



The concept of *democracy* originated in Ancient Greece as far back as the middle of the 5th century BCE. People strived for rulers to recognise their choices in how they wanted to live their lives and not be controlled by arbitrary power.

Democracy recognises and supports fundamental individual rights, personal freedoms, and the rule of law creating equality and a better quality of life for citizens. It provides the people with the power to participate in decision-making through their elected representatives.

The law holds supreme power under rules set out in a written constitution, underpinned by the rule of law.

Keeping power with the people

A successful democracy has many different elements to ensure human rights and freedoms are respected and those in power do not exercise excessive control. These include:

- All people are considered equal before the law and can only be punished by, and in accordance with, the law. Under **the rule of law** no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention or deprived of their liberty except on grounds, and in accordance with, procedures that are established by law.
- The **law-making** process follows parliamentary rules and procedures and are made in an open and transparent way. A bicameral parliament is particularly effective as it provides two levels of scrutiny between multiple political parties, ensuring all government decisions pass through one of the required checks and balances before being passed as law.
- Citizens have the freedom to vote for representatives in the parliament. **Universal suffrage** is conducted through regular elections, which must remain free, honest, and fair. Citizens should not be prevented from exercising their right to vote and is an important responsibility. This vital component of a democratic society provides opportunities for the people to decide who will exercise political power on their behalf, therefore keeping those in power accountable. Citizens also have the opportunity to be nominated and become an elected representative themselves.
- **Checks and balances** - authorities are publicly scrutinised and held accountable through mechanisms to limit power. This separation of powers is between the legislature (a parliamentary body that makes and changes the law), senior government executive (actions the law), and an independent judiciary (interprets the law and administers justice).
- **Transparency** is maintained through regular scrutiny by the people and media organisations. An effective democracy allows society to access information from a variety of multimedia sources. Well-informed citizens can make decisions and act accordingly to help them live a safe and healthy life. Governments that control media content and outlets, do not allow citizens to be adequately informed about what is going on around them. Freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom of speech are important rights exercised within a democratic society. These rights support government accountability and help to maintain trust for citizens living in a democracy. When members of society lose confidence in the government's decision-making capabilities, trust becomes severely eroded.
- Successful democracies keep citizens informed in knowing and understanding the law, to know their rights in accessing the law, and to recognise their civic responsibilities in abiding by the law. **Education** supports and maintains civic virtue, resulting in a well developed culture of lawfulness.

Democratic societies operate under principles of the rule of law to deliver fundamental freedoms and protect human rights

