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.
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
8. Conclusion
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., Syria
  - 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

2017

1977

Note: Map reports data for the 187 countries included in the Polity IV database. Countries labeled “mixed” have a blend of democratic and autocratic regime characteristics. “Failed” 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/
• 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

Developers
- Design Meetings
- Work in Isolation
- Project Meetings
- Testing/Retesting
- Release
- Fix Bugs

Users
- Receive Software
- Acceptance Tests
- Resolve Problems
- Install
- Production
- Resolve Issues

Sales
Democratic Development Flow

Developers

- Propose Feature
- Patch Review
- Apply / Testing
- Beta Testing
- Release
- Fix Bugs

Users

- Discuss Feature
- Patch Review
- Testing
- Beta Testing
- Production
- Resolve Issues

Internet
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?
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

Features

Performance

Reliability

Time

Open Source

Closed Source
7. Democracy in Action

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

New Workloads
Platforms
(Big Data/Cloud)

- Liaisons with other communities
- FDW for common no-SQL DB’s
- Continue to evolve new datatypes: JSON, XML, HStore

Easy to use / deploy

- Diagnosing Problems
- Configuring for success
- Still easier installs
- Tighter integration with frameworks
- Integration with other data stores
- Very simple in the cloud

High-end Enterprise Requirements

- Vertical Scale (parallel query)
- Horizontal Scale
- Performance Diagnostics
- Incremental Backup
- Integration with other data stores
- Zero down time upgrades

Keith Alsheimer, EnterpriseDB
Foreign Data Wrappers

Postgres

Oracle

MongoDB

Twitter

mon_tab

ora_tab

tw_tab
Foreign Data Wrappers

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

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

https://postgis.net/
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
• Individuals and political parties have roadmaps
• Democratic governments don’t
• Developers and companies have roadmaps
• Postgres doesn’t
PgLife

PgLife Postgres Community Life

Users
General       Re: echo of \C foo
Other         Re: BUG #17158: Distinct ROW fails with Postgres 14
Announce      PGSpider extention is newly released

Developers
Hackers       Postgres Win32 build broken?
Commit        Don’t print extra parens around expressions in extended stats
Versions      Stable: 13.4+, 12.8+, 11.13+, 10.18+, 9.6.23+ | Development: 14 beta3+, 15 devel

External
Blogs         Hans-Juergen Schoenig: PostgreSQL: The power of a SINGLE missing index
News          pgmoneta 0.5.0
Media         Critical rights gap in PostgreSQL closed - Market Research Telecast
Events        PGDay Austria 2021

IRC (also Slack)
rsrx: convert_from() I guess
johto: what should happen if you cut a character in half?
johto: or 1/3 or 1/4 or whatever
rsrx: I can just trim to lower bound character, thats ok
rsrx: I mean, I can just round to the whole character, thats what I meant
rsrx: would casting column do the trick?
rsrx: i.e. column::varchar(65535)
johto: convert_from(), though it doesn’t deal with characters you cut off
8. Conclusion

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https://momjian.us/presentations

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