

Government Basics 2: Forms of Government



Occasionally a group has no rules and enforcement. This is **anarchy**. Stems time! In Greek, “a-” means “without,” and “arch” means ruler. So there is no ruler and each person does whatever is right in his or her own eyes, or whatever one can get away with. Law of the jungle. Might makes right.

When there *is* government – rules and enforcement – maybe the most basic question is *Who gets to do the ruling?* Is one person, or a few, ruling the many – or do the many rule themselves somehow?

Dictatorship (“authoritarian rule”)

When one, or a few, do the controlling, and the many don’t have much or any say about it, that’s **dictatorship**. “Dicto” = “I say,” so the rules and enforcement are whatever the dictator says they are.

I. Rule by one person:

A. **Monarchy** - inherited; authority usually based on beliefs about God

1. **Absolute** - the monarch has complete authority
2. **Limited** – shares power with others

B. **Military dictatorship** – rule by fear, weapons; succession (who comes next) is often a problem.

II. Oligarchy: rule by only a few:

- A. **Junta** - council of generals
- B. **Aristocracy** - rule by the upper class
- C. **Plutocracy** - rule by the rich. Pluto (Hades) was the Roman god of wealth
- D. **One-Party Rule** - rule by one political party
- E. **Theocracy** - rule by priests or a certain religious group

Two words you should know that are often used to describe dictatorships:

1. **Fascist** – any government that allows little freedom, and rules by fear (a.k.a., a “police state”)
2. **Totalitarian** – pretty rare, but the government pretty much totally runs people’s lives: where to work, shop, live, what to wear, eat, etc.

Democracy

When a great many people *do* have a say in how they’re governed, that’s **democracy**. In Greek, “demos” = “a people” and “-cracy” means power.” Power to the people, baby! Right on.

I. **Pure democracy** is when everyone gets to vote on every issue.

II. **Representative democracy** is when the people choose . . . you guessed it, representatives, to decide all the particular issues. This is also called a **republic**. That’s us!

Practice Use your first; then look back if you must.

Write the word that best follows each example:

1. Michigan is what kind of democracy?
2. A New England town where each person can vote on everything down to what to pay the village dogcatcher:
3. The Roman pre-Empire was ruled once by Julius Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey, generals all:
4. Prior to them, the Roman Republic had voting, but a lot of people say it wasn't a real democracy because only the upper class could vote:
5. In 2012, 10 minutes before the end of the world, it is all looting and chaos and Lord of the Flies-y:
6. Some people say America looks like a democracy, but it's a sham because really the rich 1% control how things turn out:
7. Iran is ruled by a Muslim imam (religious scholar) and council of imams who approve the president before elections and approve or deny laws:
8. This specific "f-word" word is usually applied to Germany, Spain, and Italy of the '30s, in which individuals had limited rights, and there was much fear of secret police and torture:
9. King Louis IV of France said, "I am the government." (*L'État c'est moi.*)
10. China under Mao at one point had all people wearing the same clothes, and relocated many people to collective farms. The Communist party still controls what Chinese people see on t.v. and can read on the internet.