

CIVICS 101

How Our Government Works



BY LYNN NEFF, EDITOR

I HAVE BEEN NOTICING LATELY THAT MANY PEOPLE I TALK TO (ESPECIALLY YOUNG PEOPLE) DON'T SEEM TO HAVE A GOOD GRASP OF HOW OUR ECONOMIC, JUSTICE AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS WORK. SO, I THOUGHT I WOULD GIVE US ALL A GOOD TOOL FOR DISCUSSION AND LEARNING.

IN THIS SERIES OF COLUMNS I WILL ADDRESS THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CIVIC THOUGHT, OUR COUNTRY'S CIVIC GUIDELINES AND HOW WE CAN ALL BE BETTER INFORMED CITIZENS. AT ANY TIME I WELCOME YOUR THOUGHTS, SPECIFIC AREAS OF INTEREST AND QUESTIONS. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO EMAIL ME AT EDITOR@BACKCOUNTRYMESSENGER.COM AND PUT THE WORD 'MESSENGER' IN THE SUBJECT TO BYPASS MY SPAM MAIL.

WHAT IS CIVICS?

WIKIPEDIA DEFINES IT THIS WAY: CIVICS IS THE STUDY OF THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENSHIP. IN OTHER WORDS, IT IS THE STUDY OF GOVERNMENT WITH ATTENTION TO THE ROLE OF CITIZENS ... IN THE OPERATION AND OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT.

WITHIN A GIVEN POLITICAL OR ETHICAL TRADITION, CIVICS REFERS TO EDUCATING THE CITIZENS. THE HISTORY OF CIVICS DATES BACK TO THE EARLIEST THEORIES OF CIVICS BY CONFUCIUS IN ANCIENT CHINA AND PLATO IN ANCIENT GREECE. THESE TRADITIONS IN GENERAL HAVE LED TO MODERN DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE WEST AND THE EAST, AND TWO VERY DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF RIGHT AND JUSTICE AND ETHICS IN PUBLIC LIFE.

FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

HERE IS A LIST OF GOVERNMENT TYPES. WE WILL TOUCH ON ALL OF THEM. AT THE END OF THIS COLUMN I WILL LIST WEBSITES FOR FURTHER STUDY EACH MONTH.

- * ANARCHY
- * ARISTOCRACY
- * AUTHORITARIANISM
- * AUTOCRACY
- * COMMUNIST STATE
- * CONFEDERATION
- * CORPORATOCRACY
- * CONSOCIATIONALISM
- * DEMARCHY
- * DEMOCRACY (Nov 2009)
- * DESPOTISM
- * DICTATORSHIP
- * EPISTEMOCRACY
- * ETHNOCRACY
- * EXILARCHY
- * FASCISM
- * FEDERATION
- * FEUDALISM
- * GERONTOCRACY
- * KLEPTOCRACY
- * KRATOCRACY
- * KRITOCRACY/KRITARCHY
- * LOGOCRACY
- * MERITOCRACY
- * MINARCHISM/NIGHT

- WATCHMAN
- * MONARCHY
- * NOOCRACY
- * OCHLOCRACY/MOBOCRACY
- * OLIGARCHY
- * PANARCHISM
- * PLUTOCRACY
- * PUPPET STATE
- * REPUBLIC
- * SOCIALIST STATE
- * SOCIOCRACY
- * TECHNOCRACY
- * THALASSOCRACY
- * THEOCRACY (Nov 2009)
- * TIMOCRACY
- * TOTALITARIANISM
- * TRIBAL
- * TYRANNY

Democracy

I'm going to begin here and touch on all of the forms of government listed on the left.

We live in a Democracy. A Democracy is a system of government in which either the actual governing is carried out by the people governed (*direct democracy*), or the power to do so is granted by them (as in *representative democracy*).

A democracy includes a set of checks and balances to ensure the will of the people. These include the Legislative Branch, Congress, the Executive Branch, the Judicial Branch, and the Electoral Process, to name few. We will cover each of these in-depth in future articles in this series.

Also, in later articles we will be learning much more about our system of government, but I want to touch on some of the other forms of government as well, in order to bring you awareness of their practices.

Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism (or *totalitarian rule*) is a political system where the state has complete authority and regulates nearly every aspect of public and private life. Totalitarianism is generally characterized by *authoritarianism* (i.e., where ordinary citizens have no significant input in state decision-making) and *ideology* (i.e., a pervasive scheme of values promulgated by the means to direct the most significant aspects of public and private life).

It theoretically permits no individual freedom and seeks to subordinate all aspects of the individual's life to the authority of the government. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini coined the term *totalitario* in the early 1920s to describe the new fascist state of Italy, which he further described as: "All within the state, none outside the state, none against the state." By the beginning of World War II, "totalitarian" had become synonymous with absolute and oppressive single-party government.

Examples of such centralized totalitarian rule include the Maurya dynasty of India (c. 321–c. 185 bc), the Ch'in dynasty of China (221–206 bc), and the reign of Zulu chief Shaka (c. 1816–28). The totalitarian states of Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler (1933–45) and the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin (1924–53).

Totalitarianism is often

distinguished from dictatorship, despotism, or tyranny by its supplanting of all political institutions with new ones and its sweeping away of all legal, social, and political traditions. The totalitarian state pursues some special goal, such as industrialization or conquest, to the exclusion of all others. All resources are directed toward its attainment regardless of the cost. Whatever might further the goal is supported; whatever might foil the goal is rejected. This obsession spawns an ideology that explains everything in terms of the goal, rationalizing all obstacles that may arise and all forces that may contend with the state. The resulting popular support permits the state the widest latitude of action of any form of government. Any dissent is branded as evil, and internal political differences are not permitted. Because pursuit of the goal is the only ideological foundation for the totalitarian state, achievement of the goal can never be acknowledged.

Under *totalitarian rule*, traditional social institutions and organizations are discouraged and suppressed; thus weakening the social fabric and lessening the morale of the people. Participation in approved public organizations is at first encouraged and then required. Old religious and social ties are replaced with artificial ties to the state and its ideology.

Police operations within a *totalitarian state* often appear similar to those within a *police state*, but one important difference distinguishes them. In a police state the police operate according to known, consistent procedures. In a totalitarian state the police operate without the constraints of laws and regulations with disastrous results.

Theocracy

A Theocracy is a form of government in which God or a deity is recognized as the supreme civil ruler, and the governmental rulers are identical with the leaders of the dominant religion; God's or the deity's laws being interpreted by the ecclesiastical authorities. Typically the government claims to rule on behalf of God or a higher power, as specified by the religion in question.

Theocratic forms of government have been practiced in various parts of the world mostly in the middle east and or in western history itself, the middle ages. Following are some pros and cons of this type of government.

Pros:

A nation under a theocracy is most likely a totalitarian or a one party state, therefore, bills are easily passed and imposed without the check and balances of the legislative branch; i.e. house of commons, or the congress and senate.

The nation will most likely have a very strict disciplinary policy, so chances are, crime rates might decrease.

Everyone is religious under the nation, everyone will go to paradise if they follow the law and obey the government/church.

The nation will have a high sense of patriotism that increases the morale of the population when things like economic breakdown or natural calamities occur.

Well organized, and orderly.

However, Cons:

Since theocratic governments are most likely a totalitarian state, chances are the power of the leader are imposed for his benefit and not for the nation. Extreme corruption is inevitable.

Theocracy is very conservative and there will be limited change.

Theocratic government tends to be very radical and can easily swing into a highly fanatic state.

Indoctrination, propaganda, press filtering and scapegoats will likely appear.

Using the name of God to condemn something or oppose something, or introduce something that would burden the country.

There are different forms of theocracy. One is caesaro-papism, in which power is shared between a secular ruler (an emperor) and a religious leader (a pope). Theocracy can also be exercised directly by the clergy (as in Iran) or indirectly (such as via the divine right of kings).

Current theocratic nations today include the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Vatican City.

Many people criticize the British monarch as being a theocratic ruler because of her title as Head of the Church in England. However, as the monarch retains only ceremonial authority, most people do not consider the United Kingdom, or any other nations with the British Monarch serving as Head of State, as a theocracy.

Monarchy

A monarchy is a



government which is ruled by one person, who is wholly set apart from all other members of the states (called his subjects).

Currently, 44 nations in the world have monarchs as heads of state, 16 of which are Commonwealth realms that recognize Queen Elizabeth II as their head of state.

In the 14th century monarchies meant undivided rule or absolute sovereignty by a single person; a government having a hereditary chief of state with life tenure and powers varying from nominal to absolute.

A constitutional monarchy is a form of monarchical government established under a constitutional system which acknowledges a hereditary or elected monarch as head of state. Modern constitutional monarchies usually implement the concept of trias politica, or "separation of powers," where the monarch is the head of the executive branch. Where a monarch holds absolute power, it is known as an absolute monarchy, and law within an absolute monarchy can often be quite different from law within a constitutional monarchy.

In most constitutional monarchies today, the monarchy exists only at the pleasure of the elected parliament. In many cases, a simple majority vote in parliament is considered sufficient to abolish the monarchy and replace it with some form of republican alternative. With the exception of post-war Italy, no modern, democratic constitutional monarchy has voted to abolish itself. Most have ended as a result of complications following the aftermath of war or invasion (such as Austria or Germany) or because of a violent anti-monarchical revolution (such as in Russia or Greece).

Though many of Europe's past and present leftist parties contain anti-monarchy factions, to date few have openly declared a preference for flat-out monarchical abolition, and instead use their powers to curtail and reform alleged "un-democratic" or "prejudiced" elements of the monarchy. For example, in recent years the age-old tradition of "males first" order of succession to the throne has been abolished in most constitutional monarchies, allowing for

eldest daughters to assume the throne before their brothers. The removal of formal reserve powers from the monarchy is another common measure in which a party may chose to "depoliticize" the monarchy, yet not scrap the entire institution.

Other defenders of constitutional monarchies argue that royal families promote tourism, and are a key tradition associated with patriotism and national pride. For example, in many constitutional monarchies the monarch's birthday is a national holiday, and an event marked with public patriotic events and parties. In recent years many royal families have also become popular targets of tabloid journalism and gossip, which although often argued as being intrusive and destructive, continues to prove that many find royals interesting simply as celebrities. A further argument speculates that abolishing a popular monarchy may be a pointless endeavor anyway, as even a "deposed" royal family could presumably still live their royal lifestyle and capture public attention, making any republican replacement seem illegitimate. Historically, when monarchies have been abolished the royal family was usually exiled to a foreign country to prevent their presence from interfering or distracting from the new republican government. However, such moves were usually done during periods of conflict and turmoil with the monarchy. If a democratic country was to abolish its monarchy today, an exile for the royal family would likely be denounced as cruel, and would thus not be seen as a practical option.

SOURCES INCLUDE:

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