

# [To what extent had democracy in britain been achieved by 1918 essay sample](https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-had-democracy-in-britain-been-achieved-by-1918-essay-sample/)

Democracy- the binding of people in a country together ruling under a Government by the people or their elected representatives. ‘ By the people, Of the people, For the people. ‘ In 1850 however, this was certainly not the case. Britain was still ruled under a fairly strict tri-partait system consisting of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Monarchy. There was in no way equal voting rights between either the social classes or the sexes. But, had democracy been achieved in Britain by the year 1918?

No, simply because the working class and women were still discriminated against within the system. The Great Reform Act of 1832 which increased the suffrage to 653 000 was further expanded in the Second Reform Act of 1867. In 1867, the suffrage increased again. Most males living in the larger towns and cities (excluding the extreme poverty stricken), gained the vote, Scotland gained seven more MPs, taking them from 53 to 60 and various small boroughs lost one MP and others gained an MP.

These reforms increased the electorate from 653 000 in 1832 to 1 120 000, this was still a poor figure going by a population size out of roughly 30 million people and also the fact that the figure still excluded ALL women. In 1850 voting took place openly and was in no way private. This made bribery, corruption and intimidation easier, which was most certainly not fair on the overall voting results. But, in 1872 Gladstone’s Liberal Government passed the secret ballot act.

This was particularly effective in areas where voters were very numerous e. g. London. In 1883 corruption and bribery was further targeted with the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act. This act introduced penalties and punishments e. g. a fine or prison sentence to any candidates who exceeded the set election expenses or offered incentives to voters to vote for them. Both of the mentioned acts above made voting extremely more orderly. In 1884/85 the Third Reform Act (sequel to 1867 2nd reform act) was introduced.

The reform was split into two parts- 1814 dealing with changes to the voting system and 1885 dealing with redistribution of seats etc. This act abolished the old county/borough division with the aim to reduce the rotten boroughs and also to adopt the idea of creating constituencies of about 50000 people each. This act also introduced the law that all male householders, tenants of at least one years ownership and better off lodgers now had the suffrage, again increasing the electorate. The second part of the act in 1885 introduced the rule of plural voting for certain people.

This was seen as some as unfair because it meant that university students now had a second vote for their university MP as well as their home constituency MP, those who owned properties in various towns or cities now also had the right to have a vote for each constituency. 1885 also saw the redistribution of 142 seats, this increased Scotland’s representation to 72 which overall balanced the country’s representation out. In the period of 1850 to 1918 Britain was still ruled under a very strict tri partait system (Monarchy, House of Lords, House of Commons).

The monarchy played the same role, if not even a more important one as it does today. The king or queen (between 1850-1918; Victoria in 1837-1901, Edward VII in 1901-1910 and finally George V in 1910-1936) still had the power to choose the Prime Minister and also had the force to such an extent that every law, ballot or important decision could not be passed without his or her consent. Most people saw the House of Lords system as unfair because the majority of Lords inherited their position or were bishops- their power was reduced in 1911 under the house of lords act.

Between 1850-1918 and even beyond that, the country was seen as a material thing, about the land. ‘ The country’ was not the people within it and the wealth etc but quite literally the ground we walk on. This is certainly not democratic. As the quality of education increased, so did peoples insight and knowledge into everyday politics. Furthermore, the media also increased peoples’ insight into politics as the railways began to revolutionise Britain into national time with people having the advantage of hearing about the happenings in other areas of the country.

Therefore, people weren’t so nai?? e and began to realise that if you were being taxed, you should have the right to say how your money should be spent – ‘ no taxation without representation. ‘ Although, voters could still speak to their MP about their views, queries and complaints which in a way contributed to the running of their country. On the run up to 1918 the political parties grew as did their ideas. In particular, the rise of the Labour party in the 1900s saw them plus other major parties offering voters party programmes of reforms that they all hoped would be popular and appeal to the public voters.

In 1918 Britain was introduced to the ‘ 1918 Representation of the People’s Act. ‘ This act consisted of many points, which increased democracy. The constituencies were reorganised again with the hope that each constituency was as near to 70000 votes as possible and voting throughout the country was now to take place on the same day, instead of being spread out over several weeks. Because of this act democracy had been nearly achieved for men of all classes (excluding those who didn’t satisfy a 6 month residence qualification).

With this point, there was still discrimination between the sexes by 1918 because although all women over 30 (excluding those who were not householders, wives of householders or university graduates) had by this stage gained the vote because of their contribution to WWI and also their long running suffrage campaigns on the run up to the war, their age and grounds of gaining the suffrage was still not equal to that of the men. Some poorer working class males or females could still not vote because of the requirements mentioned above, this was not democratic. And so, by 1918 democracy had been achieved to a slight extent.

Although the acts introduced between the 1850s to 1918 which included the Secret Ballot, the Corrupt and Illegal practices Act, the redistribution of seats and MPs, the abolishment of the county/borough system, the decrease in power that the house of lords possessed and men and women gaining better voting rights did all contribute to an advance in democracy, it had still not been fully achieved purely because of various problems- The MPs would always and will always favour the decision of their party over the constituents views, the monarchy still had ultimate power over all decisions, university graduates still had two votes as did those who owned more than one property and men had superior voting conditions than women.

All of these problems mentioned contributed to the failing of complete democracy. Universal suffrage had still not been achieved because of voting age limits, the discrimination of sexes and the working class population. The dictionary defines Democracy as “ rule by the people”, this had most certainly not been achieved by the year 1918.