

## Explore More—Democracy: Direct and Representative

**Directions:** Listen to your teacher talk about the key differences between direct and representative democracy. Refer to the maps in your Explore Geography Picture Dictionary to locate the places your teacher mentions. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

### Direct Democracy

The word “democracy” comes from two Greek words meaning “the people to rule.” Under democratic rule, the people decide what laws are passed and how the government runs. When we vote in the United States today, we cast our ballots for people who will represent our views and values when they make and vote on laws. For example, we vote for city councilors, mayors, and members of Congress. This is called a representative democracy. Democracy in ancient Greece operated differently than this model. People in some of the Greek city-states, particularly Athens, had a direct democracy. This means that every citizen gathered in one place and discussed issues. Every citizen was expected to vote on every law brought before the assembly. Sometimes “direct democracy” is called “Athenian democracy” because it is so closely associated with the Greek city-state of Athens.

*Find Athens on a map of ancient Greece.*

Although every citizen had the right to vote, not every person who lived in Athens was a citizen. As a result, Athenian democracy was not quite as equal as you might think. Only free men over the age of 18 born in Athens could be citizens and vote. Women, slaves, and those men born outside the city-state did not participate in Athens' direct democracy.

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## Representative Democracy

A direct democracy\* would be very difficult to carry out in a large nation like the United States. How could everyone assemble to discuss bills coming up for a vote? Where could they meet? To address practical concerns such as these, the United States (and other industrialized nations) has what is known as a representative democracy. A representative democracy is one in which citizens elect individuals to represent them in government. These elected officials are the people who create laws and vote on them. They are supposed to act as the people's voice when determining how the country operates. Of course, there is no guarantee that the representative will vote the same way that an individual would have voted on a particular issue. However, if people become unhappy with the way their representative votes, they can vote for a different representative in the next election. Or they can run for office themselves! ❖

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\* In some states, citizens do have the right to vote directly. For example, when people vote on a ballot initiative (or proposition), they are engaging in direct democracy.

**YOUR TURN!**

Write your answers to the following questions.

1. Describe the key features of a direct democracy.

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2. Describe the key features of a representative democracy.

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3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a direct democracy? A representative democracy? In the space below, create a graphic organizer to compare and contrast these concepts.

**Questions for further discussion:**

- What would you like to know more about in terms of direct and representative democracies? Frame questions that you can answer by historical study and research. Conduct this research and discuss your findings.
- How is the democracy that was practiced in Athens different than the sort of democracy we exercise now in the United States? What elements of Athenian democracy did we borrow and adapt? Explain the sources of historical continuity regarding the democratic system and how the combination of ideas and events explains the emergence of new patterns.
- Why did the Athenians develop a democracy? When the United States was founded, why did the framers of government use democratic principles as the basis for the country's operation? Do additional research if necessary to understand and distinguish cause, effect, sequence, and correlation in historical events, including the long- and short-term causal relations.