

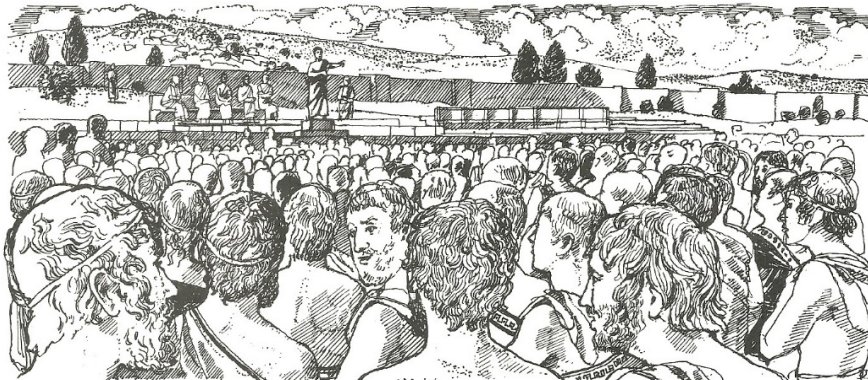
Ancient Athenian democracy

The citizens of Athens

In the 400s BC, the city-state of Athens had a very large population of about 250,000–300,000. About 50,000 were full citizens. An Athenian citizen had to be a male over the age of 18 whose father and mother had been born Athenians. The farmers in the territory around Athens were as much Athenian citizens as the potters, tailors, shoemakers and traders who lived in the heart of the city. Women, children, slaves and the foreigners who lived in the city could not be citizens.

The Assembly

All Athenian citizens had the right to attend, speak and vote at meetings of the Assembly. The Assembly discussed and voted on questions. Citizens voted by raising their hands. Votes were not counted: the officials of the Assembly judged which decision had the most hands showing.



A meeting of the Assembly. You can see the platform for the speakers.

Before a meeting of the Assembly, slaves owned by the city carried a long rope dripping with red paint across the market place. Anyone who was marked by the rope could be fined for being late for the meeting. Many citizens in the countryside found it hard to come to the city for meetings because they had ploughing or harvesting to do.

The Council

There was also a Council of 500 citizens who prepared business for the Assembly. It also organised the running of the city: roads, rubbish-collection, market places and many other things. Council members were chosen by lot and served for a year.

Elections and ostracism



This ostrakon has the name of a famous Athenian politician scratched on it.

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Every year the Athenians elected ten generals and several officials to check that the city's money had been used properly. The Assembly also decided whether to hold a special election called an ostracism. In an ostracism, people scratched the name of another citizen on a piece of pottery, called an *ostrakon*.

The citizen who got the most votes was sent away from the city and not allowed to return for ten years. This prevented someone becoming too powerful.