

Types of Government Systems

There are many different types of government systems. For this unit, we will be focusing on Democracy, Monarchy, Republic, Dictatorship, Totalitarianism, and Theocracy.

Democracy

Example: United States of America, France, Switzerland



In a democracy, government authority is determined by the will of the people. People can either vote on issues directly or elect representatives to make government decisions for them. In the United States, the voters elect a powerful chief executive (a President) every four years who is independent of the law-making legislature and law-enforcing judiciary, but his power is limited by a system of checks and balances enforced by the other two branches. Voters elect legislative members every 2 years, and judges are appointed by the President currently in power.

Constitutional Monarchy

Example: United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark



Monarchies are probably the oldest form of government. One of the main characteristics of monarchies is that the ruler inherits his power. When the ruler dies, power will automatically pass to one of the monarch's children or his closest living relatives. Monarchs usually claim to hold power through "divine right", or the will of their God. Today, most monarchies share their power with elected legislatures. This is known as a constitutional monarchy because a written constitution separates the power between a Prime Minister, who leads the government, and Parliament, who write the nation's laws. While the monarch has no legislative power, they are expected to serve as a symbolic head of state.

Absolute Monarchy

Example: Bahrain, Oman



There are still many monarchies where the ruler holds absolute power over his subjects. In Bahrain, King Hamad bin Isa inherited his power from his father and will pass his power to his eldest son when he dies. As ruler, he surrounds himself with advisors in order to make the best decisions for his people, but he is not bound to actually listen to them,

Dictatorship

Example: Cuba, Venezuela



A dictatorship is a system of government in which a single person or small group exercises complete power over others. Dictators will usually seize control by force with assistance from the military or police. In some Latin American countries, the military seizes power and places one person in control, usually removing them from power once they are no longer useful. Dictators are free to do what they want, but the citizens do not experience any level of freedom. People are often afraid to criticize or oppose the dictator.

Totalitarianism

Example: North Korea



Many dictators establish totalitarian systems in which all aspects of the government is controlled by one person. In these governments, no other political parties or organizations that are not sponsored directly by the government are allowed, and this level of control is maintained through the police, military, tech communications (Internet, radio, newspapers, TV), the economy, and the educational systems. Government censorship will severely prohibit criticism of the government and the head of state. People who oppose or displease the government leader in any way are sent to labor camps or killed. Kim Jong-Un, the current leader of North Korea, is a totalitarian dictator.

Theocracy

Example: Iran, Vatican City



A theocracy is a government run by religious leaders. Like a monarchy, theocracies are very old forms of government that claim to have divine right, or directed by God, to hold power over the people. There is no legal separation between church and state; so essentially, the laws of the religion are the laws of the government. In Vatican City, the Pope is head of the Catholic Church as well as the leader of Vatican City, an enclosed section of Rome where high-ranking Catholic bishops reside. When an Islamic religion is in control, the laws enforced are known as Sharia law. In Iran, the constitution emphasizes the importance of Sharia law, so they have two leaders. They have the Ayatollah- the Supreme Leader- an Islamic cleric who serves in his role for life. He ranks above the President and the legislature; he can even dismiss them from their roles and declare war on other countries.