

Premier's Spirit of Democracy 2020



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Minister's Foreword



It is my great privilege to commend to you this compilation of entries written by the winners and runners-up of the inaugural Premier's Spirit of Democracy Program.

In 2019, Victorian students in Years 10-12 were invited to draw upon classical Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, to prepare a personal reflection, short story, or expository essay responding to the topic:

Ancient democracy is often viewed as a system of government where the citizens of the city-state held the power. Is this an accurate observation of the democratic model in modern day Australia?

The topic invited them to take a close look at the complexity of our civic structures, the philosophies upon which they are built, and the ideals they strive to uphold. It asked them to critique our success in our endeavour to sustain democracy in contemporary society.

Civics and citizenship education is a cornerstone of Victorian education. It instils in young people the skills to be active and informed citizens who can participate in and strengthen our democracy. These benefits are felt far beyond the school gates, as students continue to shape the future of Victoria and our nation.

This book contains 25 outstanding student entries. Each reflects the student's writing and critical thinking skills, as well as their dedication to their studies. These writings offer unique insights into the keen perceptiveness of our young Victorians, giving us new and important perspectives on social issues and visions for our collective future.

Each student, their schools and families can feel very proud.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Merlino". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Merlino" clearly distinguishable.

The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier

Minister for Education

Minister for Mental Health

Consul General's Foreword



It is my honour to join the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Mental Health, the Honourable James Merlino MP, in congratulating the 25 student authors published in this book.

While some scholars may say that Greek civilization has been around for so long that Greece has had a chance to try nearly every form of government, we are perhaps most proud of our contribution to democracy. We have a long history of democracy, from its ancient Athenian roots, to present day systems of government, which uphold the rights of individuals and their communities.

As Greece celebrates the bicentenary of the Greek War of Independence this year, it is timely to acknowledge that the modern Greek State, through its pioneering Constitutional texts, was founded on solid principles of representative democracy, like wide civic participation, protection of fundamental rights and distinction of State powers and functions. These principles remain in the epicentre of our social and political thought, both in Greece and Australia.

Democracy as a system relies on the emphasis of educational opportunities for young people. Civics education plays a vital role in helping young people make informed choices about their futures and the ways in which they will choose to lead each other as well as future generations. It is, after all, the responsibility of today's young, not only to safeguard the achievements of previous generations, but primarily to work on further enhancing and fine-tuning their governing system in order to serve an ever-evolving society.

It is my great pleasure to support the Premier's Spirit of Democracy program, which enables Victorian students to explore political philosophy and reflect on its role in modern societies. This collection of essays demonstrates the students' deep interest and passion for civics, citizenship, philosophy and contemporary politics. This passion is a prerequisite, as well as a guarantee, for the formation of commendable future citizens.

I congratulate all the students on their inspiring work.

Συγχαρητήρια!

Emmanuel S. Kakavelakis

Consul General of Greece, Melbourne

Ancient democracy is often viewed as a system of government where the citizens of the city-state held the power. Is this an accurate observation of the democratic model in modern day Australia?





From Athens to Australia: A tale of democracy

M Bannon

Princes Hill Secondary College, Year 11

In 508BCE Cleisthenes, the so-called “Father of Athenian Democracy”, established the first-ever democracy in Athens following the tyrannical rule of Hippias. After the exile of Hippias, Cleisthenes began a series of political reforms called *demokratia*, or “rule by the people”, originating from the words *demos* “people,” and *Kratos* meaning power.

In his improvements of the Athenian society, he persuaded the people of Athens to form groups not based on family ties but on area, known as a deme. These demes kept a register of their own citizens and could elect its own officials. This made a more inclusive Athens in which the mixed local tribes formed the basis of representation in politics. This new democratic system comprised of three separate institutions: The Ecclesia was an independent governing body consisting of 40,000 adult citizens, majority rule dictated foreign policy and formed laws. The Boule, a council of 500 men from the ten Athenian tribes (50 from each) who decided what issues the Ecclesia would vote on, and the Dicastery public courts in which citizens would argue cases before a group of elderly jurors, who, in the absence of police officers, dealt with citizens under persecution. Another law introduced was Ostracism, where any citizen could be expelled from Athens for more than ten years as voted by the majority. Philosophers were quite critical of Cleisthenes Government, men such as Socrates and Plato disliked democracy for they believed that the majority would always form a tyranny against the minority, believing that “democracy passes into despotism”. Despite the Athenian democracy only surviving for two centuries, it still remains one of the most enduring and influential contributions to the modern world, influencing nations such as Australia up until this very day.

Since this historic event unfolded within the 6th century, many countries including Australia have based their policies and laws upon those of the Ancient Athenian Democracy. Australia’s political system is quite similar to Ancient Athens, but with time democracy has changed to suit the modern world, its laws evolving and adapting with each generation. Despite both being governed by a democracy, each has their own systems. Ancient Athens was ruled by direct democracy, in which the citizens decided the policies and laws themselves, meaning that the citizens of the city-state held the power as they were the decision-makers. Although the citizens only included the free adult men of Athens and represented only 20% of the population, despite democracy meaning peoples rule, women and slaves were not considered citizens and therefore couldn’t participate in politics, contradicting the meaning of democracy. Whereas, Australia is ruled by the more commonly used representative democracy, in which Australian citizen’s vote for a Prime Minister to make important decisions on their behalf, passing the baton onto the Prime Minister and his Government. Although the Prime Minister may hold the power once being voted in, winning an election ultimately relies on the citizens of the nation and in the end, they decide who represents them in parliament. However, lately, it seems that with cases such as Adani and the School Climate strikes, the citizens aren’t represented and the people struggle to be heard. So unlike the limited citizens of Athens, the various citizens of Australia are not individually involved in the decision making and therefore do not personally hold the power. Australia’s laws ensure political equality, allowing more citizens to

vote, making politics more representative of Australia's entire population. The diverse laws share power to women and men alike, regardless of gender or race, making the democratic system in Australia more representative of the Australian population, and distancing itself further away from the roots of Ancient Democracy.

In my own democratic experience, my family and I earlier this year got to experience what happens when equality triumphs over inequity. My family and I went through a decade of oppression and in many ways my father was a dictator. He was the Hippias to our Athens, his rule over my family was cruel and his selfish decisions put me and my family at jeopardy. Although this wasn't always the way, as Plato stated: "tyranny naturally arises out of democracy". What he claimed was best for the family only served himself. Once my father left, our family grew and prospered as never seen before. Since being liberated, I was able to place greater focus on my passions, getting more involved in my school council, VicSRC and Rotary clubs, of which democracy plays a very big part. And when combined with my work at the British Consulate, allows me to play a large role in youth work and connecting students across all of Victoria. These trials have reinforced my beliefs that just as my family couldn't work under a dictatorship a nation cannot truly function without democracy.

Ancient democracy has served as a foundation on which many countries are based, just like Australia, they have adapted their policies and laws to suit the modern world and the citizens residing within their borders. When comparing Athens to Australia, it is impossible for Australia to remain true to the roots of Ancient Democracy within the modern-day, no longer accurately depicting the democratic system from Athens, but evolving to be a more representative and equal government.

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Shadow of democracy

Nikala Bervanakis

Rosehill Secondary College, Year 11

Plato wrote that people are fixated on the material prospects of living, and not the perfect forms that exist elsewhere in our minds. He proposed that only a select few who can see beyond the material plane and illusion, are the worthiest leaders; as they're, in Aristotelian terms, truly 'virtuous'.

The notion that Australians possess the power to determine how they'll be managed, is diminished by the influence of the media and the questionable motives of parliamentary members. Rather than governing like a 'guardian class', representatives continue to be held prisoner with the rest of society, enchanted by the phantoms of 'true forms'. Through democracy, power is promised to the Australian people, however the clutches of ignorance continue to hold them hostage in a material society. The youth of Australia fighting to re-establish power to the Australian people are falling victim to the harshness and subversion of democracy.

Australian political figures inevitably become consumed by the deficiencies or excess of Aristotle's 'golden means', failing to deliver the policies that reflect society's views. Rather than promoting potential policies, parties believe that, people respond to disparaging an opposition, instead of advocating their own proposals. The Australian public isn't voting for who they believe is the best candidate, rather for the least incompetent of several incompetent options. This lack of information that continues to seize power from Australian citizens, stems from inadequate parliamentary leadership, illustrating the fragility of humanity.

Human nature forbids members of Plato's 'guardian class' from remaining virtuous after assuming the leadership of a nation. Power inexorably corrupts individuals and compels leaders to obsess over maintaining their leadership, rather than what's good for the people, hence exposing a weakness in Australian government. The three years provided to governments is consumed strategising ways to be elected for another term, rather than focussing on the duty to represent Australian citizens. People's views become lost in politicians' narcissism, indirectly undermining their power at the expense of their deleterious priorities.

The Aristotelian expectation that politicians are to be virtuous has been lost through the constant surveillance by the modern media. The media's acute influence over the beliefs of society has allowed it to become a strong driving force of democracy, as it holds the warrant to the success or downfall of a campaign. The media is like a python tightening itself around the neck of its prey; keeping perpetual control of its victim's movements. The media disallows any emergence from Plato's material cave, cementing society's existence in the 'shadows' of imperfect forms.

Conversely, the media provides a platform for Australian youth to protest the government's interpretation of the 'shadows'. In ancient democracy, youth were disregarded for being irrational. Modern youth are now able to express their own interpretations and use various platforms to understand the potential of 'true forms'. Youth are the

primary advocates for Climate Change and are breaking through the stigma of immaturity, thus condemning the immoral actions of the government and defending the power that belongs to the Australian people. Through exposure and communication in the media, youth are demanding the 'shadows' be remodelled into a form that applies to all Australians, not only the primary demographic of a particular party.

The 'shadows' Plato delineates symbolise people's obliviousness and suggest that only members of the 'guardian class' can surpass the heedlessness of their mystery, overestimating the wisdom of humans. Wisdom and the ability to view 'true forms' relies on the predisposition that there is a definite answer for all concepts in the universe. Euthanasia has heavily been debated in Australia since its legalisation in Victoria. Opposing parties disputed whether it is one's right to control their inevitable death or a glorified excuse for suicide. The search a definite answer regarding governing policies is unproductive. Compromise is the only solution for policy-making in a democratic government, that's consistently struggling beneath the 'shadows'. The form of euthanasia we are familiar with is a casting of a silhouette from a fire in darkness. 'Shadows' can be interpreted in various ways; hence their enigmas are constantly mocking those that try to understand their contour. Members of parliament may possess the ability to administer law that applies to all of society, however they are exposed to the same 'shadows' of the people.

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Democracy may inhibit the rise of a 'guardian class', however it is unreasonable to fixate over the acute possibility of definite 'answers'. The modern democracy Australia exercises belittles the power of Australian citizens, as its governments are upheld by individuals that arrogantly believe that their interpretation of the 'shadows' is irrefutable. The media's presence as an accompanying partner of democracy cannot be underestimated, as it conceals 'true forms', but also assists Australian youth in escaping of the grasp of materialism. Democracy itself has a perfect form, yet we're merely exercising an interpretation of a 'shadow'.

After-class conversations

Innayat Brar

Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School, Year 11

I was unable to concentrate in Philosophy class, my fleeting and half-formulated thoughts stirring a cacophony of indecision in my head to the point where listening to Dr. Hadley's lecture proved an impossible feat. Noticing this, he asked, "what's distracting you from today's lesson?"

"I haven't made my mind on attending the climate change protest today. For all our talk of 'people power', do we really have any agency to affect meaningful change?" I replied.

Considering this, he said, "It's the sad reality of today's political environment that so many students are disenchanted by their government. However, I'm not surprised. The concept of democracy failed to hold its appeal for even some Athenians themselves."

"But shouldn't democracy represent the apex of Western civilisation? Isn't its enduring legacy testament to the Greek canon of populist empowerment and the equal distribution of power?"

"Some notable philosophers foresaw the danger, and perhaps degeneracy, of a system that disseminates so much power to a largely inexperienced or misinformed public, and hold strong views on who should be deemed fit to participate in a democracy," he countered. "Consider this within the context of Athens. Under 20% of the population was considered citizens and thus given voting rights. Citizens were selected into office for most duties via allotment, based on the

assumption that common men harbour the opinions representative of the majority of the population. All citizens participated in juries, and certain official roles were voted in. Socrates foresaw the problem in doling out political power to every participant, claiming that voting is a skill which needs to be systematically taught. He further contended that allowing the citizenry to vote without informed judgement would give rise to demagogues, which exploit the public's desire for instant gratification to secure electoral success, at the expense of the city's best interests. *Democracy is only ever as effective as the education system that surrounds it.*"

"Then what's a better alternative?"

"Plato asserted that philosophers, through the virtue of knowledge, are ethically superior to the masses, and thus should control the affairs of a state through an intellectual aristocracy. Democracy, as Socrates also noted, is susceptible to corruption when rulers prioritise maintaining public support over fulfilling their moral obligations as leaders. Subsequently, Aristotle believed that true justice should only enfranchise those equal in virtue to rule, contending that a "polity", where the common good was articulated through governance by philosophers, is preferable to the mob, or *demos*-dictated politics of democracy."

"If the *demos* is supposedly so powerful," I pondered, "how can order be enforced?"

"Aristotle feared that democracy undermined the rule of law, and this is well founded in the trial of Socrates, who was charged with not acknowledging the city's gods and corrupting the youth. His execution as voted by jury evinces a potent message of the consequences faced by those who think in contravention to the status quo. Democracy can be seen here as heavily relying on censorship, coercion and punishment as means of consolidating power."

"But surely we've progressed since then. In Australia, the High Court protects the freedom of expression under the Constitution."

"That's true, but attacks on free speech still persist through police raids on media outlets and the prosecution of whistle blowers. Julian Assange, for example, seems trapped in a similar predicament to Socrates: supporters defend his right to engineer the objective distribution of information to the public, whereas dissidents denounce him for undermining national interest and authority. Ultimately, modern society recognises that the rule of law must bridge the expression of popular will to its implementation. The ways in which this is exercised makes the difference between a prosperous or degenerate democracy."

"However, the success of Athens must also be attributed to other factors," I considered, "which empower citizens to rigorously participate in the democratic process."

Democracy, as Socrates also noted, is susceptible to corruption when rulers prioritise maintaining public support over fulfilling their moral obligations as leaders.

"Plato, in his *Republic*, compared the unity of the mind to an ideal society to highlight the causal relationship between moral psychology and political philosophy, where prosperity in both the mind and city - *polis* - is achieved through justice. According to him, the recent decline in public trust in Australian democracy can be attributed to its incapacity to enact public policy concerns, thereby eliciting a sense of powerlessness amongst the people. One such concern is action on climate change, which brings us to your plight."

"What's the point in attending the strike if so many people are losing faith in the government's ability to serve the interests of its people?"

Dr Hadley, now concluding, explained, "I believe you should attend, because peaceful protest by informed and educated citizens like yourself - as opposed to the demagoguery of mob rule - orients government agendas towards public will. Ultimately, *power can only be exercised through the assent of the people*, and that is a principle of democracy which endures for millennia onward."

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A democratic transition: Australia's democracy in a new world

Eirene Carajias

Melbourne Girls' College, Year 12

Limitations to the true autonomy of citizens in a democracy have existed since the birth of democracy itself in the year 507 BCE. These limitations have not prevented the basic framework of this system from being continued over generations, with the initial *Ekklesia*, *Boule* and *Dikasteria* reflected in the contemporary Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary bodies that enable the separation of powers within government. However, as societies have progressed over time, the rapid onset of population growth and the influence of globalisation have reduced citizens' power, as the democratic model in Australia has adapted to maintain both political organisation and sovereignty.

Australia's establishment of a representative democracy partially reflects the Ancient Athenian model of democracy (with women and Indigenous Australians unable to participate) so as to accommodate for its significantly larger population. As a result, it continues to remain both cost and time ineffective for citizens to regularly participate in policy making, as shown through the \$122 million government expenditure in the 2017 same-sex marriage referendum. Despite the representative democracy still embodying the first principle of democracy, being 'Consent of the Governed', it provides significant challenges to minority groups in Australia that are ill-represented in parliament, following the formation of political parties as part of this system. The powers of these groups in their democracy are greatly

reduced as they are required to give their vote to parties who do not recognise the needs of such minority groups as a significant priority. This is only heightened by the greatening presence of party rivalry and the continual concern for re-election, making these groups even lesser of a priority in the government's eyes. In Plato's 'Republic, Book VI', he criticises the system of democracy by arguing that those who are expert at winning elections, as opposed to those who are better qualified at partaking in leadership positions, are more likely to win government. This perspective on democracy's function directly links to the nature of party politics in Australia's representative democracy, and illustrates where political concern may truly lie. An example of these minority groups are the many clans of Indigenous Australians throughout Australia. Aretha Brown, a 16 year old student from the Gumbaynggirr clan, and the youngest speaker at the 2017 Invasion Day Protest in Melbourne proposed a solution: "I would love to see more Aboriginal people in parliament...I want to see them involved in all aspects — dealing with foreign affairs, economic issues and agendas, cultural programs." Although the power of Indigenous citizens is greatly diminished between the two current major political parties of Australia's representative democracy, the structure of this democracy does allow for change, though may require more extensive political involvement from these individuals.

The democratic model of modern Australia is not an accurate depiction of Ancient Athenian democracy due to the significant advancements in economic, political and social globalisation. The growing support of both states and intergovernmental organisations, such as the United Nations, to Australian citizens in their struggles to counter government interests may arguably diminish the power of these citizens' power in their democracy. Ironically, this is because foreign aid and support does in fact provide extensive economic, physical, and moral power to individuals and organisations with the ability to undermine state sovereignty. Topical examples of the effect of globalisation on Australia's democracy are the School Strike for Climate and Extinction Rebellion movements. Evan Meneses, a 17 year old student and coordinator of the School Strike for Climate movement in Adelaide, believes that "Activism is a fantastic form of informal civics education... it's definitely a great way to be politically engaged, especially because we live in a democracy." Although it may appear that citizens like Evan maintain the power in Australia's democracy by exercising their right to peaceful protest, this may in fact be false. As Pacific states and the United Nations commend these movements that pressure the government to take climate action, the Australian government has responded by cracking down on police forces at these rallies. MP Peter Dutton has even proposed to scrap welfare benefits for climate protestors.

The democratic model of modern Australia is not an accurate depiction of Ancient Athenian democracy due to the significant advancements in economic, political and social globalisation.

As a result, Australia's democratic status in 2019 was lowered from "open" to "narrowed" by the CIVICUS Monitor, with the government taking action to remove the democratic input of its citizens in the interest of maintaining its own political power. This draws parallels to one of Aristotle's political theories, which suggests that democracy is in fact a corrupt model of polity. The latter involves the ruling of many but for a common good, unlike the former, which suggests that the ruling of many is instead out of self-interest and greed. Although citizens have debatably held varying levels of power in their democracies overtime, the impacts of globalisation on modern Australia make the reasons for such limitations exclusive of the Ancient Athenian model of democracy, where state interconnectedness was minimal.

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Evolution of democracy

Toby Clack

St Patrick's College, Year 10

Ancient Greek democracy was the world's first example of a state run by the people, since its birth in Ancient Athens over 2000 years ago, it has grown into the most widespread and accepted form of government in the world, the ripples caused by the birth of Ancient Greek democracy are still present in every part of Australia's political system today. Ancient Greek democracy was the foundation for all democracies, and it moulded the world as we know it here in Australia. A close relationship has been forged between the democracies of modern-day Australia and Ancient Greece, even though we have grown beyond the ancient ideas of our political ancestors. My own experiences with democracy although different in nature, still resemble those of an Ancient Athenian.

Ancient Greek democracy was a direct democracy where free land-owning male citizens, born in Athens that were of age, had the right to vote and attend political debates at the Ecclesia. Unlike the representative democracies common today, where leaders are elected to carry out decisions and laws on behalf of the people, Ancient Athenian democracy encouraged everyone to participate through the idea of 'Ho Boulomenos' meaning, 'Anyone who wishes.' Rather than being elected or chosen, most offices were filled by random lottery. Some ancient philosophers, such as Plato, disagreed with democracy, claiming that it was 'run by fools, highly corruptible and anarchic.' The modern-day Australian political system

is centralised around a representative democracy, and although different, it still relies on the same basic principles that ran ancient Athens. Evidence of Athenian democracy in modern day Australia include referendums, juries, citizens assemblies, elections and partitions, as well as freedom and justice for the people. However, many of these ideologies played only a small role in Ancient Athens, sortition was the preferred method of democracy, as elections were considered 'Aristocratic'.

The democracies of Ancient Greece and modern-day Australia are inevitably similar; however, they diverge on issues such as inclusivity and voting. The ideas of 'power of the people' and 'rule by the many' are cornerstones in both Ancient Athenian and modern-day Australian democracies, creating two governments that are bound to be similar. But many differences occur in how the government is chosen. Voting is the epitome of politics in our society, but it played a small role in the government of Ancient Athens, most offices were filled by randomised lottery. The only positions that were appointed by elections were those recognised as 'requiring expertise' such as Generals. Some ancient philosophers, such as Aristotle, believed in Aristocracy, hence the name, Aristocracy is, the rule of the best over the rest, where the nobles, privileged and intelligent lead the less fortunate members of society. Other differences appear in the inclusivity of the two democracies. Many argue that Australia's

democracy is more inclusive, as in Ancient Greece, women, slaves and foreigners were never given full citizenship, and when those who are too young to serve are filtered out, this means that only 10-20% of the population of Ancient Greece had the right to vote.

Australia's democracy is much more inclusive, and although it took a long time to accept all members of society, the vast majority of our country is entitled to citizenship, and the vote.

My experiences with democracy differ to that of an ancient Athenian. Voting in Ancient Greece was done in several different ways, one of the most common ways to vote was by placing pebbles in an urn, using the secret ballot. The secret ballot was invented in Ancient Greece by at least the 5th century BCE, and it supposedly used a contraption that hid which urn the voter placed their pebble in. Later that century, voting had moved to hand-raising or small bronze tokens. Anyone who didn't vote in Ancient Greece was called an 'idiot', and while people who don't vote today in Australia aren't called idiots, they get let off easy with a fine instead. In modern-day Australia, we prefer to elect those we see as fit for the job. My personal experience with a representative democracy was when my primary school elected me as School Captain 4 years ago. In Ancient Athens, they may have used sortition to select their leaders instead, which means that I might not have got the job at all.

The ideas of 'power of the people' and 'rule by the many' are cornerstones in both Ancient Athenian and modern-day Australian democracies, creating two governments that are bound to be similar.

Ancient Greek democracy was the legacy of one of the worlds greatest civilisations, and its impact can be seen far and wide in all corners of the globe. Australia's democratic model was founded upon the principles that the Ancient Greeks created. Evidence of Ancient Athenian democracy is present all over our country, in the form of the vote, and rule by the many. It is clear that Ancient Athenian democracy was the foundation for our democracy, and the two, although different, share an inseparable bond.

Untitled

Scarlett Cuthbertson

Melbourne Girls' College, Year 12

A democracy is something that has always surrounded me. I have always lived here in Australia and lived under the democratic rule of the Australian Government and Parliament. When I was younger, I didn't really understand what any of it meant, I just knew that my parents had to go and vote every few years, and if I was lucky, I'd get a sausage from the sausage sizzle at the polling station.

As I grew up, my knowledge and understanding of what a democracy really was started to grow and change. In year 6 we learnt about Prime Ministers and the history of the Australian Parliament; I learnt about Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin. As I have progressed through high school my scope on not only politics, but further into the philosophy and social and political science spheres, I am truly able to start to gain a broader view on what a true democracy is.

Like a lot of great thing present in the world, the model of democracy seen here in Australia is based off of the ancient form of democracy born in Greece. The model saw citizens of their city-state hold the power in a democratic manner; a new phenomenon in these ancient times. The idea that voting by all was required, rather than just those from the right families, was a new thing for everyone. This in itself was cause for many a conversation between major figureheads of Greek philosophy at the time: Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. These three philosophers were some of the most vocal surrounding democracy. Aristotle decided that a monarchy or oligarchy was the best method of ruling as these people had the money, wealth, connections and time to spend on building up the city-state to become prosperous. Similarly, it has been documented, in Plato's sixth book of the Republic, that Socrates also saw flaws in the system that was democracy. He believed that the act of voting was skill and there should be education around politics so that people can make informed choices and not poor choices that would impact all. As for Plato, he believed that a democracy was able to make way for politicians and leaders who were able to win elections but unable to pass legislation or do any of the harder work required of such a role. He believed this would make way for politics to be filled with underqualified politicians unfit to run a state.

Scarlett Cuthbertson

Melbourne Girls' College, Year 12

Here in 21st Century Australia, we live in a representative democracy; a modified model of that seen in Ancient Greece. I am sure that Plato, Aristotle and Socrates would still find faults with our system, as they did with the ancient system. What was that Plato, Australia has had too many Prime Minister changes for anyone to keep up with? Oh Socrates, were you just saying that there are people in Australia who are politically apathetic yet still forced to vote, even though their vote could skew the political sphere and undermine democracy? Not all of what these philosophers preach is relevant to Australia, but there is some merit to some of what they say.

Even if this is the case though, the newest generation of young people are still able to have some of the largest impacts on today's society. The School Strike for Climate is mostly led by young people globally, including here in Melbourne, as well as many other youth-led social movements. Personally, I was even able to speak in Parliament House for the National Council for Women Victoria's My Vote My Voice public speaking competition where I was able to speak on the relevance of today's youth and the impact they are having on votes, thus impacting the democracy present in Australia. I know of many other young people like myself that are engaged in politics and our democratic system who are young, engaged, active and informed citizens here to spice things up as soon as their time comes.

Even if this is the case though, the newest generation of young people are still able to have some of the largest impacts on today's society. The School Strike for Climate is mostly led by young people globally, including here in Melbourne, as well as many other youth-led social movements.



The influence of Greek democracy on modern – day Australia

Victoria Day

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Democracy, derived from the Greek words 'demos' and 'kratos' can be defined as a form of government in which citizens abiding within a particular city-state have the right to choose their governing bodies. In the times of the ancient Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, democracy as a complex system of government was a modernist ideal compared to the previous systems around Europe such as autocracy, dystopia, monocracy, etc. However, over time, ancient democracy is now only somewhat of an accurate observation of the democratic model in modern-day Australia. Though many key elements of democracy have stayed the same, over the years, many vital improvements have been made.

As democracy has evolved, the power held by the citizens, which in ancient times excluded many people in society, has decreased and handed over to elected politicians. In ancient democracies (i.e. Athens) all males, besides slaves, were considered citizens of the state. Aristotle's theory on citizenship depicts "a certain ordering of the inhabitants of the city-state," (III.1.1274b32-41) where the male citizens are distinguished from other inhabitants. As a result, many groups in society were excluded such as women, people of different races, and slaves. These ostracised groups were prohibited to vote; therefore, were unable to share their opinions as they were seen as unqualified. Women, in particular, made up almost half of a city-state's population but were still debarred from the freedoms of democracy. Now in 2019, citizens are not based on a person's gender or race; however, restrictions like age are still in place.

In modern-day Australia, citizens hold less power than what they did in ancient Athens due to the rise in population and area. For example, the state of Victoria compared to city-states in Ancient Greece is very different. A Greek city-state typically held around 30,000 eligible citizens, who fit within a general assembly, while Victoria has around six million citizens that are on the electoral roll. Due to this growth, citizens lose their power to the government as their unable to have their voices heard and be directly involved in governing. In the Athenian system, citizens were able to attend the assembly, the council, and sit on juries. Instead of direct governing, Victorian citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf, which relates to Plato's Political Theory on Democracy. Plato describes that the representatives as the 'democratic man,' whose position was an extra responsibility rather than their primary focus. Now in today's democratic society, representatives are educated and the position is their sole focus and duty.

The greatest contribution we can have to Australian society, as students, is being educated on the Australian government and exploring our thoughts towards civic participation.

Long-time frameworks of democracy have stayed the same over time, which includes the concept of a central guiding document (i.e. a Constitution) and structures that enable checks and balances. Since the time of Aristotle, a Constitution can be described as a legislative document that establishes basic rights for all citizens and, "...produces, operates, maintains a legal system according to universal principles." (EN V1.8 and X.9) This legal system refers to the set of complex rules between major branches of government during the implementation of laws to ensure the balance of power is maintained. Both in the 4th century BCE through to today, citizens in society are selected to fill the roles within the branches to make sure that the government runs smoothly. This allows delegations to take place between branches, where laws as well as important economical and social decisions are discussed. In addition, each branch is given specific abilities by the Constitution, such as rejecting proposals, passing laws, and negotiating to guarantee that one branch does not obtain excessive power. If the balance of power is lost, with reference to Plato's regime, a democracy may fall into a tyrannical system.

Over time, the responsibilities of the branches of government have maintained the system of checks and balances to sustain an equally balanced government.

In conclusion, ancient democracy is somewhat of an accurate depiction of the democratic model in modern-day Australia. The key differences between these democratic models are citizen eligibility and the amount of power lost by citizens. However, both democracies' long-term structures that aid in their government's decision-making processes have remained uniquely similar. Now, as we see how our democracy has evolved from ancient times, we look to the present to improve our current model. As informed and educated Australian citizens, it is our responsibility to research state political candidates before they are elected to evaluate their potential policies. The reason for this evaluation is to determine if a candidate can successfully govern a state/ country using their policies. Even though I'm ineligible to vote, it is still my responsibility as an educated citizen to understand the political and economic effects of these policies. The greatest contribution we can have to Australian society, as students, is being educated on the Australian government and exploring our thoughts towards civic participation.

The development of democracy: From Athens to Australia

J Gallos

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Australia is seen as one of the most democratic nations in the modern world. With possibly the most progressive democratic system of the current day it begs the question, how does it fair against its ancient Athenian counterpart? Australian democracy is a product of Athenian democracy and has developed into a political system where the people hold the vast majority of power and responsibility of voting. The vast differences between modern democracy and ancient democracy involve the people allowed to participate, differences between a representative and direct democracy as well as the types of responses to ancient democracy in contrast to responses to modern democracy. Australian democracy today benefits the nation greater than the ancient democratic system.

A dichotomy can be drawn between the current methods in which democracy is practiced and how the form of government was initially intended to be practiced. A key difference is that ancient democracy was exclusive to men with an Athenian citizenship. Australia is far more liberal with who is able to actively participate in a democracy. Women and men of all cultures are able to vote provided they have an Australian citizenship. Formal student participation in Australian schools and councils promotes democratic knowledge, practice and experience making them more informed and active citizens. The people able to participate in a democracy displays what percentage of the populations vote is actually considered. To state that all the people of Athens had power is inaccurate

as the democracy practiced was in favour of the adult Athenian men. Australian democracy differentiates greatly to ancient democracy and is a grown form of ancient democracy as it is more accessible and effective through its increase of inclusivity.

Next, the modern model of democracy relies on the people to elect representatives to lead for them. A contrasting structure to the assembly created by the Athenian men in ancient Athens. The Athenian assembly was made up of the citizens and a statesmen would be elected out of the assembly to conduct the assembly, much like the prime minister. The contrast lies in that the representatives of Australia are labelled as party officials and politicians. The Athenian assembly being made of the people, meant that whether or not decisions were elected within the assembly such as peace treaties or voted upon by the people such as general elections, the common citizens would still be holding the power. Examples of representative democracy observed in Australia in practice involves citizens selecting representatives to vote on laws proposed and passed by parliament. The citizens do not vote directly. This prominent contrast unveils how different the current system is to ancient democracy. However, with the population count of Australia, it is impractical to have a direct democracy in practice as the process of voting for everything would take far too long. Conversely, for matters of detriment to the nation, Australia takes the path of holding referendums signifying the ultimate form of direct democracy in our days.

Conversely, for matters of detriment to the nation, Australia takes the path of holding referendums signifying the ultimate form of direct democracy in our days.

Australia's democracy derives from a progression of 2500 years of democratic evolution. How does this compare to the ideologies of what the initial responses to democracy were. It is evident many philosophers during the time of democracy critically analysed the ideology set forth by the state of government that Athens found itself in. Plato's "Republic" in book eight, describes five states of governments and ranks them in order as they progressively become what Plato defined as a worse state of government. The main idea lies in the fact that out of the five forms of government, democracy finds itself second last, only exceeding that of tyranny. What Plato listed as the most effective form of government is an Aristocracy; a state of government ruled by a high class elite or what Plato described as a philosopher king. A historical figure who epitomizes the idea of an aristocratic ruler is commended philosopher king and Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius. It is evident from the way Australia operates as a democracy it is a blend of different ideologies of philosophers incorporating elements of ancient democracy with elements of an aristocracy.

No democracy may operate without bureaucracy, and the aristocratic model of Australia's parliament demonstrates this idea. The blend of ideologies in Australia's political system illustrates that Australia is not exactly the same as the ancient model of democracy.

Australia's progressive democratic identity has adopted many elements of further inclusivity and practice of the representative model of democracy. The Australian citizens hold the empowerment through their responsibility and active participation of electing representatives. The modern day Australian model undoubtedly has its origins in the ancient democratic system. It has evolved and as according to William H. Hastie who believed that "democracy is a process not a static condition," (Hastie, n.d) will continue to evolve.

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Equality, access and youth: The cornerstones of democracy

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Democracy as a form of government, enterprise and safeguard for social equality and citizen empowerment has varied throughout its use in history. Often, it has preserved individual liberties and prevented the suppression and denigration associated with more power-centric governmental structures. Australian democracy maintains the democratic custom of public involvement and acts as the intermediary between politicians and laymen.

Democracy is a form of government whereby the people hold the power to facilitate societal, political or economic decisions. Ancient Athenians saw it fit to lead with direct influence on political matters, citizens - namely male Athenian citizens - deliberated and conversed at an open assembly having a direct impact on the decisions passed and the topics provoked. This style of government was complemented by a complex system of checks and balances. Three main institutions helped the prevention of potential tyrannical oligarchs. The Assembly of the Demos, the Council of 500, and the People's Court, derived how government decisions were made and how the citizens could interact in the political process. The assembly maintained the largest forum for citizen engagement, often housing thousands of participants and meeting multiple times monthly. The Council of 500 (the Boule) represents the full-time government of Athens, preparing the agenda of the Assembly. The People's Court acted similarly to Australia's judicial branch, managing court cases and prosecuting individuals (Blackwell. C, 2003). Individuals who participated in either political branch were paid; this was to ensure any citizen—no matter wealth—could afford to exercise their political rights. Whilst a direct approach to democracy may be successful on a small

scale, much larger populations afford power to individuals of whom will represent a group or electorate. Generally, these individuals are politically educated and elected on the premise that they manage decisions made within the assembly with respect to the ideals of those that they represent. This representative form of government helps to uphold democratic customs by maintaining public involvement in the political process. Like Athenian democracy, modern Australian democracy maintains checks and balances through three separate institutions: the judicial, executive and legislature. Each act to prevent abuse of power and equalise the spread of influence that each system holds on Australian governance, ensuring that people maintain power, whilst not undermining the core principles of a fair and equitable society.

The current model for which Australian democracy is managed, stresses the importance of rule of law as an intermediary between expression of popular opinion and its implementation.

Since its inception, Athenian philosophers argued over the legitimacy and competency of democracy. Plato and Aristotle both viewed this style of government with scorn or indifference. Plato was born into a time of democratic collapse; evidently, he sustained an ill-begotten enmity for democracy. He contended that freedom was a mirage to true happiness and that *Eudaimonia* (the good life) was to be earned through abstaining from self-indulgence or absolving from personal

ambition. Instead, he would argue, one should yearn to be a disciplined and selfless contributor to society. Similarly, Aristotle purported that lawlessness and anarchy was a symptom of freedom and democracy. He believed a pure democracy, whereby citizens had absolute power over the law-undermined rule of law. In this context, the rule of the majority is sovereign, not the law and not the state. The current model for which Australian democracy is managed, stresses the importance of rule of law as an intermediary between expression of popular opinion and its implementation. Thus, it safeguards from the improprieties of its archaic counterpart and bodes acceptingly well with the critiques of these Athenian philosophers.

Youth engagement in politics is essential to ensure that democracy subscribes to the principle; power to the people. Currently, Australian youth are exposed to the political climate through their education and extra-curricular activities. The state government organises conferences and study-tours, such as the regional, state and national conventions and the Premier's Spirit of Democracy trip. These activities assist youth in establishing a sense of politics, including the political process and machinations required for political success. They also serve to maintain educated involvement in addressing political issues and understanding government structure and tyranny. Perversely, Athenian democracy lacked student engagement, as the men would influence political decisions because they were considered the custodians of political knowledge and substantial power.

Furthermore, the dynamics of political engagement within Australia extends to both electoral and non-electoral political participation that are viable and accepted forms of democratic involvement. Petitions, protests and surveys have become increasingly dominant mediums for political reform, with youth especially, favouring this as the conventional electoral process grows ever more distant and seemingly ineffectual (Martin. A, 2014). Athenians would instead uphold formal democratic conventions and disciplined councils. Student contribution in Australian politics, although non-conventional, has expanded from the formal, single-minded approach to a casual medium catered to youth attitudes.

Clearly, Australian democracy, whilst pertaining to the core democratic values found in Athenian democracy, uses modern innovation as well as student involvement to successfully engage its citizens in the political process.

The successful system?

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The term democracy comes from the Greek words of *demos*, meaning people and *Kratos*, meaning power. Democracy, therefore, means power of the people. The birth place of democracy was Greece. Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, who were some of the world's greatest thinkers, helped to integrate democracy into society. Socrates was very sceptical about democracy and would be turning in his grave if he knew the democratic system used in Australia. Plato was the labelled the idealist and despised democracy. Aristotle, was the 'realist' and justified the city-state model despite the structure's flaws. Democracy describes the varying government systems which enable people, to an extent, govern the country. That is why in modern society, Victoria and Australia, have the best possible democratic system.

To a high extent Australia has an effective democratic system. A city-state system of democracy sounds good, does it not? Everyone gathered together to vote on new laws and plan for the future. This may have worked years ago, as a city could have consisted of very few people. However, when a population of 24 million people need to have a discussion you may begin to see how logically hard this could be. Even in Victoria the city-state model would be too ancient to work effectively. Countries look to a city-state model of democracy to create better governments. However, even with a so called successful system of democracy many people were not able to vote. Women, children and those in poverty, therefore, only people of power or wealth had their say. Is this democracy? Australia and Victoria looked at this mature system of democracy

and have taken the useful components to create the best possible structure. Australia and its states have a representative democracy. In this political system, people of age vote for candidates who will represent their views. Australians have birth right democracy; a system Greek Philosophers feared. Socrates defined it as "irresponsible", instead he insisted on intellectual democracy which was those who had thought¹ rationally should have access to a ballot paper." Australia could even arguably be more democratic because of freedom of speech, assembly and political participation. Additionally, a represented, diverse culture and laws which protect some basic human rights which ancient systems did not share. Furthering this, the Australian government on many occasions have acted from the best interests of people. For example, pressure from the public to legalise gay marriage, lead to the government taking appropriate measures to do so. As a result, Australia does actively show democracy.

In spite of Australia having the best possible system, the current system contains elements historical philosophers feared. Plato and Aristotle both not being a supporter of democracy had predicted the problems our political system is facing. Politicians have made the Australian public vulnerable and exploited voters through the use of easy answers. Politicians tell the public what they want to hear with the goal not being to benefit individuals but to be elected. Also, voters have been led to think that democracy is just giving all citizens the ability to vote. Democracy, however, is also the efforts of governments to act on the best interests of individuals.

1 The school of life (2016) why Socrates hated democracy [online video]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLJBzhcSWTk> [Accessed: 31 November, 2019.]

Democracy, however, is also the efforts of governments to act on the best interests of individuals.

This is where Australia's democratic system does not correspond with the system of government where the citizens of the city-state held power. Once elected, the prime minister and their party could not act as planned and portray the citizens who voted for them. Tony Abbott as an example, promised the public to not make budget cuts to education, once, in power Abbott did in fact make budget cuts. This is not democratic and a situation where city-state structure could be more useful. Furthermore, we could prevent and promote a democratic society through education. Future generations and peers bring excitement for the future. They are informed about global and local issues and are using their democratic freedom to create they future they wish to see. Examples include young people wanting to have knowledge on political parties and climate change discussions and protests. If only youth could vote we might see different election results. An improvement to the current structure which provided more education on democracy would lead to a government which represented people and an effective political system. This is what Aristotle and Plato would have wished for and is something the Australian population want to see. If Australia was a sinking ship who would you want to make the decisions about the sinking ship just anyone? or the educated people?

In conclusion, through integration of the current represented democratic system Australia utilises and my understanding of the city-state system, it is without a doubt that both systems share the same aim. However, due to the progression of society a city-state model is no longer an accurate observation of Australia's and Victoria's current system. Despite the flaws identified by philosophers, Australia's system is the best, feasible democratic system.

The philosophy of democracy

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As described by the writings of Plato and Aristotle, the Ancient Athenian system of government is a direct democratic method, where eligible residents of the city, also known as the citizens of the city, meet together to propose laws and policies for the city that are voted upon by the citizens to reach consensus.

This differs from systems of government such as a monarchy or oligarchy in that the power of the government is held by the average citizen, rather than by the noblemen or the ruling class. The democratic method was a radical idea in the Ancient world at the time and to this day is still a model for systems of government across most of the western world. For Australia in particular, it can be stated that our government upholds the basic principle of democracy in that the citizens hold the power of the government, while also improving on many of the criticisms that were outlined by Plato in *The Republic*.

Democracy began in Athens in 507 BC under the leadership of Cleisthenes¹. It was created to replace a primarily oligarchical government, where the wealthy and powerful families within Athens controlled the governmental and legal powers. The democratic system, while heavily criticised by leading philosophers at the time including Plato and Aristotle, lasted for over 100 years, until around 460 BC. The 'citizens' of Athens were defined predominantly as adult men who were permanent residents of Athens, which most notably excluded women and slaves from the decision-making processes of the city. As outlined by his writings in *The Republic*², Plato did not believe in the integrity of the democratic system. In his mind, a system with the power in the hands of the poor would degenerate into ever growing

freedoms being granted to the lower classes, which would in turn diminish the respect that the lower classes had for the patrician class. The Greek culture at the time relied on class distinctions to separate the powerful people from the subservient and to dictate the roles that people held in life. With this societal model, Plato believed that giving lower classes ideas such as freedom, power and rights would create a slippery slope resulting in rebellion and anarchy. In the wake of such a rebellion, it would be likely that an authoritarian, tyrannical government would be created, which according to Plato is the least successful form of government, thus democracy should be avoided. It is important to note that this is an unrealistic conclusion, as the democracy of the Athenian Empire lasted for well over 100 years before Athens became annexed by Sparta.

The democratic system in Australia holds very similar principles to the original vision in Athens, but the execution of the system has some major differences that reflect the evolution of society since the Ancient times, as well as addressing many of Plato's concerns about the democratic method. Plato's main objection to democracy was the rise of an inevitable conflict between the upper and lower classes, however in Australia, not only can every person become a citizen regardless of who they are or where they come from, there are also no longer such clear and distinct divides between classes. This ensures that everyone is voting for policies from a similar societal position, as well as giving everyone equal opportunity to run as a representative candidate or for a senate position. The main improvement of this system is that it is a truly non-discriminatory model that accurately accounts for the views and beliefs of all residents of the nation.

The biggest issue that is facing Australian democracy in recent times is the rise of misinformation about major issues facing the country.

The biggest issue that is facing Australian democracy in recent times is the rise of misinformation about major issues facing the country. The rise of the internet has fostered a media culture where the importance of a piece of news is based solely on the amount of attention that it will receive. Time and time again, it has been demonstrated that news consumers will gravitate towards shocking, sensationalised articles that promote topics such as fear, distrust and betrayal³. This is a strategy that is utilised by many political parties to promote policies based around the idea that society should be fearful of the other, regardless of the facts around the topic, which often contradict the ideas that are presented by the party⁴. In order to continue improving and maintaining the ideals of the democracy that young Australians will inherit, those young Australians need to learn about how facts and statistics can be warped to create a false sense of alarm, whilst also learning how to effectively research and draw sensible conclusions about the topics being debated in parliament. As shown by recent movements such as School Strike for Climate change, there are large numbers of youths in Australia that are invested in their futures. These youths can create a better Australia for themselves as informed citizens by learning the facts about the issues facing our country and striving to rely on these facts as a basis for strategies to help solve these issues.

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Ancient democracy is often viewed as a system of government where the citizens of the city-state held the power. Is this an accurate observation of the democratic model in modern day Australia?

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"Concerned with the nature of man, social relationships and political institutions, is normally elaborated in political treatises... Politics in this sense is almost the oldest profession in the world." (Curtis, 1961)

The theories of Plato and Aristotle mark the first identifiable roots of today's modern western democratic system. However like today, both political theory and political fact were inherently bound within the timeframe of the intellectual, "The reason why politics cannot be an art is that the historical situation in which the politician has to act is always unique." (Foster, 1942) This means that however similar, political ideas from varying zeitgeists cannot duplicate one another, this is not to say that the successes or failures of a previous state do not influence the current political systems. Our own nation's political ideology is built upon the experience of humanity, from early Greek systems through to the prevention extremism, as seen within the Communist and Fascist governments which reigned in the twentieth century.

Ancient Greece unlike their counterparts of Ancient Mesopotamia or China, was the first recorded state to begin separating politics and religion. This marks a milestone in history, as the creation of a culture which has continued as a cornerstone of modern western politics, seen in contemporary secular Australia. "They discerned the power of a celestial, mathematical-geometrical, 'natural' grounding for political order. But they grasped

this style of thinking in a demythologised form." (Sabine; Thorson, 1973) In western political thought the rise in individuality and free thought, expanded not only the ideals of politics, but creating new theories regarding the role science and the arts play in a civilized society. Aristotle's ideas of a smooth running government and society, sit closely with those still viewed as examples for today, "[Aristotle] wishes to show belief in which the orthodox good citizen lives, that he ought to obey the laws even in cases where he has no reward to hope for and no punishment to fear." (Foster, 1942) We take for granted our rights to free thought and protection by our governments at the belief of reciprocity, as they believe in the civilians' ability and willingness to abide by the laws of the state.

Despite being similar to our political ideas in many ways the Greek form of democracy was fundamentally different, due to its limitations on equality. Only within the last century has universal suffrage been granted within the western world, however this change has drastically impacted the cultural views of democracy. Within Ancient Greece approximately one third of the population were slaves, whilst another third were metics, leaving only one third of the population as citizens with the theoretical ability to vote. Other factors such as gender, age and land ownership also eliminated one's right to vote, leaving only a miniscule population with the privilege to vote. By examining ancient Greek democracy through modern eyes, it seems incomparable to

that of our current political state, supporting the denial of similarity between the Greeks and modern western society. However the underlying ideology of the Ancient Greek system is not dissimilar our current political ideology anchored within personal liberties. These liberties are explored as we see a multi-party system and freedom to protest.

Although we like to believe we, as citizens, hold power within our government, the rise of media influence within politics, has arguably instilled the subversion of individuality within our current political climate. Take for example, Australia's most recent federal election, mobile apps targeted youth, through online 'meme' culture, manipulated the malleable nature of the developing self. Targeting those many vulnerable electors for political gain rather than acting for the best interest of the state, is not what Plato expected of his 'philosopher kings'. Humanity still holds high ideals at heart, "Good counsel is clearly a kind of knowledge, for not by ignorance, but by knowledge do men counsel well." (Plato, 380 BCE)

Like Ancient Greek democracy, the Australian democratic model prides itself on being a system of government where the citizens of the city-state hold the power.

Like Ancient Greek democracy, the Australian democratic model prides itself on being a system of government where the citizens of the city-state hold the power. All times in human history have seen external factors influence political outcomes due to the social and cultural climates of the era. The full extent to which past notions and interpretations of political systems can influence our current state, is not large. "At its most ambitious, [political philosophy] proposes an ideal or the best possible regime for the age." (Curtis, 1961) We cannot copy the writings of Plato and Aristotle as though they are textbooks, we must rather learn from their theorising, to combat our modern day issues.

Democracy essay

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Ancient Greece was the birthplace of democracy, and is the basis for political systems of many nations across the globe. The word "democracy" is derived from two Greek terms: "demos" meaning people, and "kratos" meaning rule (3). It is the premise that citizens have vested in them the power to elect their representatives. Ancient Greece was governed by democracy, and although the principles have evolved, Australia is still reflective of the ancient virtues established in this bygone era. As a 15-year-old-female living in a time of democratic recession, the ability to determine the true intentions of democracy is integral to understanding the extent of power we hold as citizens of Australia.

The political system of 5th-century B.C.E. Athens accorded political equality, freedom of speech, and the opportunity for free men of Athenian descent over the age of 18, to directly involve themselves in politics. In Athenian times, democracy allowed free men (but not women) to speak for themselves, be fairly treated, and take part in political ventures and decision making. In contrast, our democracy does not discriminate. Here, suffrage is a symbol of agency and freedom of political participation, and is afforded to anyone aged 18 or over. Equal enfranchisement however, didn't commence until 1894, when Mary Lee, the founder of the most influential suffrage movement, fought for female voting rights in South Australia. She argued that females assist in sustaining the government, so therefore should have "a right to say how and by whom they shall be governed." (6) Her brave efforts were rewarded when South Australia became the first electorate in the world to establish political equality. For females of Generation Z, the anticipation of one's impending

involvement in the democratic process would be a mere abstraction if Mary Lee, and the suffragette movement didn't rise to the challenge. Australia's political structure permits all citizens the potential to voice their democratic rights. Power, therefore, is in the hands of all.

The current Australian model allows the citizens to uphold a degree of power, despite the intentions of their leaders.

The intentions of supreme leaders, both in the ancient and current eras, is often understood to be the defining principle behind what it means to be democratic. Plato defined the embodiment of a just leader and the determining characteristics of a politician. He claimed that those who are "reluctant to govern" are the most just, whereas the unjust are those "who are most eager" (1). Aristotle exclaimed that, "the best man must legislate, and laws must be passed, but these laws will have no authority when they miss the mark..." (5). But is this an accurate representation of the leaders of the modern democratic world? Do they seek to live an honorable life, or are they plagued with tyranny and "overcome with ugly desire"? (2) Our political parties (of all persuasions) are frequently embodied by 'career' politicians who can be tempted to use their positions for personal gain. It is however, important to presume many politicians still value and uphold the freedoms of democracy. If it's true that power has corrupted many of who seek the gratification of politics, we must consider that this is not the objective of all. The current Australian model allows the citizens to uphold a degree of power, despite the intentions of their leaders.

Social media's widespread popularity promotes opportunities for direct political participation in representative democracies around the globe. Ancient Greece is an example of a direct democracy. It permitted free men to actively serve and directly influence decision making regarding the way society functioned, giving them direct control of the political process. In Australia, we are governed by a representative democracy. Individuals may not have the same level of personal participation, but this doesn't imply that we can't directly influence policy outcomes. Social media provides a platform for all ages to put pressure on politicians across the globe by rallying the grassroots, and contributing to the online world of virtual debate. We can tweet disapproval of a government's agenda, then later upload a meme in support of another. Greta Thunberg, a young climate change activist, recently employed social media as a platform to initiate a global revolution. She was once a young girl with lots to say, and no means to spread her words. But through social media, she has skyrocketed to become an icon of my generation, influencing politics across the globe. The online community allows youth to input their opinions into a system that would otherwise disregard their judgement. Social media generates political power by allowing individual voices heard as a collective.

Although our democracy does not completely emulate the Ancient Greeks, the principles and values are reflective of the past. Democracies were created based upon ideals of ancient virtues, and these ancient virtues continue today. The power from the past and the power of the future continue to be in the hands of the people, and I am hopeful this ideal is upheld for generations to come.

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How democracy has shaped Australia

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The events that have happened throughout Australia's history have impacted our current way of life and continue to change as time progresses. Since Federation in 1901, democracy has played a critical role in shaping us as a nation. Australia's political history can be divided into two vital segments: early Australia and the mid to late 20th century. The word democracy comes from the Greek words *demos* meaning 'common people' and *Kratos* meaning 'strength'. This is an accurate representation of how Australia has been governed since unity.

(Dahl, Robert A. [1998]. Democracy. Available: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy> Last accessed 09/12/2019)

The birth of democracy in Victoria was at the Eureka Stockade of 1854. Of the 20,000 people living in Ballarat at the time, not one of them had the right to vote. In November 1854, gold miners in Ballarat planned to meet with the government about better treatment. The men met with Governor Sir Charles Hotham, who declined their requests. This sparked the Eureka Stockade on the 3rd December. The miners rebelled against the government to gain democratic representation; eventually, they gained the right to vote. (White, Russell [2017] Democracy was Born at Eureka. Available: http://eurekapedia.org/Australian_Democracy_was_Born_at_Eureka Last accessed 27/11/2019)

Later, leader of the rebellion, Peter Lalor became a member of parliament and speaker for the Australian Labour Party. His entrance into the Government shows his passion for politics – in particular democracy – and representation for groups. The Eureka Stockade encapsulates the spirit of Australians, by representing our desire to fight for what is right, no matter the consequences and shows how important democracy is to a functioning society.

The mid-20th century in Australia was a time of hardship due to the Second World War breaking out with one million men and women sent to defend our country. The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies oversaw the Australian introduction into the war; after the war, many Australians saw Sir Menzies as a role model, due to his leadership throughout World War Two. During his eighteen years and five months as our leader, he presided over Australia's longest period of prosperity and rising living standards. (National Museum Australia [Unknown] Robert Menzies. Available: <https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/prime-ministers/robert-menzies> Last accessed 02/12/2019) He led our country with an air of ease and knowledge, making him one of the most admired prime ministers. Australian citizens held the most democratic power during this time because they elected the same person to be prime minister twice. If he was not idolised as a leader, the people would not have voted for him again. This is a prime example of how democracy is used to represent the voices of the people.

Along with Robert Menzies, Gough Whitlam has been an influential and notable prime minister. Mr Whitlam's three years in service from 1972 to 1975 can be seen as the years of most reform in Australian history with his support of: Welfare payments for homeless people, equal pay for women, the family law act, ACT and NT representation in the senate, the Racial Discrimination act, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and land rights for some traditional owners in the Northern Territory. (Murphy, Damien [2014] Gough Whitlam. Available: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/gough-whitlam-left-a-long-list-of-achievements-20141021-119cpu.html> Last accessed 02/12/2019)

Gough Whitlam's influence on Australia is an example of a great democratic leader as someone who can make differences for the greater good of the community.

Right now, democracy does not have to be at a parliamentary level, it can be within schools or sporting associations. Australia is a democratic society, with equality and equity. Aristotle states, "the politician and lawgiver is wholly occupied with the city-state, and the constitution is a certain way of organising those who inhabit the city-state." (Stanford University [1998] Aristotle's Political Theory. Available: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-politics/#supplement2> Last accessed 09/12/2019)

The Eureka Stockade encapsulates the spirit of Australians, by representing our desire to fight for what is right, no matter the consequences and shows how important democracy is to a functioning society.

This means that whoever oversees a state should give all their dedication and time to looking after their city-state and caring for and about its citizens. Aristotle's quote is perfect in describing how a state can be effectively governed, with all power going into the community and citizens. In my school, there are chances to be involved in the Student Representative Council, which plays an integral role in how the school operates. Currently, student voice has been the most influential way to create change and it is fantastic to know how our voices have been heard in a calm and democratic way.

To conclude, since Federation, democracy is used daily; whether that be at a federal, state-wide or local level. However, it has been adapted to suit the public's opinion of the time. The ancient Greek theory of democracy applies today by giving insight into how to effectively preside over a country and how to use it for the greater good.

Then and now: Democracy in Australia

Maximus A Sandler

The King David School, Year 12

This essay intends to unpack what the notion of 'rule of the people' has exactly meant throughout time, from its birth five centuries before Christ in ancient Athens to its modern-day fundament in contemporary Australian society. It will also detail the significant role that students play in our society.

Ancient Athens was very much a society of philosophers, a boiling pot of radical ideas which were ravenously discussed and critiqued. Whence this broad proliferation of thinking and discourse, came *demokratia*, consisting of *demos*, 'the people', and *kratos*, 'to rule'. Aristotle stated that liberty and equality were 'best attained when all persons alike share in government to the utmost'. For the first time ever, power was vested equally in citizens regardless of one's societal status. Nevertheless, this only extended to 20% of citizens, free males over 18 who had completed military service. Athens' *demokratia* was held in three institutions which had total control over governance: the *ekklesia* (assembly), the *boule* (council), and the *dikasteria* (public courts). The *ekklesia* set policy and wrote laws; meeting 40 times a year, it was a direct democracy open for all citizens to attend, address and vote according to a simple majority. The *boule* implemented the *ekklesia*'s decisions and coordinated day-to-day matters. The *dikasteria* consisted of randomly selected, paid jurors who judged on any and all matters. The egalitarian and unfettered nature of this system meant that everyone from the lowliest common citizen could truly be a ruler, but it also lent itself to a sense of fragility. Writing in *The Republic* that 'democracies lead to tyranny', Plato believed that the excess of freedom could lead to

political instability, with rulers subsequently consolidating power and quashing dissent, thus becoming machiavellian tyrants. Further, he spoke of the danger in total democracy that arises when rule of law collides with the will of the people, any actions can be taken in the name of the majority. Plato's stance was bolstered by the injustice of a 'jury of children with a cook as prosecutor' sentencing his teacher Socrates to death for 'corrupting the youth'.

While modern Australian democracy varies greatly from Athenian democracy, that ancient spirit of democracy lives on and continues to inform our legislature. Section 41 of Australia's Constitution enshrines the right of all citizens to elect individuals to Parliament. Unlike Athens, that right is extended to all citizens bar serious prisoners and those under 18. In keeping with Herodotus who wrote that democracy demands foremost 'the most splendid of virtues, equality before the law', Australia is bound by the ICCPR which states that "All persons shall be equal before the courts". Obviously by practicality it is impossible to gather citizens regularly to work through legislation as could be done in that city-state, so we practice representative democracy. This entails selecting representatives and senators who share our views and legislate policy on our behalf in Parliament. Australians are free to stand for election, and if dissatisfied with the government, we have an opportunity every three years to 'rule' through the ballot box and peacefully change leaders. Plato wrote that "the heaviest penalty for declining to rule is to be ruled by someone inferior to oneself".

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Today, students make their voices heard through social media and coordinate action across Australia like never before. School Strike For Climate saw hundreds of thousands of students across the nation's cities and towns exercise democracy and mobilise to protest inaction on climate change.

Australia's laws reflect the fact that democracy necessitates everyone's participation, so it is a federal offence to fail to vote. The structure of our government is substantially more complex than that of the *ekklesia*, with many internal structures including departments, ministries and committees, many rules dictate how Parliament must function. This complexity enables heightened scrutiny and prudence; stakeholder consultation, multiple readings, dedicated working groups, and bicameral parliament all ensure that nothing falls through the cracks. The will of the people is moderated by strict rule of law, which is held up by an independent judicial system, guaranteeing fair trial for all. Part of the checks and balances is the constitutional right to jury trial, which provides impartiality and community input as the court's expert jurisprudence is tempered with civil groundedness.

Aristotle once said that government should prioritise 'education of youth; for the neglect of education does harm to the constitution'. Indeed, students have always played a central role in democratic discourse in Australia, schools are the agoras of social change, countless movements such as Indigenous land rights, gay liberation and second-wave feminism have marched out the classroom onto the street. Today, students make their voices heard through social media and coordinate action across Australia like never before. School Strike For Climate saw hundreds of thousands of students across the nation's cities and towns exercise democracy and mobilise to protest inaction on climate change.

Ancient philosophers supported democracy for the fact that 'many are more incorruptible than the few'. Australia's democratic model implements people power by empowering its citizens to express their views in society and at the ballot box, with students the sparks that persistently and unceasingly drive progress and reform.

Expository essay on Australian democracy

Priyanshi Sharma

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Democracy is a form of governance in which the people have the power to choose their governing body. Ancient Athenian democracy was where citizens were able to rule, where all adult citizens were required to take an active part in government. Through many historic milestones and changes, the democratic system of modern Australia has heavily adapted and does not exactly reflect the early stages of democracy.

It is important to assess what this concept looks like in Australia today and if we, its people truly have the power. Today, Australia has developed into a strong representative democracy where we elect people to make decisions for us and represent our views. Citizens of Australia enjoyed and exercised their rights through the Constitution, federation, and parliament to freely elect suitable representation.

Yet, some of the contemporary complexities that are present today include the influence of print and social media over the common voter. In effect, each electorate candidate tries to achieve results by shaping their image in public which might not be a true reflection and essence of the strong democratic process. This was not possible historically as candidates influenced by face-to-face interactions and presenting individual traits to the public. More so, candidates have started to undermine the process of "governance by the people" through access to person and enterprise resources to get them elected, again downplaying individual characteristics.

As it will be explained later, this was not how democracy had manifested in Athens. More so, the government of today does not completely reflect the diverse nation of Australia on multiple axis – gender or nationality.

On the other hand, it is vital to compare modern democracy to what its forefathers had envisioned and experienced. The officeholders in Athens during its golden age were rarely decided on through elections. To bring true equality, the citizens themselves took turns to serve in office and they were selected on a random basis. The philosophy of democracy is to be self-rule, where each citizen can at some stage in life govern as well as be governed. Though this system is very extreme, it is actually prevalent in Australia. For example, juries operate on the basis of selecting random citizens.

Famous philosophers had similar views on democracy and its validity. Surprisingly, Aristotle and Plato both considered democracy as not being the best form of governance. In the terms of their six categories framework, they thought that mass democracy was the perverted form of constitutional monarchy as the government would be at the tyranny of the majority and the minority would be at the wants of the majority. They proposed that the counter to this system would be a republic in which elected representatives discussed and debated. All in all, it is emphasized that even though it is important for citizens to voice their opinions on important matters, the way in which this is done must not be corrupt.

Priyanshi Sharma

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The good news is that students and young people have a voice in how Australia runs. They have many outlets where they can exercise the power that has been given to them. In schools, there is the Student Representative Council where students can represent their classmates, reflecting what the government exactly does but on a larger scale. Luckily, there are also classes like 'Australian and Global Political'. Personally, I have been involved yearly in the SRC and my school's Social Justice Committee where we discuss emerging issues that must be fought by us, students. I have also taken a Year 10 class called 'Civics' in which we studied the success of the government system of Australia and its origins. I have even been able to participate in school elections for prefects which have prepared me well for the great responsibility of real voting soon. All of these activities have helped me to become more knowledgeable and informed about democracy.

It is my responsibility to learn from the leaders and systems of today in order to make Australia a more advanced country. This can only happen if I am able to visit the birthplace of democracy, a place that must be accessed in order to help improve our own country.

All in all, it is emphasized that even though it is important for citizens to voice their opinions on important matters, the way in which this is done must not be corrupt.



Democracy in modern Australia

Noah Slater

Donald High School, Year 10

Recently I was privileged to be an attendee at a forum to discuss the importance of renewable energy for north-western Victoria. This event was hosted by the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance and showed me how I can be a part of democratic processes for the first time.

It showed me that democracy allows me to express an opinion on social issues that are important to me, and enables me to be involved in conversations around a range of local, regional, state, national, and global issues. Through my recent attendance at the Future Renewable Energy Forum, I was involved in a consultation process which will lead to the design of a renewable road map for the Loddon Mallee region.

This can only occur because Australia is a Representative Democracy with the election of representatives for each region (who speak on behalf of the people they represent) collectively forming a governing body. Compulsory voting ensures full representation of Australian citizens, unlike other countries such as the UK and America where voting is not compulsory.

The great philosopher Plato stated that there are 5 regimes of government. An empire begins with Aristocracy - Plato's favourite - where a Philosopher King with his wisdom and reason ruled the people, with an army to enforce the law. He then believes that Aristocracy degrades into Timocracy where a General takes power from the King and enters a military age where intellectual achievements are replaced with military prowess, before degrading into Oligarchy where the rich hold the power and become

paranoid of the lower class, not allowing them any means to gain power (which they will eventually resist).

Oligarchy then degrades into Democracy where the people take the power off the rich and the government is controlled by a political assembly. Plato believed that the Democratic system would have individuals become too power hungry and descend into chaos, resulting in Tyranny where a tyrant would gain control of the empire and its demise.

Since the time of Plato, only Switzerland has followed Plato's vision of pure democracy (without the resulting chaos he predicted). Countries like Australia have taken a form called Representative Democracy which allows the people to elect a regional representative to serve their needs.

Another philosopher - Aristotle - said as society evolves, small changes need to be made to a governments ruling style. Aristotle believed in the wisdom of crowds, and that laws only speak in general terms and cannot be used circumstantially - hence a Government should be using its laws as guidelines, and acting in accord with the wishes of its people.

Although young people in Australia do not vote, they are our future policy makers, Politicians and tax payers. Activism is highly celebrated in a modern democratic society with people being able to get behind issues that are important to them. Greta Thunberg is a current example of a youth voice attempting to help influence global decisions on climate change. She is a role model for many others concerned about climate change and other issues that will impact our future.

Although young people in Australia do not vote, they are our future policy makers, Politicians and tax payers. Activism is highly celebrated in a modern democratic society with people being able to get behind issues that are important to them.

Closer to home we have seen a number of climate change events organised and attended by young people in our capital cities and regional centres. Students at Wycheproof – a small town near where I live - also participated in the most recent climate action in September.

In Victoria, a number of our Local Councils have Youth Councils, and there are regional forums such as the Renewable Energy Forum (which I attended) that young people are encouraged to attend and have their say.

As a young rural Victorian, I want – and believe that I have the opportunity - to participate in the democratic process on issues that are important to me, such as better outcomes for people living in rural and regional Australia, connectivity, education, LGBTQI equality, and the environment.

According to the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVIC), young people today are predicted to be the first generation worse off than their parents. They face great uncertainty in terms of employment and housing security, income inequality is growing and they are deeply concerned about the existential threat of climate change. They are navigating a far more complex world than previous generations, with challenges created by the internet, fast changing social norms, and political instability a normal part of their lives (YACVIC Strategic Plan 2020-22).

Young people have a huge role in future democratic decisions and need to be involved in Australia's decision making. Our system of representative democracy loosely follows Plato's guidelines, but adopts Aristotle's view that a society/government needs to adapt to the needs of the time.

So yes, to me ancient democracy - when viewed as a system of government where the citizens of the city-state hold the power - is an accurate observation of the democratic model in modern day Australia, or at least I hope it is...

The autocratic properties within Australia's democracy

Rani Thuan

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Democracy is a political idea that has existed for over two thousand years since its development in ancient Athens. Democracy is defined as a system that allows every individual to have a voice. Australia's political system partially resembles this idea as defined by Plato and Aristotle, however, it more acutely represents, in Plato's words¹, a democratically elected autocratic government. The limited contribution from the demos² in decision making and the structural flaws in a representative democracy, that prevent it from being a true direct democracy due to its reliance on the 'majority' is significant. This partial democratic voice that occurs due to the reliance on the majority within Australian democracy, has always been present and successive local, state and federal governments have inadvertently and intentionally exploited this for their own power.

Australia doesn't completely apply to this idea of direct democracy due to the fact that the political system we have is a representative democracy which resembles more of a democratically elected individual or party with the highest qualification, or an autocracy³. The primary reason for this is the scale upon which our democracy is built is too large to operate as a direct democracy yet allows for the effective employment of a representative democracy. This is quite an overbearing conflict of ideological definition and thus opens up the discussion to whether a representative democracy is actually a democracy in essence. Yes, there are democratic properties, such as electing an official or party to be in charge of your electorate or state or country. However, this

is the only consistent element of democracy that exists within our current political system. With the rare exceptions of plebiscites, Australians do not have a voice in decisions made for them in parliament. This elimination of the power of the demos' voice in the legislation process is a clear fracturing of the concept of democracy. Another extremely contentious concept of a representative democracy is the potential that an elected party may not actually reflect the majority of the demos. This is due to the election process that Australia currently has in which the number of seats or electorates that a party holds dictates who is in charge. This is a violation of the very nature of a democracy as defined by Plato and Aristotle, which relies on the conclusive decision by the majority of the demos. These are structural flaws that prevent Australia from holding accuracy to the ideas of Plato and Aristotle.

A prevalent issue with any democracy is equal voicing within the general populous and restrictions on those who can be part of the demos. The defining feature of a democracy is as it translates: people power. Every individual should have an equal input into the decision-making processes that take place within their state, whether the state listens to these required voices is up to the individual or party in charge. When the demos becomes restricted, even when it is seemingly necessary, the democracy within that political system is inaccurate. This is apparent in every non-theoretical democracy past and present. Within Australia, this is demonstrated by the age restriction on the voting system. This prevents people under

1 Plato and Aristotle defined democracy as a system that had contribution from the demos (Republic P, 2019).
2 Demos is representative of individuals capable and allowed to vote.
3 (Republic P, 2019)

the age of 18 from having an equal voice within Australia's democracy. This enormous demographic can be observed throughout history as one of the most progressive age groups. There are alternatives to voting that Australia's government does allow⁴ but those who can vote still have access to these processes therefore establishing an imbalance in voice equality. Even these processes in Australia have had attempts of limitation and abolishment by politicians. Peter Dutton has been quite open about this stating that "protestors should have automatic jail times" and "should not be eligible for government provided financial aid", attempting to suppress a group which is already a form of minority. This is where I actively participate in my government. I attend protests and encourage others to do so, trying to utilise my limited voice as much as I can. This inequality in voice accentuates how Australia's democracy is only partially accurate to that of ideas of the system provided by Plato and Aristotle.

The political ideology, democracy, that Australia attempts to follow is only emulated in partial accuracy with the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. This is prevalent through the structural flaws of our representative democracy and the inequality or lack of input from the demos. Australia has formed a political system with democratic properties; however, it does not meet Plato and Aristotle's democracy.

A prevalent issue with any democracy is equal voicing within the general populous and restrictions on those who can be part of the demos. The defining feature of a democracy is as it translates: people power.

4 Examples of this include protesting and reaching out to an MP.

The imperfection of democracy

Cassie Tudge

Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne, Year 10

It is a statistical reality that Australia's representative democracy gives the average Australian citizen less power than Ancient Athenian model. There are important reasons why direct democracy is no longer a feasible form of government. More importantly however, Australia's representative democratic model upholds the essential and modern values of democracy in giving the people the power.

What is the purpose of democracy? The Greek translation encapsulates the answer with the word democracy (demos kratos), literally translating to 'people power.' The Ancient Athenian and Spartan governing systems were designed to deliver the people the power, via pure or direct democracy. In Athens, every citizen of its city-state could have a say on every matter in the Ecclesia. The voting and processes were managed by the Boule or Council of 500 who were a group of delegates randomly selected via sortition.

Similarly, in modern Australia there is a cacophony of opinions. To resolve the chaos of 'public opinion' our Constitution employs a system of representative democracy, no longer giving their citizens the right to vote on every issue, but providing the opportunity to vote on who does actually vote on every issue. This separation of citizen from actual decision begs the questions of why is pure democracy not implemented in today's society; and secondly, does representative democracy defy the principle goal of democracy itself?

Direct democracy is simply not viable in today's society given the size of Australia's population and complexity of today's issues. Despite Ancient Athens having a population of approximately 140,000, only 10-20 percent of the polis population was regarded as a citizen as this excluded women, foreigners and slaves. Of these, it is estimated that only 3000 men actively took part in voting in the Ecclesia, and with only these few thousand, voting was already extremely chaotic.

With over 17 million eligible Australian electors (according to the Australian Electoral Commission) it would be diabolically difficult to have comprehensive votes on every issue. However, for special issues of particular public importance, a referendum can be held to enable all voters to have their say.

A further impediment to direct democracy is the complexity of our modern world and the need for expertise to make informed decisions. Australian voters elect delegates with the expectation they are well informed and knowledgeable on issues. The goal is well articulated by Plato, 'A good decision is based on knowledge and not on numbers (Plato, Plato's Republic)'. Some may argue that representative democracy is a fundamentally better form of government due to the lack of sortition in appointing delegates and lack of the uninformed having a say. Plato strongly resented sortition, or democracy in general, partially due to his mentor Socrates' execution by it, as he argued that

giving power to random delegates and an uneducated population resulted in worse decisions being made than by those more educated. In his opinion, philosophers should rule as the decisions made by them would be more morally upright and informed.

Although the citizens of Australia today receive less power than those of Ancient Greece, when looking at the goal of democracy, to have the people with the power, Australia's representative democracy upholds this. While it is clear that not all people of Australia hold equal power, with our politicians and senators clearly having more than the average citizen, it is also clear that the power never rests with one source.

If the goal of a perfect democracy should be freedom for the people and the absence of tyranny, Australia's representative democracy accomplishes this with ultimate power never lying with a single individual or party. Aristotle's key objection to democracy was that it creates opportunity for corruption by undermining law. "The many are more incorruptible than the few; they are like the greater quantity of water which is less easily corrupted than a little (Aristotle, Politics.)". Therefore, although Australia's democracy does not evenly distribute power as is done through Athens' pure democracy, representative democracy neither supports corruption nor grants any one individual all power.

If the goal of a perfect democracy should be freedom for the people and the absence of tyranny, Australia's representative democracy accomplishes this with ultimate power never lying with a single individual or party.

In summary, Australian citizens today hold less power than Ancient democratic systems due to our citizens' inability to vote directly for legislation, apart from referenda. But a direct democracy is simply not a viable form of government due to the size of Australia's population, the chaotic nature of pure democracy and complexity of our issues today. Furthermore, Australia's representative democracy, while not giving its citizens all equal power, is closer to Plato and Aristotle's ideal democracy with its use of educated delegates and absence of corruption through the distribution of power. Direct democracy is no longer a feasible form of government and would be inferior to representative democracy, as it does not accommodate a large population nor the complex issues addressed in Australia's governing system.

Ancient democracy is often viewed as a system of government where the citizens of the city-state held the power. Is this an accurate observation of the democratic model in modern day Australia?

Lachlan Van Veen

Frankston High School, Year 12

Democracy is derived from two Greek words “Demos” and “Kratos”. “Demos” meaning people and “Kratos” meaning power. In other words, democracy means the power of the people. Ancient democracy shared similar values to current models they both seek a purpose in which the “government [is] by the people, of the people and for the people.” (Abraham Lincoln 1863).

Three Athenian philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all had many theories and beliefs about democracy. Although no written text of Socrates own exists today, Socrates held many beliefs about democracy which have been shared by his student Plato. Socrates held suspicions about democracy, would it be logical to let the uneducated choose who ruled a country? It is recounted that Socrates believed voting to be a skill and allowing the uneducated to vote would undermine the strength in the system. He believed intellectual democracy was ideal compared to that of a democracy by birthright.

Socrates was well known for sharing and teaching upon his beliefs and later in his life was put on trial and executed for doing so. Birthright democracy is reflected today in modern day Australia, in which our right and responsibility to vote is compulsory for those over the age of 18, setting such age is important in allowing the opportunity for the people to vote once they have developed knowledge of the world around them.

Execution by fellow citizens is not a way of seeking justice in modern day Australia compared to that of the ancient democratic model, instead punishment occurs through sanctions or penalties. Plato believed there was something more specific to what we would call ancient democracy. He believed there was a flaw within the Athenian democracy model and that would lead to authoritarianism by leaders. Plato decided that he would teach such concerns to students in a field outside of Athens. He constructed a school known as Plato's academy around 400 BCE. He did so to try share these concerns about the nature in which people should be ruled and also to discuss many different philosophical issues with his friends.

Similarly Aristotle is another well known Athenian philosopher, the student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. Through his teachings he was able to gain support to build a centre for learning, he taught at the Peripatetic school in which he taught philosophy, Aristotle was not like most philosophers who were more focused on the gods and theoretical vs experimental matters, Aristotle provided a focus for learning and an understanding for the world.

These three philosophers' ideas can widely reflect upon how a rational democratic government is run around the world and in Australia today in comparison to those of Ancient times. It is clear that although

In Australia our powers are separated so that fairness, equality and justice can be upheld.

there are many challenges in maintaining democratic values many countries around the world today take great effort and pride doing so. It allows people to have a say in how their country and state are governed and gives them a voice in law making decisions.

One common issue with democracy that is largely reflected upon by these three philosophers is that power can be abused or used unfairly. In Australia our powers are separated so that fairness, equality and justice can be upheld. Legislative powers are given to the parliament which is chosen by the people. Their role is to draft, debate and vote on new laws they also have the ability to amend pre-existing laws.

Executive powers are not fully separated from legislative as those with executive powers, like the governor-general takes advice from the executive council who sit in parliament or the legislative area, although the Governor General possess the ultimate power over the Commonwealth of Australia.

The Judiciary is the final power and is held by the courts they must make decisions based on the law and The Australian Constitution, The High Court has the power to rule a law created by parliament or actions by the executive and executive council as unconstitutional and unlawful, this gives the people ability to challenge the government's decisions if necessary. Through these powers our democracy is able to strive, and the people can be involved in the process.

Today students try to make their voice heard by parliamentarians and the voters, whether it be a protest held in a gathering to express their pain and emotions or by sharing their strong will for an improvement in society through their opinions on social media. They too are important in what makes a democracy successful although they cannot vote until 18, it allows those who can and our members of parliament to understand some of the worries and troubles that today's youth share. Through democracy, countries over many centuries have been able to create a society in which social cohesion exists and citizens roles are to choose who governs their country through regular elections as outlined in the constitution.

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The birth of democracy

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Plato and Aristotle viewed democracy in similar lights, often referring to the innate problems with man and the influence it had on the effectiveness of democracy, how the concept of citizens leading citizens was considered impracticable by Greece.

The democratic model demonstrated in modern society, although is similar to Athenian Democracy, is more representative, making it less exclusive and an embodiment of society, however, student's ability to contribute to democracy is limited. While ancient and modern democracy were both relevant in their time, ancient democracy was exclusive to a small group of society, making it more direct. However, modern democracy, depicted in modern Australia, wouldn't merit the label of its predecessor, according to ancient democrats, due to its reliance on the majority of voters electing officials, to make decision on behalf of voters.

The Athenian idea of democracy was not supported by either Plato or Aristotle, instead, believing that it was corrupt and violated the idea of justice of proportionality. If the people were to control the power, instead of using it for good, Plato conceptualised that people would misuse the property of the rich, interfering with the hierarchy of society, leading to anarchy. Moreover, Plato believed that ordinary people were not intelligent enough to make complex decisions in government. Similarly, Aristotle strongly believed that, "Government should be by those people with enough time on their hands to pursue virtue"¹. However, Aristotle dissented the premise that democracy was wholly bad, believing that democracy would be a stable form of government, as citizens want

equality in social relationships, something democracy provided. He blamed inequality as a reason for revolution and, in democracy, the right to vote is equally weighed amongst all those who vote, fulfilling equality. Aristotle believed that democracy was the safest form of government, that if a society was ruled by the people, the likelihood of corruption was slim, due to the majority, being able to see the good. However, Aristotle believed that governments such as Aristocracy were more beneficial, as they had the interests of the country at their heart, unlike democracy, that ultimately serves, and is ruled by, the needy. While both Plato and Aristotle concluded that democracy was corrupt, Aristotle understood that, in comparison to other governmental systems, democracy was a better option.

Modern democracy, a form of government in which the citizens elect representatives who make decisions on behalf of the country, is demonstrated in Australia. This contrasts Athens' direct form, where free men of Greece would make laws and policies for the city-state, echoing Aristotle's belief that only men who had the time to pursue virtue should form government. The genesis of democracy was extremely exclusive; women, slaves, etc, could not vote, making the idea of representative government a foreign concept. However, Athenian democracy is hypocritical, although called 'democracy', it excluded much of the population, contrasting what democracy is to a modern citizen. The social inequality in Greece is a direct juxtaposition between what it means to be a modern democrat, to believe in "government by the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives"², regardless of personal characteristics.

¹ <https://studyres.com/doc/5980768/pericles-and-aristotle-on-government>

² <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Modern+Democracy>

Democratic techniques in modern democracy have employed the ideology of democracy, however, the structure has been diluted over time. "The dominant ideologies in modern capitalist states have tended to dilute the democratic idea, to dissolve it altogether into the concept of liberalism, to offer liberalism not as a complement to, but as a substitute for, democracy" (Euben, Wallach, and Ober, 78).

Student involvement in democracy in modern Australia is hard to comprehend, as many are unable to vote. However, the purest form of democracy, where the definition is directly applied, is not being demonstrated in Australia, instead, student leaders are being silenced for their age. This defies the foundation of democracy, that regardless of personal attributes, people should be able to speak up and have a voice. Furthermore, the rate of young voters is in the decline, possibly being discouraged due to age-based discrimination. However, instead of only blaming those in government, our education professionals should be looked at as to why student's voices are in decline. Are young people being taught their civic duties and the inner workings of the government, if not, students are leaving school as uninformed new members of society. However, students are still able to get involved in protests, lobbying, petitions and speaking up to make their voice heard.

Athenian democracy is hypocritical, although called 'democracy', it excluded much of the population, contrasting what democracy is to a modern citizen.

Although there are similarities between ancient and modern democracy, they only have a basic affinity with each other. However, in the Ancient form of democracy, only men who had the correct social status could influence or be apart of the government, making it unfair and impracticable in today's progressive society.

A curious encounter

Jasmine Xu

Methodist Ladies' College, , Year 10

I thought I saw an old friend.

I called out to her. When she turned around, I saw myself looking at a familiar figure of delicacy.

Gazing at the dark, wise eyes and basking in that aura of liberty and equality sank me deep into the pool of memories. When I first met her, it was in the city-state of Athens where our leader Cleisthenes first introduced us. Her name was *Demokratia*, meaning "the people hold power".

At first, I did not take this dainty little figure too seriously. Nonetheless, through our occasional conversation, I came to acknowledge her, then respect her, and eventually, I worshipped her. We spent so much time together that soon, we became inseparable. Sometimes we met on the hillside of Pnyx under the name of *Ekklesia* and dealt with issues of uttermost importance. Other times, we would meet as Boule and decide what our *Ekklesia* meetings would consist of. Or, as little *Dikasteria*, we would judge even the most trivial decisions. I treasured our friendship greatly.

However, when Athens fell, conquered and broken, she too, fell. I did not see her again for a long time. No, not until this peculiar morning where the tides of time have carried us to the nation-state of Australia; where Fate had planned our next meeting.

"I have missed you, my dearest friend!" I cried out, unable to contain my excitement. "Throughout these years I am influenced by your values of equality, freedom and most importantly, rule of the people. The student part of me displays these values especially. A member of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria produced a research report to raise awareness for the young care leavers.

However, when Athens fell, conquered and broken, she too, fell. I did not see her again for a long time.

Another member created an inspiring video called The Hidden Victors as a message of hope against domestic violence. Others participate in the YMCA youth parliament and are heard at the highest levels of State. They are all exhibiting your value of "people power" and bringing equality and freedom to our state by doing so. *Demokratia*, you must be proud of them too..."

"Democracy," she corrected gently. "My name is Democracy now."

I frowned. I studied *Demokratia*, or Democracy, whatever her name was, carefully. It was the face of familiarity with the air of a stranger's.

"You do not seem like yourself. Has Plato or Aristotle affected you?" I questioned, with the husk of subtlety.

Back then, an acquaintance called Plato would often point a sharp finger at me, proclaiming, "Society, *Demokratia* is so occupied with her ideas of equality that she fails to tell the good from the bad, the just from the unjust, filling her days with unnecessary desires. She is so devoted to liberty that if anyone tells her what to do, she would accuse them of oligarchy. When *Demokratia* with you, there is no order, no law and no rationality."

Other times, another acquaintance with the name of Aristotle would utter solemnly, "Society, you must know that *Demokratia* serves the needy and banishes the strong to bring her idea of equality to the state... Though I do support her principle of 'although individually the people may be worse judges than those who have special knowledge, as a body they are as good or better'."

Maybe, Democracy has changed her values and principles upon hearing the insults. Having her existence, her being, based on these principles, when they change, she inevitably changes too. That must be what was different about her.

Yet Democracy shook her head slowly, "I stay true to myself. When one hears of me today, one still relates back to equality, freedom and people-power."

"But if you did not change, why do you seem foreign?" "I burst out.

"Well, are you still the same Society?" Her eyes gleamed with bitter wisdom in her equally blunt speech, "You are no longer an Athenian of a city-state. Time has left its mark on you. What you think is a change of me, is actually a change of our relation- a change of the democratic model from direct to representative to adjust to your changes. No longer do we directly communicate with each other. We now have representatives in the form of government who do it for us."

"Well, what does that mean?"

Democracy sighed at length. "I, and what I stand for- people power, still exists. However, now that the people must assert their power through others, their power lessens and is no longer sovereign. It is the extent of the essence that differs from the ancient days, not the essence itself."

On that note, Democracy left.

In the years to come, I could always feel her presence. She was a shadow which walked beside me, breathing her ghostly breath near me. I often thought about what she said.

And what this encounter had meant.

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Welcome to 'Democracy Tonight'

Elwyn Carlile

Castlemaine Secondary College, Year 11

"Hello, and welcome back to 'Democracy Tonight'. Ancient Greek democracy is often viewed as a system of government where citizens of the city-state held the power. To find out more about this, we are crossing over to Athens to discuss democracy with Anthea, a young girl living in the 4th century BCE. Hello, Anthea"

"Thanks, and hello everyone. I wasn't born when democracy first started in Athens in around the 5th century BCE, though I have heard about it. Athens had been previously ruled by many aristocrats but after years of social tension marked by conflict, powers like voting and speaking in the assemblies were offered to ordinary citizens, laying the groundwork to what was to become democracy. This now enables any free adult man, who is a citizen, owns land and has had at least 6 years of military training, to discuss and vote on decisions that affect the city.

Athenian democracy is regarded as a direct democracy because it openly involves its citizens. But unfortunately it isn't a pure direct democracy because it excludes people like myself, my mother, our slaves and our foreign family friends. Therefore, it only includes around 10-20% of the population!"

"My father, who is able to take part in this direct democracy, got up early yesterday morning to attend the Ekklesia. When there, my father makes decisions along with others about war and foreign policy, he also helps to write and revise laws and approve or condemn the conduct of public officials. There is also another level of government called the Boule, consisting of 500 randomly selected male citizens to supervise government workers, control navy ships and army horses, and deal with ambassadors and representatives from other city-states. As well as its main function, deciding what matters will come before the Ekklesia. I wish I could take part!"

"My father came home last night talking about two interesting men called Plato and Aristotle. Apparently, these philosophers were arguing that democracy was a corrupt form of government. Plato was saying stuff about people not having the intellectual ability to rule. While Aristotle was yelling out that the government should only be governed by those with the leisure to practise it. Democracy has the illusion of power but really it is for the few. Back to you in the studio."

Today, because of Australia being a democracy, I am able to contribute my voice to multiple groups and activities locally. Such as the local government's Youth Advisory Group, where I advise on the needs of youth in the community.

"Now, we are crossing live to Elwyn, a young girl living in central Victoria, who will talk to us about 21st century democracy in Australia and her community. Elwyn, does Anthea give an accurate observation of the democratic model in modern day Australia? Over to you, Elwyn"

"Hi, Ancient Greek democracy, as Anthea said, was direct democracy whereas in Australia today, we have a representative democracy for our three levels of national, state and local government. All adults vote for candidates to carry out the business of governing on our behalf. And do you know some of our Australian politicians are even of Greek origin! People in my home town of Castlemaine helped to set a path for democracy in Australia. In 1851 a Monster Meeting of gold diggers protested against the State Government's costly gold license. It ultimately led to the Eureka Stockade in 1854, which led to everyday people getting more rights to undertake things such as mining and the opportunity to gain wealth."

"Today, because of Australia being a democracy, I am able to contribute my voice to multiple groups and activities locally. Such as the local government's Youth Advisory Group, where I advise on the needs of youth in the community. I recently presented to the council on the activities the group have been doing over the last 12 months. I also present a radio show every Friday morning, which gives me a voice to promote local youth issues in the community."

"While my friends and I are too young to vote as yet, we are concerned about the future of democracy in Australia and other similarly governed countries. I have heard of reports about social media like Facebook, directly or even indirectly using data harvesting to manipulate people's news feeds, and possibly control elections. Let's hope we all can continue to have an equal vote."

"Thank you, Elwyn and Anthea, for your detailed reports on democracy in your societies. To summarise today, direct democracy in Ancient Greece let citizens of the city-state hold the power and make all decisions even if it was only for a minority of people. While in Australia today, a representative democracy, lets everyone hold the power to vote for whoever they choose to govern. Which is not to say not the same thing but has the same principle of government by the people. Thank you for watching, good-night"

#democracyathenstomelb

Marymaeve Hartsthorne

Northcote High School, Year 11

Democracy is defined as the rule of the people. Many democratically-governed countries like Australia base their system on the regulations and policies of the Ancient Greek democracy.

The word democracy comes from the Greek 'Demos' which means people and 'Kratos' which means power or rule. In a true democracy, every single citizen would have a voice in the country's governance (although in practice this is often difficult to achieve).

Ancient Athens was the first place where people came together to speak about their concerns and opinions in front of rulers of the city-state and directly vote on new rules and laws. Citizens were encouraged to participate through the principle of 'ho boulomenos' or 'anyone who wishes'. This meant that any of its 30,000 eligible citizens could attend a general assembly meeting several times a month, also known as the 'Ecclesia'.

In principle, any of the 6,000 who showed up at each meeting had the right to propose a law, address their fellow citizens or bring a public lawsuit. Of course, a crowd of that many people trying to speak at the same time would not have made for effective government! So to make this system more balanced the Athenians also relied on a large governing council called the 'Boule'. The council would set the agenda and evaluate proposals, in addition to hundreds of jurors and magistrates to handle legal matters.

Rather than being elected or appointed, the people in these positions of power were chosen by a sort of lottery. This process of randomised selection is known as 'sortition' and has influenced the modern jury system which we have in place today in Australia where ordinary citizens are chosen at random to deliver a verdict on a criminal case.

The entire system relied heavily on the citizens of Athens, but the philosopher Plato disparaged this form of democracy believing that it was anarchic and foolish. Plato wanted to create a system made up of a small number of people from the privileged elite, which therefore excluded the majority of citizens. He believed if a person is to give good advice on the highest affairs of state, he must understand the concept of justice, which requires a high level of virtue, education and self-knowledge.

The system proposed by Plato is quite similar to the Australian modern democracy where we elect representatives largely based on the merits of education and life experience. In Australia you can't vote for a new law yourself but you can vote for people who then become lawmakers and represent your interests. Australian citizens elect senators and other representatives who will decide who our Premiers, Prime Ministers and other important officials will be.

Another problem is the composition of parliament doesn't reflect the diversity of the Australian community. For people to feel like they 'hold the power' in this day and age they must be able to see themselves reflected in their government.

Unfortunately, many Australians are quite apathetic and disengaged from the democratic system that we have the luxury of living under. A large majority of Australians reach voting age without having any idea who they want to vote for or even a basic understanding of how the political system works and this undermines its success. They are disillusioned because the compromises involved in our complex three-tiered system of government (federal, state and local) means that individual voices are lost along the way.

While the Ancient Greeks inspired and empowered their eligible citizens to participate in the democratic process, many Australians are not educated about their strength and power as citizens. Another problem is the composition of parliament doesn't reflect the diversity of the Australian community. For people to feel like they 'hold the power' in this day and age they must be able to see themselves reflected in their government. For example, women remain underrepresented even though they are over half of the population. According to the Parliament of Australia website (www.aph.gov.au) in July 2019, only 46 of the 151 members of the House of the Representative were women.

However, there are signs of change as young women like myself are feeling more politically engaged through actions like the #schoolstrikeforclimate protests where we peacefully express our fears for the future in the face of climate change.

Above all, the fundamental difference that separates Athenian and Australian democracy lies in the right to vote. Although the Athenians encouraged citizen participation, they essentially excluded a large number of people because women, slaves and foreigners were not considered citizens. This meant the pool of Athenians eligible to vote dropped to only 10 to 20 per cent of the overall population. In modern Australia this would not be tolerated because for us the word 'democracy' means that all citizens should be able to voice their opinion on the important matters of their country no matter what their social status.

In this way, it can be said that while the Ancient Greeks bestowed considerable power upon the few, Australia in 2019 bestows a small amount of power on the many.

The ancient roots of modern democracy

Sumaer Singh Grewal

Melbourne High School, Year 10

Australia was once composed of 6 partly self-governing British colonies that acted under British parliamentary rule. In 1901, the colonies federated to form the country of Australia, starting the strong democracy we have today. The first democracy began in ancient Athens in the 5th century and was a sophisticated form of governance for its time.

Democracy has its roots and origins in the city-states of Ancient Greece. The word is derived from the Greek word *demokratia*, from *demos*, "the people", and *kratos*, "rule." 500 citizens served in the government for the term of one year. When a new law was proposed by the 500, all the citizens of Athens had the duty to vote on it. However, the Athenian definition of citizenship was very different from today; only free men were considered citizens.

This form of government, where the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens, is known as direct democracy. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, believed "The most pure democracy is that ... the poor should be in no greater subjection than the rich ... it must be so by every department of government being alike open to all; but as the people are the majority and what they vote is law." (*Politics*, book iv, ch. 4, 1290b, 1291b.) The democracy described here is in many ways fundamentally different to modern democracy. The whole citizen body formed the legislature, and there was no representative system, unlike today. This was only possible due to the limited size of the ancient cities, which seldom had more than 10,000 citizens.

The Greek philosopher Plato describes 5 regimes of government in his writings: Aristocracy, Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy and then Tyranny. Plato believed that democracy would give power to poor, who were materialistic and not of good virtue. The desire of freedom and power in this society would descend into anarchy, then tyranny.

On the other hand, Aristotle, believed that the cause of revolt was inequality, and the population has good intentions. However, both these philosophers preferred aristocracy, stating that the power to rule should be given to those with good virtues, education, and time on their hands.

Representative democracy aims to simplify and increase the efficiency of parliament. We vote for candidates to best represent our electorate in parliament. Once elected, politicians spend their term in parliament representing the views of the electorate, creating and amending laws, however, what they do during this time is not in our direct control. We must rely on one politician to represent the opinions of thousands. There is an obvious problem with this: can we rely on our representatives to do their jobs and remain faithful to us? Sometimes politicians do remain faithful. Other times they do not, and we must live with the consequences until the next election.

Some politicians make more promises than they can keep to win the majority of votes. Othertimes politicians distort their views in order to better suit their political preferences and distort the truth to get votes. This can create 'echo chambers', that encourage people to ignore policies, no matter how beneficial or rational, simply because they are made by their political opponents.

Even when representatives do act in the interest of the majority, minorities will never have a voice in the parliament and as such cannot have their views represented, due to having one representative to represent a whole community. Because representatives are elected using absolute majority, it means that the people who did not form the majority do not get someone to represent them in parliament.

By becoming part of a selection panel that allocated \$150,000 in grants for community led environmental projects in the Gellibrand electorate, I gained a firsthand understanding about our democracy on a local level. Being involved with all parts of the community, participating in door knocking appeals, national tree day, Relay for Life, and the Annual walkathon, helps me see the many ways our local government can affect our community.

The problems are intrinsic to representative democracy, not Australia. We do a great job of mitigating these issues; however, they will always be present in representative democracies around the world, including ours.

The problems are intrinsic to representative democracy, not Australia. We do a great job of mitigating these issues; however, they will always be present in representative democracies around the world, including ours. The ancients had a very straight forward and direct form of democracy that fulfilled its purpose. Although the Ancient Greeks did not have a democracy for long (due to their defeat to Rome), it is regarded as the first real democracy. Australia's democracy does a better job to give power to the citizens than most other countries, due to our preferential voting system, increased transparency and low corruption. However, it is not perfect. The complications of the representative democracy mean that people must rely on a candidate to represent them in parliament. Representative democracy simply lacks the simplicity and the directness that the ancients introduced.

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