Forms of Government

**Anarchy**

Anarchism refers to the absence of government, a condition in which a nation or state operates without a central governing body. This denotes an absence of public utilities or services, a lack of regulatory control, limited diplomatic relations with other nation-states, and in most instances, a society divided into different, locally-ruled settlements (or fiefdoms).

### Aristocracy

Aristocracy refers to a form of government in which wealthy nobles are given power over those in lower socioeconomic strata. Positions of leadership are reserved for those of an elite ruling class, a status which is typically hereditary. The privileged ruling class is viewed, in this system, as possessing the education, upbringing, and genetic traits required for rulership. Aristocracy promotes an inherent class system that connects wealth and ethnicity with both the ability and right to rule.

### Colonialism

Colonialism is a form of governance in which a nation will seek to extend its sovereignty over other territories. In practical terms, colonialism involves the expansion of a nation’s rule beyond its borders. This often entails occupation of indigenous populations and exploitation of resources to the benefit of the ruling nation. The colonizer will also often impose its own economy, culture, religious order, and form of government on an occupied people to strengthen its own authority.

### Communism

In its purest form, Communism refers to the idea of common, public ownership of the economy, including infrastructure, utilities, and means of production. Communism, as idealized by thinkers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, denotes an absence of class divisions, which inherently requires the subversion of the ruling class by the working class. As such, communism often incorporates the idea of revolutionary action against unequal rule. Communism often positions itself as a counterpoint to the economic stratification underlying capitalism. This resistance to stratification sometimes also takes the form of a single-state authority, one in which political opposition or dissidence may be restricted. This may manifest in some communist states as a more authoritarian form of governance, as typified by the Soviet brand of communism that swept the globe during the mid-20th century.

### Democracy

Democracy refers to a form of government in which the people are given a direct role in choosing their leadership. Its primary goal is governance through fair representation, a system in which no single force or entity can exercise unchecked control or authority. The result is a system which requires discourse, debate, and compromise to satisfy the broadest possible number of public interests. Democracy is typified by fair and free elections, civic participation, protection of human rights, and the rule of law.

### Feudalism

Feudalism is a social structure revolving around land ownership, nobility, and military obligation. Though not a formal way of governing, feudalism refers to a way of life in which sharp, hierarchical divisions separate noble classes, clergy, and peasantry. Opportunities for movement between these hierarchies is largely impossible. In this system, peasants typically provided labor and military service in exchange for occupancy of land and protection from outside forces under the authority of a noble lord. In turn, lordships, or fiefdoms, often engaged one another politically, economically, and militarily. Feudalism was a highly decentralized and agrarian way of life supplanted when the European monarchies created the infrastructure to impose central rule over their various dominions.

### Military Dictatorship

A dictatorship is a nation ruled with absolute power, in the absence of a democratic process, and typically under the thumb of a single authority figure. In a military dictatorship, this authority usually heads the nation’s armed forces. A military dictatorship often comes to power by subverting the existing seat of government — sometimes though claims of corruption, weakness, or ineffectiveness — and which subsequently uses the military to establish its own brand of law and order. Military dictatorships will frequently prioritize law and order over due process, civil liberties, or political freedoms. Dissent or political opposition can be dangerous or even deadly for those living under a military dictatorship.

### Monarchy

Monarchy refers to a form of rule in which absolute power and authority are held by a single member of a royal bloodline. In a monarchy, the individual in the seat of power is often believed to have been placed there by “divine right,” or the will of God. In a monarchical society, power is inherited within a line of succession that relates to one’s bloodline and birth-order within the ruling royal family. Though the monarchy has historically indicated absolute power, the concept has become increasingly diluted with the evolution of democratic principles. Today, some monarchies exist but are merely symbolic, whereas others coexist within constitutional structures. However, until the 19th century, monarchy was the most common form of government in the world.

### Oligarchy

Oligarchy refers to a form of government in which a smattering of individuals rule over a nation. In many ways, oligarchy is a catch-all for any number of other forms of governance in which a specific set of qualities — wealth, heredity, race — are used to vest power in a small group of individuals. So, forms of government regarded as aristocratic, plutocratic, or totalitarian, for instance, can be referred to as oligarchic. Oligarchies are often characterized by tyrannical or authoritarian rule and an absence of democratic practices or individual rights.

### Socialism

Socialism refers to a form of government in which the people own the primary means of production. A counterpoint to the competitive nature and unequal proclivities of capitalism, socialism has existed in many forms and to widely variant degrees of strictness throughout history and around the world. From small communal societies to state-level governments that provide encompassing public services such as universal healthcare, the concept of socialism permeates governments the world over. By contrast to the less compromising and often more authoritarian nature of communism, socialism tends to be a malleable concept. Some adherents view socialism as referring to a strict policy of shared ownership and equal distribution of resources, while others believe free market capitalism can coexist with socialist forms of public administration. To wit, the Social Security system of the declaratively capitalist United States is inherently socialist in nature.

### Theocracy

Theocracy refers to a form of government in which a specific religious ideology informs the leadership, laws, and customs of a nation. In many instances, there will be little to no distinction between scriptural laws and legal codes. Likewise, religious clergy will typically occupy roles of leadership, and in some instances, the highest office in the nation. Because religious law usually extends from writings and traditions that are many centuries old, and therefore impose practices that may not conform with present-day standards of ethical justice or constitutional law, theocracies frequently run afoul of organizations and agencies advocating for global human rights.

### Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism is an authoritarian form of government in which the ruling party recognizes no limitations whatsoever on its power, either in the public life or private rights of its citizens. Power is often vested in the hands of a single figure, an authority around whom significant propaganda is built as a way of extending and retaining uncontested authority. Totalitarian states often employ widespread surveillance, control over mass media, intimidating demonstrations of paramilitary or police power, and suppression — usually violent — of protest, activism, or political opposition.

### Tribalism

Tribalism refers to a form of governance in which there is an absence of central authority and where, instead, various regional tribes lay claim to different territories, resources, or domains. In this system, trade, commerce, and war may occur between different tribes without the involvement or oversight of a unifying structure. This was a particularly common way of life in the premodern world, where different families and clans would establish a set of common rules and rituals specific to their community. While many tribes have forms of internal leadership — from councils and chiefdoms to warlords and patriarchs — tribes are also distinct for having relatively limited role differentiation or role stratification within. In some regards, this can make the customs internal to some tribes particularly egalitarian. That said, tribalism as a way of life has been threatened, and in many parts of the world extinguished, by modernity, development, and the imposition of outside authority.