

Two democratic elections led to the independence of South Sudan. As a result of the general election in 2010, Salva Kiir became the acting president of southern Sudan. In a referendum that took place in January 2011, the people of southern Sudan voted for independence. Here, Kiir speaks to the public after casting his ballot for the referendum.



Sudan gained independence from British rule in 1956, the people of southern Sudan sparsely won positions in their government. After years of war and discontent, South Sudan finally gained independence. Today, South Sudan is an impoverished nation with a **traditional economy**. About a quarter of adults in South Sudan can read, and living standards are low.

The people of Switzerland and South Sudan do have one thing in common. When facing the question of who should have power to rule their nations, both answered, “the people.” For the Swiss, this decision was made in 1848, when they adopted a constitution that created a democratic government. The South Sudanese, however, only recently decided to build a democracy. Whether this endeavor will be successful in this troubled country remains to be seen.

■ 2.2 The Origins and Evolution of Government

All societies, large and small, develop some form of government. During prehistoric times, when small bands of hunter-gatherers wandered Earth in search of food and game, government might have been as simple as a few elders making decisions for the group. The invention of farming triggered the evolution of more formal systems of governments. Once people learned how to raise food, they settled down into permanent villages. This new way of life created

a host of novel problems and conflicts. Governments had to evolve to meet the needs of the more complex societies they ruled.

The Ancient World: From City-States to Empires

Over time, some farming villages grew into cities and **city-states**. A city-state is a sovereign state consisting of a city and its surrounding territory.

Around 3000 B.C.E., the first city-states arose in Sumer, a region located in what is today southern Iraq. There, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the Sumerians grew crops of barley, wheat, dates, apples, and plums.

Then, as now, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates was largely desert. Farming in this region depended on irrigation. Governments arose to resolve issues pertaining to the fair and orderly distribution of water. They also provided protection by building walls around their cities and organizing armies to ward off invasions by nomadic tribes. A similar evolution occurred in ancient Egypt, India, and China.

Gradually, power in many city-states became concentrated in the hands of a single ruler. The strongest of these rulers conquered neighboring city-states to create the world’s first empires. Sargon of Akkad was one of Sumer’s early conquerors. Sargon, whose name is thought to mean “the true king,” carried out more than 30 battles against the Sumerian city-states to consolidate his empire. To legitimize their power, empire-builders like Sargon often declared that the gods had given them the right

to rule. Some rulers even claimed to be gods themselves. As power passed from father to son in these early empires, monarchy became the most common form of government in the ancient world.

Greece and Rome: Early Forms of People Power

In the fifth century B.C.E., the Greek city-state of Athens made a radical change in its form of government. The Athenians reorganized their city-state as a **direct democracy**. In a direct democracy, public decisions are made directly by citizens meeting together in an assembly or voting by ballot. The Athenian leader Pericles explained the new form of government this way:

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses.

—Pericles, *Funeral Oration*, 431 B.C.E.

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The Athenians established an early form of direct democracy in the fifth century B.C.E. This cartoon pokes fun at the belief held by most people living in a democracy that their form of government is superior to all other forms.

When Pericles spoke of government being in the hands of “the whole people,” he meant in the hands of male citizens of Athens. Women, slaves, and foreign-born people living in Athens were not allowed to participate in government affairs. For those who did qualify, however, they participated on a scale that was unique in the ancient world. Never before had so many people dedicated so much of their time to the business of governing themselves.

Elsewhere, the Italian city-state of Rome was developing a different form of people power. In 509 B.C.E., the Roman people overthrew their monarchy and turned Rome into a **republic**. Over time, the Romans set up a **representative democracy** to govern their republic. In a representative democracy, public decisions are made by leaders who are elected by the citizens to represent their interests.

The Roman Republic lasted nearly 500 years. During that time, officials elected by Rome’s citizens headed the government. Then, in 31 B.C.E., after 20 years of civil war, the Roman Empire was established. Power passed from elected leaders to emperors who held absolute power for life.

The Middle Ages: From Feudalism to Nation-States

For a time, Rome’s emperors ruled an empire that included most of Europe, as well as North Africa and western Asia. In 476 C.E., Rome fell to invading tribes from the east. In parts of Europe once ruled by mighty Rome, the empire broke into tiny districts, each ruled by a duke, lord, king, or other noble.

With no strong central government to provide security, each district had to look out for itself. It often made sense for weak nobles to look to a nearby, more powerful neighbor for protection. However, protection had a price. Because money was scarce, the powerful lord or local king usually took his payment in land. In this way, some lords gained control of very large areas.

By the 700s, many lords acquired more land than they could manage. They began granting parcels of land, called **fiefs**, to tenants. In return, the tenant became the lord’s vassal. A vassal took an oath of loyalty to the lord and promised to provide him with military service in time of war. This system of exchanging the use of land for military and other services became known as **feudalism**.

In addition to serving as warriors, the vassals also had political obligations. For example, they all sat together at the lord's court to help settle disputes. The lord was also expected to seek the advice and consent of his vassals before making new laws. Europe's **parliaments** developed from meetings of vassals summoned by a lord or king.

During the 1200s, the feudal system of lords and vassals entered a period of decline. The 1300s saw the rise of **absolute monarchies**, or governments headed by hereditary rulers who claimed unlimited powers. These powerful monarchs consolidated the patchwork of feudal districts in their kingdoms into the world's first nation-states.

By the 1700s, several European countries had become nation-states headed by absolute monarchs. These all-powerful rulers based their legitimacy on the divine right of kings theory. So important was the role of the monarch in France that Louis XIV is reported to have said of himself, "*L'état c'est moi*" ("I am the state").

The Age of Revolutions: Democracies and Dictatorships

Some monarchs ruled with the best interests of their people in mind. Others ruled as **despots**, or tyrants, who used their power for selfish ends. Growing dissatisfaction with this form of government triggered a series of world-altering revolutions, first in Europe and then in the American colonies.

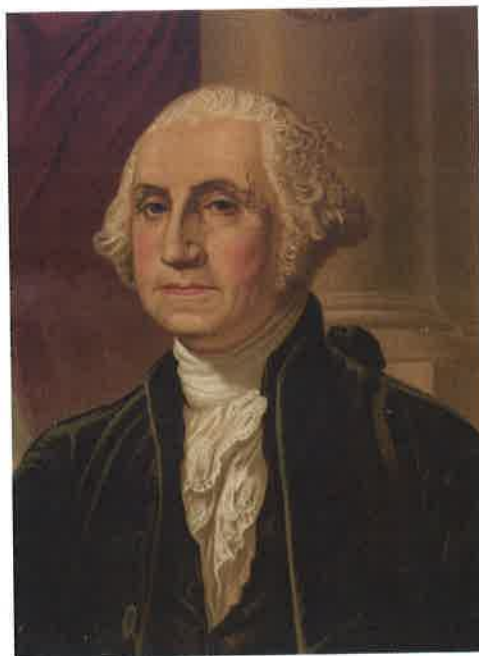
The first of these revolutions against tyranny occurred in England in 1688. The Glorious Revolution, also known as the Bloodless Revolution, led to the establishment of Europe's first **constitutional monarchy**—a system of government in which the powers of the monarch are limited by a constitution, either written or unwritten.

The second of these revolutions began in 1775 when American colonists rebelled against what they saw as British tyranny. The American Revolution led to the creation of the first modern **constitutional democracy**—a democratic government based on a written constitution. Abraham Lincoln would later describe this form of democracy as "government of the people, by the people, for the people."

A third revolution broke out in 1789, when the French people took up arms against their king. At first the French Revolution seemed likely to produce another constitutional democracy. Instead it took a radical turn and eventually collapsed into chaos. In time Napoleon Bonaparte restored order, but only by establishing an **authoritarian regime**—a system of government in which the state exercises broad control over the lives of its citizens. Napoleon, for example, used secret police forces to spy on French citizens. To stifle opposition, he censored the press while mounting his own propaganda campaigns.

Some historians argue that Napoleon's approach to governing set the stage for rise of **totalitarianism**

The American and French revolutions both rejected monarchy in favor of democracy. In both revolutions, a military hero played a large role in the formation of a new regime. In the United States, George Washington helped forge a constitutional democracy that still endures. In France, Napoleon Bonaparte established a short-lived dictatorship. Washington died a hero while Napoleon died in disgrace. After his fall from power, Napoleon reportedly lamented, "They wanted me to be another Washington."



in the 20th century. A totalitarian government is an extreme form of an authoritarian regime that seeks to control almost every aspect of its citizens' lives.

Twentieth-century totalitarianism dates back to the Russian Revolution of 1917. That revolution overthrew the Russian monarchy. In its place, revolutionaries established the Soviet Union as the world's first state based on **communism**.

The term communism has several meanings. It can mean a system of government in which a single political party controls the government and the economy. It can also mean the theories developed

by German philosopher Karl Marx about the ideal society. Marx's goal was the creation of a society that provides equality and economic security for all. To accomplish that end, he called for government ownership of land, factories, and other resources.

The theory of communism appealed to many people in the 1900s. In practice, however, it led to the creation of totalitarian states, first in the Soviet Union and later in other countries, such as China, Vietnam, and Cuba. In these states, dictators like Joseph Stalin used spies, secret police, and government censors to suppress all opposition.

Three Forms of Totalitarianism

Communism

Joseph Stalin ruled the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1953. Historians hold him responsible for the deaths of millions of Russians. The hammer in this communist symbol represents industrial workers, while the sickle represents agricultural workers.



Key Characteristics

- The Communist Party holds supreme power
- Belief that the state should control the economy
- Brutal suppression of opposition
- Hostility to religion and human rights

Fascism

Benito Mussolini was dictator of Italy from 1922 to 1943. He used his power to control every aspect of the government and the press. This symbol of fascism suggests that while a single stick may be easily broken, a bundle of sticks bound together is too strong to break.



Key Characteristics

- Dictator holds supreme power
- Belief that everyone should serve the state
- Extreme nationalism
- Glorification of the military
- Use of censorship and terror to suppress opposition

Nazism

While ruling Germany from 1933 to 1945, Adolf Hitler tried to rid Europe of Jews, Gypsies, and others he deemed "undesirable." The swastika is an ancient Hindu symbol of well-being. The Nazis adopted it as a symbol of the German master race.



Key Characteristics

- The Nazi Party holds supreme power
- Belief in racial superiority
- Aggressive territorial expansion
- Elimination of "inferior" minorities
- Rejection of democracy and civil liberties

A form of totalitarianism known as **fascism** first appeared in Italy during the 1920s. Fascism resembles communism in terms of its control of citizens' lives. Unlike communism, however, fascism allows businesses to remain in private ownership, though under government control. Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator of Italy, used his power to turn his country into a police state.

A third type of totalitarianism, **Nazism**, took root in Germany. Nazism is a variety of fascism built in part on the myth of racial superiority. After taking power in Germany in 1933, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler launched an extermination campaign against Jews, Gypsies, and other groups he defined as "undesirable."

2.3 Forms of Government in Today's World

With the exception of Antarctica, the landmasses on Earth are divided into nation-states. Some of these countries, such as Switzerland, have existed for hundreds of years. Others, like South Sudan, are new. Almost all have some form of functioning government. As Aristotle observed more than 2,000 years ago, these governments fall into three broad groups: rule by the one (monarchies and dictatorships), rule by the few (theocracies and single-party states), and rule by the many (parliamentary and presidential democracies).

Monarchy: Rule by the One Hereditary Ruler

Monarchies are one of the oldest forms of government still found in the world today. For monarchical government to have survived for thousands of years, it must have enduring attractions.

One of those attractions is efficiency. Traditionally, a ruling monarch has been able to make decisions and have them carried out on his or her word alone. As a result, new policies can be carried out without a lot of political bickering. A second advantage is a clear line of succession. Citizens living in a monarchy know who is next in line for the throne. A third is the unifying power of monarchy. Loyalty to a ruling family can be a strong bond holding a nation together.

At the same time, monarchical government has its drawbacks. One is the varying quality of hereditary leaders. An exemplary monarch in one generation

may be followed by an incompetent one in the next. Also, the job of running a modern nation-state has become too big for any but the most exceptional monarchs to do well.

Today's monarchs go by many names, including king, queen, sultan, emperor, and emir. Most have inherited their power and expect to rule for life. But the modern monarch's power is rarely as great as in the days of Louis XIV and other absolute monarchs.

Most monarchs today face rigid legal restrictions on their power, often imposed by a constitution. The British monarch, for example, has the formal authority to call elections and appoint a new prime minister. These functions, however, are strictly ceremonial. Real power rests with Great Britain's democratically elected leaders.

In contrast, Saudi Arabia's king exercises broad powers. He inherits his position and has legislative, executive, and judicial powers. There are no recognized political parties or national elections in Saudi Arabia. The king may seek support from the royal family, religious leaders, and other important members of Saudi society. However, in theory, only Islamic law and Saudi traditions limit his powers.

In 2011, a series of uprisings known as the Arab Spring challenged monarchies in Southwest Asian countries. Several protests erupted in Saudi Arabia, but King Abdullah maintained his power.



In Saudi Arabia, the monarch has real power. King Abdullah acts as the ceremonial chief of state and as the head of government of Saudi Arabia. Here, King Abdullah (right) meets with Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the hereditary ruler and head of state of Qatar, who also has real power.



Vietnam has been a single-party state since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. In 2011, this propaganda poster called on Vietnamese to celebrate Vietnam's independence from French rule and to recognize the communist party's continuous political dominance.

Dictatorships: Rule by the One Powerful Leader

Whereas monarchs inherit their power, dictators take and hold power by force. Muammar al-Gaddafi, for example, took control of Libya in a military **coup d'état**, or coup, in 1969. The term *coup d'état* means “blow to the state” in French. A coup is the sudden overthrow of a government by a small group of military officers or political leaders. This often happens during a time of political unrest or a national emergency.

Dictatorships share some of the advantages of absolute monarchies. Power is centralized in the hands of a single military or political leader who can get things done efficiently. With control of the military and police, the leader can put an end to political unrest and maintain peace and order. That same power, however, can easily be used to abuse citizens who oppose the dictator's authoritarian regime.

Dictatorships face serious legitimacy problems. Over time, pressure often builds to return the government to control by elected leaders. When this happens, ruling becomes increasingly difficult. For example, in February 2011, growing discontent led to a wave of protests in Libya, calling for an end to Gaddafi's rule. Months later, he was overthrown.

Theocracy: Rule by the Few Religious Leaders

A **theocracy** is a government headed by religious leaders. In ancient city-states, theocracies were common, with government officials serving as religious leaders as well. Having a government based on one set of religious beliefs had clear benefits. A single, state-supported religion encouraged political and social unity. It also ensured that

political decisions were in line with the people's moral values and beliefs.

As states grew larger, however, enforcing religious unity became increasingly difficult. Religious minorities were often marginalized or even persecuted. Religious warfare broke out as groups with differing beliefs fought for control of their governments.

By 2007, only two theocracies existed in the world: Vatican City and Iran. Vatican City is the governmental and spiritual center of the Catholic Church. Although located in the heart of Rome, Italy, it is an independent state headed by the Catholic pope.

Iran changed from a monarchy to a theocracy in 1979. That year, Iranians expelled their hereditary ruler and formed an Islamic republic headed by a religious leader known as the Ayatollah Khomeini. As Iran's supreme leader, the Ayatollah put into practice his belief that “in Islam, the legislative power and competence to establish laws belong exclusively to God Almighty.” The most influential body in Iran's theocracy is the 12-person Council of Guardians. Their job is to make sure that the laws of the country conform to Islamic religious law.

Single-Party State: Rule by the Political Elite

In a **single-party state**, the constitution allows only one political party to govern. Power is exercised by the leading members of the party, who form the nation's political **elite**, or a small group of people within a larger group who have more power, wealth, or talent than the others. The party elite nominate candidates for public office and make most policy decisions for the country.

Ideally, a single-party system avoids much of the political wrangling that is common in multiparty states, making it easier to pass laws and implement government policies. This party unity comes at a cost, however. The views of the party elite may be very different from the interests of the people as a whole, leading to social unrest. Also, people with differing political views or solutions to problems are often completely shut out of the political process.

The handful of single-party states today are mainly socialist republics, in which the Communist Party rules. In China, for example, the Communist Party is the only legal political party, and it has controlled the government since 1949. The legislature in China usually approves all legislation proposed by the Communist Party.

Direct Democracy: Rule by All Citizens

In the direct democracy of ancient Athens, several thousand citizens met regularly as an assembly to make decisions for their city-state. Each citizen had an equal voice in public affairs, and decisions, once made, had widespread support. Nonetheless, this form of government was time-consuming for citizens. That may be one reason why Athenian-style democracy was not widely copied in the ancient world.

In the modern world, no country is governed as a pure direct democracy. The country that comes closest is Switzerland. Swiss citizens regularly vote to approve laws passed by their legislature. This form of direct democracy is known as the **referendum process**. Citizens may also propose laws and submit them directly to voters in what is known as the **initiative process**. As much as the Swiss value their form of democracy, voter turnout is often low, because people tire of frequent elections.

Limited forms of direct democracy exist in the United States. One is the New England town meeting, where townspeople meet to discuss and solve local problems. In several states, voters help shape public policy through the initiative and referendum processes. They may also be able to vote an elected official out of office by means of a **recall election**. In 2012, the governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, faced a recall election. However, the recall failed, and he retained his position.

Parliamentary Democracy: Rule by a Legislative Majority

Most nations today have adopted one of two forms of representative democracy: parliamentary or presidential. Both forms use elections to choose national leaders. But they differ in other ways.

The United Kingdom, India, and Australia are examples of **parliamentary democracies**. In a parliamentary democracy, voters elect lawmakers to represent them in the nation's parliament. The party that wins a legislative majority forms a new administration. If no single party wins a majority, several parties join together to form a ruling coalition.

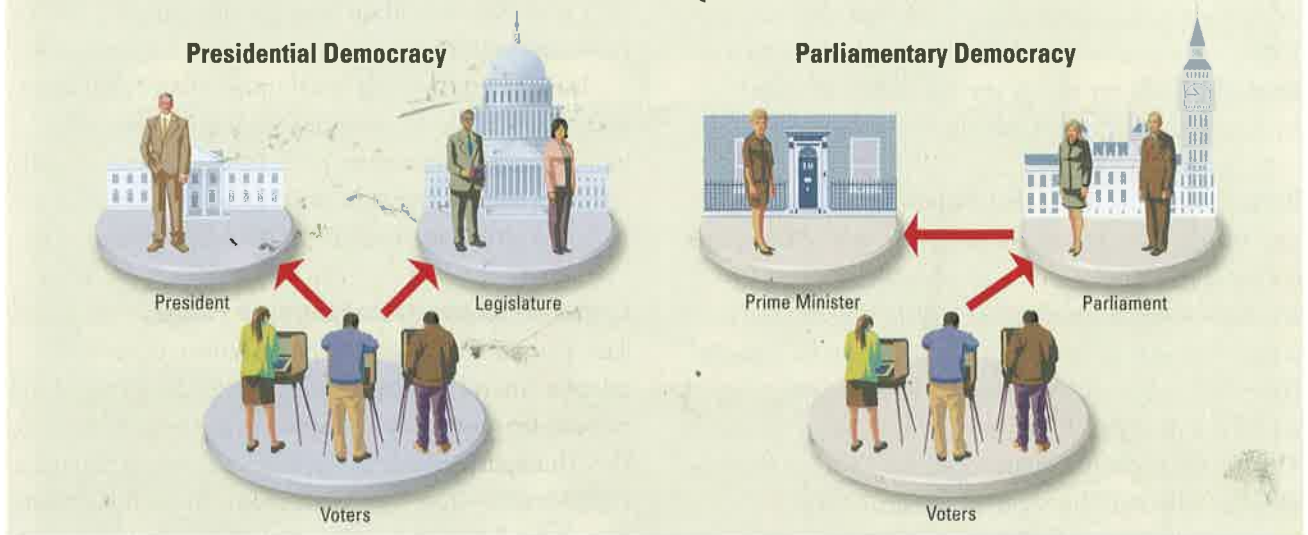
The legislative majority then selects a member of parliament to serve as the nation's **prime minister**, or chief executive. Usually the person chosen is the leader of the party with the most seats. The prime minister then chooses other members of parliament to head key government **ministries**, or executive branch departments.



The Folketing, the Danish national parliament, has legislative power in Denmark. Like in most parliamentary democracies, the party that wins the most seats in parliament selects a member to serve as the prime minister of Denmark.

Presidential and Parliamentary Forms of Government

In a presidential democracy, such as the United States, citizens vote for their legislators and also for a president. Legislative and executive powers are thus separated. In a parliamentary democracy, voters elect only their legislators. The majority party in the parliament then chooses one of its own to be prime minister. Legislative and executive powers are thus joined.



In a parliamentary democracy, there is no clear-cut separation between the executive and legislative branches of government. Members of the legislative majority usually vote with the prime minister on key issues. This may make it easier to get legislation passed than in a presidential system. However, the lack of separation means there is no real check on the prime minister's power. Also, the prime minister may lack the legitimacy and public support of an elected president.

Prime ministers remain in power only so long as they have the support of parliament. Should parliament approve a **vote of no confidence**, the prime minister must resign. At that point, an election may be held to choose a new legislative majority. Although forcing an unpopular prime minister out of office in this way may seem democratic, it can also make parliamentary governments unstable.

Presidential Democracy: Rule by Representatives of the People

The United States, Russia, and most countries in Latin America are **presidential democracies**. Voters in these countries choose a president to lead the government as the head of the executive branch. They

also elect lawmakers to represent them in a national legislature. Both the president and the legislators serve fixed terms of office.

This system has some advantages over a parliamentary democracy. Because presidents are directly elected by the people, they may be more responsive to the public than to their party. They may also enjoy more legitimacy and public support than does a prime minister chosen by a parliament. The presidential system also separates executive and legislative powers, which allows each branch to watch over the other to prevent abuses of power. Also, with fixed terms, a presidential system may be more stable than one in which the prime minister can be dismissed at any time.

This system does have several disadvantages when compared with a parliamentary one. First, it is almost impossible to remove presidents from power before their terms end, no matter how unpopular they might be. Also, when presidents are not from the political party that controls the legislature, the result can be gridlock—a situation in which little or no progress is made on pressing issues. Finally, in some countries, presidents have used their power to establish authoritarian regimes.