**What is representative democracy?**

In simple terms, representative democracy is about you, as someone who lives in the county, voting to elect someone to make decisions on your behalf. In the UK, this could be in the UK Parliament in Westminster, the parliaments of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland or in your local council elections. Generally, states can choose to limit the right to vote. Some countries, for example, choose to only allow national citizens to vote, or set a minimum age.

You can find out when your next elections are (to vote for people to represent you) on [this website](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information?ContensisTextOnly=true).

You are allowed to vote at different ages depending on where you live and what elections you are voting in. For example, in Scotland and Wales, you can vote in some elections when you are 16. You have to be 18 to vote in UK Parliament elections.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland because these are countries as part of the United Kingdom, there are two governments which control the laws and rules of the country. For example, in Scotland, The Scottish Government is responsible for things like health (the NHS), education and crime (devolved matters). The UK Government is responsible for things like defence (the armed forces), drugs policy and work and pensions rules.

Watch this video for more information about representative democracy:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/welcome-your-vote/resources-14-18-year-olds?country=335>

In representative democracy the elected representatives make decisions for the people living in the country on a day-to-day basis. To get peoples insights on difficult decisions, forms of direct, participatory or deliberative democracy can be used as well.

**What is participative democracy?**

“*Participative democracy, far from weakening representative democracy, can strengthen it. ….People speak with many voices, expressing differing values and interests. The task of the elected representative is to seek to reconcile, to balance and in the end to judge*” (Professor John Stewart, in [The Nature of British Local Government](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Nature-British-Government-Beyond-Centre/dp/0333665694/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1328358249&sr=1-1)*,* 2000).

You may have already been involved in some forms of participatory democracy without even realising it! For example, some elements of youth work involves participatory democracy. Taking part in focus groups, citizen forums, design workshops or responding to a consultation online are all forms of participatory democracy.

Simply put, this is about giving people more chances to have a say and influence decisions which are made about them – because voting once every few years in elections (representative democracy) sometimes is not often enough. Decision makers sometimes want to find out more details about particular issues and how they affect groups within our communities, for example, how changes to local bus services may affect young people. There are likely to be less rules about who can take part, e.g. people below the age of 16. This is participative democracy.

**What is deliberative democracy?**

Deliberative democracy is about processes which are used to explore issues which no one has any ‘easy answers’ for. Like how to regenerate a town centre, or tackle climate change. You may have heard the term ‘citizens’ assembly’ or ‘citizens’ panel’ before – these are processes which are deliberative.

Deliberation is the act of learning more about an issue (for example, by hearing from expert speakers) and then discussing what you learn and your views with others. It is not debating. Deliberation involves listening to other points of view and sometimes changing your mind! People come to decisions as a whole group, rather than as individuals. This is called consensus decision-making.

An important part of deliberative democracy is the recruitment process. People are recruited to take part by random selection – sometimes a letter is sent to a large number of addresses within an area and people sign-up to take part this way. From the people who sign-up to take part, a smaller group of people (for example, 50 to 100 people) are selected to represent the population of the area as much as possible. This means that if 5% of the area’s population are black, then as far as possible 5% of the people recruited will be too.

Deliberative democracy processes are normally run by expert organisations and involve a lot of people to run them. They are expensive and therefore don’t happen frequently.

**Direct democracy**

This type of democracy is when a vote is put to citizens who are eligible to vote (the government sets the rules again for who can vote – like with representative democracy). But instead of voting for particular people or parties, voters choose their answer to a question. For example, in Scotland in 2014, direct democracy was used in the form of the Independence Referendum. In Ireland in 2015, people voted in a referendum on equal marriage. These are examples of direct democracy.

**The differences between all three types of democracy at a glance...**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of participants** | **Type of participation** | **How people get involved** |
| **Deliberative democracy** | Relatively small (but representative) groups. This means that groups will broadly reflect the people who make up Scotland as a country or the local area they are held in/for. | Deliberation. This means that people who take part are   * Well informed about a topic (they receive information/presentations during the process) * Consider other people’s views * Arrive at a public judgement about ‘what they as a group can strongly agree on’.   Everyone taking part follows the same process. This process is normally led by experts. | Random selection with stratification.  This means that people are randomly invited to take part (normally by a letter through the post). Of those who say they would like to take part, a group of people will be created which broadly reflects the diversity of the people who make up Scotland based on our population.  A specialist company would usually run the recruitment on behalf of a local council or government organisation. |
| **Participatory democracy** | Any size – people who take part are normally affected by a decision or issue, actively interested or the general public. | More participation:   * Lots of ways to take part * All areas of decision-making from start to finish * Anyone can choose to be involved * Can make decisions collectively (as a group) or as individuals. | Self-selected.  Open access participation to enable as many people as possible to take part, sharing the experience.  Efforts needed to reach everyone in a community – reducing barriers to them being able to take part. |
| **Representative democracy** | All adults in the population.  Adults (either 16+ or 18+ depending on the election & country) elect representatives to make decisions on our behalf, for example, in our local council or government. | People take part by registering to vote and then voting on election days.  Every person in Scotland is represented by elected representatives which is different depending on where you live. | Registering to vote. You only have to register to vote once and you don’t need to register for every election as long as you haven’t changed your name or moved to a new house since the last time you voted. |