

#1 Democracy

Democracy means the rule by the people. **Direct democracy** is a phrase that represents decisions where citizens pass laws directly, without using representatives. Each person casts their own vote for proposed laws. A current example of the way direct democracy is practiced is the “initiative” and “referendum”. This allows citizens to place ideas on the ballot and vote on them.

The earliest direct democracy date back to Athens, Greece in 510 BC, which allowed only men to vote. As democracy became successful in Athens, many other city-states (cities that acted like nations) chose it for their government too. But most of them allowed even fewer people to vote: most of the other city-states only allowed free adult male citizens to vote if they owned land.



One problem that comes up in a direct democracy is deciding who is going to be able to vote. It is much easier to allow fewer people to vote because fewer have to be taken from their regular work to vote. However, the less people that were allowed to vote, the less the principle of “rule by the people” was practiced. As a result most democracies sooner or later ended up choosing a few men who would do most of the voting.

Ancient Rome developed the idea of a **republic** or a **representative democracy**. A republic is a government in which all citizens have the right to vote and in which the government's power is limited by a constitution. This is what we have in the US today. Instead of voting on every little decision we vote for representatives (politicians), people we trust to make decisions on our behalf. If they do not act in a way the citizens agree with, the people make their feelings known by voting in someone new. Most modern democracies are representative instead of direct democracies.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is democracy?
- 2) What problems were caused by direct democracy?
- 3) What is a representative democracy?
- 4) How does a republic solve the problems brought on by a direct democracy?

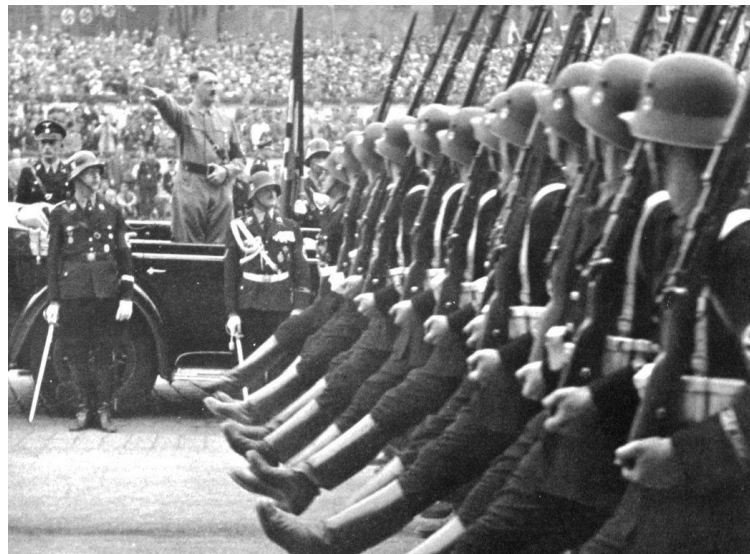
#2 Autocracy

An **autocracy** is a form of government where one person has unlimited power. One type of an autocracy is a dictatorship where a military leader takes power often through violent means. Another type of autocracy is an **absolute monarchy** where a person becomes the sole leader of a country by being born into a family of rulers (royalty, kings & queens). Absolute monarchs hold supreme rule over their nation.

The term **dictatorship** means a government in which absolute power is centered in the hands of a dictator and sometimes his closest partners. It may also be known as an **authoritarian regime or a totalitarian state**. In both cases the government is led by a single person and holds absolute power over the lives of the people.

Dictators can come to power in a variety of ways. They can be elected, be appointed by the ruling party, or inherit their position. Some dictators have taken power using violence and are supported by the military. This is known by the French term **coup d'état**, meaning 'blow of state'.

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



In a dictatorship, there are no elections. Sometimes dictators can first obtain power from democratic elections, but shortly after being elected the dictator will ban all opposing parties and cancel all future elections. This was the method used by Hitler in Nazi Germany, he was democratically elected but then made himself 'Supreme Leader'. Though free elections will never occur under a dictatorship, sometimes dictators arrange for fake elections in an attempt to give themselves the appearance of democracy and public support.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is an autocracy?
- 2) What do an absolute monarchy, a dictatorship, authoritarian regime and a totalitarian state have in common?
- 3) What is a coup d'état?
- 4) Why would a dictator hold 'fake' elections?

#3 Monarchy

Monarchy is a form of government where power is held by a single person whose right to rule is based on birth (that person is born into a family of kings and queens) and who has the power to remain in office for life. The power of this ruler can vary. There are **absolute monarchies**, a type of **autocracy** where the king or queen has unlimited power. In the past much of Europe was ruled by monarchies. The kings and queens relied on the '**Divine Right of Kings**' the idea the God made them the ruler, to justify their absolute power. This should not be confused with a **theocracy**, where the



government is ruled by religious leaders.

There are also **constitutional monarchies**, where the monarch's power is strongly limited by a constitution that outlines the laws. In most countries with monarchies, the monarch serves as a symbol of the country.

Many countries have strong rules against the monarch becoming involved in politics.

Since 1800, many of the world's monarchies have become republics. A **republic** is a form of government where the citizens elect representatives to make and pass laws. Most countries that have a monarchy have limited the monarch's power, making them constitutional monarchies.

The rules for choosing monarchs vary from country to country. In constitutional monarchies deciding how power passes from one king or queen to another is generally found in a law passed by parliament (legislature). Most European monarchies of the 21st century pass power from the oldest male and then the oldest female if no males are qualified. Other constitutional monarchies allow only males to serve as monarchs.

Monarchies can come to an end in several ways. Many a war has been fought in European history because a monarch did not leave behind a clear heir to the throne. There have been revolutions as well in which the monarchy is taken over, this was the case in France. In other nations citizens have voted and decided to form a republic.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is a monarchy?
- 2) What is the difference between an absolute and constitutional monarchy?
- 3) How is the Divine Right of Kings different from a theocracy?
- 4) How may a monarchy come to an end?

#4 Oligarchy

Oligarchy means the rule of the few and generally means the people who are richer and more powerful than the others. Because those with power in oligarchies are generally the rich in a society, oligarchies are generally bad for the poor. People who rule in oligarchies may be elected, born into their positions, or may have a certain amount of money or land which allows them to be a part of the ruling group.

Oligarchies can occur in countries with other forms of government and can create change. 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, (Great Charter) that limited the powers of the king. 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.



In 1911 sociologist Robert Michels introduced the idea of the "**iron law of oligarchy.**" It states that all forms of organizations, (whether it is a club or government) regardless of how democratic they may be at the start, will eventually and inevitably develop oligarchic tendencies. He believed that true democracy was practically and theoretically impossible, especially in large groups and complex organizations. Basically you end up with a small group of elite that end up controlling the government.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is an oligarchy?
- 2) What is the Magna Carta?
- 3) What is the iron law of oligarchy?
- 4) Do you agree with the iron law of oligarchy, why or why not?