

## **Autocracy (Dictatorship)**

A **dictatorship** is a government headed by a dictator.

Originally a legitimate military office in the Roman Republic, the dictator was given his powers by the Senate. The dictator had absolute power, but for a limited time.

In the twentieth century, the term *dictatorship* has come to mean a government in which absolute power is concentrated in the hands of a dictator and sometimes his cronies. Many dictators have held the formal title of "President", but wield extraordinary, often non-constitutional or de facto powers.

Dictators can come to power in a variety of different ways. They can be elected (see below), be appointed by the resident ruling party or Communist hierarchy, or inherit their position from a deceased relative. Still other modern dictators seize power in a military coup d'état, and are supported by the military.

The dictator generally controls the three state powers: legislative, executive and judicial.

In a dictatorship, there is not periodical universal, free, direct and secret polling of the citizens to elect the leaders. Sometimes dictators can initially obtain power from democratic elections (like Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany), but shortly after being elected the dictator will ban all opposing parties and cancel all future elections (see human rights). Though *free* elections will never occur under a dictatorship, sometimes dictators orchestrate phony elections in an attempt to grant themselves some illusion of democratic legitimacy and public support. Usually, the dictator runs for "re-election" unopposed, with voters being asked to answer a simple "yes or no" ballot on the leader's continued rule. As can be expected, coercion and corruption usually plague such "elections" and dictators will often claim unrealistically high voter turnouts and results. Dictator Charles King[?] of Liberia for example once claimed to have been "re-elected" by a majority that was more than 15% larger than his country's entire electorate.

### **History of Dictatorship**

For most of history dictatorship has been the most common form of rule. In early European history power was held by a variety of absolute monarchs who ruled their kingdoms with virtually unlimited powers. As the years went on, political liberalism began to spread, and so too did the rise of nation states, constitutions, and democracy. Monarchs lost most of their powers to elected assemblies and in some cases were abolished altogether, and replaced by republics. In several countries such reforms spiraled out of control, and amid the power

vacuum created, certain leaders would arise out of the confusion and seize control. Following the French Revolution, for example, power was rapidly consolidated by future dictator Napoleon Bonaparte.

In the 20th Century two World Wars were fought to prevent the rapid territorial expansion of dictatorial regimes. In World War One, the aggressors were the few remaining absolute monarchs of Europe, while in World War Two the villains were the elected dictators of fascist Germany and Italy.

When World War Two ended, there was a widespread "dumping" of former European colonies in Asia and Africa. In many cases independence was granted to these territories somewhat prematurely, and many of these new nations quickly collapsed into a military dictatorship. The post-WW2 Cold War between the dictatorship of the Soviet Union and the United States of America also greatly affected global dictatorships, with many of the world's dictators able to consolidate their hold on power by catering to the interests of the two superpowers. When the Cold War ended, many dictatorships (including the Soviet Union itself) quickly collapsed and were replaced by democratic governments.

Today, dictatorship has reached an all-time global low. Europe is now free of the rule of dictators that have dominated most of their history, with the Belarussian state controlled by its president Aleksandr Lukashenko being the only remaining exception. South and Latin America, which were once monopolized by the rule of the military are now largely free and democratic, as well. The biggest hold-outs of dictatorship remain in certain regions of Africa, Asia, and most of the Middle East.

A new global dedication to human rights have also helped force many dictators out of favor, and prevent the rise of new ones. Today, dictators and dictatorship members are often subject to national and international responsibility for their acts (see International Criminal Court).

## Democracy

A **democracy** is a form of government in which the people, either directly or indirectly, take part in governing. The word democracy originates from Greek, and means *rule of the people*.

### Distinctions

Democratic governments can be divided into different types, based on a number of different distinctions. The most important distinction is between direct democracy and indirect democracy. The latter type is the most common one.

A direct democracy is a political system in which all citizens are allowed to influence policy by means of a direct vote, or referendum, on any particular issue.

Indirect democracy is a term describing a means of governance by the people through elected representatives.

A representative democracy is a system in which the people elect government officials who then make decisions on their behalf. This is often referred to as Republic, particularly in historical usages and in constitutional theory. Modern definitions of that term, however, refer to any State with an elective Head of State and most monarchies are representative democracies. Essentially, a representative democracy is a form of indirect democracy in which leaders and representatives are democratically selected. Another form of indirect democracy is delegative democracy. In delegative democracy, delegates are selected and expected to act on the wishes of the constituency. In this form of democracy the constituency may recall the delegate at any time.

One important issue in a democracy is the suffrage, or the franchise - that is the decision as to who ought to be entitled to vote. Recent example of how the "right to vote" changed over history is New Zealand, which was the first country to give women the right to vote (19 September 1893). In the Athenian democracy, slaves and women were prohibited from voting.

Another important concern in a democracy is the so-called "tyranny of the majority". In a pure democracy, a majority would be empowered to do anything it wanted to any unfavorable minority. For example, in a pure democracy it is theoretically possible for a majority to vote that a certain religion should be illegalized, and its members punished with death. In some countries, their Constitution intentionally designs a representative rather than a direct democracy in part to avoid the danger of the tyranny of the majority. Some proponents of direct democracy argue that not all direct democracies need to be pure democracies.

### **Direct and Representative Democracy**

However, elections are not a sufficient condition for the existence of democracy, in fact elections can be used by totalitarian regimes or dictatorships to give a false sense of democracy. Some examples are 1960s right-wing military dictatorships in South America, left-wing totalitarian states like the USSR until 1991 or the more prominent III Reich, in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s.

Representative democracy is the most commonly used system of government in countries generally considered "democratic". However, it should be noted that the definition used to classify countries as "democratic" was crafted by Europeans and is directly influenced by the dominating cultures in those countries; care should be taken when applying it to other cultures that are tribal in nature and do not have the same historical background as the current "democratic" countries.

### **Alternative Definition of 'Democracy'**

According to this definition, the word "democracy" refers solely to direct democracy, whilst a representative democracy is referred to as a "republic". Using this definition, most western countries' system of government is referred to as a "democratic-republic," rather than a democracy.

The words "democracy" and "republic" were wrongly used by some of the Founding Fathers of the United States. They argued that only a representative democracy (what they called a 'republic') could properly protect the rights of the individual; they used the word 'democracy' to refer to direct democracy, which they considered tyrannical.

According to most political scientists today the term "democracy" refers to a government chosen by the people, whether it be direct or representative. The term "republic" today commonly means, a political system with a head of state elected for a limited term, as opposed to a constitutional monarchy.