

AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEM

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Summary

Authoritarianism is a historically generated phenomenon in response to state crises of political order. Its main characteristic has been elitist dictatorship, with the occasional cult of personality. It is a response to democratic failure, social polarization, economic stagnation, and international instability.

It generally exercises sovereign power through single-party rule, and may depend upon military forces to maintain order. In its extreme control over society, it may become a totalitarian monopoly. Authoritarian regimes often offer trade-offs between economic development and political democracy, and have been the historical gateway to democratic systems when political order is well-established, and long-term economic progress is anticipated.

1. Introduction

Authoritarianism is a theory and a system of government customarily linked with dictatorship, in contrast to democracy. It is a principle based on obedience to authority, and opposes autonomy of individuals in thought and action. As a form of government, authoritarianism concentrates power in a leader or in a small elite not constitutionally accountable to the people. Unlike totalitarian systems, authoritarian governments usually lack a highly developed ideology. Also, the latter tends to tolerate a degree of pluralism in social organization, usually lacks the power to mobilize the nation for collective goals, and exercises its power within limits. Leaders in authoritarian systems often exercise their power arbitrarily and consider themselves above existing law. Modern authoritarian systems usually operate through single, dominant parties, which control government and other key parts of society, including the economy, media, and education. They usually do not hold free elections, which could replace them with a competing party (see *Political Parties*). It is either difficult or impossible for citizens to create opposition groups or parties.

1.1 Dictatorships

Authoritarianism provides the conceptual framework of modern dictatorship, and the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. The latter is a form of government in which one person or a small elite group wields absolute power with few or no constitutional restrictions. The term originates from the Roman Republic dictator, who was a temporary magistrate, granted extra powers to deal with state emergencies. In the twentieth century, dictators have also claimed extraordinary powers to deal with state crises and exercise despotic powers, using coercion, terror, and suppression to hold control, and they employ modern propaganda to maintain popular support.

Authoritarianism is a set of analytical characteristics, while dictatorship is a form of government, which manifests authoritarian characteristics. Dictatorships may be authoritarian or totalitarian. An authoritarian political system is one in which individual freedom is completely subordinate to the power of authority of the state, centered either in one person or a small group that is not constitutionally accountable to the people. As Almond and Powell (1996) specified, authoritarian governments are “those in which executive, legislative, and judicial power are concentrated and in which the agents of government are not chosen in popular competitive elections”.

Industrial authoritarian nations can be classified into either radical or conservative types. The Soviet model adapted in Eastern Europe was an example of a radical authoritarian variety. Almond and Powell (1996) claim that, as Communist authoritarian states evolve (see *Communist System*), they could resort to “the technocratic authoritarian approach with the containment of popular pressure and protest by repressive means, and the management of investment and distribution in the interest of economic growth”.

Franco’s Spain (1938–1978), the Greece of “the colonels” (1967–1974), the Chile of Pinochet (1973–1988), and the Brazil of “the generals” (1964–1985) are examples of conservative authoritarianism. The military authoritarian regimes of Southern Europe

and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s repressed popular political organization, and they granted considerable freedom to private enterprise, for the purpose of economic growth. After the Second World War, the new Afro-Asian states saw dictators emerge out of the failed constitutional governments established at the time of independence. Without a strong middle class, and faced with tribalism and ethnic friction and poverty, democracy often failed to take hold. Presidents and Prime Ministers were elected, and frequently consolidated power through single party rule by outlawing any opposition. In other states, the military seized power and established dictatorships, sometimes for life.

1.2 Authoritarianism as Response to Crisis

War, industrialization, revolution and decolonization destroyed many old political systems, including traditional monarchies, and left little in their place. Attempts to establish constitution democracies (see *Constitutional Government*) were often frustrated by the magnitude of political and economic crisis. Often the emergence of charismatic leaders, who promised solutions, if given extraordinary powers, provided fertile grounds for dictatorships. Post-First World War, Europe both demonized and romanticized the Bolshevik revolution as cutting the Gordian knot of “talk shop” democracy. Democracy and capitalism’s failures were magnified and multiplied in the world depression of the 1930s. Dictators took responsibility not only for mobilizing the state, but the economy as well. Lenin, Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin were men of action, and drew admiration for their apparent success in re-starting broken economies. Even Roosevelt was accused of taking extraordinary powers to deal with the depression, at the expense of constitutional democracy.

In Latin America, the end of Spanish rule saw the rise of various self-proclaimed leaders after collapse of central authority, termed caudillos, and often having private armies. Antonio López de Santa Anna in Mexico and Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina were examples of caudillos who established control over a local territory before marching upon a weak national government. Latin American dictators in the twentieth century tended to be national, rather than provincial leaders and often were installed in their position of power by nationalistic military officers, as was Juan Perón of Argentina. They sometimes allied themselves the interests of wealthy elites, or they pursued radical social reforms.

1.3 Soft Authoritarianism, Mexico

The Mexican political system has been pragmatic and moderately authoritarian since 1940, and based on institutions more than personalistic rule. The system has tended to be inclusionary, with co-optation and incorporation rather than exclusion of troublesome political forces. It attempts to incorporate a broad range of social, economic and political interests within the ruling PRI and its “mass” organizations, as well as opposition groups whose activities are tolerated by the regime. When potentially dissident groups appear, their leaders are often co-opted into government-controlled organizations. When new groups do not cooperate, the government uses force. On paper, the Mexican government resembles the US system, with President, three autonomous branches of government, and federalism. In reality, there is much more centralization in the hands of the ruling party—the PRI. A patronage system, run largely

by and for the PRI, also exists in the elected apparatus, with candidates usually nominated by the PRI apparatus.

1.4 Oligarchies in Latin America

Latin American authoritarianism grew out of a different set of developments than Europe. With reliance on limited commodity products sold to developed countries, and dependence on agriculture and mining, industrialization was slow in the region. With expansion of export economies, the increased incomes allowed political consolidation among some elites, but led to civil wars in other societies. Some of the new authoritarian rulers engaged in developing economic infrastructure to facilitate growth. One such was Mexico's Porfirio Díaz, who promoted railroad construction, but also forced peasants to work on rural estates, and suppressed popular organizations.

In Brazil, rural elites, replaced the constitutional monarchy in 1889 and took as its motto the slogan "*Ordem e Progresso*" ("Order and Progress"). This summarized what a number of nineteenth century elites were seeking—maintenance of their own dominance with some imitation of the more advanced societies of North America and Western Europe.

2. Totalitarian and Authoritarian Political Structures

Totalitarian dictatorships arose in the prewar late industrializing countries of Germany, Italy and Russia, but only survived in the USSR, which created satellite dictatorships in Eastern Europe after the war. Emulation of the Soviet pattern occurred in Asia in Mongolia, North Korea, China and Vietnam. The key features of totalitarianism are:

- identification of the state with a single mass party under its charismatic leader,
- an official ideology for legitimacy of the regime,
- terror and propaganda to suppress dissent and opposition, and
- the use of modern science and technology to control the economy and individual behavior.

Extended periods of crisis are more likely to produce dictatorship than are normal and stable times. Most constitutional governments provide for emergency powers of the elected government, but set strict limits on powers and time to avoid dictatorship. Nevertheless, dictators have emerged out of these constitutional arrangements, including the dictatorships of Hitler in Germany, Benito Mussolini in Italy, Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, Józef Pilsudski in Poland, and António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal.

During times of domestic or foreign crisis, even most constitutional governments have conferred emergency powers on the chief executive, and in some notable cases, this provided the opportunity for duly elected leaders to overthrow democracy and rule dictatorially thereafter. In other democracies, however, constitutional arrangements have survived quite lengthy periods of crisis, as in Great Britain and the United States during the Second World War, in which the use of extraordinary powers by the executive came to a halt with the end of the wartime emergency, with no incurable habits of dictatorship.

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Biographical Sketch

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