

Type of government in england and the ottoman empire

[History](#), [Empires](#)



Comparing theories of government in England and the Ottoman Empire. In attempting to compare theories of Government we need to look at the type of government in place in both England¹ and The Ottoman Empire^{2, 3} we need to define the period for comparison. It would be good to use descriptions of the rise of each form of government by following a timeline to form the basis of this essay. This unfortunately can't be the case, other than time there is no like-for-like comparison.

The Ottoman's imperial or dynastic monarchy, with a realm, extending over many countries needs to be looked at as an empire with responsibilities, which are by their very nature, complicated by the cultures they cross. England's feudal monarchy and its constitutional executive government was very much focussed on internal affairs, ongoing wars and skirmishes with traditional foe, France, is somewhat the opposite of the Ottoman⁴. The rise of the Ottoman Empire, with sultan Osman I, from around 1299, was coincident with a series of opportunistic events.

Important amongst these was a change in the expansionist Mongol empire in the East⁵. In the west was the collapsing Byzantine Empire, of which Turkey was or had been a part and desired to be free. In an interesting turn of events many aspects of Byzantine rule were incorporated by the Ottoman. Famine and flood had affected Western Europe, including England. England and France were in and out of war during their first century and the 100 Year War the second century of their empire. The mid 14th century was the time of the Black Death where populations throughout the known world, particularly the Christian world, had been decimated.

Add to these that the Ottoman lived for war⁶, probably the most influential element for successful expansion. The warrior Ottoman Empire was also the longest dynastic monarchy since before Christ. Led by an absolute monarch, the sultan, to decree the laws of the realm the rule then divided into the administrative and military lines. This dynastic head at various times also took on various other names as well Sultan and titles including caliph. Caliph or Caliphate seems to have a closer connection to Muhammad and possibly made governing Arabs and other Islamic believers easier⁷.

The only significant time, in what was to become a 600 year history that the government wasn't from this singular dynastic head was between 1402 and 1417 when the Ottoman Triumvirate was in control. By the beginning of the 16th century the Ottoman realm covered most of the Islamic world, and much of the known world at that time. Like the spread of Islam 600 to 800 years before them, the development of the Ottoman Empire was one gained through conquest and maintained through a form of discrete yet absolute rule. There is a problem with maintaining rule over a conquered people.

Continued oppression is counter-productive. If, however, the vanquished feel there is a benefit in the victor remaining ruler⁸ the ongoing relationship will be very productive. It is probable that the Ottoman's use of the religion, both Islam and those the "non-faithful" (eg. Jews, Christians and Orthodox) to maintain their own religion is an example of providing the conquered a benefit they needed to prevent insurrection. The Ottoman had the Qur'an and Sharia law to do the much of this work for them. ⁹ This connection to the Qur'an is important.

So much in fact, that in 1517 the Islamic office of the caliphate¹⁰ was resurrected and used continuously from then till 1924 when the Ottoman Empire finally ended. The Caliphate was a significantly different position to the spiritual leader, whose task has always been to guide, provide solace and inform the believers we need to remember that this government remained a theocratic hegemony throughout its history. Throughout the life of the empire the Sultan or Caliphate seems to have provided for a number of protections for the citizens of the empire.

These protections included, as examples, ensuring the 'fealty'¹¹ of the territorial governors, providing consumer protections, rights of appeal against, for instance, the tax system and the collectors, the avarizhanes¹². The rise of the Ottoman Empire continued till the 1600's until internal stresses begin to surface including the defeats by the Venetians and growing problems with Habsburg Austria. After this time we see growth become the development and modernisation of the empire.

In an attempt to emphasise the size, management and requirements of the Ottoman Empire we need to look at the scale of the Empire: from Morocco and Spain in the West to Iran and the Horn of Africa in the East, then North to the Austrian states and all that these areas encompassed the success of Ottoman rule is almost incomprehensible in terms of continuous dynasty. At peak times the population of this empire reached 30 million people. Staggeringly large when compared to the populations of England, France, Spain etc.

Also, aside from the loss of Islamic Spain as a result of the reconquista defeats of the rulers of Granada in 1492 The empire remained reasonably stable. (It is important to note that the Reconquista had begun toward the end of the 11th Century which was before Ottoman rule. So how do the Ottomans achieve this fantastic feat? 13Firstly, there is the belief within the dynasty that they are right chosen people, acting on behalf God and according to Islam. This and a fear of holy retribution would be tremendous motivators in both getting it right and keeping it right in terms of governing the people.

Next, the conquering Ottomans effectively kept the rulers of conquered nations in place to rule apparently on the Ottoman's behalf they appointed representatives of the countries conquered or appointed to the Ottoman court as friends and advice givers. Thirdly, they left the spiritual or religious life of the conquered in place, except for polytheist religions. The central bureaucracy managed to contain the many challenges it faced with pragmatism, flexibility, and a tradition of negotiation to co-opt and incorporate into the state the social groups that rebelled against it. Ozmuçur and Pamuk) In SOLEYMAN OZMUCUR AND UEVKET PAMUK Real Wages and Standards of Living in the Ottoman Empire, 1489-1914 were kept reasonably stable in real terms for most of this period and particularly in relation to England and Amsterdam. Finally, the Ottoman had a reasonable idea of just how big the area they could control could be. By creating clearly defined borders and installing a system of controls which kept skirmishes at the borders trouble within the empire was kept to a minimum.

When reading the accounts of this period either via the course notes or the bibliographic references¹⁴ I am struck by how few problems seemed to be evident in such a diverse and widespread empire. For all practical purposes, the caliphate sultans of the Ottoman Empire only had to keep check of the rulers and governors of the territories they controlled. Remember the ruthlessness of the Ottomans¹⁵ and in part a process of rigorous benevolence. Examples of the latter would be the correct application of the taxing system and distribution of its revenues, providing the finances to keep Empire in place.

For the people, the Ottoman's "super government" provided things such as consumer protection, border security and a means of trade within the empire. The Ottoman Empire seems to have reached a critical point towards the late 1600's with the Ottoman-Austrian (Hapsburg) wars which had begun over a century before. Ottoman losses seem to be related to the continuing emergence of the European Powers¹⁶. There seems to be some correlation with emerging Europe's focus on conquest of the new world beginning of change in the Ottoman Empire.

England, on the other hand, around 1300 we find a period which was significant for England, too. It was toward the end of Plantagenet reign, the century of Kings Edward (I, II, III). There was the great famine of 1315, upheavals in the Royal house left by Henry III and the 100 year war with France beginning in 1337. To read a chronology of this period is more like reading a plan for the collapse and annihilation¹⁷. Factor into this the grip of the "Black Death", mid century, and the decimation it brought to England's

population and we find ourselves in almost the opposite position to the launching Ottoman Empire.

The Government and Parliament of late 1300's and early 1400s was not as we know it today, a Westminster Parliament with a ceremonial, almost titular, head of state. There were King's ministers, lords, commoners and petitioners. By the time of Edward I, the parliament met twice yearly to deal with the arising matters. He needed this parliamentary institution to be seen to work as a means of instilling a sense of unity in a civil war ravaged country left to him by Henry III. In reality and in terms of association with the rest of the known world, England was somewhat isolationist, perhaps a benefit of the Channel.

There was trade and there Anglo-French wars but as for government England, and what was to gradually to become known as the British Isles, the monarchy and Parliament were somewhat introverted in their rule. England's woes were probably reflected in the advice given by Fortescue on government. Firstly, England had to clearly define itself as either a royal ruling monarchy or constitutional monarchy. Secondly, it had to ensure that the feudal system inherited from France, worked properly. Finally, the people from peasant to aristocrat had to have confidence that it was working. Parliament and its institutions were that vehicle.

Returning to the English case the period between Edward III and Elizabeth I is critical in the history of English government. This period includes the War of the Roses, which was a highly divisive civil conflict. It also includes

the break from the papacy by Henry VIII. It was not really until Elizabethan England that the first real journeys of discovery took place. The reports to the Queen and government of the time by the likes of Sir Walter Raleigh seemed to have changed England to expansionism. It is important to note at this point that the early British explorers were more probably opportunistic merchant pirates than explorers in the truer senses of the word.