

## Athenian vs Spartan Government

In the grand scheme of time, human existence draws parallels with a vibrant, obnoxious bouncy house on a 50-mile stretch of bleak South Dakota terrain. In other words, although we are but a microscopic speck in the vast timeline of life, our existence is infinitely more advanced and sophisticated than that of simpler creatures of far simpler creeds. On a societal and cultural standpoint, we are so much more than what has come before us. In this instance, the bizarre, unusual installment of our beloved bouncy house seems to have unfolded in ancient Greece, where the development of new governmental and societal doctrines began.

Just as we examine the roots of a tree for hints at its health, or the heart and lungs as an indicator for ours, it's absolutely imperative that we examine the founding roots for today's governments. The ancient Greeks, while being under one general name, actually exhibited several different forms of leadership throughout their existence. Amongst them are monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. And while the blaring alarm bells for traitorous blasphemy may ring, I would like to briefly explain why the Spartan governmental theory of Oligarchy was more effective than Athenian democracy. Through its practicality and militaristic superiority, it becomes apparent that Spartan oligarchy was simply more suited for the time era. In other

words, oligarchy provided that crucial support to craft something remarkable out of a barren wasteland, kind of like a bouncy house in South Dakota.

Before unearthing the long-lost time capsule of oligarchy's surprising effectiveness, let us first examine its opposition – Athenian democracy. Athens was populated since about 3-4,000 BC, but it only emerged as a world superpower around 700 BC. At the time, it was ruled by a series of absolute kings; however, thanks to a lower class, populist revolution and a fast decline in wealth in 594, it became the first society to experiment with pure, democratic rule.

Understandably, many patriotic individuals might feel alarmed at the claim of ancient democracy's incompetence, *"How could you betray the entire western world?"* As a patriotic westerner, I feel as if I can make these claims based on the little-known fact that us, as Americans, do not experience true democracy like the Athenians did. Simply put, Athenian rule, while being solidly humanitarian, certainly wasn't the same as what we have to boast of today.

Amongst the differences, Athenian democracy was direct, meaning they did not vote for a qualified, educated officials who train for his entire lives like we do. For starters, every male, Athenian citizen was drawn into a lottery and had the same chance of becoming a member of the council, comparable to the house or senate today. Furthermore, the court representatives were decided based upon the results

of lottery drawings as well. This created an uneducated court system which operated through the forces of personal vengeance and grudges.

Now, let's examine the Spartan form of government. The policy-makers, called the council of elders, were a group of 28 wise men, joined together by two kings, who acted as military leaders. Once a proposal was made, it was sent to an assembly of all free adult males. Keep in mind, this citizen-based aspect of Spartan government wasn't incredibly powerful; it had the inability to create proposals and rarely rejected ones made by the policy-makers. Even further, the Spartans understood the lengthy exchanges of power between the king and the council of elders, so they implemented five annually elected "overseers" to regulate feuds between the two main powers. The Spartans even implemented modern-day impeachment into their system, as the overseers could imprison a king or policy-maker at the sight of political corruption. Essentially, this system combined the militaristic benefits of totalitarianism with the humane ones of democratic elections.

For a war-plagued society, rooted almost solely on its efficiency of battle, victory was the ultimate arbiter of national success. If you are in any doubt, consider the famous Spartan poem, "Come back [from war] with your shield – or on it. So, with the ancients making it clear that military is the ultimate aspect of civil life, it's necessary to examine the Peloponnesian, or Athenian-Spartan war, which was the result of Athens' authoritarian demands towards other city-states.

The war between these states was truly David v. Goliath. At the time, Athens held 140,000 citizens whereas Sparta had about 8,000. Yet, after 30 years of gruesome fighting, Sparta and a few minor allies defeated the city-state of Athens, debilitating its sense of patriotism and might. But how is this possible? Well, the more totalitarian Sparta trained its citizens, from the age of 6, militaristic tactics and skills. In a democratic, free society, like Athens, this simply wasn't the case.

Of course, Sparta's government also outshined the feeble rule of Athens. Sparta, directed by decisive kings, effectively attacked and defended themselves, whereas the Athenian army was largely ineffective. One particular Spartan strategy, mainly executed between 415-404 BC, simply focused on the murder of the entirety of the innocent, inadequately trained Athenian population. This crippled the state's economy and left the very root of its government, the people, both endangered and less patriotic. Additionally, working-class Athenian citizens desired expansion of the empire and brutal imperialism. Due to Athenian democracy, officials took the interests to heart. Throughout the war, the army attacked many neutral city-states, which in turn persuaded them to join forces with Sparta. By the end of the war, Athens' council of everyday merchants and scientists were simply ineffective novices compared to Spartan decisions, which were based upon the ideas of the wisest, strongest, and most competent men of the state.

As the patriotic byproduct of thousands of years' worth of experimentation and learning through countless defeats and victories, we'd like to think of our own

system of government as the most effective and practical in history. Following that logic, most uninformed Americans would make the assumption that, because it's called a democracy, Athens is the closest predecessor to our societal theory. However, as demonstrated throughout this summary, neither Athens nor Sparta truly possessed a fully modernized system. In fact, through the grueling thirty-year Peloponnesian War, Sparta proved that its way of life and government were far more effective than the Athenian ones.

As humans, it is our duty to reinforce our egos by simply over-glorifying ourselves. Thanks to our mindlessly progressive and forward-looking attitudes, we stampede our way towards liberty like a runaway car about to fly off a desert cliff. The Athenians are perhaps the greatest example, crafting a system of government that failed to recognize the militaristic failure they were bound to experience. So, looking back on that bouncy house across the desolate landscape, we find the inevitable truth that despite its flamboyant colors and appearance, the byproduct of human victory, is not solely rooted in our societally altered, fickle beliefs.

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