	2.5	60-100
Riding horse	10-30	n/a
Wagon	2-4	200-1000

How frequently would you turn up?

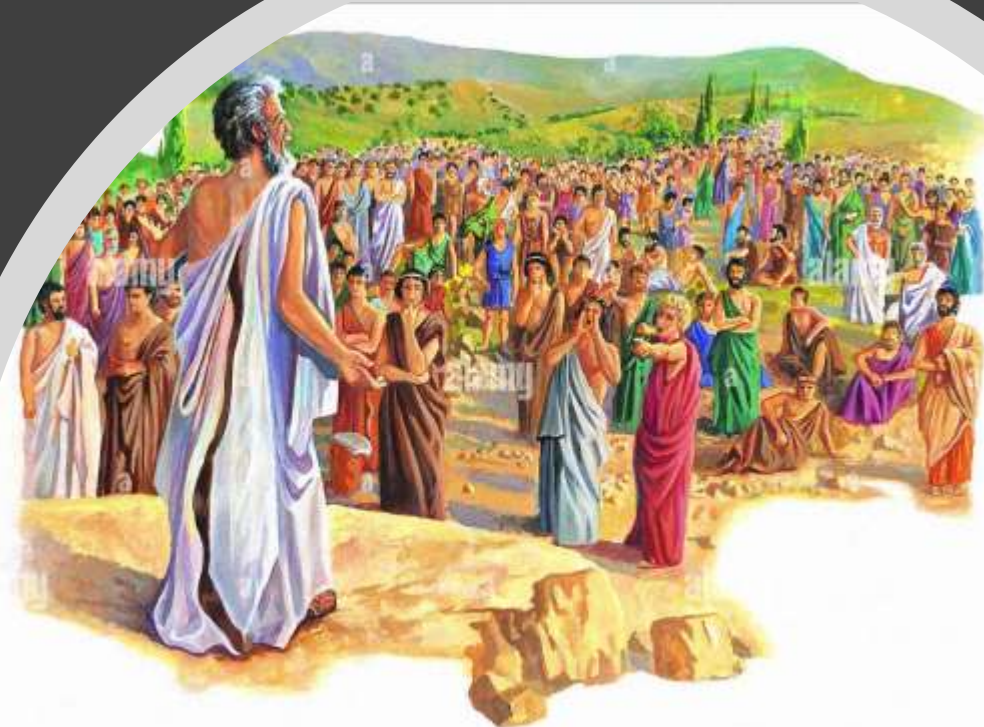


Athenian Democracy

How did it work?

The Ekklesia (Assembly)

- All adult male citizens could attend.
- Met every 9-10 days.
- *Ho boulomenos* - anyone who wished could:
 - propose a motion, comment and vote.
- Procedure: only one chance to speak on any one issue.



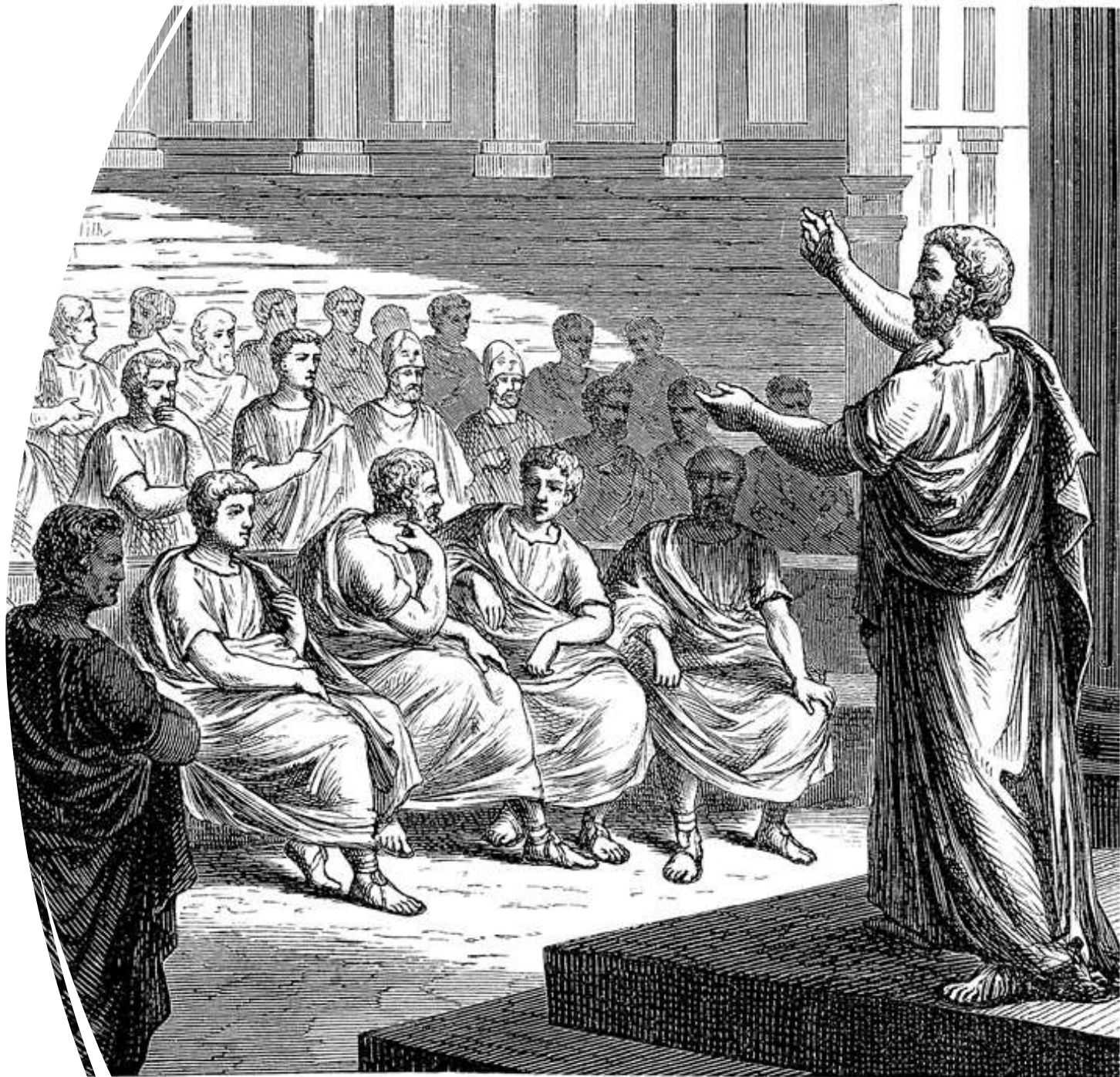
Boule (council)

- Prepared agenda for assembly.
- 500 members in total (50 from each of ten tribes).
- Only a member for 1 year, can hold post twice, but not consecutively!
- Selected **by lot! Not vote** (voting “undemocratic”).



Prytaneis (Presidents)

- Meetings of Boule chaired by the “presidents”.
- 50 prytaneis (presidents) for a “civic” month (c. 35-36 days).
- Each day one prytanis selected (by lot) to serve as “caretaker”.
- At least a third of them meant to be on duty at any one time.



Offices, voting and sortition

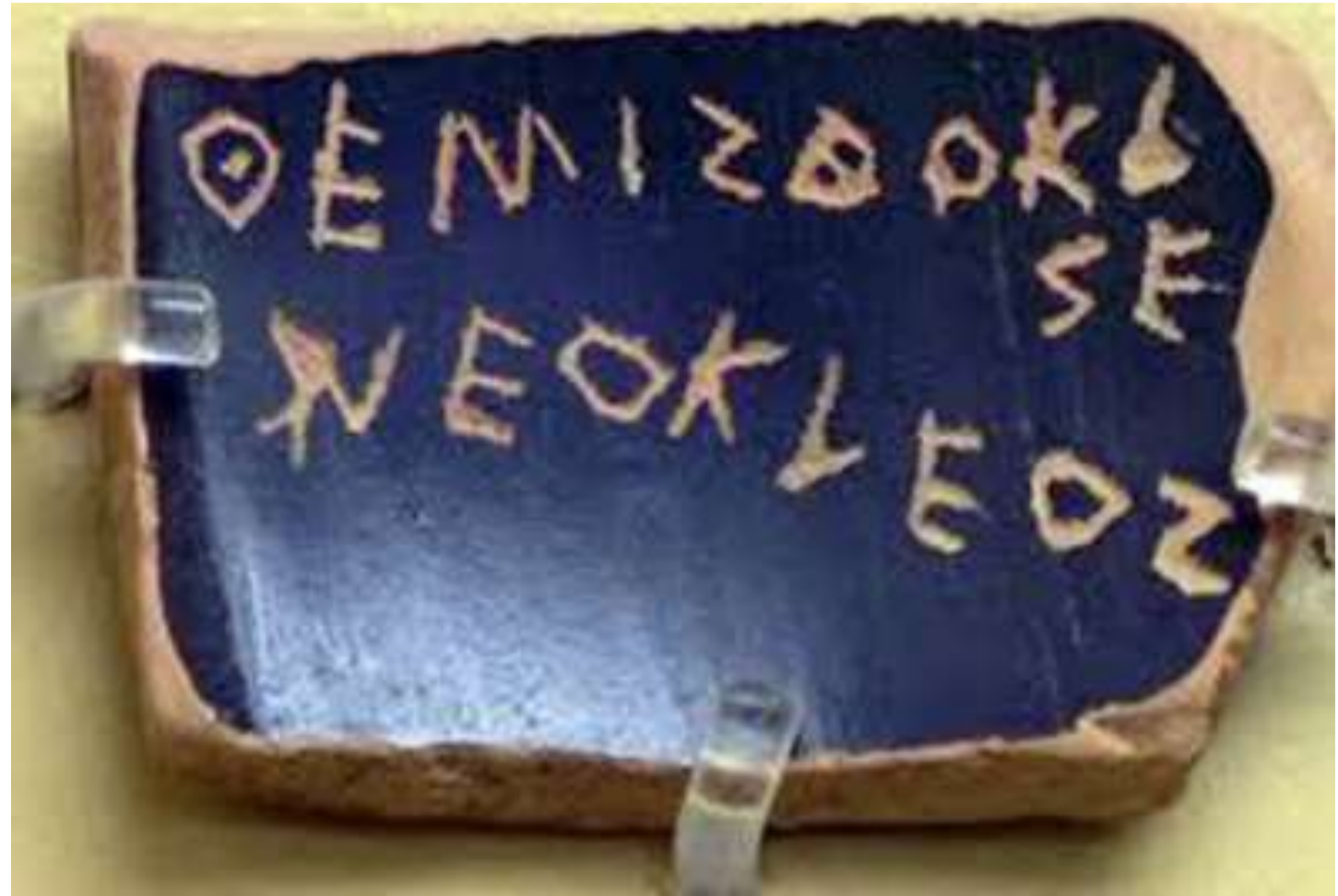
- Most offices filled by sortition.
- Boards of ten – annual tenure.
- Ban on repeated office holding (except military).
- Some important offices elected, notably ten generals (*strategoi*).

**Why might
voting be
deemed
undemocratic?**



Ostracism

- Exile for 10 year period.
- Minimum of 6,000 citizens must vote.
- First used in 487 BC (Hipparchos son of Charmos).
- Last ostracism Hyperbolous? (Plut. *Nicias* 11.1-4).



Themistocles son of Neocleos

Question to consider: does
Classical Athenian
democracy seem more or
less “democratic” than
contemporary
democracies?

