

## Athenian democracy

### What was Athenian democracy?

In 508BCE, Cleisthenes became the ruler of Athens. Cleisthenes changed the political structure of Athens. He was one of the earliest rulers to support Athenian democracy and introduced *demokratia*, which means 'rule by the people'.

Athenian democracy was structured in three separate parts: the *Ekklesia*, the *Boule*, and the *Dikasteria*:

- The *Boule* were responsible for day-to-day government. This was a council of 500 men who were chosen by random selection. These men served on the council for one year. They were not permitted to serve for two consecutive years. The *Boule* represented the 139 districts of Attica, the city-state which included Athens. The *Boule* met every day. They decided what laws were given to the *Ekklesia* to discuss. Therefore, they had a lot of control over Athenian democracy.
- The *Ekklesia* was a group of people who were in charge of writing the laws. Any male citizen could attend the meetings, no matter what their social class. The *Ekklesia* met 40 times a year at a hillside auditorium called the *Pnyx*. They made decisions on war and trade, and were responsible for electing magistrates. Laws were decided by majority vote. The *Ekklesia* had the power to expel any citizens from Athens for 10 years!
- The *Dikasteria* was a court that handled the lawsuits and trials. Every day, 500 men were appointed to and paid for their work on the *Dikasteria*. Anyone elected to the *Dikasteria* had to be over 30 years of age. The people brought the cases to the *Dikasteria* to argue them. They had to decide if the person was guilty or not guilty. The Athenian people often used the *Dikasteria* to embarrass or punish people they did not like!

### Who could vote in Athenian democracy?

**Citizens** could vote for every law. However, only men who had been in the army were counted as citizens.

Athenians had officials to run the **government**. Officials were chosen by lottery, with names drawn by random selection so that every citizen had the chance to become part of the government.

A few important positions were voted on: the person who was in charge of money and taxes, and the people who ran the army.

Although Athenian democracy did not last very long, it had spread to other city-states and it became influential across the world. Most countries today claim to follow some form of democracy.