The Influence of Classical Athens on the Founding Fathers of the USA

ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΕΙΡΑΙΩΣ

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family and mentors, whose unwavering support and guidance made this journey possible.

Summary

This thesis explores how the democratic ideals of Classical Athens shaped – and were reshaped within – the political thought of the American Founding Fathers and the institutions of the early United States. The text starts by explaining three core Athenian principles which include *demokratia* (people's governance) and *isonomia* (legal equality) and *eleutheria* (political freedom) and the requirement for citizens to actively participate in governance. The text compares Athens' direct democracy system which operated through the Assembly and Council and popular courts to its extensive exclusion of women and slaves and resident foreigners who lacked political rights despite its claims of freedom and equality.

The study shows that the Founding Fathers encountered Athenian ideas through a classical education and Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau, who reinterpreted Greek political thought for the modern state. Figures like Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton drew on Athenian ideals of civic virtue, popular sovereignty and mixed government, but rejected direct democracy as unstable and prone to demagoguery and factionalism. Instead, they built a republican system of representative democracy with checks and balances, federalism, staggered elections and an independent judiciary, preserving Athenian ethical principles (citizen authority, rule of law, accountability) while adapting them to a large, diverse republic.

The thesis examines Athenian democracy alongside the U.S. Constitution to show their common dedication to popular governance and legal equality and institutional checks on power but emphasizes substantial distinctions regarding size and organizational design and participation levels. It argues that the influence of Athens is often overstated: Roman republicanism and Enlightenment theory were at least as decisive, and much of what the Founders knew of Athens came through later interpreters. The two societies of Athens and early America demonstrated a contradictory nature because they declared freedom and equality yet maintained slavery and discriminatory practices (such as Athenian slavery and the U.S. Three-Fifths Compromise).

The thesis ends with a summary of essential knowledge about modern democratic systems in its final sections. The paper demonstrates how Athenian civic education methods and public discussion practices and auditing systems and official term restrictions and public oversight systems create sustainable models for citizen participation and official accountability despite the impossibility of implementing direct democracy at Athenian dimensions. At the same time, Athens stands as a warning about demagoguery, short-term decision-making, economic inequality and civil strife, all of which remain contemporary dangers. The conclusion establishes that democracy exists as an ongoing development throughout history because Athenian principles passed through Enlightenment and American constitutional frameworks to shape current discussions about democratic participation and institutional reform in modern digital and interconnected societies.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The ancient city-state of Athens established the foundation for democracy which people consider the most fair system of government. During the 5th century BCE Classical Athens established a revolutionary political framework which incorporated citizen involvement in governance alongside equal legal rights and group-based decision processes. As Dahl (1998, p. 12) explains, "Among the Greek democracies, that of Athens was far and away the most important... of incomparable influence on political philosophy, and often held up later as a prime example of citizen participation."The term 'demokratia' was coined by the Athenians, signifying rule by the people. Through direct participation and public debate and civic duty the institutionalization of popular sovereignty became both the basis for democratic theory and a cultural ideal which appeared in philosophical works by Plato and Aristotle and subsequent thinkers.

The American Founding Fathers from the late 18th century established a new system of government which combined liberty with representative democracy and fair justice. As Richard (1995, p. 133) notes, their education was steeped in classical literature and they "turned directly to the ancients for mixed government theory."The political systems and philosophies of antiquity received constant references from Thomas Jefferson and John Adams and James Madison. Adams delivered his warning about democracy through these words: “Democracy never lasts long. The species completes its life cycle before it can reach its full natural lifespan. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide” (Adams, 1851, p. 484). This quote reflects both an admiration for and a cautious critique of Athenian governance. The Founders used Athens as their inspiration but they also learned from its negative aspects because they feared how factionalism and majority tyranny and political instability could emerge.

The research investigates how the Founding Fathers of America used Athenian democratic principles to develop their own distinct system of government. The book explores how these principles evolved to match the political environment of 18th-century America which resulted in a representative democracy that continues to exist today. The study investigates how these thinkers interacted throughout history to understand the historical growth of American democracy and its enduring effects.

1.2 Key Political Concepts: Defining Democracy and Republicanism

Under the fundamental definition of democracy citizens either maintain direct control of power or they select representatives who exercise authority. The citizens of Classical Athens practiced direct democracy because they took an active role in creating decisions. According to Ober (1989, p. 22), "The Greek word demokratia can be translated literally as 'the people possess the political power'... and citizenship was determined by one's status as a free Athenian male."The system granted power to numerous citizens although it barred women and slaves and metics from participating in the democratic process.

The Athenian democracy functioned through public gatherings and regular citizen involvement and random selection of public officials. As Dahl (1998, p. 12) elaborates, "At its heart and center was an assembly in which all citizens were entitled to participate... the main method for selecting citizens for other public duties was by a lottery."The system created a powerful civic identity because citizens understood that political involvement was their fundamental duty as citizens. Plato together with other critics expressed doubts about the participatory system because they believed democracy might result in unstable rule by the masses.

The American system of government combines elements from Athenian democracy and Roman republicanism through its adoption of power division and constitutional framework. As Montesquieu (1748/1989, p. xxv) asserted, "Political liberty is the result of the separation of powers."The U.S. Constitution needed to preserve civic virtue and stop corruption according to Jefferson and the Anti-Federalists who wanted structural safeguards to be included. The system of government required a delicate approach to maintain personal freedoms while achieving proper administration of the extensive and varied republic.

The system of government known as republicanism unites democratic principles with protective measures that stop power from becoming too centralized. Rahe (2001, p. 57) explains how the Founders established a power distribution system with built-in mechanisms to stop factions from seizing authority. The design united philosophical concepts with operational needs for running a federal system which spanned various states with their individual goals.

The correct understanding of these differences enables us to evaluate how the Founding Fathers received Athenian principles and what degree of similarity exists between American democracy and its ancient roots.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

The influence of Classical Athens on the political philosophy of the Founding Fathers is a topic that warrants a detailed examination. This thesis seeks to answer the following key questions:

How did the democratic principles of Classical Athens shape the political ideas of the Founding Fathers?

In what ways were these principles reinterpreted to align with the socio-political realities of the United States in the 18th century?

What are the limitations of attributing the development of American democracy to Athenian ideals?

The primary objectives of this research are:

To trace the intellectual pathways through which the Founding Fathers encountered Athenian democratic principles.

To evaluate the extent to which these principles influenced the foundational documents of the United States.

To critically analyze the limitations and exclusions inherent in both Athenian and early American democratic systems.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study of historical elements which shaped political systems allows researchers to trace the full historical development of governmental structures. The research between Classical Athens and the United States demonstrates how political experiments from antiquity continue to influence modern society. The document presents various democratic methods which prove to political theorists that democracy can adapt and shows how the Founding Fathers developed their political ideas through history. The continuous advancement of these concepts shows how political systems transform by reinterpreting and reorganizing their structures when dealing with new situations.

The research contributes fresh knowledge to contemporary democracy research by examining fundamental democratic values. According to Dahl (1998) democracy represents an ongoing system which develops through time by incorporating lessons from past events and cultural changes. The Founders used Athenian democratic principles to establish new constitutional systems through their implementation. The book encourages readers to think about how

democratic systems will transform their operations in response to social developments and technological progress and ongoing conflicts between individual freedom and social fairness.

The research demonstrates how both Athenian democracy and early American democracy failed to include women and enslaved people and indigenous populations in their political systems. Ober (1989, p. 5) emphasizes that in Athens, "citizenship rights were limited to freeborn males... the community of franchise-holders was less coextensive with the whole society than in modern democracies."The United States established its first republic through laws which denied voting rights and basic freedoms based on racial background and gender and property ownership thus challenging both the democratic principles of equality and the ability of contemporary reforms to resolve past discriminatory practices.

1.5 Methodology and Approach

The research uses historical-comparative methods to study how Classical Athens shaped the Founding Fathers of America through three distinct sections.

Primary Source Analysis – Key texts such as Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Politics are analyzed for Athenian democratic principles, alongside the Federalist Papers and founding documents. The texts contain direct references to ancient times as well as hidden philosophical ideas about civic duties and political leadership and moral excellence.

Secondary Source Analysis – Scholarly works like Richard's (1995) The Founders and the Classics and Rahe's (2001) Republics Ancient and Modern provide contextual insights into classical influence on American political thought. This body of scholarship allows the study to position the Founders within a broader intellectual tradition that bridged ancient republicanism and Enlightenment rationalism.

The paper conducts a comparative evaluation of Athenian democracy and the U.S. Constitution through an analysis of their shared and distinct features regarding representation and participation and institutional balance. The Founders dedicated special focus to their method of classical idea selection which they transformed into a system for governing a pluralistic republic through constitutional means.

The research combines various analytical approaches to study Athenian democratic principles within American founding documents and their ongoing impact on modern political institutions.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into eight chapters, each addressing a specific aspect of the research topic:

- **Chapter 2:** Provides an overview of the political and philosophical principles of Classical Athens, focusing on its democratic structures and intellectual contributions.
- **Chapter 3:** Examines the educational and ideological influences on the Founding Fathers, with an emphasis on their engagement with classical texts.
- **Chapter 4:** Conducts a comparative analysis of Athenian democracy and the U.S. Constitution, highlighting areas of alignment and divergence.
- **Chapter 5:** Discusses the influence of Athenian ideals on foundational American documents, including case studies from the *Federalist Papers* and the *Declaration of Independence*.
- **Chapter 6:** Critiques the limitations of Athenian influence, including issues of exclusion and misinterpretation.
- **Chapter 7:** Evaluates the legacy of Athenian principles in contemporary governance, exploring their relevance in modern democracies.
- **Chapter 8:** Concludes the thesis by summarizing the findings and suggesting areas for future research.

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Chapter 2: Classical Athens: Political Philosophy and Governance

2.1 The Athenian Democratic System

The city of Classical Athens created a revolutionary political framework which became the foundation for numerous democratic systems throughout history. Through its democratic form known as dēmokratia power rested directly with citizens who formed the population of the city known as the dēmos. Under Athenian democracy citizens directly participated in all legislative and judicial processes which differed from contemporary representative democratic systems. The democratic system developed through Cleisthenes' political reforms in 508/507 BCE to break aristocratic power structures and build a broader system of governance.

Three key institutions formed Athenian democracy: Ekklesia (Assembly), Boule (Council of 500) and Heliaia (People's Court). Every male citizen in Athens attended the Ekklesia to vote on warfare, diplomatic matters and new laws through majority rule. The Boule took responsibility for creating meeting plans for the Ekklesia and managing public administration duties. Lot selection for Boule members demonstrated Athenian dedication to equality and protected the system from powerful structures developing. The political system of Classical Athens became the model for countless societies to follow during many centuries. Power in dēmokratia directly belonged to citizens who formed the dēmos population. Athenian democracy demanded that its citizens actively participate in both legislative and judicial processes which differed from present-day representative democracies. Through the political reforms of Cleisthenes in 508/507 BCE, aristocratic rule was abolished while a broader system of governance emerged. The principal institutions of Athenian democracy included the Ekklesia (Assembly), the Boule (Council of 500), and the Heliaia (People's Court). Through majority votes all male citizens of Athens participated in war decisions and diplomacy matters and legal creation within the Ekklesia legislative body. The Boule functioned to set the agenda for Ekklesia meetings alongside management of administrative duties. Members of the Boule received their positions through random selection to defend Athenian values of equality and prevent powerful groups from forming.Similarly, the Heliaia provided a judicial system where citizens acted as jurors, further embedding democratic ideals into Athenian governance (Cartledge, 2016, p.117).

While Athens prided itself on equality, this system was not without exclusions. Citizenship was restricted to adult males born of Athenian parents, excluding women, slaves, and non-Athenians (*metics*). This limited the participation to a fraction of the population, revealing

inherent contradictions in the Athenian claim to universal equality and liberty (Ober, 1989, p. 5). Nonetheless, the active involvement of citizens in governance and the absence of a centralized authority were revolutionary for their time and continue to resonate as hallmarks of democratic governance.

2.2 Core Philosophical Principles: Democracy, Freedom, and Citizenship

The foundation of Athenian democracy rested on three essential principles which included active citizenship together with equality (isonomia) and freedom (eleutheria). The basic philosophical ideas of Classical Greece operated independently of political systems to create the intellectual environment of that period. The Athenian political system granted citizens full political rights which required them to actively participate in public affairs. Active participation gained moral approval because it helped participants develop a shared sense of community responsibility and collective leadership.

Every citizen under Athenian law received equal voting rights through the principle of isonomia regardless of their social position or economic status. The concept of equal law application stood as a direct opposition to oligarchic systems found throughout other Greek city-states because political power in those systems rested with the elite class. The concept of eleutheria (freedom) reinforced individual autonomy to make choices while operating under the collective governance of the polis. Athens granted political freedom to its citizens through public discussions and voting procedures which allowed citizens to make collective decisions (Raaflaub, 2007, p.229).

The Athenian democracy operated through two main elements which included official accountability and transparent operations. The combination of random official selection and time-limited terms distributed power across the population and protected against corruption. The voting process of ostracism allowed citizens to remove dangerous individuals which proved that the system had built-in mechanisms for maintaining equilibrium. The governance framework established the principle that power should not rest with a single person or group thus shaping the future design of the American political framework.

2.3 Philosophical Foundations: Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero

Three prominent philosophers namely Plato and Aristotle together with Cicero significantly shaped the intellectual discussions about Athenian democracy. These thinkers while expressing their negative views about democracy made essential contributions to the study of governance

and ethics as well as citizenship. The ideas of these thinkers established both ancient intellectual traditions and shaped the Enlightenment movement and the creation of modern democratic institutions.

Plato and the Critique of Democracy

Plato became known as a major critic of democratic political systems. The Republic presents his perfect state under philosopher-kings because he believed democracy gave power to uneducated citizens. Plato maintained that effective governance needed both wisdom and expertise which he believed were absent from voting-based systems. Plato observed that democratic leadership resulted in demagoguery because leaders exploited public emotions to seize power instead of making decisions through rational methods. Plato first recognized the instability and tendency toward excess in democratic systems which later became a main focus of political theory development (Plato, 2000).

Plato developed his doubts about democracy after witnessing the Athenian execution of Socrates which he saw as proof that democracy could turn into tyranny when public opinion controlled the government. The American Founding Father James Madison shared Plato's concern about democracy evolving into mob rule when left without proper oversight in Federalist No. 10.

Aristotle and the Mixed Government Model

Aristotle adopted a practical approach to learning which stood in contrast to the teachings of Plato. In Politics, he classified democracy as one of several forms of government and analyzed its strengths and weaknesses. Aristotle acknowledged that democracy achieved equality and citizen involvement yet he saw how it could lead to factional conflicts and majority rule tyranny. Aristotle (1998) suggested that a mixed constitution which unites democratic and oligarchic and monarchical elements would create the most stable and just system of government. His ideas of balancing governance structures would later influence the Enlightenment and the Founding Fathers, particularly James Madison and Alexander Hamilton’s vision for checks and balances in the U.S. Constitution.

Cicero and Republicanism

Although a Roman thinker, Cicero’s ideas on republicanism, civic virtue, and the separation of powers deeply influenced the Founding Fathers. In De Republica Cicero established that law

must be respected while power needs to be limited through checks and that leaders must maintain their ethical duties. The belief in people-driven governance which he supports matches the Athenian system and the constitutional structure of the United States.

2.4 Limitations of Athenian Democracy

The system of Athenian democracy introduced new political concepts but it contained major structural weaknesses. The system demonstrated a major weakness because it operated as an exclusionary system. Citizenship, and therefore political participation, was limited to adult males of Athenian descent, excluding women, slaves, and metics (resident foreigners). The voting rights of Athenian democracy were limited to 10-20% of the population which made their claim to represent the dēmos invalid according to Ober (1989, p.5).

The Athenian democratic system used slave labor which revealed an essential flaw between its declared principles. The Athenian democracy promoted freedom and equality among its citizens but its economy and society operated through the extensive use of enslaved people. Slaves received no political rights or personal freedom which established a deep social inequality in a society that valued liberty. The two aspects of Athenian democracy create barriers for implementing its democratic principles in modern political structures.

2.5 Legacy of Athenian Democracy

The historical impact of Athenian democracy continues to be important even though it had its limitations. The Athenian democracy established three fundamental principles which guide political systems across the world today: citizen involvement and equal legal protection and government official responsibility. Through its collective governance approach the Athenian experiment proved that political power does not need to belong to a small elite group.

The political discussions of this time established fundamental principles which Cicero and Rousseau later applied in their political theories. The Athenian system served as a historical reference for American democratic principles when the Founding Fathers built their intellectual structure. The American system uses representative democracy but its political framework continues to follow the Athenian principle that citizens should maintain control.

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Chapter 3: The Ideological Foundations of the Founding Fathers

3.1 Intellectual Influences on the Founding Fathers

The Founding Fathers of the United States were profoundly shaped by a confluence of intellectual traditions, including Classical Antiquity and the Enlightenment. The political philosophy of the Founding Fathers developed through their study of classical texts which included works by Aristotle and Plato and Cicero and Polybius that taught them about governance and liberty and civic virtue. The educational curriculum of 18th-century colonial America taught Greek and Roman literature to students who would become leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and Alexander Hamilton (Richard, 1994).

Ancient Athens stands as a major historical example of political development in human history. Athens operated through direct democracy yet the Founding Fathers understood that this system would not work for a big and varied nation. The new nation adopted specific principles from the original system which included citizen participation together with checks and balances and the rule of law. Through an Enlightenment perspective the Founding Fathers interacted with these ideas as European thinkers John Locke Montesquieu and Rousseau reinterpreted ancient concepts for modern governance challenges. The Founding Fathers combined classical and Enlightenment principles to develop a political system which matched the requirements of the new American Republic.

The Founding Fathers found inspiration in historical governance systems and power structures which they studied from ancient Athens and Rome. The Founding Fathers examined Athenian democracy's failures to learn about the rapid shifts in public opinion which made direct democracy vulnerable to demagogic manipulation. The political system of Athens collapsed because its people fought against each other while making poor military decisions during the Peloponnesian War. The historical understanding of the Founding Fathers resulted in their development of a political framework which combined democratic principles with protective measures against both unchecked popular rule and absolute power.

3.2 The Enlightenment and Its Role in Shaping Ideals

During the Enlightenment period known as the Age of Reason the Founding Fathers developed their ideological foundations. Enlightenment thought emphasized reason and progress and human potential to develop better political and social systems which the Founders used to create their theoretical framework based on ancient Athenian lessons.

The core belief of Enlightenment philosophy stated that governments gain their proper authority through the voluntary consent of their citizens. The Founders transformed Athenian direct democracy into representative democracy because they needed to govern a large and varied nation. The Founders chose indirect representation instead of direct democracy because Enlightenment critics had shown how Athens' system led to mob rule and instability (Madison, 1788).

The ideas presented by Locke about natural rights and social contracts which drew from classical concepts of justice and equality shaped Thomas Jefferson when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. The Athenian concept of isonomia (equality before the law) inspired Jefferson to write that all men are equal yet he struggled with the dual nature of equality and exclusion that existed in Athenian and American societies (Jefferson, 1776; Ober, 1989).Similarly, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* provided a crucial analysis of governance structures, advocating for the separation of powers as a safeguard against tyranny. His analysis, which drew upon both the Roman Republic and Athenian democracy, resonated strongly with the Founders, leading them to implement a system of checks and balances in the U.S. Constitution (Montesquieu, 1748).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, another key Enlightenment thinker, also played an indirect role in shaping American democracy through his theories on the general will and direct civic engagement. While the Founders rejected Rousseau's call for radical direct democracy, they appreciated his arguments about civic virtue and the moral responsibility of governments to serve the public interest. His critiques of aristocratic privilege and unchecked monarchy reinforced the Founders' commitment to a system where power derived from the people, albeit in a structured and representative manner.

3.3 Classical Education and the Study of Greek Texts

The political thought of the Founding Fathers developed from their classical education. Elite education in 18th-century colonial America relied on Greek and Latin texts as its fundamental foundation. The educational institutions of Harvard and William & Mary focused on teaching ancient authors' works thus providing the Founders with deep knowledge of Athenian and Roman political and philosophical backgrounds (Richard, 1994).

Aristotle's Politics together with Plato's Republic and Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War served as essential texts that shaped the Founders' political ideas. These works provided both inspiration and cautionary lessons. The Founders supported Aristotle's recommendation

of a mixed government system which featured democratic and oligarchic elements to establish their stable republican framework. Plato's analysis of democracy showed how its weaknesses made it prone to demagogues and instability which strengthened the necessity for protective institutional measures. Through his historical account of the Peloponnesian War Thucydides provided crucial lessons about democratic survival during crises which proved valuable for the newly formed American Republic (Aristotle, 1998; Plato, 2000; Thucydides, 1998).

The Founding Fathers studied classical texts as more than academic material because they used these principles to solve political problems they encountered. Alexander Hamilton used historical examples from antiquity in The Federalist Papers to support his arguments for a powerful central government. James Madison used Aristotle's concepts about factionalism to establish a system which managed conflicting interests while preserving social unity (Madison, 1787).

3.4 Key Figures: Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, and Their Greek Inspirations

The intellectual work of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and Alexander Hamilton shows how the Founding Fathers adapted Greek concepts to create American institutions.

Thomas Jefferson: The classical antiquity received great admiration from Jefferson through his writings and political philosophy. He chose Athenian democracy as his system of governance but recognized its multiple shortcomings. The belief of Jefferson in an educated citizenry as the basis of democracy followed Athenian principles but he faced the problem of slavery and social exclusion that existed in Athens (Jefferson, 1776).

James Madison: Madison is often called the “Father of the Constitution” because his work was shaped by classical and Enlightenment ideas. Federalist No. 10 by Madison showed how factionalism threatened the stability of government in a manner that Aristotle had previously warned about. Madison supported checks and balances as a solution to Athenian democracy problems which Montesquieu criticized while endorsing mixed government (Madison, 1787).

Alexander Hamilton developed his political beliefs through practical historical knowledge which incorporated the experiences of Athens and Rome. He used the Federalist Papers to explain why Athens’ direct democracy failed which proved the need for representation. Hamilton believed Athenian democracy needed substantial changes to work in modern governance systems (Hamilton,1787).

The Founders established a political system through their combination of classical and modern ideas which created institutional safeguards to defend democratic principles.

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Chapter 4: Comparing Political Systems

4.1 Similarities Between Athenian Democracy and the U.S. Constitution

Despite being separated by centuries and vastly different cultural contexts, Athenian democracy and the American political system share foundational principles rooted in the sovereignty of the people and institutional accountability (Bederman, 2008).[1] The Founding Fathers, educated in the classical tradition, were deeply influenced by the political structures of Ancient Greece, particularly Athens. Many of the democratic principles embedded in the U.S. Constitution, such as governance, participation, and equality before the law, can be traced to Athenian concepts of democracy (Ober, 1989).[2]

Active Participation in Governance

The Athenian democracy created a unique political system which demanded active citizen involvement in governing the state. The Ekklesia (Assembly) institution let citizens create laws which they could then vote on while the Heliaia (People's Court) allowed citizens to participate as jurors who made decisions in judicial cases. The Founding Fathers used this system as a model to create their framework which established power through popular consent. The United States upholds this principle through its congressional and judicial systems which enable elected officials and citizen juries to serve as representatives of public interests. Though indirect in nature, the American system preserves the essence of Athenian ideals by embedding citizen influence into legislative and judicial processes. (Bederman, 2008; Cartledge, 2016; Ober, 1989). [3][4][5][6]

The United States operates through elected representatives who represent citizens whereas Athens used direct democracy which allowed all citizens to participate directly in governance. The mechanisms of referenda and public hearings function to maintain the participatory character of Athenian democracy. Digital platform development has increased citizen

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[1] Bederman, D. J. (2008). The classical foundations of the American Constitution: Prevailing wisdom (p. 1). Cambridge University Press.
[2] Ober, J. (1989). Mass and elite in democratic Athens: Rhetoric, ideology, and the power of the people (p. 9). Princeton University Press.
[3] Ober, J. (1989: 134).
"The Assembly represented …of his state and of himself."
[4] Ober, J. (1989: 136).
"The forums of Athenian … the agora, and the theater."
[5] Bederman, D. J. (2008: 51).
"This intellectual exercise … and modern confederations."
[6] Cartledge, P. (2016: 21).
"Decrees… or forty times per annum."

participation because it enables people to participate more actively in policy discussions and decision-making processes. The current implementation of participatory budgeting and town hall meetings as direct democracy methods supports the democratic principles which Ober (1989) and Bederman (2008) identified in ancient Athens.[7][8]

Equality Before the Law

The Athenian belief in isonomia which means equal treatment under the law exists as a core value that matches the U.S. Constitution. Athens protected the legal and political rights of all citizens at the same level without any distinction based on social status or financial position. This principle is mirrored in the Constitution's guarantees of due process and equal protection under the law. The Fourteenth Amendment which followed the Civil War established equality as a constitutional right and maintained the Athenian principles of fairness and justice.[9][10]

However, both Athens and early America had their limitations regarding equality. Free male citizens of Athens held the right to participate in government but women and slaves and metics (resident foreigners) were denied this right (Ober, 1989).[11] The early American political system restricted voting rights to white landowners until constitutional changes and legal reforms brought about voting rights expansion (Bederman, 2008).[12] The U.S. model demonstrates superior adaptability than the Athenian system because it has expanded its inclusiveness throughout its development. The United States has expanded its democratic rights to include marginalized groups through its ongoing process of democratic development (Cartledge, 2016). The United States has expanded democratic rights to include excluded groups while Athens maintained its narrow definition of citizenship.[13]

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[7] Ober, J. (1989: 134).
"The Assembly represented … state and of himself."
[8] Bederman, D. J. (2008: 93).
"In the most pure democracies … propositions to the people."
[9] Ober, J. (1989: 9).
"The Athenian democratic 'constitution' … to the political sphere."
[10] Cartledge, P. (2016: 94).
"Equality is good, so long as ...deemed relevantly equal."
[11] Ober, J. (1989: 5).
"The Athenians, for their part, limited ...is the case in modern democracies."
[12] Bederman, D. J. (2008: 97).
"Voting qualifications of citizens, ... experience of the Civil War."
[13] Cartledge, P. (2016: 135).
"Women as citizens existed … of Athenian democratic politics."

Checks and Balances

Both Athens and the U.S. implemented mechanisms to prevent the concentration of power. The Athenian system of official selection through lot drawing combined with term restrictions and ostracism practices worked to distribute power and maintain leader accountability (Ober, 1989).[14] The U.S. system built upon these principles through its advanced system of power distribution between the executive and legislative and judicial branches (Bederman, 2008).[15] The structure prevents any single branch from gaining control while maintaining the democratic balance which both systems aim to achieve.

The two systems also contain public accountability systems. In Athens, public officials underwent scrutiny through the process of dokimasia (preliminary examination) and euthyna (review of actions) (Ober, 1989).[16] The United States uses impeachment procedures together with ethics probes and judicial oversight to maintain legal and ethical compliance from government officials (Bederman, 2008).[17] The Athenian practice of ostracism which allowed citizens to vote for the exile of leaders they considered dangerous or too powerful resembles contemporary American political practices of impeachment and recall elections (Ober, 1989).[18]

4.2 Differences in Governance Structures

While Athens and the U.S. share democratic ideals, their governance structures reflect the distinct challenges and contexts in which they developed.

Direct vs. Representative Democracy

The Athenian democracy operated through direct citizen participation because every decision needed approval from the Assembly through voting. This was feasible in a small city-state with a limited population of eligible voters (Ober, 1989).[19] The United States chose representative democracy as its system which allows citizens to choose representatives who will represent them in decision-making processes. The model proved suitable for a large and varied nation

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[14] Ober, J. (1989: 73).
"How extensively Cleisthenes …the institutional apparatus of the state."
[15] Bederman, D. J. (2008: 93).
"Each branch of the government …the branches are not often conflated."
[16] Ober, J. (1989: 329).
"Athenians considered accountability, … vital to the democratic polity."
[17] Bederman, D. J. (2008: 193).
"The clear analogue for this …or before the senate of five hundred.'"
[18] Ober, J. (1989: 74).
"Ostracism was a way of expelling … of democratic decisions on an individual."
[19] Ober, J. (1989: 134).
"The Assembly represented the Athenian …his state and of himself."

while simultaneously serving as a strategic solution to prevent the dangers of direct democracy including hasty choices and manipulative leadership (Cartledge, 2016).[20] James Madison, in Federalist No. 10, believed that a representative system would better manage factionalism and lead to more stable governance (Madison, 1787).[21]

The Founding Fathers believed that pure democracy, as practiced in Athens, could be unstable, leading to the tyranny of the majority. They designed a republican government to temper such risks by introducing mechanisms such as the Electoral College, staggered elections, and a bicameral legislature. These features ensure that decisions are deliberated upon before becoming law, reducing the influence of sudden public opinion shifts. In contrast, Athens placed decision-making power directly in the hands of citizens, which sometimes resulted in impulsive and short-sighted policies, such as the execution of military leaders after the Battle of Arginusae (Ober, 1989).[22]

Inclusion and Citizenship

Athenian democracy was exclusive, restricting citizenship to free adult males born of Athenian parents. The political system of ancient Athens denied voting rights to women and slaves and metics who lived in the city (Ober, 1989).[23] The early American republic excluded women and enslaved people and indigenous populations from voting rights but the U.S. Constitution established pathways which would result in their future political power (Bederman, 2008).[24] The Fifteenth, Nineteenth and Twenty-Sixth Amendments of the United States Constitution expanded voting rights which proved that the American system could change whereas the Athenian system remained unalterable. The United States demonstrates democratic governance growth through civil rights law development because its framework does not stay fixed in time.

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[20] Cartledge, P. (2016: 4).
"All ancient ones are direct, …as well as on behalf of—us."
[21] Madison, J. (1787). Federalist No. 10. In The Federalist Papers (C. Rossiter, Ed.). Signet Classics.
"A pure democracy, …the potential for a faction to seize power."
[22] Ober, J. (1989: 329).
"The immediate transmutation … as was the case with the Sicilian Expedition of 415-13."
[23] Ober, J. (1989: 5).
"The Athenians, for their part, … is the case in modern democracies."
[24] Bederman, D. J. (2008: 97).
"Voting qualifications of citizens, …experience of the Civil War."

4.3 Adaptations of Athenian Ideas to the American Context

The Founding Fathers drew inspiration from Athenian democracy yet they modified its principles to address the distinctive needs of their historical period. The implemented adaptations developed from the operational needs of governing a big republic and the knowledge gained through Athens' military triumphs and setbacks.

Modern Innovations in Participation

The development of new technologies enables the creation of direct democratic systems which can function alongside existing representative government structures. The Athenian system of citizen involvement operates through digital platforms and budgeting participation and voting systems which solve current governance management problems. The development of direct and representative democracy shows that these systems progress through the combination of historical understanding and modern technological advancements. The Athenian Agora's public deliberation process finds its modern equivalent in digital petitions and social media activism and congressional debates broadcast in real time (Cartledge, 2016).[25]

4.4 The Legacy of Athenian and American Systems

The two political systems have created permanent impacts which shaped democratic governance throughout history since ancient times. Athens showed how citizens could participate directly in governance through its system which proved that education and accountability and equality were essential (Ober, 1989).[26] The United States developed its system of government through these initial principles which established a framework for protecting individual rights while maintaining institutional stability to serve as a model for big diverse democracies.

These systems have delivered knowledge that continues to be essential for modern society. Athens' emphasis on civic engagement highlights the importance of an informed citizenry, while the U.S. system demonstrates the value of adaptability in addressing new challenges. These systems show the continuous effort to create governments which serve people while defending their rights to freedom and justice. The study of previous governance structures

[25] Cartledge, P. (2016: 310).
"Modern technology … Bill of Digital Rights."
[26] Ober, J. (1989: 9).
"The Athenian democratic … and the equality of all citizens."

together with current democratic systems enables researchers to create better political systems for today.

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5. Classical Athenian Ideals in the American Founding Documents

5.1 Influence on the Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence, authored primarily by Thomas Jefferson, encapsulates the philosophical underpinnings of the American Revolution. Among its most significant influences are the Enlightenment ideals of natural rights and popular sovereignty. As John Locke articulates, “Men being...by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent” (Locke, 1988, p. 330).[27] These ideas of natural rights and the consent of the governed are foundational to Jefferson's arguments. Furthermore, the concept of popular sovereignty is expressed in Locke’s assertion that “the community perpetually retains a supreme power of saving themselves from the attempts and designs of anybody...against the liberties and properties of the subject” (Locke, 1988, p. 367). However, the foundational ideas of equality and liberty that the Declaration espouses can also be traced back to Classical Athens, where concepts of eleutheria (freedom) and equality before the law were central to Athenian democratic ideology. As Hansen (1991) explains, “Equality before the law…is a very important concept for the understanding of the Athenian democratic ideology” (p. 84).[28] Raaflaub (2004) further emphasizes that “Freedom became the domain of the citizens at large…who ruled in, and through, their city and whose civic identity rested on their political liberty” (p. 270).[29]

The Athenian principle of isonomia which establishes equal treatment under the law matches Jefferson's statement that “all men are created equal” (Jefferson, 1776).[30] The Declaration establishes individual liberty and equality as natural rights but Athens considered equality essential for both citizenship and proper governance. The Athenian democratic system based its operations on group decision processes while maintaining that all citizens should have equal power to determine the direction of the polis (Cartledge, 2016).[31] Aristotle (1996) describes Athenian democracy as operating through citizen equality because all citizens actively participated in city governance.[32] The Athenian democratic system demonstrated the value of

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[27] Locke, J. (1988). Two treatises of government (P. Laslett, Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
[28] Hansen, M. H. (1991). The Athenian democracy in the age of Demosthenes: Structure, principles and ideology. Blackwell.
[29] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The discovery of freedom in ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.
[30] Jefferson, T. (1776). The Declaration of Independence.
[31] Cartledge, P. (2016: 75).
"The pro-democracy speaker in Greece’s… of status and respect under the laws."
[32] Aristotle (2017: 346).
"Democratic justice is equality … of ruling and being ruled."

active citizenship which matches the Declaration's statement about people having the right to change or eliminate abusive governments. The concept reflects the Athenian political system which granted citizens full authority to make decisions through the Ekklesia (Assembly) where they directly controlled laws and policies. Ober (2008) explains that Athenian democracy required citizens to actively participate in the decision-making process. Through the Ekklesia (Assembly) citizens exercised their collective power to make decisions about policies and to monitor the actions of public officials (p. 166). [33] Jefferson's framing of rebellion as a duty in the face of tyranny reflects the Athenian ethos that governance should serve the interests of the people, not the ruling elite.

The Declaration of Independence contains multiple elements that differ from the principles of Athenian democracy. The Declaration of Independence created a wider definition of equality and freedom which differed from Athens' restricted voting rights system yet the United States did not maintain these principles during its first years (Jefferson, 1776).[34] The Founding Fathers transformed Athenian principles into a new system which matched Enlightenment values about universal rights and the specific needs of the American environment. The Athenian system of governance through direct participation in primary institutions of governance provided the Founding Fathers with a model to establish a system which united popular sovereignty with operational requirements of their new nation (Ober, 2008, p. 166). The Athenian citizens exercised their governance authority by actively participating in the essential institutions which controlled their city according to Ober (1989).[35]

5.2 Athenian Principles Reflected in the U.S. Constitution

The U.S. Constitution which was created in 1787 serves as a functional and intellectual answer to historical teachings that Classical Athens demonstrated. The Constitution developed from Enlightenment ideas but its basic structure and essential principles show direct links to Athenian philosophical thought.

Checks and Balances

[33] Ober, J. (2008). Democracy and knowledge: Innovation and learning in Classical Athens. Princeton University Press.
[34] Jefferson, T. (1776: n.p.).
"We hold these truths …. Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..."
[35] Ober, J. (1989). Mass and elite in democratic Athens: Rhetoric, ideology, and the power of the people. Princeton University Press.

The Constitution includes a system of checks and balances which serves to stop any single branch of government from gaining excessive power. This principle has roots in both Athenian democracy and Enlightenment critiques of its weaknesses. Athens used ostracism as a tool to control powerful figures and officials received their positions through random selection to prevent corruption and promote equality (Hansen, 1991).[36] Athens established the basis for future democratic systems through its practice of direct citizen involvement and power distribution across the Ekklesia (Assembly) which operated through collective decision-making (Ober, 2008).[37] The Founding Fathers developed an advanced system of government through their combination of Athenian principles with Enlightenment critiques of monarchical power and centralized authority (Bailyn, 1967).[38]

The Role of the Citizenry

The Constitution also reflects the Athenian belief in the importance of an engaged citizenry. Athens operated through direct democracy yet the United States chose representative democracy because of its large size and intricate nature. The Constitution upholds Athenian governance principles through its implementation of regular elections and systems which allow citizens to monitor government activities. The first words "We the People" in the preamble establish the Athenian principle of popular consent as the foundation of political power according to Ober (2008) who demonstrates how citizens used useful knowledge aggregation to achieve better social cooperation (p. 166).[39]

Rule of Law

The Athenian democratic system based its governance on legal principles which the United States Constitution protects through its establishment of equal legal rights and fair judicial procedures. The power of constitutional interpretation by the judiciary follows the Athenian system of citizen juries which entrusted ordinary people to maintain justice (Cartledge, 2016, p. 169).[40]

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[36] Hansen, M. H. (1991: 5).
"Ostracism was introduced … the stability of the democratic system."
[37] Ober, J. (2008: 166).
"The Athenian system of government … a cherished Athenian value."
[38] Bailyn, B. (1967: 73).
"What was agreed on, …the encroachments of the other two."
[39] Ober, J. (2008). Democracy and knowledge: Innovation and learning in Classical Athens. Princeton University Press.
[40] Cartledge, P. (2016: 169).
"Consistently, the democratic Athenians …of strict legal rules of evidence and precedent."

5.3 Philosophical Roots of the Federalist Papers

Through The Federalist Papers Alexander Hamilton and James Madison and John Jay explained their understanding of classical principles when creating America's first national government. The Papers focus mainly on governance operations but they show how Athenian democratic values shaped the system and its constraints.

Factionalism and Stability

In Federalist No. 10, Madison addresses the dangers of factionalism, a concern that was also central to Athenian political thought. The American system of government incorporated warnings from Aristotle and Thucydides about how internal conflicts within the polis would create instability which Madison applied to the new nation. The proposed large republic with its varied population base follows a different system than Athenian democracy yet upholds the fundamental concept of interest balance for stability (Cartledge, 2016, p. 293).[41]

Accountability and Representation

Hamilton supports his case for a strong central government through multiple historical illustrations throughout the Federalist Papers. He examines the shortcomings of the Articles of Confederation while emphasizing accountability which draws from Athenian and Enlightenment philosophical traditions. Athens used direct citizen supervision but Hamilton supported a representative system which he believed would produce equivalent results through a more workable and enduring framework (Bailyn, 1967, p. 289).[42]

5.4 The Role of Athenian Values in Early American Political Discourse

The fundamental documents of Athens served as the basis for early American political discussions about Athenian values. The Founding Fathers along with their historical context employed classical examples to validate their decisions during the establishment of the new republic framework.

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[41] Cartledge, P. (2016: 293).
"In Federalist 10 (1787), Madison delivered a … excluded from any active or direct share in it."
[42] Bailyn, B. (1967: 293).
"In an extensive country, direct assembly of the whole population … ‘productive of hasty results and absurd judgments,’ avaricious, and ambitious."

Education and Civic Virtue

The educational system of Athens received backing from initial American leaders who wanted to create virtuous citizens. Jefferson believed public education should exist because he wanted people to acquire skills needed for their role as self-sufficient members of society. The concept reflects the Athenian belief that democracy needed citizens who were both knowledgeable and actively involved in order to survive (Jefferson, 1786).[43]

Civic Engagement and the Public Good

The Athenian belief that public welfare should take precedence over personal gain became a central idea in the first political theories of America. The leaders Madison and Hamilton stressed the requirement to create institutions which would foster public involvement and fight corruption. The Constitution's design which focuses on public accountability and transparency demonstrates its dedication to serving the common welfare. As Ober (2008) notes, "Athenian governmental practices manifested formal political principles, such as transparency and accountability, that are now widely recognized as characteristics of good government. The Athenian system of governance operated with unstructured yet discernible governance principles as described in (p. 273).[44]

The Balance of Power

The Athenian system of democracy influenced American debates about government power distribution between different branches of government through its positive and negative aspects. The Founding Fathers admired Athens' commitment to equal participation but they sought to avoid its potential problems which included the danger of demagogic control. The American system combines Athenian principles with solutions that fix their weaknesses to create a new system. As Cartledge (2016) notes, "Demagoguery was indeed an occupational and structural hazard of the Greek ‘government by mass meeting’ form of democratic decision-making, but demagogoi were a structural feature of the Athenian democracy, enabling it to function at all. The church members conducted their operations through scheduled Assemblies which served as the decision-making bodies that created enforceable choices (p. 260).[45]

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[43] Jefferson, T. (1786).
"I think by far the most important bill … to cure them of that folly." (Letter to Charles Yancey, 1786).
[44] Ober, J. (2008). Democracy and knowledge: Innovation and learning in Classical Athens. Princeton University Press.
[45] Cartledge, P. (2016). Democracy: A life. Oxford University Press.

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6. Criticism and Limitations of Athenian Influence

6.1 Gaps Between Athenian Ideals and American Realities

The Founding Fathers adopted democratic principles from Classical Athens but encountered major discrepancies between Athenian theoretical ideas and how they would function in American society. The two systems faced opposing elements which blocked their ability to achieve equality and justice.

The democratic system of Classical Athens contained natural barriers because political rights together with citizenship privileges existed only for free male Athenians who were born to Athenian parents (Ober, 1989: 261). [46] The population majority consisting of women and enslaved people and metics received no right to participate in governance (Ober, 1989, p. 267).[47] The system demonstrated a fundamental weakness of Athenian democracy because it granted political freedom to only a particular segment of society. The practices followed these ancient social customs yet they oppose the democratic values of today.

The United States received democratic principles through its Declaration of Independence and Constitution yet these rights remained accessible only to specific groups of people. Although the Founding documents proclaimed the equality and inalienable rights of "all men," these promises were systematically denied to enslaved individuals, women, and indigenous peoples. Through the Three-Fifths Clause the Constitution created this exclusion by giving enslaved people representation value for counting purposes yet stripping them of all rights (Bederman, 2008, p. 104).[48] Women together with Native Americans experienced political disenfranchisement throughout 100 years following the establishment of the United States because voting rights remained limited to particular social groups (Cartledge, 2016, p. 32).[49] The historical records show how American political theory based on universal democracy faced opposition from discriminatory practices which emerged during its execution.

The identification of these contradictions enables us to understand the fundamental restrictions of initial democratic systems while recognizing the ongoing struggle of contemporary

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[46] Ober (1989: 261).
"Most Athenian citizens … inhabiting Athenian territory."
[47] Ober (1989: 267).
"The Athenians reserved the right … from participation in political life."
[48] Bederman (2008: 104).
"The Constitution's treatment … the governmental form adopted in 1787."
[49] Cartledge (2016: 32).
"However, before we point the finger ….to the latter half of the nineteenth century."

democracies to achieve complete inclusivity in their decision-making processes. The early United States and Athens prove that democratic principles continue to encounter difficulties because social structures along with discriminatory practices restrict political participation thus demanding continuous work to develop democratic principles.

The economic system of Athens based on slavery creates a major ethical problem. Athens honored freedom and equality for its citizens but its economic system and social structure operated through the work of enslaved people. The relationship between slavery and democratic participation in Athens remained complex because Athenian society depended on slaves but most slaves belonged to wealthy citizens rather than common citizens (Ober, 1989, p. 27).[50] The United States faced an identical paradox because slavery persisted throughout the early years of the republic despite its founding principles which emphasized liberty and equality. The Three-Fifths Clause in the Constitution served as a compromise to address slavery because the Founding Fathers wanted to avoid dealing with the slavery problem (Bederman, 2008, p. 104).[51]

6.2 Historical Misinterpretations or Overstatements of Athenian Influence

While the Founding Fathers admired and frequently referenced Athenian democracy, the extent of its direct influence on American political development is often overstated. The majority of their knowledge about Athens came from Roman historians and Enlightenment philosophers who interpreted and transformed the original ideas based on their own viewpoints.

Importantly, the Founders were well aware of the inherent flaws and vulnerabilities of Athenian democracy. They recognized, as Aristotle critiqued, that democracy in its extreme form—where "the demos rules by decree and considers itself above the laws"—was unstable and prone to degeneration (Cartledge, 2016, p. 102).[52] Aristotle maintained that democracy functioned as a distorted form of governance which he preferred to see a balanced polity where the middle class ruled between the wealthy and the poor (Cartledge, 2016, pp. 18–19).[53] The

[50] Ober (1989: 27).
"The importance of slavery … not by the average citizen."
[51] Bederman (2008: 104).
"The Constitution's treatment of slavery … the governmental form adopted in 1787."

[52] Cartledge (2016: 102).
"Aristotle, as we shall see, …. considers itself above the laws.'"
[53] Cartledge (2016: 18–19).

Founders based their decision to create representative government instead of direct democracy on classical skepticism. Federalist 55 by James Madison illustrates this point through his statement that Athenian democracy would remain a mob even if all citizens possessed the wisdom of Socrates (Bederman, 2008, p. 92).[54]

The U.S. Constitution received its structure from Roman republicanism through its focus on mixed government and civic duty more than from Athenian democracy. The Founders considered the Roman Republic to be the most workable and enduring system because it combined democratic principles with oligarchic and monarchical elements. The broader philosophical framework of the Athenians received its influence from Athenian ideals but these ideals did not function as the main or single cause. As Bederman (2008) explains, "The Framing generation was aware of how the Roman republic was structured in theory and how it operated in practice. They understood as well the workings of some of the Greek city-states and other polities of the ancient Mediterranean. The Framers were troubled, however, by an assumption (advanced by Montesquieu in his Spirit of the Laws, but expressed earlier in the writings of Machiavelli) that republics could subsist only in narrow spatial and temporal circumstances" (pp. 51–52).[55]

Bederman (2008) further highlights the significance of Polybius' model of mixed government to the Framers, noting that "among the 'opinions and reasonings of philosophers, politicians and historians' esteemed by the Framers, it will not be contested that all these characters are united in Polybius... Invocations of the precept of mixed government were made at the Philadelphia Convention and some state ratifying conventions" (p. 74).[56] The Framers appreciated how the Roman constitution balanced powers, with "the three kinds of government that I spoke of above all shared in the control of the Roman state... If one fixed one's eyes on the power of the consuls, the constitution seemed monarchical; if on the Senate, aristocratic; and when on the power of the masses, democratic" (Bederman, 2008, pp. 65–66).[57]

"Aristotle was not an ideological …of rich and poor was preferred."
[54] Bederman (2008: 92).
"James Madison put it so pungently … by emphasizing institutional checks and balances."
[55] Bederman (2008: 51–52).
"The Framing generation was aware …only in narrow spatial and temporal circumstances."
[56] Bederman (2008: 74).
"Among the 'opinions and reasonings … and some state ratifying conventions."
[57] Bederman (2008: 65–66).
"The three kinds of government … on the power of the masses, democratic."

6.3 Contemporary Critiques

Modern scholars identify two major weaknesses of Athenian democracy which stem from its limited size and restricted membership base that reduces its applicability to modern political structures. The democratic system of Athens granted citizenship to only 25,000 to 30,000 people from a population of 300,000 citizens (Cartledge, 2016: 108–109).[58] The political system denied voting rights to women and slaves and foreigners which runs counter to modern democratic values of inclusivity (Ober, 1989: 6).[59] Moreover, the feasibility of Athenian direct democracy depended on the small and relatively homogeneous nature of the polis. Aristotle stated that numerous citizens in a state would prevent the establishment of a genuine constitution because extensive populations made such systems unworkable (Finley, 1998: 32).[60] Consequently, Athenian direct democracy is widely regarded as impractical for large, diverse nations like the United States, which instead rely on representative forms of governance to function effectively.

The decision-making process of Athenian democracy receives criticism because it focuses on short-term outcomes instead of considering future effects. During emergency situations direct citizen voting led to fast but brief decisions that people made more often. Notably, the execution of Socrates and the disastrous Sicilian Expedition during the Peloponnesian War exemplify the dangers of mob rule and the absence of institutional safeguards. Finley (1998) explains how the Socratic trial occurred in an unfavorable setting because people saw intellectuals as dangerous to young people because they believed they corrupted them (pp. 86–88). The government operated as a democratic system under Pericles and his successors yet actual power rested with the first citizen who made decisions based on public opinion leading to numerous mistakes (Finley, 1998, pp. 25–26). The Founding Fathers established a political system based on long-term stability through strategic planning yet this method limited direct citizen participation in the short term.[61]

Academic research shows that Athenian democracy and early American democracy failed to achieve full equality for all citizens in their respective populations. According to Cartledge (2016) women lost all political rights in most parts of the world until the late 1800s because

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[58] Cartledge (2016: 108–109).
"Modern guesstimates of citizen …one reaches a figure for 404-322 of around 25,000 to 30,000."
[59] Ober (1989: 6). "The exclusion of women, slaves, and foreigners …undemocratic by current standards."
[60] Finley (1998: 32).
"The second point is what Ehrenberg … it can hardly have a true constitution.'"
[61] Finley, M. I. (1998). Democracy ancient and modern. Rutgers University Press.

social norms from ancient times continued to persist (p. 34).[62] The current democratic systems need to address the restrictive and exclusive characteristics that were present in their historical counterparts. The modern political world lacks direct institutional connections to ancient Athenian democracy and other forms of direct governance because it operates at a much larger scale with diverse needs that require different political systems (Cartledge, 2016, p. 306).[63] Thus, today's democratic societies must confront these historical legacies as they strive toward more inclusive and just political systems.

6.4 Lessons for Modern Governance

The two political systems of Athenian democracy and early American democracy offer essential knowledge about modern governance but their implementation faces natural restrictions. The systems place citizen involvement and legal accountability and rule of law at the core of democratic governance. The Athenian dedication to education and civic values continues to hold significance in modern times because Finley (1998) explains that Athenian education extended past traditional schooling to include the cultivation of moral character and civic duty through political participation. Active citizens who both know about democratic institutions and actively participate in them are necessary for maintaining these institutions (pp. 17–19).[64]

Modern democratic theorists believe that although ancient democracy operated under different principles than modern systems they can provide useful knowledge to improve current governance structures. Ober (2015) explains democratic knowledge as an efficient utilitarian system which produces knowledge through democratic processes to achieve effective limited collective self-governance (p. 309).[65] The research shows that contemporary democracies need to create participatory systems with accountability mechanisms which build upon historical models but address their historical shortcomings.

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[62] Cartledge (2016: 34).
"However, before we point …the latter half of the nineteenth century."
[63] Cartledge (2016: 306).
"There is no direct institutional legacy … than any ancient Greek polity."
[64] Finley (1998: 18).
"It was that sense of community...put themselves forward as policy-makers, as leaders."
[65] Ober (2015: 309).
"Although ancient democracy …what politics should be ultimately about."

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7. Legacy and Relevance Today

7.1 The Enduring Legacy of Classical Athens in Modern Democracies

The democratic system of Classical Athens created fundamental democratic values which continue to support modern democracies although its limitations and opposing forces existed. The three core principles of contemporary political systems consist of citizen participation and legal equality and leadership accountability of ruling officials. Athens exists as a vital historical milestone which helps us trace the development of democratic principles throughout history.

The citizen body of Classical Athens made a fundamental contribution to modern governance through its central position in the political system. The political system of Athens operated under a principle which required citizens to both vote and actively take part in political activities and decision-making processes. The Athenian political system according to Ober (1989) eliminated property requirements for citizenship acquisition which led to maximum political participation from the population. Mechanisms such as pay for officeholding, selection of magistrates by lot, and the right to free speech in the Assembly curtailed the domination of governance by the wealthy elite, thereby fostering a more inclusive political culture (pp. 54, 193).[66] [67] This participatory ethos extended to the open Assembly meetings and the random selection of juries, which collectively empowered citizens in the formulation and administration of laws.

According to Finley (1998) the concept of freedom in Athens involved both legal compliance and political engagement rather than individual rights (p. 75).[68] The concept of civic duty determined how representative systems including the United States developed their structure. According to Bederman (2008) the American Founding Fathers studied ancient Greek city-state structures while they created their own system of government which emphasized active citizenship as a core principle of republican rule (p. 51).[69]

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[66] Ober (1989: 54).
"Assembly meetings were …of the elite took the most active part."
[67] Ober (1989: 193).
"The absence of property qualifications …political apparatus by rich citizens more difficult."
[68] Finley (1998: 75).
"Freedom meant the rule of law and participation in the decision-making process, not the possession of inalienable rights."
[69] Bederman (2008: 51).
"The Framing generation … and other polities of the ancient Mediterranean."

The principle of isonomia which means equal treatment under the law serves as a basic principle that Classical Athens passed down to future generations. The United States as a modern democracy has established legal systems which provide equal access to justice for all citizens beyond their financial standing or social position. The adoption of this principle as a basic principle demonstrates how Athenian political ideas shape modern legal and political systems although both Athens and the first American republic did not fully implement it. The Athenian system of democracy should be recognized despite its exclusion of women and slaves and foreigners from political rights because it operated within its historical time frame (Ober, 1989).[70] Cartledge (2016) shows that global societies kept such exclusions active throughout most of the nineteenth century which proves that achieving complete inclusivity has been a long process. Raaflaub (2004) studies the political development of isonomia from its origins as a treatment principle for particular citizens to its transformation into a political concept through the political reforms of Cleisthenes after the end of tyranny.[71]

7.2 Lessons for Contemporary Governance

Modern democracies can gain important knowledge by studying both the accomplishments and errors of Classical Athens during its historical period. The method enables public participation and monitoring which functions as a blueprint for establishing participatory governance systems that include all citizens. The problems which Athenian democracy faced in its operation including its discriminatory nature and its tendency to follow short-term decisions and fall victim to demagoguery demonstrate why institutions need protection and why planning for the future is essential.

Active Citizenship and Civic Education

The Athenian model of democracy underscores the essential role of cultivating an informed and actively engaged citizenry through a comprehensive form of education known as paideia. The Athenian democratic system depends on developing an educated population which receives complete education through the system of paideia. The concept reached further than traditional education to include moral development and civic values and strong community ties with local customs. According to Josiah Ober the polis used education for both political skill development and to preserve its core values through institutional means. According to Ober

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[70] Ober (1989: 6).
"The exclusion of women, … is ahistorical."
[71] Raaflaub (2004: 94–96).
"Isonomia, an 'order based on equality,' … are qualified to participate in government."

(1989: 100) Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates all believed that a good life could only be achieved in a good polis and that citizens had a moral obligation to enhance the community's character through education and institutional involvement.[72]

A fundamental part of this paideia was the political education young Athenians received by attending the Assembly. Moses I. Finley explains that through this experience, a young man learned about the political issues facing Athens, the competing choices and arguments, and how to assess the qualifications and character of those who sought leadership positions (Finley 2019: 19).[73] The public education system provided civic training to citizens while basic literacy spread throughout the population during the fourth century so people could serve in public roles. The political culture maintained its oral nature because citizens experienced poetry and music and dance and oral traditions through state-sponsored public events which strengthened community ties and common values (Ober 1989: 157).[74]

The citizen's formal induction into democratic governance began in his local deme, where citizenship was granted through the vote of fellow demesmen. Ober describes the deme assemblies as vital training grounds for communal decision-making and civic responsibility, modeled closely on the governance of the polis. Participation in magistracies, the Council (Boule), courts, and the Assembly provided citizens with practical political education, helping them to develop the skills and experience necessary for effective participation in democracy (Ober 1989: 150).[75]

Finley clarifies that the ancient Greek notion of paideia referred not simply to formal schooling but to the holistic moral formation and civic responsibility of individuals. This education developed virtues and a mature identification with the community, preparing citizens to engage meaningfully in public affairs and to evaluate their leaders judiciously (Finley 2019: 19).[76] Within this educational milieu, political orators emerged as the most visible and highly trained members of the Athenian educated elite. Ober notes that many fourth-century politicians

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[72] Ober (1989: 100):
"The educational function of the polis …which good institutions would inculcate in the mature citizens."
[73] Finley (2019: 19):
"A young man was educated … as policy-makers, as leaders."
[74] Ober (1989: 157):
"Basic literacy—the ability to read and to write some words—seems to have been general …often through state-sponsored festivals and public performances."
[75] Ober (1989: 150):
"The citizen's first formal … Assembly participants gave citizens practical political education."
[76] Finley (2019: 19):
"I use the word [education] not in its … forward as policy-makers, as leaders."

sharpened their rhetorical skills studying under late fifth-century sophists and in formal schools such as that of Isocrates. Although higher formal education was rare, rhetorical training was essential for those pursuing political leadership and ambition (Ober 1989: 156).[77]

Through their educational system Athenian paideia components united to establish democracy which taught citizens intellectual growth and civic engagement and moral values to sustain democratic governance. The complete method of civic education provides essential knowledge which contemporary democratic nations need to develop their citizenry into active participants.

Accountability and Transparency

The Athenian democracy created essential systems which maintained political responsibility and open governance. Cleisthenes established ostracism as a protective mechanism to prevent any person from gaining too much power which could endanger the democratic system. Each year, the Assembly voted on whether to hold an ostracism, allowing citizens to vote for the exile of a particular individual for ten years without loss of citizenship or property. The system operated beyond legal procedures because it functioned as a political tool to eliminate potential dangers that endangered public security. The practice of ostracism proved that political success needed complete social unity because it required all citizens to actively participate in governance and support community decisions (Ober 1989: 74; Bederman 2008: 195; Cartledge 2016: 70).[78]

The implementation of citizen juries together with ostracism served as key mechanisms for maintaining legal transparency and ensuring accountability. Jurors were selected by lot from a large pool of volunteers and were tasked with adjudicating cases through majority vote in secret ballots. The number of jurors in a trial depended on the type of case because public trials required more jurors. The judicial system operated without appeal because it demonstrated the absolute power of citizens to enforce legal decisions and protect the rule of law (Finley 2019: 76; Ober 1989: 142; Cartledge 2016: 117).[79]

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[77] Ober (1989: 156):
"The political orators were collectively … because of their political ambitions."
[78] Ober (1989: 74).
"Ostracism clarifies the central message … remains part of the group.'"
Bederman (2008: 195).
"Ostracism was a purely political sanction.An individual could be ostracized without having committed a crime; it was necessary only that the person be considered dangerous."
Cartledge (2016: 70).
"At a stated moment in each civil year …would not be deprived of his citizen status or his ownership of property."
[79] Finley (2019: 76).

Furthermore, public officials were subjected to thorough administrative oversight upon the completion of their terms through the euthyna process. Financial audits started the review process which then moved to conduct assessments that followed legal procedures to punish officials who committed misconduct or malfeasance. The euthyna system created a post-office accountability system which imposed penalties on public officials after their term ended (Bederman 2008: 194).[80]

These particular institutions from ancient times do not match modern representative democracy yet they demonstrate that leaders need to answer to their citizens and governments must maintain open operations and answer to public needs. The core accountability system of Athenian democracy functions in modern democratic systems through free press institutions and independent judicial bodies and open public administration.

Inclusivity and Equality

Modern democracies need to analyze the fundamental restrictions of Athenian democracy because this system denied voting rights to women and slaves and all foreign residents. Josiah Ober stresses that we need to recognize these limitations because they create a fair basis for understanding classical Greek civilization. The Athenian democratic system denied voting power to noncitizens and women yet this restriction does not prove that Athens should lose its democratic classification according to contemporary standards. The text shows that political rights during that particular historical period applied only to freeborn male citizens. Ober explains that Athenian laws and customs established a social system which placed women below men thus removing their political rights (Ober 1989: 6).[81] Paul Cartledge clarifies this by explaining that, while women were technically citizens—referred to as politides—they were barred from active political participation and decision-making in the public sphere. In practice, even attempts to keep women out of the public eye were frequently undermined, especially for

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"The jury then arrived at a verdict, usually in a single day's sitting, by majority vote in a secret ballot held in full view, without any discussion."
Ober (1989: 142).
"A typical jury might …secret ballot to acquit or convict the defendant."
Cartledge (2016: 117).
"Decisions by the allotted juror-judges were formally inappellable... The only way to reopen a case or challenge a verdict was by prosecuting witnesses for perjury."

[80] Bederman (2008: 194).
"The first was a financial audit, … If misconduct was suspected, the charges were referred for trial before a regular jury or to the thesmothetai."

[81] Ober (1989: 6):
"The exclusion of women, ... Athenian laws and customs kept women in an inferior social position and denied their political existence."

women of poorer households who had to leave their homes to work or gather water (Cartledge 2016: 135).[82]

Furthermore, Ober describes the citizen body of Athens as a politically exclusive elite distinguished sharply from noncitizen groups. The right to citizenship which people received through birth granted them political power and legal rights that slaves and foreign nationals did not possess and which lower-class citizens also lacked. The political system created an aristocratic class which gained power through inheritance and sustained its rule by discriminating against noncitizen residents of the polis (Ober 1989: 261).[83]

The historical development shows that modern democracies must grant political rights to all citizens even though previous systems had their restrictions. Modern political systems work to eliminate discriminatory aspects from their original democratic foundations in order to create an inclusive political framework which promotes equal political participation.

7.3 Challenges to Athenian Ideals in a Modern Context

The democratic principles of Athens have motivated global adoption of democratic systems yet they encounter obstacles when applied to modern large-scale diverse populations with advanced technology. Modern nation sizes create an impractical environment for direct democracy which leads to the necessity of representative systems that reduce citizen direct involvement. Modern democracies need to establish proper representation through participatory systems as their main priority.

Demagoguery and Populism

The practice of demagoguery remains a lasting criticism of Athenian democracy because it allows powerful speakers to use their charm to control public sentiment for their own gain. Paul Cartledge notes that following the death of the statesman Pericles, Athenian politics deteriorated into conflicts dominated by so-called demagogues, often portrayed as lower-class politicians pandering to the base desires of the populace. However, Cartledge clarifies that the term demagogos originally meant simply "leader of the demos," and it is primarily from an oligarchic or conservative viewpoint that it took on the negative connotation of "rabble-rouser" or "misleader of the masses."Interestingly, Pericles himself was as much a demagogue as his

[82] Cartledge (2016: 135):
“Women as citizens existed at Athens, ... to fetch water from the public fountains and other water sources.”
[83] Ober (1989: 261):
“The citizen population of Athens ... The political cohesiveness of the citizenry was partly a product of the oppression of noncitizen groups within the polis.”

critics, equally subject to the volatile moods of the people. For Thucydides, this phenomenon illustrated the dangers of governance by a fickle and unreasoning crowd, whereas ideological democrats saw it as the very essence of popular rule (Cartledge 2016: 115–117).[84]

Moses I. Finley elaborates that all ancient writers accepted the necessity of political leadership but wrestled with distinguishing good leaders from bad ones. The term "demagogue" became a simple label for the second type of leader even though it did not appear in the original texts. Public service leadership functioned autonomously from those who used their power to serve personal agendas and manipulate public opinion. The main criticism of demagogues throughout classical literature starting with Aristophanes and ending with Aristotle focused on their ability to deceive citizens through false information which led people away from sound reasoning for personal gain (Finley 2019: 27–29).[85]

The author Josiah Ober demonstrates how Athenian democracy operated through rhetoric because demagogues employed emotional manipulation to sway public choices by appealing to human instincts and pre-existing beliefs. The writers of late fifth and fourth centuries rejected this method because they saw demagogues using emotional manipulation instead of logical arguments. Sociologist Max Weber labeled Athenian leadership as "charismatic" and emotionally based yet Finley disagreed by showing that demagogues provided specific promises which the people expected them to keep (Ober 1989: 123–124).[86]

Finley explains that the term "demagogue" becomes pejorative when leaders make false promises which they never plan to fulfill or cannot fulfill in reality although such instances remain exceptional. He uses the oligarchic coup of 411 BCE as an example to demonstrate how Athenians were tricked into accepting it as a vital measure to gain Persian backing and prevent defeat in the war. This event, Finley argues, exemplifies the literal meaning of demagogy as deliberate misleading of the people (Finley 2019: 41–42).[87]

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[84] Cartledge (2016: 115–117):
“After the death of the statesmanlike Pericles, … conversely, every bit as vulnerable to the moodswings of the demos.”
“To the conservative, ... To an ideological democrat, on the other hand, the treatment of Pericles was just exactly what the kratos of the demos meant.”
[85] Finley (2019: 27–29):
“All writers accepted …the least whether the word appears in any given text or not.”
“The crucial distinction … in whose interest does the leader lead?”
“Demagogy means misleading the people in the literal sense.”
[86] Ober (1989: 123–124):
“The key position of the individual demagogue …the baser emotions and ingrained prejudices of their audiences.”
“Max Weber characterized Athenian political leadership … which they were expected to fulfill.”
[87] Finley (2019: 41–42):

The research shows how demagoguery operated in Athenian democracy and proves its ongoing influence on contemporary political systems which deal with populist leaders and fake news. The struggle against these threats requires institutions with authority and an informed population that can track down decisions which follow transparent procedures.

Economic Inequality

Athenian democracy, while founded on the principle of political equality, was underpinned by profound economic inequalities that shaped its social and political dynamics. Paul Cartledge highlights the indispensable role that enslaved individuals—depersonalized and socially marginalized non-Greek chattels—played in sustaining the Athenian economy and, by extension, its democratic system. The brutal labor of slaves in vital economic sectors, such as the lethal conditions in the silver mines of Laureum, was foundational to the wealth of the city's elite. For Athenians, citizenship was defined in opposition to slavery, with freedom intrinsically linked to not being a slave (Cartledge 2016: 138).[88]

Josiah Ober points to the unequal distribution of wealth among citizens as one of the most politically challenging forms of social inequality in Athens. While most citizens labored for their livelihoods, a small leisure class—constituting roughly 5 to 10 percent of the citizenry—enjoyed considerable wealth and influence. The elite class understood that their financial support was essential for state operations so they received social advantages as payment. The existing social differences between the two groups created widespread anger among the general population because most people believed in equal political and legal rights. Ober warns that should the advantages of the wealthy become excessive, the very survival of democracy would be jeopardized (Ober 1989: 192).[89]

Reflecting Aristotle's characterization of democracy as the "rule of the poor," Ober acknowledges the numerical dominance of the poorer majority over the affluent minority. The

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"The label 'demagogue' should be conceded … we know of comes from the other camp."
"The oligarchy of 411 was sold to the Athenians... That is what I should call 'demagogy,' if the word is to merit its pejorative flavour. That is 'misleading the people' in the literal sense."

[88] Cartledge (2016: 138):
"Slaves—and at Athens that means depersonalized, … being an Athenian citizen meant, by definition, not being a slave."

[89] Ober (1989: 192):
"The unequal distribution of wealth …Clearly, if the advantages enjoyed by the rich got out of hand, democracy would end."

political system of ancient Athens allowed all citizens to participate but economic differences between citizens limited the political influence of the majority (Ober 1989: 192).[90]

Ober notes that economic disparities between Athenians created ongoing social conflicts throughout their society. After the loss of its empire, Athens became increasingly reliant on taxing the surplus wealth of the rich to maintain the functioning of the democracy. The wealthy class received social advantages because they understood their vital economic position so they received them as a reward for their financial support. The system preserved its power structure which led to continuous public outrage because ordinary citizens needed to join forces against the dangerous wealth concentration of wealthy citizens to defend democracy (Ober 1989: 240).[91]

Technological and Social Transformations

Modern technology integration enables democratic governance to transform through teledemocracy which combines digital systems with the core elements of ancient democratic principles. This emerging model ideally would be underpinned by an international Bill of Digital Rights and requires a fundamental rethinking of twenty-first-century political culture and mindset. Cartledge agrees with Marcus Schmidt who developed a framework that includes essential Athenian democratic elements including direct citizen voting on major matters and sortition and rotation systems and political compensation and electronic platforms for citizen-professional politician collaboration. The concepts have proven effective in practice through Iceland's constitutional reform process which involved successful online citizen participation (Cartledge 2016: 310–311).[92]

The Internet and digital media play a role in democratization which continues to generate strong arguments among scholars. The digital space creates a free environment for public participation according to some observers but others warn that it could develop into either an

[90] Ober (1989: 192):
"Aristotle defines democracy as the 'rule of the poor,'…the direct political power of wealth."
[91] Ober (1989: 240–241):
"The existence of economic inequalities created considerable tension in Athens. ... The power of the majority, acting in concerted defense of their interests, had to limit the dangerous accretion of power to the rich citizens."
[92] Cartledge (2016: 310–311):
"Modern technology does offer …help redraft the national constitution, with some apparent success..."

illusion or a control mechanism which hinders genuine public empowerment (Cartledge 2016: 5).[93]

The digital revolution has established a new worldwide network which breaks down the traditional geographical and organizational barriers that used to contain democratic systems. The current interconnected world requires new political systems which break through current limits to enable citizen involvement in modern globalized networked systems (Cartledge 2016: 310).[94]

7.4 Athenian Ideals in Global Democracy Movements

The foundations of democracy as we understand it today were uniquely established by the ancient Greeks, particularly through the intellectual and political innovations of Athenian democracy. Freeborn native males gained political equality through the system which established this principle as a fundamental concept for future democratic theory development (Finley 2019: 8).[95]

Modern democracies need to adapt their established democratic principles to the digital and interconnected environment of our present society. The advanced state of global society and technology requires new governance methods which move beyond conventional institutional systems. This requires reimagining democratic participation to address the scale and intricacy of modern social and political life (Cartledge 2016: 310).[96]

The political system of Athens used strong accountability systems which allowed citizens to monitor their leaders through both voting and evaluating their personal conduct and leadership qualities. Public officials maintain their democratic accountability through public observation which represents a core principle of democratic governance according to Ober (1989: 329).[97]

The present-day participatory governance experiments unite modern digital technology with classical democratic practices through the implementation of ancient principles which include

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[93] Cartledge (2016: 5):
"In almost all these variously utopian …to liberate or empower the world?"
[94] Cartledge (2016: 310):
"A key challenge both theoretical and practical …engagement in a globalized and networked world."
[95] Finley (2019: 8):
"The Greeks, and only the Greeks, discovered democracy in that sense... It was the first time in recorded history a complex society empowered all native freeborn males, irrespective of ability, family, or wealth, as political equals."
[96] Cartledge (2016: 310):
"A key challenge both theoretical and practical …institutional frameworks of democracy."
[97] Ober (1989: 329):
"Legal indictments, dokimasiai, and euthunai …linking personal character with political accountability."

sortition and political remuneration and office rotation. The current constitutional reform in Iceland shows how Athenian democratic principles continue to influence modern governance through its use of digital platforms for citizen participation (Cartledge 2016: 310–311).[98]

7.5 The Future of Athenian Influence

The ancient Greeks established democracy and political systems through collective decision-making which they developed into the most influential model of Athenian democracy. The system established by the Athenians created the basis for contemporary democratic theories which developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under Greek influence from Athenian democracy (Finley 2019: 8). The Athenian democracy operated through political accountability which found its expression in legal systems that included dokimasiai and euthunai and legal indictments. Through these processes citizens gained the ability to evaluate both public actions and personal conduct of their leaders which proved that demos-based trust stands as the foundation for political legitimacy (Ober 1989: 329).[99]

The current world requires democratic principles to operate effectively because it unites international relations with technological progress. According to Cartledge the process of making democracy global or making globalization democratic needs innovative solutions because modern society has outgrown all past political systems. The digital age, with its unprecedented interconnectedness, tests the limits of traditional democratic frameworks and calls for new forms of participation and governance (Cartledge 2016: 310).[100] The Icelandic participatory constitutional reform serves as a promising model which draws from a Danish academic's framework that includes five Athenian democratic elements: direct citizen voting on significant matters and sortition and rotation and political compensation and digital platforms for professional and citizen collaboration. The research shows that modern democratic principles require transformation to handle current problems by making democratic choices more inclusive for public participation (Cartledge 2016: 310).[101]

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[98] Cartledge (2016: 310–311):
"Such a rethink has indeed been undertaken fruitfully …for election to a 'constitutional assembly' consisting of up to 31 members."
[99] Ober (1989: 329):
"Legal indictments, dokimasiai, and euthunai … linking personal character with political accountability."
[100] Cartledge (2016: 310):
"A key challenge both theoretical and practical … institutional frameworks of democracy."
[101] Cartledge (2016: 310):
"Such a rethink has indeed been undertaken fruitfully … a 'constitutional assembly' consisting of up to 31 members."

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Chapter 8: Pericles' Epitaph and the American Vision

8.1 The Republic of Athens and the Republic of America

Pericles delivered his Funeral Oration to showcase Athens as a democratic system which established equality under the law and rewarded merit and granted citizens their freedom.[102] The polis existed as a community which valued civic involvement above all else regardless of social status or financial background.

The American Founding Fathers expressed a similar ideal. The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson established that all people share equal status because liberty stands as the base of the new nation.[103] John Adams supported Polybius' view that the perfect constitution unites monarchical and aristocratic and democratic elements through both theoretical and practical knowledge.[104] The two political entities shared a common goal to establish themselves as perfect republics yet they struggled with the gap between their declared principles and their practice of exclusion.

8.2 Athenian Idealism and American Idealism

Pericles also stressed that disengagement from politics was unacceptable, declaring that those who took no interest in public affairs had "no business here at all."[105] This insistence on civic duty reflected the Athenian conviction that democracy depended on active citizenship.

Athenian democracy was also sustained by culture. As Josiah Ober explains, it promoted values of freedom, equality, and dignity, while encouraging critique of its own failings. This "flywheel" of democratic culture preserved stability during crises.[106] The American republic echoed these principles: James Madison argued in Federalist No. 55 that republican

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[102] Raaflaub (2006: 239). "Every citizen enjoys equality of law in private disputes, while his public esteem depends on his accomplishments, not on his… circumstances… 'Our communal life is founded on freedom.' Freedom, then, is the hallmark of democracy."

[103] Jefferson, Declaration of Independence (1776). "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness…"

[104] Bederman (2008: 23). "It is manifest that the best form of government is that which is compounded of all three. This is founded not only in reason, but in experience."

[105] Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 2.40 (1972 trans. Warner). "Even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics... we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all."

[106] Ober (2008: 267). "Athenian democratic culture promoted an ideology grounded in values of freedom, equality, and dignity… Culture served as a sort of 'flywheel' capable of storing social energy and making it available when the system was temporarily incapable of fully repaying the costs to individuals of their participation."

government presupposes civic virtue,[107] while Alexander Hamilton in Federalist No. 70 emphasized energy in the executive as vital to good governance.[108] Both traditions thus linked liberty to civic responsibility and public-spiritedness.

8.3 Legacy and Modern Relevance

The legacies of Athens and America converge on the principle that democracy relies on the virtue and participation of its citizens. Abraham Lincoln, in the Gettysburg Address, echoed Pericles when he proclaimed that government must remain "of the people, by the people, for the people."[109]

Yet Athens also stands as a cautionary tale. Thucydides described how civil strife corrupted language and norms, undermining trust.[110] The disastrous Sicilian expedition showed how overreach and division could destroy even a great democracy.[111] For the United States and modern republics, these lessons remain urgent: democracy can endure only through resilient institutions, shared civic culture, and renewed public virtue.

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[107] Madison (1788), Federalist No. 55. "Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form."
[108] Hamilton (1788), Federalist No. 70. "Energy in the executive is a leading character in the definition of good government."
[109] Lincoln, Gettysburg Address (1863). "…that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."
[110] Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 3.82. "The sufferings which revolution entailed upon the cities were many and terrible... To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings."
[111] Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 7.87. "They were utterly destroyed, as the saying is, with total destruction—their fleet, their army—everything was destroyed, and few out of many returned home."

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1 Recap of Key Findings

The research examines how early United States institutions' political theory was influenced by Classical Athenian democracy and its continued influence on its foundation. The research examines both direct and indirect Athenian democratic influences on American Founding Fathers' political theory from their reading of ancient Athenian civic institutions and intellectual trends. The research conducts extensive historical-comparative analyses to show classical democratic thought influenced American political development but was countered by novel republican thoughts.

Most significant critical research findings show that Athenian ideals of democracy have philosophical affinities to Enlightenment thought which most powerfully impacted Founding Fathers' thinking. Josiah Ober names Athenian democracy's three fundamental principles which included isonomia (equality before the law) and eleutheria (liberty as political action) and civic duty to participate in ruling.[112] Even though these virtues applied only to a limited minority of Athenian citizens—including women, slaves, and resident aliens—they established an influential civic ideal which would later inspire later democratic traditions. Kurt Raaflaub (2007) points to such ideals as yielding philosophical foundations which Enlightenment thinkers reinterpreted against the backdrop of modern statehood. Montesquieu and Rousseau transformed classical political theories into novel theories of popular sovereignty and separation of power and republican liberty which impacted American political thinking.

The new American republic incorporated into its core ideological framework this classical inheritance because its Founding Fathers were largely scholars of classical texts. Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence asserts all humans are equal and have unalienable rights under an articulation which borrows from Athenian civic vocabularly and simultaneously incorporates old wisdom and enlightenment thinking.[113] [114] Similarly James Madison codified constitutional checks and balances under Aristotle's theory of mixed constitutions and olybius's

[112] Ober, J. (1989). Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People. Princeton University Press.
[113] Jefferson, T. (1776). Declaration of Independence.
[114] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.

Roman commentary on republics which derived from Athenian political power and weakness analysis.[115] [116]

The Founding Fathers used classical models through adaptive selection rather than straightforward imitation. The American framers saw direct citizen participation as an impractical system for their large and diverse republic based on Athenian democracy. The Founders studied classical texts such as Plato's Republic and Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War to understand the potential risks of direct democracy including demagoguery and popular volatility and factionalism.[117] [118] According to David Bederman, these concerns guided their decision to establish representative democracy alongside institutional safeguards.[119]

The American constitutional framework implemented new mechanisms which protected democratic values while building lasting political stability. Federalist No. 10 and Federalist No. 51 by James Madison and Alexander Hamilton described federalism alongside bicameral legislatures and staggered elections as mechanisms to balance popular rule with protection against majority tyranny.[120] [121]The institutional frameworks demonstrated an intentional adaptation of classical elements to address the requirements of an emerging political system. According to Bederman, the hybrid system maintained Athenian democratic ethical principles through the reduction of recognized procedural problems.[122]

The research demonstrates that both Athens and early America faced ongoing conflicts between democratic values and practices that denied rights to certain groups. Athenian democracy promoted freedom and equality alongside civic duty yet these principles applied only to free-born Athenian males who formed a minority demographic. Paul Cartledge points out that women together with slaves and metics received complete exclusion from political participation although they made up the majority of the population.[123] A similar pattern characterized early American democracy. At its creation the new republic proclaimed universal

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[115] Aristotle. (1998). Politics (C. D. C. Reeve, Trans.). Hackett Publishing.
[116] Bederman, D. J. (2008). The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution: Prevailing Wisdom. Cambridge University Press.
[117] Plato. (2000). The republic (B. Jowett, Trans.). Dover Publications.
[118] Thucydides. (1998). The Peloponnesian War (R. Crawley, Trans.). Penguin Classics.ssics.
[119] Bederman, D. J. (2008). The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution: Prevailing Wisdom. Cambridge University Press.
[120] Madison, J. (1787). Federalist No. 10.
[121] Hamilton, A. (1787). Federalist No. 23: The Necessity of a Government as Energetic as the One Proposed.
[122] Bederman, D. J. (2008). The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution: Prevailing Wisdom. Cambridge University Press.
[123] Cartledge, P. (2016). Democracy: A Life. Oxford University Press.

rights yet granted voting rights only to white landowning men. The Constitution included the Three-Fifths Compromise as one of its institutional provisions which simultaneously recognized and devalued enslaved people.[124] The observations of Ober and Raaflaub demonstrate that these exclusions functioned as built-in structural elements which revealed fundamental conflicts between democratic principles and social fact.[125] [126] The thesis analyzes these historical models to demonstrate how different societies fought between their pursuit of equality and participation and their entrenched hierarchical systems and marginalization. The conflict between democratic goals and discriminatory practices continues to shape current discussions about democratic legitimacy and membership inclusivity. Through the Athenian and American examples we can study the development of citizenship boundaries and the unresolvable theoretical disputes within democratic theory.

Through this research we can understand how the political thought of ancient Athens still shapes the contemporary governance of democratic states. The contemporary representative system retains strong Athenian democratic ideals despite utilizing different structural mechanisms from direct ancient democracy. Legal equality, public accountability and belief that political power is sourced from the people are the fundamental columns of Athenian democracy. As posited by Raaflaub these political ideals experienced successive stages of philosophical development and institutional changes to signify their presence in contemporary states' constitutional frameworks.[127]

Its rhetorical tradition also still remains effective. America sees itself as a “city on a hill” endowed with democratic virtues which is much the same type of thing as the old Greek ideal of Athens as beacon of freedom and virtue. For Raaflaub such rhetorical tradition shows how civic self from classical tradition was taken up and used by others.[128] Thucydides recorded Pericles’ Funeral Oration which enshrined democracy both as moral duty and civilizational achievement.[129] For Ober such vision still shapes American political speeches when speakers talk about national unity and public service and shared purpose.[130]

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[124] Bederman, D. J. (2008). The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution: Prevailing Wisdom. Cambridge University Press.
[125] Ober, J. (1989). Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People. Princeton University Press.
[126] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.
[127] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.
[128] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.
[129] Thucydides. (1998). The Peloponnesian War (R. Crawley, Trans.). Penguin Classics.ssics.
[130] Ober, J. (1989). Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People. Princeton University Press.

The American Founding Fathers absorbed Athenian democratic thinking while crafting the original political framework in a complex manner. The thesis demonstrates that there was transfer of the ideas of democracy from Athens to early America through active interpretation processes. The Founders approached ancient exemplars both through analytical judgment and critical reading and creative appropriation. The thesis demonstrates that classical political thinking is still at work in modern governance due to its ideals remaining alive through active interpretation processes of updating and transforming.

The history of democracy demonstrates how it is an evolving political system which requires citizens to remember the past and be capable of thinking critically and bringing creative skills to translate past knowledge into contemporary problems. Present-day democracy retains both its philosophic depth and its potential for transformation by still looking to its classical sources.

9.2 Implications of the Study

Historical awareness serves as an optimal method to understand the development of modern political institutions according to the research. Democratic thinking of the eighteenth century developed on the foundation of centuries-long philosophical thinking and institutional evolution and public intervention. Kurt Raaflaub and Josiah Ober decide that Classical Athens is an original source of knowledge for such thinking.[131] [132] The political framework of Athens established fundamental democratic principles which were used by later political thinkers for developing new paradigms for democracy.

The evaluation shows that American Founding Fathers applied Athenian democratic principles at an advanced level while preventing basic unexamined adoption. David Bederman illustrates that Founding Fathers used intellectual power along with adaptive ability while managing classical sources.[133] The Founders adopted some Athenian thoughts which were transformed into a fitting system for their new republic's demands. The method demonstrates a harmonious connection between the appreciation for classical democratic theory and the understanding of its operational dynamics and moral limitations.

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[131] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.
[132] Ober, J. (1989). Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People. Princeton University Press.
[133] Bederman, D. J. (2008). The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution: Prevailing Wisdom. Cambridge University Press.

The results require additional study to determine how democracy has evolved through time. Political institutions evolve as changing structures for Ober since they evolve due to the changing process of reinterpretation and critical review and preservation of historical memory.[134] To determine strength of today's democracies against today's political challenges it would be significant to look at reactions to and interactions with classical political models.

The evaluation indicates that we need to study the positive aspects of early democratic conventions. M. I. Finley illustrates how political conventions of Athens which balanced civic virtue and public debate coexisted alongside fundamental structural constraints and short-sighted political thinking which spawned ultimate political instability.[135] Early American democracy embraced revolutionary political thought but preserved social injustices such as disenfranchisement and slavery and patriarchal traditions which inform current political argument. The natural constraints of democratic history require us to approach democratic principles with caution when we evaluate and improve them instead of treating them as absolute standards.

9.3 Areas for Future Research

The central consideration of this work explores American Founding Father political thought and its influence from Classical Athenian democracy but many future study opportunities are derived from these findings. Research should be devoted to comparison of old political systems starting from Athens to explore how they determine contemporary constitutional theory through an investigation of the Roman Republic as a significant case. David Bederman (2008) and Kurt Raaflaub maintain that American Founders sought Roman political ideas for developing answers for sustainability and stability and for developing civic virtue through Polybius and Cicero's writings.[136] Polybius established a mixed constitutional regime which combined elements of democratic, aristocratic and monarchical power to offer stability and hence was an original invention applied to Enlightenment political thought and American government creation. Cicero defined civic virtue and moral duty which circumscribed early American thought about republican ethics and public office. Comprehensive comparison between Roman and Athenian systems would demonstrate how both systems uniquely defined

[134] Ober, J. (1989). Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People. Princeton University Press.
[135] Finley, M. I. (1998). Democracy Ancient and Modern. Rutgers University Press.
[136] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.

American constitutional principles while contributing to an elevated level of understanding of classical elements applied to contemporary rule.

The study must broaden its focus to explore how Athenian democratic ideals were received and interpreted and faced challenges in non-Western political traditions. More understanding of world perspectives challenges conventional academic focus on democratic inheritance of the transatlantic world. Classical political thought was transmitted to political leaders of Asia, Africa and Latin America in a variety of modes from model-based reforms to cultural challenges to their historico-geographical confines. A study of worldwide receptions of democracy would enable scholars to understand how political ideals were transformed for different societies and would debunk any assumption that democracy originated among Western societies. An analysis of Athenian democracy from a comparative perspective, says Raaflaub, shows its paradoxical legacy as source of intellectual influence and intellectual controversy on different cultural trajectories.[137]

The development of basic principles of democracy such as liberty, equality and citizenship is worth study attention. These very central political terms which were central to Athenian and American thought have evolved tremendously over different social political historical epochs. An historical-philosophical treatment tracing them from earliest antiquity to Enlightenment reconceptualizations to modern manifestations of democracy will reveal them to be constantly evolving. This investigation will reveal how ideal principles of democracy are constantly beset in practical manifestation distinctively on political inclusion and political representation and distributive justice questions.

The evolving digital technologies that define political participation open avenues for reassessment of classical democratic principles for contemporary digital society. Athenian tradition on direct political participation presents good lessons for analysis of digital mechanisms expanding democratic participation for contemporary societies. Technological advances such as participatory budget platforms and virtual town halls and digital referenda are confronted with basic questions on their ability to provide for direct civic participation. The new technological advances are like the old Athenian traditions asserts Raaflaub but also create potential risks through potentially introducing corresponding limitations which existed within the original system.[138] More empirical work needs to establish whether digital platforms really

[137] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.
[138] Raaflaub, K. A. (2004). The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece. University of Chicago Press.

enhance political participation while avoiding introducing new inequalities and political disengagement.

The avenues of investigation of this thesis advance intellectual and cultural and technological domains which are based on arguments already constructed. These avenues of investigation show how classical models are at the core of democratic government and disclose their natural centrality when studying democratic theory. Future research which explores how ancient frameworks function on modern political institutions will illuminate further democracy as an ongoing practice.

9.4 Final Reflection

The Founding Fathers demonstrated that ideas of democracy are ageless when adopting democratic principles from Classical Athens. Basic democratic principles of political equality and active citizenship and public accountability create lasting connections between these two regimes despite their divergent historical experiences and organizational structures.

Democracy is an unfinished piece of work that needs always from an Athenian and an early American vantage point to be refined. Democracy continues to be an ongoing regime which is afflicted by perennial challenges because of social injustices and political partisan divisions and bureaucratic opposition. The task of connecting democratic theory and democratic praxis continues to be no less central today as it was 5th-century BCE Athens and 18th-century CE America. The Founding Fathers established an amalgam of stability and freedom which brought together civic virtue and ordered society. The Founding Fathers established a new political system through an integration of classical ideals into a system that would work for contemporary times. The classical ideals used by them indicate how they influence later societies. The twin career of Athens continues to offer revealing lessons on both representation and legitimacy and inclusion difficulties in the face of current democratic crises. It would be ideal to investigate our modern citizenship definitions and limits of participation and look for new possibilities to update our democratic processes. Ancient democracy's very significant questions continue to be significant for society's rapid transformations in contemporary society.

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