

The Democratization of Databases

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Democratic governments have a long history of success, with some setbacks. This talk explains how democratic principles underpin the success of the open source relational database Postgres.

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Outline

1. History of governance structures
2. Strengths of each structure
3. Efficiency and messiness of democracy
4. Ultimate success of democracy
5. Software governance history
6. Where does this leave Postgres?
7. Democracy in action

1. History of Governance Structures



Pnyx Hill, Athens

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/>

Autocracy

- Single person or small group in power
- Examples
 - dictatorship, e.g., Belarus
 - absolute monarchy, e.g., Saudi Arabia
 - communist, e.g., North Korea
- First governing structure

Representative Democracy

- First established in ancient Athens
- Historically only a small group of the population could vote
- Elect representatives to vote on issues

2. Strengths of Each Structure



Chepstow Castle, Wales

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/damiavos/>

Autocracy Strengths

- Good for focusing a fixed amount of resources on a clear goal
- Examples
 - space exploration
 - military

Democracy Strengths

- Allows rapid adjustment for unclear goals
- Emboldens talent to act near the problem
- Expands the pool of talent
- Examples
 - consumer goods
 - software

3. Efficiency and Messiness of Democracy



Madison, Wisconsin

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dennisdeery/>

Efficiency of Democracy

- Unleashes a flurry of activity based on agency, i.e., personal power
- Fluidity of solutions

Messiness of Democracy

- Hard to predict behavior
- Problems can get stuck
- Difficulty with large projects that span multiple elections
- Direct democracy rarely tried, yielded mixed results

4. Ultimate Success of Democracy



Moscow

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/varfolomeev/>

Democracy's Checkered History

- First democracy in Athens, suspended during wars
- Roman democracy ended in dictatorship
- Middle Ages, Magna Carta, Renaissance
- American Revolution, black and women's voting rights
- French Revolution leads to monarchy

Democracy Today

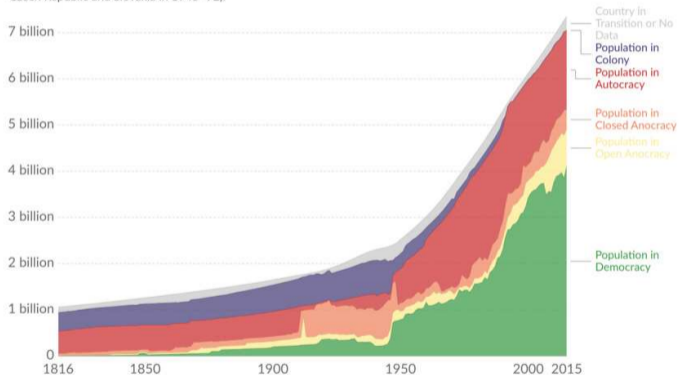
- Democracy continues to make steady progress
- There are still setbacks

Democracy in the Past 200 Years

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dennisdeery/>

Number of world citizens living under different political regimes

The scale goes from -10 (full autocracy) to 10 (full democracy). Anocracies are those scoring between -5 and 5. "Colony" (coded as -20) includes not only colonies, but also countries that were not yet sovereign states (e.g. the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1945–92).



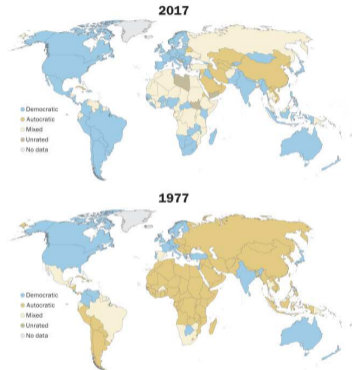
Source: World Population by Political Regime they live in (OWID (2016))
OurWorldInData.org/a-history-of-global-living-conditions-in-5-charts/ • CC BY

<https://ourworldindata.org/democracy>

Democracy in the Past 40 Years

Democracy has grown across the world over the past four decades

Regime types in each country, 1977 and 2017



Note: Map depicts data for the 167 countries included in the Polity IV database. Countries labeled "mixed" have a blend of democratic and autocratic regime characteristics. "Unrated" countries are those whose central government has or had completely collapsed, which are or were subject to foreign intervention or occupation, or which are or were in the midst of a regime transition. "No data" refers to states or entities that either have fewer than 500,000 people or are not internationally recognized as fully sovereign.

Source: Center for Systemic Peace's Polity IV Project.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/14/more-than-half-of-countries-are-democratic/>

5. Software Governance History



Redwood City, California

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nzdave/>

Proprietary Autocracy

- Executives make decisions
 - input from sales and marketing
 - indirectly from customers
- Decision matrix
 - “If we do this, what percentage of customers will we gain?”
 - “If we don’t, what percentage of customers will we lose?”
 - gains are more sensitive to the decision than losses
 - “Do gains or avoided losses justify the implementation costs?”

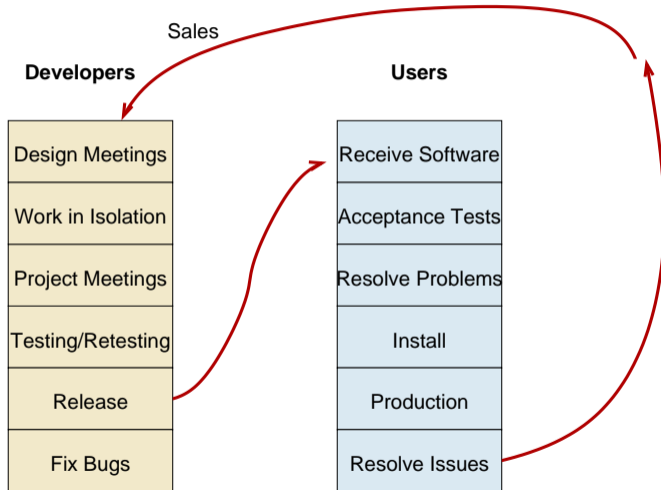
Open Source Democracy

- Mix of direct democracy and meritocracy
- Voting can be problematic
- Sometimes too much feedback
 - bike shedding
- Bad decisions can be quickly corrected, i.e., easy to revert
- No reliable road map

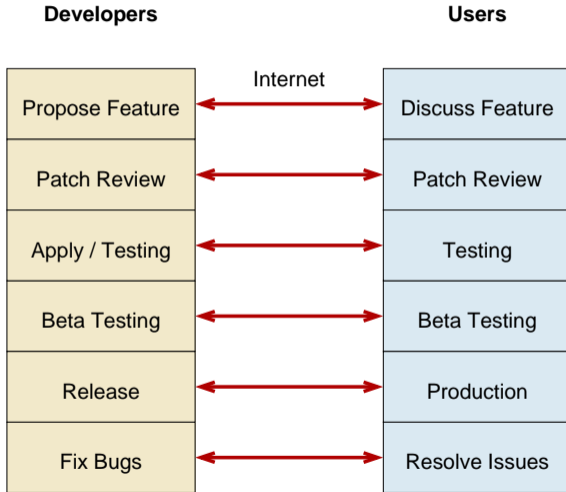
Internet Makes Direct Democracy Possible

- Easy to share ideas and iterate new solutions
- Rapid global communication

Autocratic Development Flow



Democratic Development Flow



Hybrid Development Models

- Single company controls development
- Open source distribution
- Uses autocratic decision matrix
- Lacks democratic feedback
- More comfortable for users transitioning from proprietary since there is a single company to contact
- Examples
 - MySQL, MariaDB
 - MongoDB

6. Where Does This Leave Postgres?

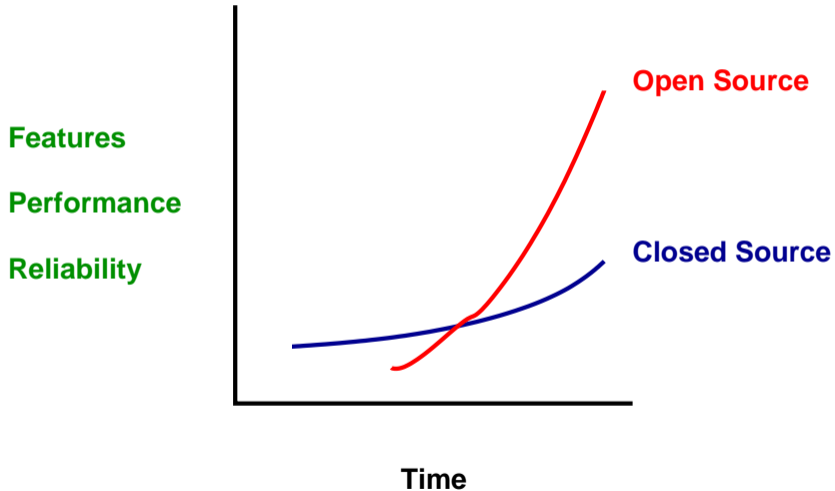


https://www.flickr.com/photos/tomas_vondra/

Postgres Wins Because Democracy Wins

- Uses democracy to attract talent
 - talent pool can easily compete with proprietary staff
- Superior feedback and decision matrix lead to success
- This is a challenge for niche software
- Setbacks still possible

Rise of Open Source

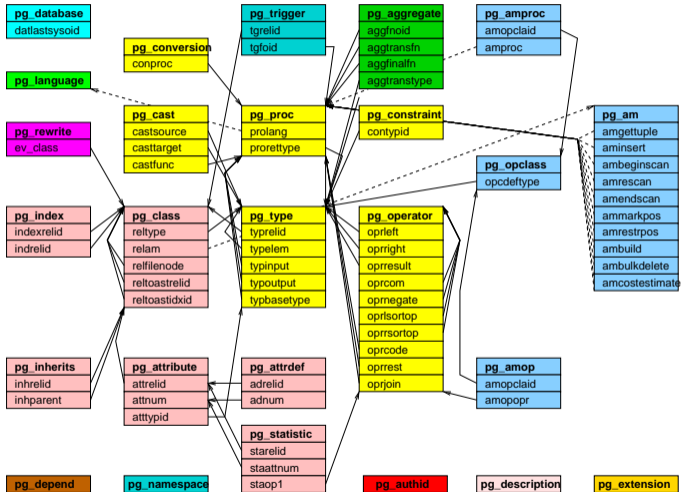


7. Democracy in Action

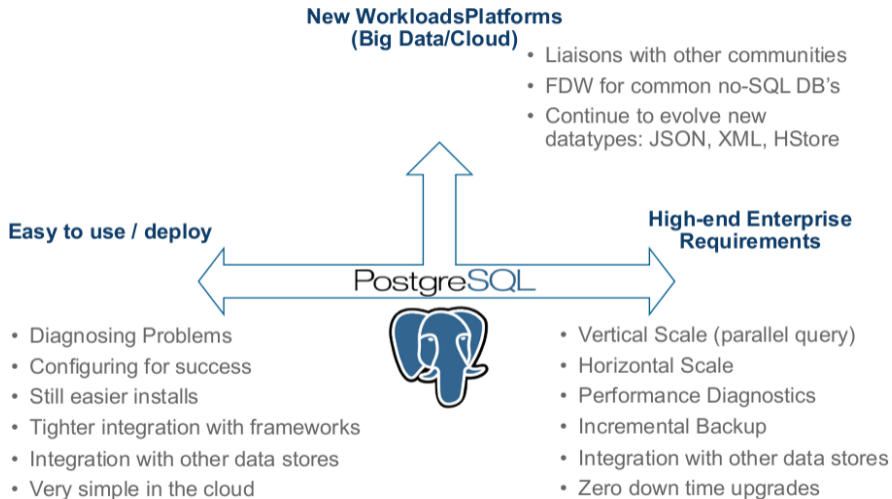


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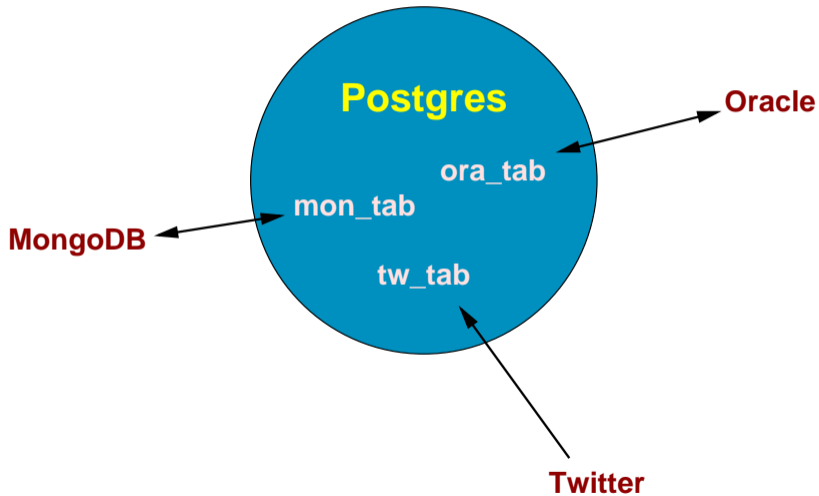
Postgres Extensibility



Many Focuses



Foreign Data Wrappers



Foreign Data Wrappers

- 100+ interfaces to foreign data
- Read/write
- Sophisticated push down of joins, sorts, and aggregates



[users](#) [tags](#) [recent](#)

in Distributions PGXN Search

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PGXN, the PostgreSQL Extension network, is a central distribution system for open-source PostgreSQL extension libraries.

Recent Releases

pljs 1.0.0

PLJS trusted procedural language

h3 4.2.3

PostgreSQL bindings for H3

pg_search 0.16.0

Full text search for PostgreSQL using BM25

vhord 0.4.3

Scalable, fast, and disk-friendly vector search in Postgres

pg_isok 0.4.0

Query based data integrity management

[More Releases →](#)

- PostGIS is a full-featured Geographical Information System (GIS)
- Implemented as a extension
- Independent development team and community



PostgreSQL Tenth Anniversary in 2006



https://www.postgresql.org/files/community/conference06/conference_group.html

My Postgres Activities



Voting

- Committers nominate new committers
- Core team nominates new core members
- Development is open to all, even occasional visitors
 - “Let the best idea win!”
 - “Where did that guy come from?”
 - Focus talent like a lens on every task

Roadmap

- Individuals and political parties have roadmaps
- Democratic governments don't
- Developers and companies have roadmaps
- Postgres doesn't

Users

- General** Re: password rules
- Other** Re: many sessions waiting DataFileRead and extend
- Announce** pgDay Lowlands 2025 - Schedule published, registration open; come find us at the zoo

Developers

- Hackers** Re: Skipping schema changes in publication
- Commit** doc: Updates for RETURNING OLD/NEW.
- Versions** **Stable:** 17.5+, 16.9+, 15.13+, 14.18+, 13.21+ | **Development:** 18 beta1+, in commitfest

External

- Blogs** Dave Stokes: Entity Relationship Maps
- News** pgDay Lowlands 2025 - Schedule published, registration open; come find us at the zoo
- Media** Snowflake to Acquire Crunchy Data to Power Agentic AI with PostgreSQL Integration - Cloud Wars
- Events** Swiss PGDay 2025

IRC (also Slack)

[patrik]: yw

authadia: did something incredibly cursed

authadia: lack of extensions is at least one of the issues

authadia: so i directly modified the dumpall; i added in the 'create extension' commands every time a new database is created

authadia: i have no clue if this will work but i guess we'll find out!

sobel: that sounds like the right thing to do when you're migrating from 9.2 and what sounds like a weird postgis installation

sobel: weird and/or incomplete

sobel: d'oh they gone

London 11:01 Berlin 12:01 Moscow 13:01 Mumbai 15:31 Beijing 18:01 Tokyo 19:01 Los Angeles 03:01 New York 06:01 São Paulo 07:01

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Conclusion



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