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# Democracy Portfolio

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## What does democracy mean to me?

For me, living in a democracy means being able to participate in the political life and especially in the decision-making. Even if the population doesn't vote the law directly, it elects some representatives with the same opinion, to represent it inside the government. People also have the right to take part in petitions and demonstrations if they are not happy with a decision or a law. Furthermore, it is only in this type of political system that the population is truly free and can fully enjoy its human rights. People can freely express themselves without fearing to face any repercussions. Everyone has the right to express their opinion, no matter what other people may think. But democracy is also about being free to move and to act the way we want (except if it is a criminal activity). Even if there are some rules to follow, people are not subject to any dictatorial authority and can decide almost always for themselves. There are still rules, but those are necessary. They allow us to live all together in "peace" and prevent people from violating each other's rights. In a democracy, people must be tolerant and have to accept the differences of others. No matter which sexuality, religion, ethnicity, or political opinion we have, everyone must respect it.

To summarize, democracy is the guarantee of our freedom and the guardian of our fundamental rights. It prevents the eruption of illegal movements that could infringe on our freedoms. It also guarantees the participation of the citizens in every decision, and this is how conflicts of interest and "wars" are prevented.

It may not be the best political system ever, but it is the fairest one yet.

## Definition and origin of the word "democracy"

*"A government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections."*

The word "democracy" has its origins in the Greek language. It combines two shorter words: "demos" meaning whole citizen living within a particular city-state and "kratos" meaning power or rule.

Source : <https://www.moadoph.gov.au/democracy/defining-democracy/>

## Democracy then and now

Democracy, free elections and parliamentarianism did not appear in Luxembourg overnight. Indeed, democracy as we know it today has come a long way and has undergone many modifications and versions over the years, even centuries. Today, although democracy is the fairest and most committed political system in terms of human rights, it still faces many criticisms and seems far from perfect. In the following essay we will briefly analyse how the democratic political system has evolved over time. What was it like in the past? What is it like today?

The first democratic system appeared in ancient Greece around the 5th century BC, more precisely in the city of Athens. At that time, all citizens who had reached the age of majority were obliged to take part/actively participate in the government. For the Athenians, only adult males were considered real citizens. Women and slaves were totally excluded from this type of system and therefore had no right to participate in voting. Each year, 500 citizens were chosen randomly to represent the government of the city of Athens for a period of one year. If anyone refused to participate, they risked being fined or humiliated by being marked with red paint. The aim of the government representatives was to draw up new laws, manage the various political processes and organise the votes. When a new law had to be passed, all citizens had to go to the assembly to vote. In short, this form of political system, which is called direct democracy, gives more power and thus more freedom and responsibility to the Athenians. On the other hand, women and slaves, not having the right to vote, are subject to the choices of the 'real' citizens and cannot influence the various political decisions, although these decisions also concern them. Over time, the Greek system of democracy has evolved greatly, eventually coming into line with the other Western democracies. Women, after a long struggle, also obtained the right to vote and to participate in government.

As already mentioned, Greece is not the only country in which a so-called democratic system has emerged. In many Western countries and in the United States, almost identical political systems have developed over the centuries.

During the Middle Ages, most countries, such as France, Germany and so on, were governed by a lordship, following a feudal principle. In other words, it was a form of government where power was held by a small group of people from higher social classes. Most often these were aristocrats or lords. Therefore, the right to participate in elections or to attend the assembly was strictly reserved for this wealthier minority. Farmers, knights, craftsmen and so on were not allowed to vote. This type of political system is called an oligarchy and has elements of a democracy, but without giving power to the majority. It was not until the Enlightenment and the Italian Renaissance that things began to move in the direction of a fairer system. In France for example, the most important change, which marked the beginning of what we can call a modern democracy, was the vote on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789. The latter defends the idea that everyone is equal and that therefore equal rights should be granted to everyone. It also emphasises the separation of powers, the right to freedom and the right to speak. Finally, in 1791 a new constitution was adopted. It introduced universal suffrage, in other words the right to vote for all citizens except for women and guaranteed the separation of the three powers and thus the survival of democracy. On 29 April 1945, French women exercised the right to vote for the first time in municipal elections.

In Luxembourg we have a parliamentary democracy. In other words, the population doesn't vote the law directly, but it elects some representatives with the same opinion, to represent it inside the government. All the representatives form what we call the parliament. It was not until 1919 that every citizen who had reached the age of 21 was granted the right to vote. In 1972, the voting age was lowered to 18. This means that anyone can actively participate in politics, something unimaginable at the time. This form of democracy is the most modern today and probably the fairest.

## ESSAY 1: PROTESTS

*"Protest beyond the law is not a departure from democracy; It is absolutely essential to it."* - Howard Zinn.

In this essay, we will first explain what a protest is and what its purpose is. Then we will define the link between protests and our form of government, which is a democracy.

In the world we live in, many things are constantly changing, and others remain as they already were years ago. Many modifications are occurring or have occurred, for example, in the political field, in traditions or even in terms of regulations and human rights. The prohibition of slavery by law, the internationalization of the world, the recognition of the independence of certain countries or the right to protest are all concrete examples of changes that have taken place over the last century. But as already stated before, there are also things that have seen little or no change, like the pay gap between men and women, the inequalities between blacks and whites or even our education system. All those changes or lack of changes in different domains can be the source of disagreement and dissatisfaction among the population and can therefore lead to public demonstrations/protests. In other words, a protest is a civilian reaction against decisions taken by the government or its inactivity regarding different issues. During these protests, people take to the streets armed with posters, banners and megaphones to express their opinion and disagreement, in the hope of bringing about a radical change. In general, protests are peaceful, but sometimes they get completely out of hand and become violent, leading to vandalism and fights. Sometimes the right to protest is not respected by the authorities, or even the government itself. The numerous arrests of anti-war protesters in Russia are a concrete example. The numerous protests organized every Saturday in the context of the Covid pandemic and the famous White Marches are another example that proves that sometimes demonstrators can cross the line. Indeed, when they attack civilians or political figures, they can no longer be called peaceful protesters. The damage to the Prime Minister's car and home, the threatening letters and chants wishing him dead are things that have no place in a democracy, even if the person is not liked. This kind of behaviour, which is clearly vandalism, is prohibited by law and can lead to a fine or even imprisonment.

The right to organize or participate in a protest is crucial in a democracy. Indeed, a democracy is a political system in which decision-making power is held by the population either directly or indirectly through elected politicians. Thus, most of the decisions that are taken are voted by the majority, although a more or less important minority does not agree. Some decisions are even taken by the government even though the majority of the population is not in favor. In order not to discriminate against minorities and to allow citizens to express their opinion on various issues, the government considers protests to be of major importance and classifies the right to protest as a fundamental human right. Protests also have the advantage of being able to help and guide politicians by highlighting various issues that they feel should be discussed.

I personally think that the right to protest is fundamental in a democracy and that every person is therefore free to disagree with certain decisions, as long as that person does not violate the freedoms and rights of another person.

## ESSAY 2: Freedom of speech

*“I may not agree with you, but I will defend to the death your right to make an ass of yourself.”* - Oscar Wilde

Freedom of expression is defined by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. In other words, everyone has the right to hold opinions, to impart and receive information through any possible media. This freedom concerns not only verbal but also written communication. Whether by word of mouth, in text messages, on social networks or in press articles, everyone can express themselves freely. But like any right, freedom of expression also has its limits. Abusive, defamatory, racist or discriminatory comments in general are not tolerated and are punishable by law. A concrete example where freedom of expression has gone too far is the case between rapper Turnup Tun and politician Fred Keup. In one of his raps, the rapper clearly insults the politician because he does not share the same opinion. Even if the politician's ideas turn out to be wrong, no one has the right to insult someone like that. But in the end, the rapper came out of this trial victorious.

Freedom of expression and opinion is one of the many fundamental rights that our ancestors fought hard for in their time. Long before we had the freedom we have today, which we can enjoy almost without any limit, people were often unable to express their ideas freely, under threat of being condemned by the law. Although in most countries of the world things have changed, there are still exceptions. North Korea, with its dictator at the helm, is a perfect example. In this country citizens are censored, the press is non-existent except for the one promoting the Kim Jong-Un regime.

In my eyes, freedom of speech is arguably the most important pillar of a democratic political system. A democracy is best characterized by the participation of citizens in decision-making, either directly or indirectly by voting for like-minded politicians. Therefore, everyone has a say, and no one should be punished or discriminated because of their opinion. Moreover, a democracy can only function if everyone is able to express themselves freely, without being censored, otherwise it would be more like a dictatorship or even a repressive policy, like in North Korea for example, where people don't have the right to express their own ideas. This is why freedom of expression is part of the long list of basic human rights that are in force in countries that have adopted democracy as their political system.

## Sources

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