

Rule and Order in Greek City-States

By 750 B.C., the city-state, or **polis**, was the fundamental political unit in ancient Greece. A polis was made up of a city and its surrounding countryside, which included numerous villages. Most city-states controlled between 50 and 500 square miles of territory. They were often home to fewer than 10,000 residents. At the agora, or marketplace, or on a fortified hilltop called an **acropolis** (uh•KRAHP•uh•lih), citizens gathered to discuss city government.

Greek Political Structures Greek city-states had many different forms of government. (See the chart on page 128.) In some, a single person, called a king, ruled in a government called a **monarchy**. Others adopted an **aristocracy** (AR•ih•STAHK•ruh•see), a government ruled by a small group of noble, landowning families. These very rich families often gained political power after serving in a king's military cavalry. Later, as trade expanded, a new class of wealthy merchants and artisans emerged in some cities. When these groups became dissatisfied with aristocratic rule, they sometimes took power or shared it with the nobility. They formed an **oligarchy**, a government ruled by a few powerful people.

Tyrants Seize Power In many city-states, repeated clashes occurred between rulers and the common people. Powerful individuals, usually nobles or other wealthy citizens, sometimes seized control of the government by appealing to the common people for support. These rulers were called **tyrants**. Unlike today, tyrants generally were not considered harsh and cruel. Rather, they were looked upon as leaders who would work for the interests of the ordinary people. Once in power, for example, tyrants often set up building programs to provide jobs and housing for their supporters.

Athens Builds a Limited Democracy

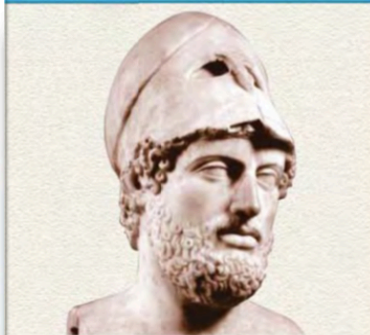
The idea of representative government also began to take root in some city-states, particularly Athens. Like other city-states, Athens went through power struggles between rich and poor. However, Athenians avoided major political upheavals by making timely reforms. Athenian reformers moved toward **democracy**, rule by the people. In Athens, citizens participated directly in political decision making.

Building Democracy The first step toward democracy came when a nobleman named Draco took power. In 621 B.C., Draco developed a legal code based on the idea that all Athenians, rich and poor, were equal under the law. Draco's code dealt very harshly with criminals, making death the punishment for practically every crime. It also upheld such practices as debt slavery, in which debtors worked as slaves to repay their debts.

More far-reaching democratic reforms were introduced by Solon (SO•luhn), who came to power in 594 B.C. Stating that no citizen should own another citizen, Solon outlawed debt slavery. He organized all Athenian citizens into four social classes according to wealth. Only members of the top three classes could hold political office. However, all citizens, regardless of class, could participate in the Athenian assembly. Solon also introduced the legal concept that any citizen could bring charges against wrongdoers.

Around 500 B.C., the Athenian leader Cleisthenes (KLYS•thuh•NEEZ) introduced further reforms. He broke up the power of the nobility by organizing citizens into ten groups based on where they lived rather than on their wealth. He also increased the power of the assembly by allowing all citizens to submit laws for debate and passage. Cleisthenes then created the Council of Five Hundred. This body proposed laws and counseled the assembly. Council members were chosen by lot, or at random.

The reforms of Cleisthenes allowed Athenian citizens to participate in a limited democracy. However, citizenship was restricted to a relatively small number of Athenians. Only free adult male property owners born in Athens were considered citizens. Women, slaves, and foreigners were excluded from citizenship and had few rights. **A**



Pericles 495–429 B.C.

Pericles came from a rich and high-ranking noble family. His aristocratic father had led the Athenian assembly and fought at the Battle of Salamis in the Persian Wars. His mother was the niece of Cleisthenes, the Athenian noble who had introduced important democratic reforms.

Pericles was well known for his political achievements as leader of Athens. Pericles the man, however, was harder to know. One historian wrote: "[He] no doubt, was a lonely man. . . . He had no friend . . . [and] he only went out [of his home] for official business."



Pericles' Plan for Athens

A wise and able statesman named Pericles led Athens during much of its golden age. Honest and fair, Pericles held onto popular support for 32 years. He was a skillful politician, an inspiring speaker, and a respected general. He so dominated the life of Athens from 461 to 429 B.C. that this period often is called the Age of Pericles. He had three goals: (1) to strengthen Athenian democracy, (2) to hold and strengthen the empire, and (3) to glorify Athens.

Stronger Democracy To strengthen democracy, Pericles increased the number of public officials who were paid salaries. Earlier in Athens, most positions in public office were unpaid. Thus, only wealthier Athenian citizens could afford to

hold public office. Now even the poorest citizen could serve if elected or chosen by lot. Consequently, Athens had more citizens engaged in self-government than any other city-state in Greece. This reform made Athens one of the most democratic governments in history.

The introduction of **direct democracy**, a form of government in which citizens rule directly and not through representatives, was an important legacy of Periclean Athens. Few other city-states practiced this style of government. In Athens, male citizens who served in the assembly established all the important government policies that affected the polis. In a speech honoring the Athenian war dead, Pericles expressed his great pride in Athenian democracy:

PRIMARY SOURCE **A**

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership in a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty.

PERICLES, "The Funeral Oration," from Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*

Athenian and United States Democracy

Athenian Democracy

- Citizens: male; 18 years old; born of citizen parents
- Laws voted on and proposed directly by assembly of all citizens
- Leader chosen by lot
- Executive branch composed of a council of 500 men
- Juries varied in size
- No attorneys; no appeals; one-day trials

Both

- Political power exercised by citizens
- Three branches of government
- Legislative branch passes laws
- Executive branch carries out laws
- Judicial branch conducts trials with paid jurors

U.S. Democracy

- Citizens: born in United States or completed citizenship process
- Representatives elected to propose and vote on laws
- Elected president
- Executive branch made up of elected and appointed officials
- Juries composed of 12 jurors
- Defendants and plaintiffs have attorneys; long appeals process

The Early Republic

Around 600 B.C., an Etruscan became king of Rome. In the decades that followed, Rome grew from a collection of hilltop villages to a city that covered nearly 500 square miles. Various kings ordered the construction of Rome's first temples and public centers—the most famous of which was the Forum, the heart of Roman political life.

The last king of Rome was Tarquin the Proud. A harsh tyrant, he was driven from power in 509 B.C. The Romans declared they would never again be ruled by a king. Instead, they established a republic, from the Latin phrase *res publica*, which means “public affairs.” A **republic** is a form of government in which power rests with citizens who have the right to vote for their leaders. In Rome, citizenship with voting rights was granted only to free-born male citizens.

Patricians and Plebeians In the early republic, different groups of Romans struggled for power. One group was the **patricians**, the wealthy landowners who held most of the power. The other important group was the **plebeians**, the common farmers, artisans, and merchants who made up the majority of the population.

The patricians inherited their power and social status. They claimed that their ancestry gave them the authority to make laws for Rome. The plebeians were citizens of Rome with the right to vote. However, they were barred by law from holding most important government positions. In time, Rome's leaders allowed the plebeians to form their own assembly and elect representatives called **tribunes**. Tribunes protected the rights of the plebeians from unfair acts of patrician officials. **A**

Twelve Tables An important victory for the plebeians was to force the creation of a written law code. With laws unwritten, patrician officials often interpreted the law to suit themselves. In 451 B.C., a group of ten officials began writing down Rome's laws. The laws were carved on twelve tablets, or tables, and hung in the Forum. They became the basis for later Roman law. The Twelve Tables established the idea that all free citizens had a right to the protection of the law.

Government Under the Republic In the first century B.C., Roman writers boasted that Rome had achieved a balanced government. What they meant was that their government had taken the best features of a monarchy (government by a king), an aristocracy (government by nobles), and a democracy (government by the people—see the comparison above of Rome to the United States). Rome had two officials called **consuls**. Like kings, they commanded the army and directed the government. However, their power was limited. A consul's term was only one year long. The same person could not be elected consul again for ten years. Also, one consul could always overrule, or veto, the other's decisions.

The **senate** was the aristocratic branch of Rome's government. It had both legislative and administrative functions in the republic. Its 300 members were chosen from the upper class of Roman society. Later, plebeians were allowed in the senate. The senate exercised great influence over both foreign and domestic policy.

The assemblies represented the more democratic side of the government. For example, an assembly organized by the plebeians, the Tribal Assembly, elected the tribunes and made laws for the common people—and later for the republic itself.

In times of crisis, the republic could appoint a **dictator**—a leader who had absolute power to make laws and command the army. A dictator's power lasted for only six months. Dictators were chosen by the consuls and then elected by the senate.



Ancient Rome
500bc – 500ad

Comparing Republican Governments

	Rome	United States of America
Executive	• Two consuls, elected by the assembly for one year—chief executives of the government and commanders-in-chief of the army.	• A president, elected by the people for four years—chief executive of the government and commander-in-chief of the army.
Legislative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senate of 300 members, chosen from aristocracy for life—controls foreign and financial policies, advises consuls. • Centuriate Assembly, all citizen-soldiers are members for life—selects consuls, makes laws. • Tribal Assembly, citizens grouped according to where they live are members for life—elects tribunes and makes laws. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senate of 100 members, elected by the people for six-year terms—makes laws, advises president on foreign policy. • House of Representatives of 435 members, elected by the people for two years—makes laws, originates revenue bills.
Judicial	• Praetors, eight judges chosen for one year by Centuriate Assembly—two oversee civil and criminal courts (the others govern provinces).	• Supreme Court, nine justices appointed for life by president—highest court, hears civil and criminal appeals cases.
Legal code	• Twelve Tables—a list of rules that was the basis of Roman legal system	• U.S. Constitution—basic law of the United States
Citizenship	• All adult male landowners	• All native-born or naturalized adults

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

1. **Comparing** What similarities do you see in the governments of the Roman Republic and the United States?
2. **Drawing Conclusions** Which government seems more democratic? Why?