

## What are the characteristics of a democracy?

You cannot always tell whether a state is a democracy by its name. Even states called "Democratic Republic XY" or "People's Republic YZ" are therefore not necessarily run democratically!

Democratic states have some special characteristics. And certain important principles and rules apply, without which a democracy cannot function:

### Vote

Elections are a fundamental element of a democracy. Through them, every citizen entitled to vote has the opportunity to have a political say in the state.

Equality: In a democratic state, all citizens have the same rights and obligations, regardless of gender, origin or property.

Legal order: The rights and duties are laid down in laws. This is also called the legal order. The rights in a democracy should enable people to determine for themselves as far as possible how they want to live.

## Division of powers

The division of powers should actually be more accurately called "division of state power". This means that no single party, person or institution has all the power in the state. Power is divided into different areas. This is to prevent abuse of power.

The classical division of powers is based on the so-called 3-pillar system. This consists of the legislature, which is the legislative power, the executive or administration and the judiciary, which is the judicial power.

**Legislation (legislature):** Legislation (legislature) is carried out by the parliament (National Council and Federal Council) and the provincial parliaments. The representatives elected by the people meet in parliament and in the provincial parliaments. They pass the laws. In this way, citizens have an influence on the laws in force in Austria.

**Administration (executive):** The administration (executive) includes the Federal President and the Federal Government. The executive carries out and implements the decisions of the legislative power. Simply put, administration is everything that, in the separation of powers, does not fall under the tasks of legislation or jurisdiction.

**Judiciary:** The courts and judges constitute the judiciary.

**Human and minority rights:** In a democracy, human rights and minority rights are protected by law.

**Freedom rights:** One of the most important principles in a democracy is that one may freely express one's opinion - without being punished or disadvantaged by the state for doing so. One also has the right to join with others to make that opinion public (freedom of expression and assembly) Television, newspapers, radio, internet sites and all other media are also free to publish information (freedom of the press and information).

Unfortunately, the fact that democratic principles are respected is not a matter of course everywhere in the world.

**Democracy** (from the ancient Greek δημοκρατία 'rule of the people'; from δῆμος *dēmos* 'people of the state' and the ancient Greek κράτος *krátos* 'violence', 'power', 'rule') today refers to forms of rule, political orders or political systems in which power and government emanate from the people (popular rule).

The people participate either directly (direct democracy) or through the selection of decision-making representatives (representative democracy) in all decisions that affect the general public in a binding manner.[1] In democratic states and political systems, the government emerges from the people through political elections. Since power is exercised by the general public, freedom of expression and freedom of the press are essential to the formation of political will.[2][3][4] Other important features of a modern democracy are free and equal elections, the majority or consensus principle, protection of minorities, acceptance of a political opposition, separation of powers, constitutionality, and protection of fundamental, civil and human rights. This liberal value basis, which as such cannot be touched even by majority decision, also distinguishes it significantly from an ochlocracy, people's republic or tyranny of the majority.



Democracy is a difficult language.  
That means in easy language:  
All people in Germany  
are allowed to participate in decision-making.  
And all people  
have the same rights.  
And all people in the world are equal.  
Even if they look different.  
Or speak a different language.  
People in Germany elect politicians.  
To do this, people must be allowed to vote.  
Politicians work in the Bundestag  
of Germany.  
The Bundestag is also called the parliament.  
The politicians decide important things together.  
For all the people in Germany.  
For example, laws.  
Or things with money.  
The politicians in the Bundestag elect a Federal Chancellor.  
The Federal Chancellor is the head of the federal government.  
The federal government can also be led by a head as Federal Chancellor.



Germany says:

Every human being should  
participate in democracy.

That's why Germany has programmes.

For example, the programme:

Live Democracy!

Associations can take part in the programme

Live Democracy! programme.

And all citizens:

Who want to do a project.

The programme helps:

So that there is more democracy in Germany.

Because democracy is good for Germany.

The programme Democracy Live!

is from the BMFSFJ.

The programme is

for all people in Germany.

So that they can stand up for democracy.

And so that all people

can live well together.

Democracy is a state order.

An order that says who is allowed to decide in a state.

For example, it says who is allowed to make laws.

In a democracy, the people decide.

The people elect representatives.

Most of the time there are parties in a democracy.

The people who are elected are usually in a party.

In Germany there are many different parties.

The biggest parties in Germany are, for example:

- the CDU,
- the SPD,
- the Greens,
- the AFD,
- The Left
- FDP.

The parties say what they want to do before the election.

Democracy is a way of organising and governing a state. The word comes from the Greek and means "rule of the people". The people elect the parliament, which makes the laws, and the government, which applies the laws and determines what happens in the country.

In a democracy, the state protects people's rights so that they are truly free to make their own choices, even if they have different opinions. In addition, human rights apply to all people. Even children have rights.

**What are the basic rules in a democracy today?**



Stamp from 1981: Basic ideas of democracy

In a democracy there is no autocracy, that is, no autocrats, as kings once were. In a democracy there is only temporary rule. The people or the parliament can appoint the head of government and also vote him or her out of office.

An important principle is the separation of powers. Laws are made by parliament, which is the assembly of the people's representatives. The government executes the laws. Judges control compliance with the rules and laws. These three "powers" in the state control each other to make sure that none of them becomes too powerful.

## **How are leaders determined?**

In a democracy, elections are particularly important. Through them, people can decide which politicians they want to have as representatives of the people. If many voters cast their vote for someone, that politician gets into parliament. People's representatives are also elected in municipalities, districts, cantons or parts of the country. So there is a parliament in the larger municipalities. It is called a municipal council, municipal parliament or city council and is elected by the population of the municipality. In smaller municipalities, the municipal assembly takes over these functions.

In some elections, a single office is voted on, like the head of state. When a decision is taken on a particular issue, it is called a referendum. This sometimes happens in Austria. In Switzerland it happens regularly. Germany knows referendums only in the federal states.

## **How great is freedom in a democracy?**



A lot of politics is also done outside the halls of parliament: here in the Wandelhalle in the Federal Parliament building in Bern, Switzerland.

For a democracy, it is not enough that there are elections. Elections must also be truly free and secret. For example, the government must not simply decide for itself who may be elected in the first place. It is also important that the laws and the police protect the people. Fair courts with independent judges also protect the people.

A parliament has various tasks: It makes the laws that apply to everyone and can restrict freedoms. In road traffic, for example, there must be a law that all road users must obey. Otherwise, road traffic would be much more dangerous. Parliament also decides how much money can be spent in the future. This list is called a budget, or Büdsche.

## **What is not allowed in a democracy?**

In a democracy, it is not allowed to violate people's rights. These rights are called fundamental rights. Only a court is allowed to punish someone for a crime and put them in prison. All laws are subordinate to people's fundamental rights and may not violate them.

People have many different opinions about what exactly a democracy is. Democracy also works a little differently in every country. They also change over time. But above all, democracy is not compatible with a dictatorship: there, only one person or a small group decides what is done in a state.

### **Does a democracy also apply to children?**

In a democracy, voting is very important. However, you can only do that when you are 18 years old. In some elections, you can vote at the age of 16. Children are not allowed to vote in parliament, but they have special rights. These include the right to grow up protected and to go to school.

Democracy is an idea of how people should treat each other. Children can also experience this, for example at school. Class representatives and pupil representatives are elected there. They represent other pupils, are allowed to have their say and sometimes have a say in certain things. Some cities and municipalities even have their own children's and youth parliaments.

Human rights are rights that everyone has. For example, everyone has the right not to be imprisoned or robbed. People have such rights simply because they are human beings. They have not received these rights from a friendly ruler who is allowed to take them away again.

Human rights include the right to life and not to have one's body violated. One may not be imprisoned, except as punishment for a crime. One may speak one's mind and choose one's religion. In addition, there are many other human rights. In Germany they are also called basic rights. Some of them are rights that you only have as a citizen of Germany, for example the right to vote in parliament.

In a democracy, all people basically have the same rights and duties. Everyone is allowed to express their opinion, to inform themselves and to assemble. Citizens therefore have the right to freedom of expression, the right to information and the right to assemble. The state must abide by certain laws and duties that are enshrined in a constitution. In Germany, these rules are laid down in the Basic Law. A democratic state is thus also a constitutional state.

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In a democracy, there are various parties that represent certain views and make this known in a so-called party programme. The people can choose between these parties and elect one that they think is good for the citizens and the country. If parties get enough votes, they are allowed to govern for a certain period of time. In Germany, the Bundestag is re-elected every four years - if people are no longer satisfied with the government's policies, they can choose a different party at the next Bundestag election.

The elections are secret and free. Free means that every citizen is allowed to vote for the politicians and the parties they find best. So no one may be forced to vote for a certain party or to vote at all. Although it is very important in a democracy that many people participate in the election, fewer and fewer people go to vote. But this is the only way for the people to decide by whom the country should be governed. However, quite a few people are generally dissatisfied with the parties' programmes and feel that they have too little say when it comes to important decisions for the citizens and the country. A "representative" democracy, as we have it in Germany, in fact means that people can only elect representatives who make the political decisions, but cannot take part in a vote on certain issues themselves, as in a so-called "direct" democracy.

In a representative democracy, therefore, the people elect the representatives of the people.

In every state there is an order that determines who is allowed to decide in that state. For example, who is allowed to determine which laws everyone must abide by. In a democracy, the citizens of the people determine this in elections.





The image features a background with a light blue to white gradient at the top, transitioning into a grid of squares in various shades of blue. On the left side, there is a purple shape that resembles a roof or a stylized letter 'L', with a cluster of green leaves below it. A prominent pink rounded rectangle is positioned on the right side, containing the white text 'De'.

De

## ZDFtivi | logo! - Demokratie

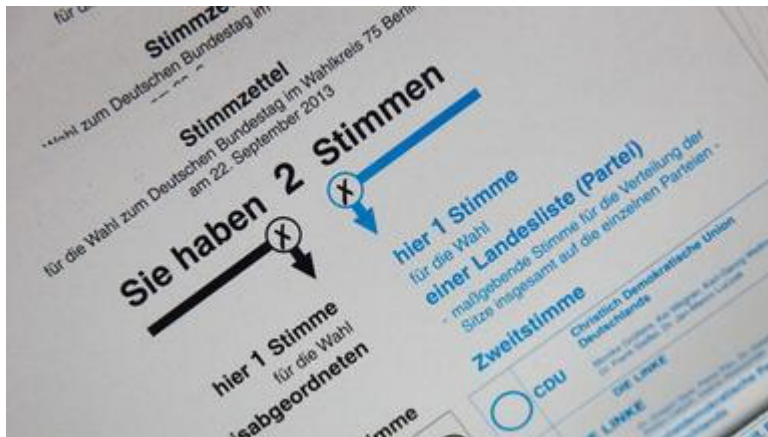
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1 min

The idea of popular rule, i.e. democracy, is quite old. Clever people came up with this state order in the sixth century before Christ. They thought it was very unfair that only one person, such as a king or emperor, ever had power in a state. Their idea at that time was that every citizen in a state must have the right to have a say in what happens in their country. So every citizen should get a piece of power.

Imagine if all adults in Germany always had to have a say in every law. That would take forever. Besides, there are of course many different opinions. It's not that easy to come to an agreement. That's why there are elections in every democratic state - just like in Germany. Voters elect politicians who represent them and their opinions.

### **Free and secret elections**



Source: dpa

This is how politicians are elected.

It is very important in a democracy that elections are free and secret. Free means that everyone can vote for the politician they like best. No one may be forced to vote for a certain politician. It is also forbidden to pay voters money to vote for a certain politician. Secret means: no one has to reveal who they voted for.

In a democracy, both have power: politicians and citizens. Politicians decide many things. But the citizens elect the politicians who are to decide for them. If the people in a state do not like the work of the politicians, they simply do not vote for these politicians again at the next election.

### The power of the citizens

The power of citizens in a democracy is therefore to elect those who are in charge - and to vote them out again if they do not like the work of the politicians. That is why it is very important in a democracy that elections are held again and again at certain intervals. In a democracy, politicians cannot just do what they want. They always have to consider what their voters want. What they have to do and what they are allowed to do is also regulated by laws that everyone has to abide by.

In a democracy, everyone has the right to speak their mind freely. No one has to be afraid of being punished for it. But there are still countries where there is no democracy.

There are also countries without democracy

In such countries, people are not free. They have to obey a ruler and his people and are not allowed to speak their minds freely. If they do, they are persecuted, put in prison or even killed. Sometimes people fight back and demonstrate against the government, for example. Unfortunately, they often have little success with this. Other countries are democratic, but some politicians do not follow the rules of democracy. They no longer consider what would be best for the citizens, but only seek their own advantages.

Important features of a modern democracy are free and equal elections, the majority or consensus principle, protection of minorities, acceptance of a political opposition, separation of powers, constitutionality, and protection of fundamental, civil and human rights.

<http://www.bpb.de/36961/arbeitsblaetter>

a) Political rights - e.g.

.....

D Enactment of laws only by elected politicians;

D free, fair and frequent elections;

D universal suffrage and the right to stand for election for all adults,

D significant opposition

.....

b) civil liberties - e.g.

.....

D freedom of expression, information and the press

D Freedom of organisation and assembly,

D equality before the law,

D Freedom of belief

D Entrepreneurial/economic freedom.