

The formation of authoritarian governments

[Government](#)



The Formation of Authoritarian Regimes Over half the world's population still live in societies defined as "partly free", where many basic human liberties and democratic liberties are limited and the public has very little individual freedom. This paper will examine the origin of authoritarian regimes. Social scientists look at competing societal and economic explanations to determine whether society's natural state is one of democratic or nondemocratic rule.

Although authoritarian regimes display a great deal of diversity, comparative politics can identify and contrast a number of common features. Authoritarian governments by their nature are built around the limitations of individual freedom. Scholars define authoritarianism as a political regime in which a small group of individuals exercises power over the state without being constitutionally responsible to the public (O'Neil p111). In authoritarian regimes the public has no significance in electing or removing their leaders from political power.

Therefore political leaders in authoritarian regimes have boundless authority to develop policies that they dictate to the people. In other words an authoritarian regime (Nazi 'nationalist socialist'/in between the right and left) is a type of dictatorship where a leader controls social/public life and the government, and gives its people limited private freedoms and privacies in their own homes. Despite its complete control on the public life, it is not like the confining, full time prison of the totalitarian regime, where the state controls the private as well as the public domain.

Although they are on opposite sides of the political ladder, fascism (Mussolini/right wing) and communism (Lenin, Stalin/left wing) share a few things in common, 1) the rejection of liberal democracy as a substandard form of social organization, preferring powerful state and restricted individual freedoms. 2) Socialism and fascism attempt to bring back the focus on the community and 3) both are quintessentially against free markets. The idea behind striving for 'community' is the notion of the united nation-state, and the homogeneity of that state, which is the ultimate ideal.

Surveillance is an important agency of controlling the population and maintaining nondemocratic regimes. Surveillance allows the government to prevent the opposition from organizing and inculcates uncertainty amongst the society. Internal security forces that monitor public activity, spy on individuals and interrogate members of the public that are assumed to hold political, philosophical or religious views that are contentious with the political regime. The use of coercion is associated with authoritarianism as nondemocratic regimes use coercion as a means to control the public .

In authoritarian regimes compliance and obedience amongst the population is enforced through the use of force, instilling fear to those who do not conform. Latin American regimes have in the past referred to the police or military as " death squads" which targeted individuals who were alleged to hold political views that were in opposition to the regime. Individuals who were suspected to have challenging views were abducted, murdered or tortured. Stalin concentrated his totalitarian rule in the Soviet Union by carrying out widespread arrests that annihilated the state bureaucracy, known as " purges".

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All dictators share similar stories, the desire for power, control and disciplining the masses. Through punishment, conformity, social indoctrination, using pure force and fear tactics. Hitler's construction of the concentration camps and Nazi doctors medicalized anti-Semitism and isolated the Jewish population on the basis of the notion of " impure, diseased blood," sending them to be exterminated so that they would not poison the relatively pure Europeans. Hitler had seized their identities, and integrity both physically and mentally, bankrupting the German Jewish population, along with all other " mix bloods" or mixed breeds in Germany.

He purged Germany of the 'undesirables like cutting an ulcer from a body. In communism under Stalin, the state owned absolutely everything within its borders, and not because it earned it, but because Lenin, Trotsky, and the other Bolsheviks and the Red Army had siezed everything by force. It was a total tyranny and responsible for more deaths due to government murder than any state other than that of the communist Chinese. It is believed that communism has murdered more than 120 million people during the years of 1917 up to 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down and the Gulags were emptied.

Yet, it is not over, as there are still people being murdered for their beliefs to this day in China, Laos, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, and other communist nations. The Western assumption that all societies seek to be democratic is dangerous, as cultural factors are essential in the explanation of nondemocratic rule and the origin of authoritarian governments. Culture has the capacity to either advance or hinder democratic development. Religious philosophies may sponsor the form of government a nation adapts.

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Scholars of comparative politics assert that democracy as a regime was founded by the interconnected societal characteristics of European culture, such as industrialization, the development of capitalism, Protestant Christianity combined with the emphasis on individualism. Conversely, Islamic nations are more susceptible to nondemocratic rule, as religion is usually state sponsored. In Islamic societies laws are as codes handed down by Allah that are to be abided and defended while citizenship is determined by allegiance to the state sponsored faith.

Proponents of this hypothesis conclude that these liberal values are not universal and that societies that have not been impacted by these factors and are not Westernized, are less democratic, regardless of the economic wealth or resources. Political institutions are responsible for economic and societal explanations of nondemocratic regimes and intrinsically shape the nature or persistence of nondemocratic regimes. However, leadership is fundamental to the collapse of nondemocratic regime, as Ghandi, Gorbachev and Mandela have proven.

Following the end of the Cold War, many assumed that liberal democracy would globalize and become the wave of the future. In the face of tremendous political, social, and economic obstacles it is questionable whether or not democracy and freedom is ever going to spread to all people. The Western assumption that all societies seek to be democratic are dangerous, as cultural factors are essential in the explanation of nondemocratic rule and the origin of authoritarian governments. Culture has the capacity to either advance or hinder democratic development. Religious philosophies may sponsor the form of government a nation adapts.

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Proponents of this hypothesis conclude that these liberal values are not universal and that societies that have not been impacted by these factors and are not Westernized are less democratic, regardless of the economic wealth or resources. Proponents of the "Asian values" debate assert that Asia's cultural and religious traditions lay heavy emphasis on religious traditions that ordain conformity, obedience and hierarchy, creating the conditions in which a political regime that limits freedom to maintain the social order. Yet distinctive historical experiences, religions and social structures vary from country to country.

China is governed by a constitution that is designated "the fundamental law of the state". Under the conditions of the elite authoritarian rule in China, political power has not been highly institutionalized. The Western notion of the rule of law has not prevailed in China. The opening of the economy and the growing complexity of Chinese society have inevitable weakened China's authoritarian regime. Economic and financial decentralization has given local authorities and private firms the autonomy to resist central policies and develop greater independence.

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Despite China's past quarter century of economic reform and global trends of decentralization, the country remains stubbornly authoritarian. Half of the world's population that does not democratically elect its leaders live in China (Giley 2003) There is a strong connection between markets and regimes. The middle class is a byproduct of the distribution of wealth. A society in which economic growth is distribute is more educated and therefore more able to articulate its own political rights (O'Neil 113).

When there is no middle class, where poverty and inequality are great, an authoritarian government is much more likely to develop and persist. Authoritarian governments develop or persist either to defend the economic wealth of the few who posses it against the majority, or to distribute wealth among the majority population. The rise of Nazi rule in Germany in the 1930s was preceded by devastating hyperinflation that destructed the finances of the middle class. The number Authoritarian regimes present around the world had declined.

One reason for this maybe the political connotations of the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War. The United States dominant presence world-wide in representing freedom and democracy, and had to grant more civil rights to its people in order to win World War II. As Western culture become more dominant around the world, popular culture, music, movies create a greater possibility for people to be exposed to democracy and better perceive the opportunities ingrained in free society. It is every human beings natural inclination to be free.

Monotheistic religions have been the root cause of forming authoritarian governments, the cause of world wars and the prevalence of slavery. Each society or nation develops uniquely, based on its historical, religious and cultural experiences. America, known as the land of the free and the brave has earned its reputation, as much blood has been shed, and even a civil war has been fought to advance the society to a nation in which all value freedom. Free nations are more prosperous, as each individual has the opportunity to maximize their resources. Societal explanations of nondemocratic regimes and intrinsically shape the nature or persistence of nondemocratic regimes. However, leadership is fundamental to the collapse of nondemocratic regime, as Ghandi, Gorbachev and Mandela have proven. Following the end of the Cold War, many assumed that liberal democracy would globalize and become the wave of the future. In the face of tremendous political, social, and economic obstacles it is questionable whether or not democracy and freedom is ever going to spread to all people.