

## What is democracy?

Democracy is a system of government in which a country's citizens, directly or indirectly decide a country's laws, policies, leadership, and major undertakings. Democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of society to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems. Learning about democracy enables us to recognise how democracy can be supported or threatened, and how anti-democratic ideologies threaten aspects of life we may take for granted.



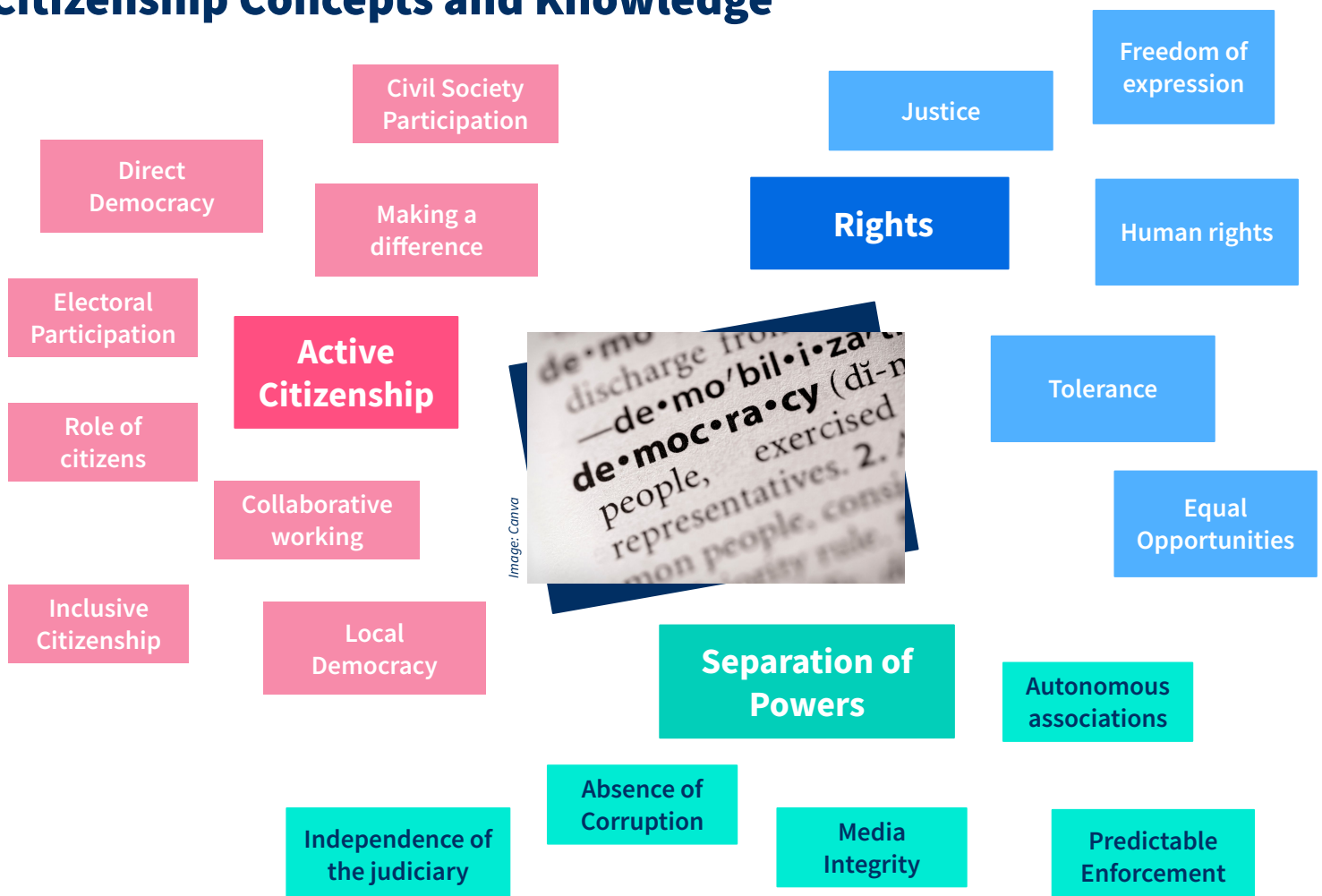
**Power to the people**

The term *democracy* comes from "demos," the Greek word for "people."

## The role of democracy

Democracy plays a fundamental part in developing societies where everyone is free and respected. Democracy means more active and engaged citizens, who have a say in how their country is governed. Democracy hears small voices in a big world, and uses them to improve societies through fair governance. Democracy upholds the effective realisation of human rights and creates a more secure, stable and successful global society. Countries with effective democratic systems thrive and their people feel safe, valued and able to search for solutions to contemporary problems within a democratic framework.

## Citizenship Concepts and Knowledge



## World Democracies and Regimes

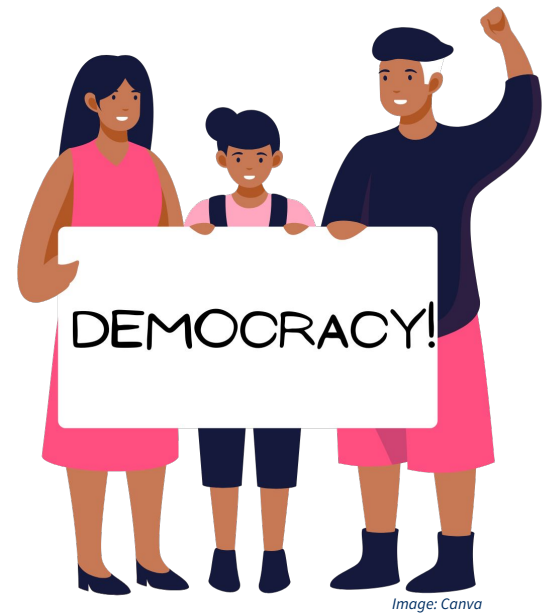
The democracy index is created by the Economist Intelligence unit (EIU) and is based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories, measuring pluralism, civil liberties and political culture. According to the EIU there are 4 types of regime.

**Full democracies** are nations where civil liberties and political freedoms are strengthened by a political culture that supports democratic principles. These nations have a valid system of governmental checks and balances, an independent judiciary whose decisions are enforced, and governments that function adequately. Examples are Norway (ranking #1) the UK (#18) and Austria (#21).

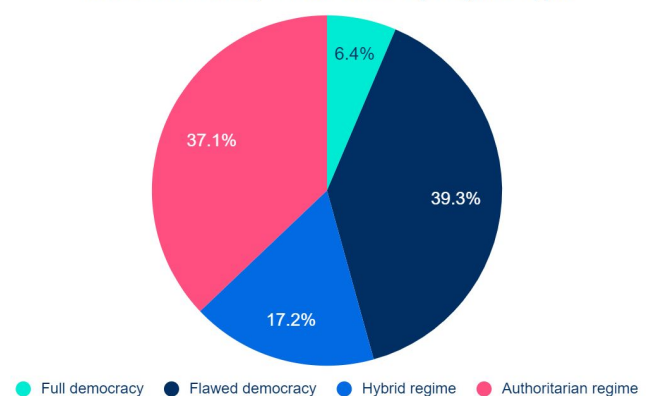
**Flawed democracies** are nations where elections are fair and free and basic civil liberties are honoured but may have issues. These nations have underdeveloped political culture, low level political participation and issues in the functioning of governance. Examples are the USA (#26) and Thailand (#72).

**Hybrid regimes** are nations with regular electoral frauds, preventing them from being fair and free democracies. These nations commonly have governments that apply pressure on political opposition and judiciaries. There tends to be widespread corruption, harassment and pressure placed on the media, and so weak rule of law. Examples are Bangladesh (#75) and Turkey (#103).

**Authoritarian regimes** are nations that are often absolute monarchies or dictatorships, they may have some conventional institutions of democracy but with little significance, abuses of civil liberties are common, elections are not fair or free, the media is often state-owned or controlled by groups associated with the ruling regime, the judiciary is not independent, and suppression of governmental criticism are commonplace. Examples are Palestine (#109) Russia (#124), and Afghanistan coming last of ranked countries (#167).



EIU's democracy index 2021 by regime type



## International Day of Democracy

The International Day of Democracy is the 15th September 2022, and it gives us an opportunity to review the state of democracy in our world. World societies do not enjoy democracy consistently; for universal enjoyment, it will need full support of the international community, governing bodies, society and individuals. The international day of democracy aims to encourage governments to strengthen national programmes devoted to the promotion and consolidation of democracy. <https://globaldimension.org.uk/calendar/international-day-of-democracy/>

## Case studies

### Norway - A Full Democracy

Norway is one of the most healthy democracies in the world. Elections are free and fair, and power regularly rotates between parties. Civil liberties are respected, with independent media and civil society actors holding the government to account. Norway is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. The country is governed by a prime minister, a cabinet, and a 169-seat parliament (Storting) that is elected every four years and cannot be dissolved. Norwegians are automatically registered to vote at 18, and 77.7% voted in the 2021 elections.

### Afghanistan - An Authoritarian State

Before the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021, they did have an elected government, but it had been undermined by constant influence from the Taliban in terms of violence and corruption leading to a flawed electoral system. Since overthrowing the elected government, the Taliban have closed the country's political space; opposition to its rule is not tolerated, while women and minority groups have seen their rights limited by the new regime.



Image: ResoluteSupportMedia, Flickr

### The United Kingdom - A Full Democracy

The UK has a bicameral Parliament. The more powerful lower chamber, the House of Commons, has 650 members directly elected by its citizens to serve five-year terms. The 788 members of the unelected House of Lords are appointed by the monarch. The body largely plays an oversight role in reviewing legislation passed by the House of Commons. The UK is considered a stable democracy with a vibrant media sector. 2019s general election achieved 67.3% voter turnout.

Whilst there are robust protections for political rights and civil liberties, recent years have seen concerns about increased government surveillance of residents, as well as rising Islamophobia and negative feelings towards immigrants.

Numerous officials in the ruling Conservative Party were involved in high-profile political scandals over the last year, including being accused of misusing political donations and holding parties in violation of COVID-19-related lockdown rules, the Electoral Commission fined the party for failing to properly declare political donations.

In 2021 UK parliament introduced a controversial draft law that included provisions that would broaden the powers of the police and restrict protest and assembly rights in England and Wales. The proposed legislation sparked mass 'Kill the Bill' protests across the country, the bill received royal assent in April 2022. The Act gives the Home Secretary powers to make regulations without reference to parliament.



Image: Alisdare Hickson, Flickr

## Glossary

<b>Bicameral parliament</b>	Means 'two-Chamber'. A bicameral parliament is one that contains two separate assemblies who must both agree when new laws are made. E.G. The House of Commons and the House of Lords in the UK.
<b>Corruption</b>	Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power.
<b>Dictatorship</b>	Where one person or a small group possesses absolute power without input from anyone else. E.G. Nazi Germany under Hitler.
<b>Electoral Commission</b>	This is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates UK political finance.
<b>Flawed</b>	Means damaged or weak.
<b>Fundamental</b>	This means vital, of central importance.
<b>Human Rights</b>	These are moral principles for certain standards of human behaviour and are regularly protected in local and international law. <i>E.G. The right to life, shelter, clean water.</i>
<b>Islamophobia</b>	The irrational fear and discrimination of Islam/Muslims.
<b>Legislation</b>	This is a law or a set of laws that have been passed by Parliament. The word is also used to describe the act of making a new law.
<b>Pluralism</b>	Where people with different interests, beliefs, and lifestyles will coexist peacefully and be allowed to participate in the governing process
<b>Referendum</b>	A general vote by the electorate on a single political question which has been referred to them for a direct decision. E.G. The Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014.
<b>Taliban</b>	Is a fundamentalist Islamic militia who once in power/take over, enforce their own rigid version of Sharia, or Islamic law.
<b>Unelected</b>	Means not chosen through a vote.

## Possible teaching activities

**Design** a poster for the International Day of Democracy. The poster should outline what the day represents and why we should celebrate democracy.

**Debate** whether or not we should have a House of Lords due to them not being elected by the general public. Consider Pros and Cons.

**Discuss** what the UK could do to improve its democracy ranking. Ask students to justify their decisions.  
**Or** Research and explain what the 'Tyranny of the majority' might mean, and how it may lead to anti democracy.

## Useful Links

[Democracy: Council of Europe](#)  
[Democracy: The UN](#)  
[International Day of Democracy](#)

[Democracy Index](#)  
[Democracy in Norway](#)  
[Democracy in Afghanistan](#)  
[Democracy in the UK](#)