

1. AUTOCRACY

An **autocracy** is a form of government where one person exercises all power.

One type of autocracy is a dictatorship, where a leader, usually from the military, takes power, often through violent means. Dictators can come to power in a variety of ways. They can be elected, appointed by a ruling party, or even inherit their position without being in a formal monarchy. Many dictators have taken power using violence and are supported by the military of their nation.

Another type of autocracy is an absolute monarchy, where a monarch has no restrictions on their power. That person becomes the sole leader by being born into a family of rulers.

In an autocracy, an autocrat exercises full control of all three governmental powers: legislative, executive, and judicial. They often force strict obedience to the government/state and do not allow for personal freedoms and individual rights.

In an autocracy, there are sometimes elections, but they are not free nor fair. Sometimes dictators first obtain power through elections, but shortly after being elected, they will ban opposing parties and cancel future elections. Dictators might even arrange for fake elections in an attempt to give themselves the appearance of democracy and public support.

Examples of autocracies in the world today include North Korea and Venezuela.

2. MONARCHY

A **monarchy** is a form of government where power is held by a single person whose right to rule is based on being born into a royal family. The monarch, once in power, remains on the throne for life. The power of monarchs can greatly vary. There are ***absolute*** monarchies, where the king or queen has unlimited power, which makes it a type of autocracy. There are also ***constitutional*** monarchies, where the monarch's power is greatly restricted by a written constitution that outlines a rule of law. Constitutional monarchies often have elements of a republic where citizens still elect representatives to make and pass laws.

Most monarchies today are constitutional monarchies, where the monarch primarily serves as a symbol of unity to the country and does not possess much power. Constitutional monarchs in fact, often have rules that restrict the royals from even becoming involved in politics!

Historically most monarchies passed power from fathers to sons, starting with the eldest and staying in the male line. Most European monarchies today pass power in the order of birth, regardless of gender. In constitutional monarchies, deciding how power passes from one king or queen to another is generally based on laws established by that country's parliament (legislature). In all cases, though, a monarch's right to rule is based on birthright, not from the people.

There remain many monarchies today. The United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium all retain kings and/or queens. Japan is the only monarchy left in the world that calls its monarch an emperor. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand all share the same monarch as the United Kingdom. All are constitutional monarchies. The country of Brunei would serve as a current example of an absolute monarchy.

3. OLIGARCHY

Oligarchy means the “rule of the few” and generally exists as a form of government where a small group of powerful and wealthy people retain power. Because those who rule as part of an oligarchy are generally the wealthiest in a society, oligarchies are generally bad for the poor as they bend the rule of law to suit the oligarchs.

People who rule in oligarchies may be elected, born into their positions, or may have a certain amount of money or land, which entitles them to be a part of the ruling group. Though elections may take place in oligarchies, they are seldom fair, and oligarchs are rarely removed from office (if they hold an office) as a result. In oligarchies, there may also be branches of government, however there is no true check on the power of the oligarchs.

The line between oligarchies and other forms of government is often not clear. Historically they have been both beneficial and harmful to citizens. For example, a group of wealthy people in a country may insist that their ruler, a monarch or dictator, share power. This occurred in England in 1215 when a group of wealthy citizens came together and forced King John I of England to sign the Magna Carta. This showed that King John's power was decreasing, and an oligarchy was coming into place. As English society continued to grow and develop, the Magna Carta was revised a few times, each time guaranteeing more rights to greater numbers of people.

However, today, an example of an oligarchy is the Russian Federation. While the Russian Federation often functions as an autocracy, at the same time, many of Russia’s wealthiest businessmen work together to support the Russian autocracy, to which they owe their wealth. These men are popularly referred to as “oligarchs”.

4. REPUBLIC

A **republic** is a form of government where the people themselves hold the power, and where the authority of the government to rule is based on the idea of the consent of the governed. This form of government allows the people to elect representatives to make policies and laws for them. So instead of the people voting directly on every issue, they vote for people to represent them, and decide what to do.

Republics are synonymous with representative/indirect democracies.

When the elected government's power is limited by a constitution, we call that a ***constitutional republic***.

One important republic in history was that of ancient Rome. In the Roman Republic, the Senate carefully considered issues and passed laws, while every year, two Consuls were elected to share executive power. The government of the Roman Republic lasted nearly 500 years and became an important influence on the development of many modern republics.

The United States looked to the ancient Roman Republic when creating its own Constitution in 1787. U.S. citizens elect individuals to represent them at all three levels of government: national, state, and local.

While the list of modern day republics is numerous, examples include: France, India, Germany, and the United States.

5. DEMOCRACY

A **democracy** is a form of government that means “rule by the people.” In this type of government, the people are given the power to make important decisions in the governance of the country by voting. The people determine what the government does or who will be elected to lead.

There are two types of democracies. Most of the time, when the term “democracy” is used, it refers to *direct democracies*. In a direct democracy, the power to govern is directly in the hands of the people rather than elected representatives. Eligible citizens consider, vote on, and pass laws directly. Whatever most people vote for becomes the law. Anybody can propose a new law. Due to the organizational difficulties of having every person vote on every issue, direct democracies often end up limiting who is eligible to vote.

The other type of democracy is an *indirect democracy* or also known as a *representative democracy*. In an indirect democracy, people elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf.

Democracy started in ancient Greece more than 2,000 years ago. However, most did not last very long before becoming subject to monarchs or other rulers who exercised all of the power. By the 1600s and 1700s, the idea that the people themselves should rule became popular once again. This was especially true in the British North American colonies, resulting in the American Revolution.

Elements of democracies (both direct and indirect) may overlap with both republics and monarchies. One modern-day example of a country that still utilizes the components of a direct democracy would be Switzerland.

In the United States, while a constitutional republic, one way direct democracy is practiced is the “initiative.” This allows citizens to place proposals on the ballot that become law if a majority of the voters vote for the proposal.

6. THEOCRACY

A **theocracy** is a form of government in which religious authorities rule in the name of a god or deity. The ruling individual or class is considered to be divinely appointed (chosen by a higher power). They exercise all government power and set laws.

In a theocracy, those in power, and the government's laws and policies, are based on religious beliefs rather than consent of the governed. In a theocracy, the government believes that it is in charge of interpreting and carrying out the will of one or more deities (gods).

A theocracy requires only the state religion to be practiced. Religious texts often serve as the inspiration for laws and governmental decisions. Because ruling leaders are divinely appointed, there is no separation of powers or checks and balances in a theocracy; the leader's decisions are not questioned. Any citizens who do not follow laws are treated as if they are not following the will of the deity and often harshly persecuted. Elections are often not necessary.

Future leaders in a theocracy typically gain their positions by inheriting them or being chosen by the previous leaders.

Theocracies can share traits with monarchies, oligarchies, and autocracies.

Today, the best examples of theocracies include the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.