

# What was Democracy like over 2400 years ago in ancient Athens?

For one thing, a form of democracy in ancient Greece was only practiced in ancient Athens, and only for about 100 years. It was an experiment. The people really liked it. All citizens had to take an active part in government and vote for their leaders and their laws. At this time, citizens were free men. Women, children, and slaves were not citizens, and thus could not participate or vote.

Each year, there was a drawing. 500 names were drawn from a pool of all the citizens of Athens. Those 500 citizens had to serve for one year. During that year, they were responsible for making new laws and for changing old laws as they saw fit. But, nothing they did became law until all the citizens of Athens had a chance to vote yes or no. Majority ruled. So these citizens were the law makers. But all citizens of ancient Athens could vote before any change was made.

This form of government is called a direct democracy. The famous Athenian, Pericles, said: "It is true that Athens is called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not the few, with equal justice to all alike in their private disputes."

This form of government came to an end in ancient Athens after Athens lost a war with Sparta. This was the Peloponnesian War. For a while, Athens was ruled by a small group of Spartans. For a brief period of time, Athens had a direct democracy, or a government in which all citizens vote on rules and laws. We owe them a lot! It is one of their finest gifts to us!

