

Democracy Fun(ky) Facts

- ★ *Hey, Democracy Fun Facts. Where does the word democracy come from? The word democracy comes from the Greek word demos, which means people. Government by the people - yo! But who are the people? Are all people people? The answer to that has changed over time.*
- ★ *So who had the first democracies? I'm asking for a friend. The first democratic forms of government developed in the Greek city-states during the 6th century B{ however — perhaps 90 percent of the population — were not citizens. Oops.*
- ★ *My cousin saw a YouTube video that claims there are two basic forms of government. That sounds like fake news. What do you think? There are two basic forms of democracy. One is direct democracy, in which all eligible citizens have active participation in political decision making. The other is called a representative democracy, in which voters remain the sovereign power but political power is exercised indirectly through elected representatives. Also, countries that practice representative democracy are known as Republics. Countries that practice representative democracy usually get better at it than countries that don't. The People's Republic of China is the world's biggest country, and while it is technically a republic, it's not a democracy. Not surprisingly, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal is a Republic. The Republic of Tea is neither a republic, nor a country. They really should change their name.*
- ★ *So I was thinking about starting a democracy with some friends. Is it too late to join? Is the planet Earth still adding democracies? Fast forward to now! The country of Bhutan is the world's youngest democracy. The first democratic elections began in 2007; by 2011, all levels of government were democratically elected. Their national **Anthem is "[Druk tsendhen](#)" ([Dzongkha](#)) or "The Thunder Dragon Kingdom"** Cool!*
- ★ *I read a dictionary the other day and it was really exciting and it had the word democracy in it. Cool! Do all books have the word democracy in them? Back up a sec. there youngin'. The word democracy does not appear anywhere in the text of the U.S. Constitution - What? Nor in the Declaration of Independence - What? What? Nor in the Hunger Games - duh!*

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- ★ *Wait a sec. I'm confused. I know all about those crazy Greek democrats. But tell me again, how got to democracy today?* I'm glad you asked: The Middle Ages saw the establishment of rudimentary representative bodies that began to lay the foundation for the later development of democratic institutions. The development of political democracy in Britain began with the gradual assertion of parliamentary supremacy over the hereditary monarch and continued with a gradual transformation of Parliament into a fully representative body (that is, a body elected by the entire adult population on the basis of one person, one vote).
- ★ *Okay, but what about the philosopher, John Locke? I can't get enough of that guy! Seems like he's dropping new tracks all the time.* The philosopher John Locke argued that the political state is created by a social contract in which individuals give up their personal right in return for a guarantee that the community (or state) protect their natural rights of life, liberty, and property. If the state does not fulfill that guarantee, the people have the right to overthrow the government. This tradition was reflected in the Declaration of Independence, which said that the king of England had abused the colonists' rights and thus they had a right to tear up their contract with the king and start a new country. The new United States of America became the first modern democratic state, although it was far from a democracy for everyone. Most colonies initially adopted the traditional English property qualification for voting: the 40-shilling freehold which meant that not many people qualified to take part in democracy, which meant the early U.S. of America was hardly a democracy. Over the years more Americans were allowed to take part in our democracy.
- ★ *Are people good or evil? And are good people more likely to do bad things than bad people are to do good things?* Sometimes people do good things for bad reasons. Like Breaking Bad in reverse. In the United States several major expansions of the electorate occurred for similar reasons: Jeffersonian Republicans eliminated property qualifications to win the votes of the very poor; Republicans passed (1870) the 15th Amendment (on Black male voting) to win Blacks' votes in southern and border states; progressive reformers in the early 20th century pushed for women's suffrage, expecting that women, more frequently than men, would support humanitarian causes such as temperance; and Republicans and Democrats vied with each other in the 1950s and 60s to promote black voting in the South in order to win Black votes. Well that makes me feel bad.

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- ★ *The Declaration of Independence does not contain the word Democracy, right?* However it does allude to the idea of liberties and rights with its opening words which asserted a common idea among European Enlightenment thinkers of the time: that “all men are created equal.” The phrase was later used to advocate for women’s right to vote and civil rights for African Americans. Thomas Jefferson was 33 years old when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. Creating the draft reportedly took him just a day or two. Other members of the Committee of Five made a few changes, but Jefferson remained the main author. Jefferson’s draft drew on the language and ideas of several other documents, including the Virginia Declaration of Rights and his own version of a Virginia constitution.
- ★ *Can places with high levels of illiteracy (like Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, and Kansas) have voting and democracy?* In Gambia, citizens cast their votes by dropping marbles into color-coded metal drums with pictures of the candidates. Each drum is rigged with a bell, which the marble, after it’s dropped in, dings. (If the bell rings more than once, poll workers know someone has broken the rules.)
- ★ I’ve always wanted to be an astronaut and I’ve also always wanted to vote. Do I have to choose? Astronauts aboard the International Space Station have had the ability to vote since 1997, when Texas lawmakers passed a measure that allowed secure ballots to be sent to space by Mission Control in Houston, Texas. Once astronauts make their selections, their ballots—PDFs of the paper ballots they’d receive in the mail—are beamed back down to Earth, where clerks open the encoded documents and submit a hard copy of the astronaut’s ballot to be counted.
- ★ *I’ve always wanted to know what the world’s largest democracy is but I’ve always been embarrassed to ask.* The Republic of India is the world’s largest democracy; one-sixth of the global population lives there. *Dummy. That’s great but I learn best by listening. Could you please tell me more about Indian elections in a tasty rap?*
INDIA IS SO HUGE, ITS ELECTIONS CAN TAKE WEEKS. They count all the votes of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikhs.
India is home to more than 800 million eligible voters, that’s more ballots than Florida has boaters.
In order to accommodate an electorate of that size, the government holds elections over the course of weeks, or even months. Whoever said elections happen in just one day was really quite a dunce.
The Indian Prime Minister, his name’s Narendra Modi. If you don’t like him next time you shouldn’t vote, he.

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- ★ *Is the voting age the same in every country? And if not, could you make it so?* While you have to be 18 to vote in American federal elections, other countries' rules vary at their discretions. (Oh, sorry. Just rapping a bit.) Sixteen is the minimum voting age in Brazil, Scotland, Switzerland, Argentina, Austria, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Cuba. The highest minimum voting age in the world is 21. Singapore, Kuwait and Lebanon have this rule in place. Sorry, can't help you there. But no matter the election age, please don't drink and vote.
- ★ *I don't have to vote but my friend, Crocodile Dundee, lives in Australia. Is he lying to me when he says that by law he has to vote?* Your friend is lying to you about this name but he's not lying about voting. Registered voters in the United States don't have to vote, but other countries make abstaining from voting illegal. Called compulsory voting, countries like Singapore, Peru and Brazil have it on the books. Some countries have it but do not enforce it, like Costa Rica, Greece, and Mexico. **VOTING IS COMPULSORY IN AUSTRALIA!** Every Australian over 18 is required by law to register to vote and to participate in federal elections. Anyone who doesn't show up on Election Day is fined AU\$20 (around \$15). Failure to pay that fine results in even steeper penalties—up to AU\$180—and can result in a criminal charge. Dang!
- ★ *All the cool kids are talking about the fact that kids as young as 5 can rock the vote in Brazil. Is that true?* **KIDS AS YOUNG AS 16 CAN ROCK THE VOTE IN BRAZIL**, but not 5. Kids that age are just dumb. Have you ever talked to a five year old about electoral politics? I didn't think so. Don't try it. Since 1988, Brazilian citizens have had the right to vote at age 16. Sixteen and 17-year-olds are also eligible to vote in Austria, Nicaragua, and Argentina, and 17-year-olds can cast votes in Indonesia and Sudan. Select states in Germany have given 16-year-olds the vote in local elections, and in 2014, for the first time ever, Scottish teens aged 16 and 17 were allowed to vote on a referendum. Studies of elections in which 16- and 17-year-olds can participate have shown that giving young people the ability to vote may translate into a more engaged citizenry as those voters grow older. What's more, teens who choose to participate in elections are often as well informed about the candidates and the issues as their older counterparts.

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- ★ *In the U.S. we have to register to vote. My friend BanKi told me that this is sort of like having to vote twice. Do all people in all countries have to register to vote? And does that make the U.S. less democratic than Sweden?* SWEDISH AND FRENCH VOTERS ARE AUTOMATICALLY REGISTERED. People in France and Sweden don't need to worry about making time to register ahead of Election Day. The government automatically registers voters when they're eligible—in France, that's as soon as people turn 18. Sweden relies on tax registries to create lists of eligible citizens. And yes, in general, the more barriers to voting, the less democratic a country. And they invented Swedish Fish too, so I feel sort of bad for you Americans.
- ★ *I like the idea of voting but I would hate to have to go offline for even one second. Is there a way to vote online? Like, maybe could we have a voting booth in Fortnight?* This is going to sound crazy, but once, in 2018, I went offline. It was really weird. I didn't know what to do/ But after a few minutes I stopped crying and got on with my life. You should try it sometime, crybaby! IN ESTONIA, YOU CAN CAST YOUR VOTE ONLINE. WHAT!!!?!?! Since 2005, Estonians have had the ability to vote online instead of waiting in line at their local polling stations. Although in-person voting is still more popular, in 2015, more than 30 percent of Estonian voters took advantage of the online voting system. The Estonian system is workable because every citizen receives a scannable ID card and PIN, which he or she can use to fulfill a number of civic responsibilities, from filing taxes to paying library fines. (Although an Estonian's ID card and PIN are used to confirm his or her identity on Election Day, the vote itself is encrypted, rendering it anonymous.)
- ★ *Since the United States is the greatest country in the history of the world is it true that it has the highest voter turnout rate in the world?* VOTER TURNOUT IN THE U.S. IS EXTREMELY LOW COMPARED TO OTHER DEVELOPED COUNTRIES. According to a 2016 report about voter turnout in developed countries, just 53.6 percent of Americans performed their civic duty during the 2012 election cycle, which places the U.S. 31st out of 35 OECD nations. By contrast, Belgium saw the highest percentage of eligible voters turn out for its 2014 election; approximately 87.2 percent of Belgian citizens cast their votes.

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- ★ *North Korea is not a democracy, therefore North Korea must not hold elections, right?* ACTUALLY, NORTH KOREA HOLDS ELECTIONS. But they're far from democratic. Although a whopping 99.7 percent of the electorate participated in the 2015 local elections, citizens didn't have much of a choice when it came to choosing who they wanted to endorse. Everyone on the ballot was selected ahead of time by North Korea's ruling party; to vote, North Koreans simply had to drop a printout of the names in a box to indicate their support. A separate box was present at polling locations, which voters could use to register their rejection of the given candidates. However, all of the candidates chosen received 100 percent of the vote—which means either no one opted to dissent, or if they did, their votes weren't counted.
- ★ *Why do Americans vote on Tuesdays?* IN MOST PLACES, ELECTIONS ARE HELD ON SUNDAYS. Voters in the U.S. may head to the polls on Tuesdays, but the rest of the world prefers to save its votes for Sunday. Interestingly, countries in which English is the primary language tend to be the exception to this rule; in Canada, citizens vote on Mondays, while Brits vote on Thursdays, and Australians and New Zealanders on Saturdays. The American vote wasn't always limited to Tuesdays by law; instead, it's a holdover from the 19th century, when farmers were often forced to travel long distances to their polling stations, and needed enough time to make it back home in time for market day on Wednesday.
- ★ *Is the US a democracy?* Keep reading!