**Advantages/ Key Features of Representative Democracy**

A further benefit or strength of representative democracy is the DIVISION of LABOUR.

This means that ordinary citizens do not have to be involved in decision making; a division of labour is created in politics. Representative democracy relives the burden on the ordinary citizen and allows them to carry on with their chosen pursuits; it provides relief from the chore of decision making and political meetings.

For example Athenian citizens were only able to devote so much of their lives to politics because slavery freed them of the need to engage in arduous labour and Women were also confined to the home.

**However** others argue that this means **having to rely on SELF-SERVING politicians**.

Having to rely on ‘experts’ when confidence and trust is limited in representatives, more direct forms of democracy would remove this link.

These ‘experts’ may distort the actual views of the people.

**For example, many politicians are accused of serving their own self-interest or are constrained in parliament by party discipline.**

***Therefore, although many representatives and ‘career’ politicians could be accused of having self-serving interests and not necessarily reflecting the view of the public, representative democracy does create a necessary division of labour in politics, as it is unrealistic for the majority of the people to be involved in decision-making the majority of the time.***

An advantage of representative democracy could be claimed to be that it is more **PRACTICABLE**.

Representative democracy is the only practical form of democracy in a large modern society, given the numbers now involved, other more direct forms of democracy are generally unpractical for a host of reasons. Direct democracy could be claimed to be impracticable. In a large scale society direct democracy is not achievable with a voting population of over 45 million people. Although it is still possible for direct democracy in small communities i.e. New England township meetings.

For example, even in Ancient Greece in the city state of Athens despite an estimated population on 250,000 only around 40,000 male citizens had the right to participate in the democratic process.

**However!**

Others argue that in the 21st century the expansion of the use of referenda and of e-voting may enhance democracy. They point to the relatively high turnouts in referenda to back up their claims. Referenda for instance provide an opportunity for the public to indicate their support or opposition to a particular policy.

For example the turnout for the Scottish independence referendum was around 86% - much higher than general election turnout, in 1998 the turnout for the Belfast Agreement was 81%

***Therefore, representative democracy is much more practicable for a whole host of reasons when dealing with a large population, even in ancient Athens the majority were excluded, as inclusion would have been impractical, However, high turnouts in recent referenda show that it is possible to apply direct democracy, also the use of modern advances in technology may mean that applying more direct forms of democracy are more realistic.***

Representative democracy also maintains STABILITY, encourages COMPROMISE and ACCOUNTABILITY.

This means that Representative Democracy maintains **STABILITY** – as it distances ordinary citizens from politics and encourages **COMPROMISE**, limited involvement of the public therefore also curtails extremism and agitation.

It also provides **ACCOUNTABILITY,** through elections and free speech the public can hold office holders to account, removing errant governments and poorly performing ministers.

For example, in 2015 the UK general election returned a majority Conservative government, which could claim to have an electoral mandate due to winning more than 50% of the seats, the next general election will be in 2020.

Many liberal Democrat MP’s lost their seats proving accountability for their actions in government.

**However,** critics argue that representative forms of democracy lead to under representation of certain groups in society. In most western representative democracies, the majority of representatives are white and male. There are flaws in how ‘representative’ the systems is with regards to gender, ethnicity and social class. Leading to a “tyranny of the majority”.

For example, in 2015 in the UK Parliament women make up only 29% of all MP’s, there are only 42 non-white MP’s out of 650.

Therefore, although it could be claimed that more representative forms of democracy encourage stability and compromise, many groups views and ability to compromise are limited due to underrepresentation, leading to a tyranny of the majority.The phrase "tyranny of the majority" was first used by [John Adams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Adams) in 1788

An additional strength or argument in favour of the use of representative democracy is EXPERTISE and EXPERIENCE.

Representative Democracy allows government to be in the hands of those with **EXPERT** knowledge, **EXPERIENCE** and perhaps better **EDUCATED**. Plato argued that the ‘masses’ do not know what is best for them, he compared the State to that of a ship **he said leaders of the state should know how to ‘steer the ship’.**

Representative democracy is government by experts or specialists, For instance in terms of law and economics, government posts are filled with people who possess detailed knowledge in these areas.

**However,** again others argue that this means having to rely on SELF-SERVING representatives

The idea that elite style representatives are the only ones capable of using ‘mature judgement’ and ‘enlightened conscious’ is highly questionable,

Mature judgement is also called into question by the behaviour and illegal actions of some representatives – **Former Energy Secretary Chris Huhne was sent to jail for lying about speeding and having his wife take the points, Former MSP Tommy Sheridan went to jail for perjury!!!! Furthermore the expenses scandal in 2009/10 saw some MP’s jailed for misuse of public money – or just plain stealing!**

An elite group also risks being unrepresentative – as the majority of the UK never went to university! **19 PM’s went to Eton.**

Therefore, although the actions and experience of some elected representatives could be criticised, There is a need for experts in certain fields who can take informed decisions and have a practical long term view for the whole of society.

