



Direct Democracy



**REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRACY**

Direct Democracy

Democracy is the form of government most widely used by many nations. It is a preferred type of government because it gives the citizens a voice in important decisions that could affect them one way or the other.

There are several types of democracy. One of which is **direct democracy**. In this form of government, the people of the country are given the ability to decide their own issues by creating a majority vote on any issue. Every “eligible” person is given the power of a vote to control the direction of their government. In Athens, considered the birthplace of democracy”, the only people eligible to vote were adult male citizens, which accounted for only 20% of the population. In theory, this allows for a greater level of transparency between the government and individuals, but it also slows down the speed of the execution of any policy, procedure, or declaration. As with any system of government, there are specific pros and cons of direct democracy which must be considered.

Here Are the Pros of a Direct Democracy

1. In a direct democracy, a vote actually counts.

With representative democracy, it can be easy to feel like a vote doesn't count for anything. This isn't the case in a direct democracy. Although decisions are based on a majority vote, everyone gets to have their say and their vote counted if they wish to be included in a decision. This process encourages people to become politically active and knowledgeable about issues because they have a meaningful say in the process.



2. There is less of a chance for corruption.

There are 328 million people in the US, yet there are only 535 people that represent our interests nationally (435 representatives and 100 senators). In a representative democracy, corporations can spend large amounts of money to influence the decisions of those 535 public servants. In fact, corporations now spend about \$2.6 billion a year on lobbyists who try to “influence” the elected officials in Congress to do things that are in the best interest of their corporations, not necessarily the people. That would be much harder to do in a direct democracy, because each person would get to vote on every decision, not just 535 individuals.

3. Government officials can be immediately recalled in a direct democracy.

In many government structures, once a government official is elected for representation, they can serve out their full term unless their conduct is deemed to be illegal in some way. Under the structure of a direct democracy, people can quickly initiate a recall on a government official who is not acting in their best interests. This keeps officials and politicians honest when dealing with the people because the people can kick an elected official out of office before their term is complete.



4. Government accountability is promoted within a direct democracy.

In the United States, more than 90% of Congressional representatives are re-elected despite having an approval rating that is often below 20%. This occurs because there is a lack of complete government accountability. When a direct democracy is in place, people can voice their concerns without fear of retaliation and must be allowed to vote, if eligible, on circumstances. This direct line of data creates a higher level of accountability than other forms of government allow.

Here Are the Cons of a Direct Democracy

1. In a direct democracy, it becomes very difficult to make decisions.

Because every eligible person has a stake in the debate of any issue or procedure, it becomes difficult to make fast decisions. Voting procedures must take place on any issue, whether that means going to war or going to increase the amount of money that goes into a food stamp program. This means there are more steps which must be followed to move forward, which slows down this form of government compared to other government structures.

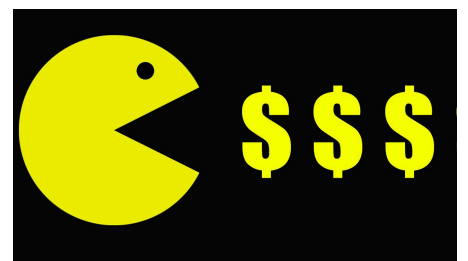


2. The majority rules at the expense of the minority.

From the Civil Rights Movement in the United States to Apartheid in South Africa, there are numerous instances throughout history where the majority ruled at the expense of the minority. A direct democracy depends on a majority rule structure to implement policies and make most decisions. When the majority is not ethically or morally right, the structure of government can put the lives of people who are in the minority at great risk.

3. People don't have a good understanding of all the complex issues they'd have to vote on.

Using the structure of a direct democracy, the population would need to vote on all kinds of laws like Wall Street regulations, environmental regulations, oversight of intelligence agencies like the CIA and FBI, and a host of other mundane decisions that must be made daily by a government. Many of the citizens voting might not have the necessary experience or expertise to make informed decisions about these issues.



4. Direct democracies are expensive.

There are a lot of costs that must be considered for a direct democracy to work properly. People must be educated about the decisions which must be made, which means there must be training opportunities, seminars, webinars, and other tools used so that the best possible decision can be made. The cost of holding each vote has specific costs associated with it as well. Time Magazine reported that in 2012, \$544 million was lost in productivity due to people standing in line to vote for the US Presidential election. Imagine what that cost would be if a vote on every issue had to take place.

5. Direct democracies create regulatory nightmares.

In the United States, there are multiple layers of representation to handle the large regulatory processes that are in place. Every dollar spent would need to be approved under a pure direct democracy structure. This constant need for voting would create a regulatory nightmare that would hold societal development back because of the sheer bulk of oversight a modern government provides.



6. A direct democracy does not generally work in a large country.

Using the United States as an example, every decision would typically require accessing a total voter population of 150+ million people. That would be extremely difficult for national-level decisions. It would also place smaller population centers in the US at a disadvantage compared to larger population centers. People in urban areas could control how people in rural areas live and work... or people in large states could dictate how smaller states operate. That is why any direct democracy structures in the US are kept to the local or state levels.

Representative Democracy

Another version of democracy is representative democracy. It is the style of democracy founded on the principle of citizens allowing other people, like elected officials, to represent them in government dealings. This is being practiced by the US and Great Britain, to name a few. The people are not directly involved in any of the legislative or lawmaking processes. This form of democracy is practiced in nations where the number of citizens is so high that direct representation would probably be too complicated or would go wrong. Unlike in direct democracy wherein people draft bills themselves, debate and vote to pass them into law, citizens elect people to handle those responsibilities on their behalf in a representative democracy. This image shows similarities and differences between the early direct democracy of Athens and the current representative democracy we have in the United States.

Athenian and United States Democracy

Athenian Democracy

- Citizens: male; 18 years old; born of citizen parents
- Laws voted on and proposed directly by assembly of all citizens
- Leader chosen by lot
- Executive branch composed of a council of 500 men
- Juries varied in size
- No attorneys; no appeals; one-day trials

Both

- Political power exercised by citizens
- Three branches of government
- Legislative branch passes laws
- Executive branch carries out laws
- Judicial branch conducts trials with paid jurors

U.S. Democracy

- Citizens: born in United States or completed citizenship process
- Representatives elected to propose and vote on laws
- Elected president
- Executive branch made up of elected and appointed officials
- Juries composed of 12 jurors
- Defendants and plaintiffs have attorneys; long appeals process

List of Pros of Representative Democracy

1. It is efficient.

The efficient use of an executive legislative body is the most important advantage that this form of democracy can offer. This legislative body is generally controlled by the laws as well as the constitution and is responsible for drafting and implementing high priority policies, laws and decisions. In direct democracy, citizens are free to participate in making national decisions by voting. However, this can be hard to manage for countries with considerable amounts of populations.



2. People still have a say in how their government operates.

Although a representative democracy takes away the direct decision-making power of individuals over national policy, it does not completely eliminate their influence on the government. If the population is dissatisfied with the performance of their elected official, they can vote to remove that person in the next election cycle.

3. People still have a voice.

Individuals may not be voting on individual issues within a representative democracy, but they can still have their opinions heard. Letters can be written to their representatives. Meetings with their representatives occur frequently during times of governmental recess. If the population feels like their voices aren't being heard by their elected officials, there is always the option to legally protest.



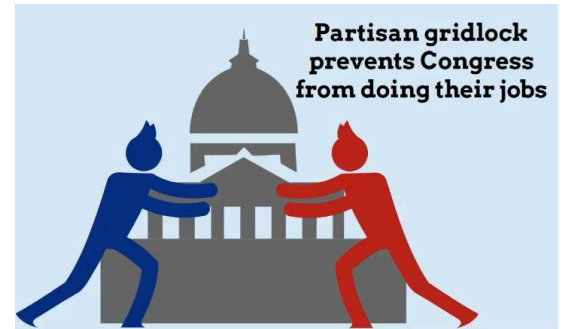
4. It simplifies the decision-making process.

Instead of forcing everyone to vote on everything, a representative democracy allows decisions to be made by a group of elected officials. In some instances, the leader of a nation may be given the power to make certain decisions on behalf of the people. Because of this assignment and delegation, decisions can be made quicker and this makes the government more responsive to a potential emergency situation.

List of Cons of Representative Democracy

1. It can easily devolve into gridlock.

A clear majority does not usually rule in a representative democracy. There are 2+ political parties in most systems that each have a specific platform of priorities they wish to pursue. When those platforms are very different from one another, it creates gridlock within the government and that stops most of the work from being done. Even when there is a clear majority, as evidenced by the 2016 US elections, it can still be difficult to avoid gridlock because each representative has their own priorities to pursue.



2. This form of government encourages deception.

Because the power of the people is typically over after the vote takes place in a representative democracy, it encourages officials to be deceptive. Once they win the vote, they can pursue their own agenda and little is in the way to stop them for several years. In the United States, for example, a Senator is elected to a 6-year term.

3. Votes aren't always counted equally.

To ensure that densely populated areas don't overly influence the rest of the country during presidential elections, the Electoral College in the United States gives different weights to votes cast in different states. For example, [as the Washington Post](#) noted shortly after the 2016 presidential election, Wyoming has three electoral votes and a population of 586,107, while California has 55 electoral votes and 39,144,818 residents. Distributing the electoral vote evenly among each state's residents suggests that individual votes from Wyoming carry 3.6 times more influence, or weight, than those from California.



4. The majority still rules at the expense of the minority.

From the Civil Rights Movement in the United States to Apartheid in South Africa, there are numerous instances throughout history where the majority ruled at the expense of the minority. A representative democracy still depends on a majority rule structure to implement policies and make most decisions. When the majority is not ethically or morally right, the structure of government can put the lives of people who are in the minority at great risk.



5. In some ways, it discourages participation.

When there is a representative democracy in power, people know that they will receive governmental representation, whether they choose to vote or not, and that can affect voter turnout. For example, [about 60% of the voting eligible population votes during presidential election years, and about 40% votes during midterm elections](#). For some, the reason they choose not to participate in the voting process is because they automatically receive representation whether they vote or not. Others choose not to participate because they feel the officials running in an election do not represent their needs. In any case, if a large majority doesn't vote, it creates a situation where the small minority of dedicated voters can control the majority when there are high levels of non-involvement. And since older people are more likely to vote than younger people, politicians are more likely to focus on their concerns rather than everyone's concerns.