

# Governments and the Foundations of Democracy Readings



## WHY HAVE GOVERNMENTS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

**Through the ages, there have been governments wherever there has been a significant number of people.** Governments are formed because groups need an organized effort to create and enforce rules that control conduct within the population. You see governments within many different groups. Besides your town government, governing occurs within groups ranging from Garden Clubs to Scout Troops. The ruling members are put in their places of *authority* to create and enforce rules that govern the conduct within the group of people with whom they meet.

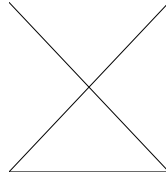
Governments also exist in order to assist society to improve in *tangible* and *intangible* ways. Governments serve to help in both these areas. Our forefathers believed strongly in freedom and equality. These two ideals became the basic of principles of American government. Differences of opinion regarding religion and politics were respected. Most of the early colonists came to America to escape the tyranny of European kings. In other countries one religious group may predominate, thus making it nearly impossible for others of different beliefs to exist openly. The United States is one of the few countries that practices religious tolerance.

## The Different Types of Governmental Leadership

The ancient Greek *philosopher* Aristotle is known as the "father of political science" because of his writings concerning the formation and directions of governments. Aristotle divided the types of governments into numerical and

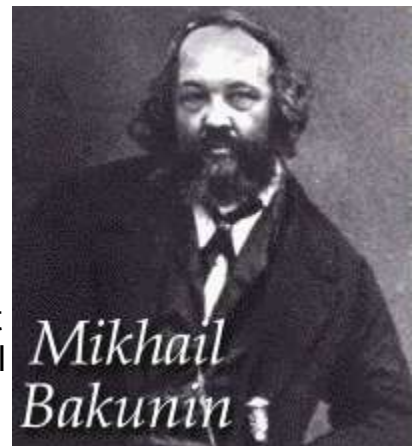
moral groupings. Numerically, he claimed that all governments fall into one of three categories:

1. One person rules.
2. A few people rule.
3. Many people rule.



Morally, Aristotle suggested that each of the above groups would be named according to how the government was run. He based his *morality* upon whether the ruling party ruled for the benefit of the people (good) or for the benefit of only the ruling party (bad). If one ruling person served the people, the good governing was called a *monarchy*. If the governing was bad then it was *atyranny*. In the case of a few people governing, working for the people was known as an *aristocracy*. Selfish group leadership was known as an *oligarchy*. When a government was ruled by many people, Aristotle called it a *polity*. Interestingly enough, if it was a dangerous, selfish mob-type rule, he labeled it a *democracy*. However, through the ages, the term *democracy* has lost its dangerous connotation.

**Anarchism** is a form of government where those in leadership have little or no power over the general population. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that an anarchist form of government is actually no government at all. To anarchists, the government is an institution that has no merit, and is merely the avenue by which people can grab and exploit power. Those in favor of anarchism believe that government should have no *jurisdiction* over them at all. Personal liberty is of the utmost importance to anarchists, and they believe that any public government is



unnecessary and dangerous. Anarchism is an extreme form of government, obviously, and is difficult to find in effect today.

Anarchism rose from thought to an actual revolutionary movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its goal was to destroy any government which held rule over the people and start a collection of "common-man" organizations which would produce and distribute economic and social needs. Regional and nation-wide federations would govern themselves, replacing the need for a state-run power.

While following the radical freedom fighting of the French Revolution, the anarchists at first embraced the ideals of Marxism. However, the Marxist "dictatorship of the proletariat," the idea of the capitalist state being used to achieve a classless society, was repulsive to the anarchists. Political groups were seen as corrupt, so the anarchist believed that anyone who was faced with the thought of overseeing a party would fall prey to the desire for power and glory. This disagreement led to a clash of ideas between Karl Marx and the Russian anarchist Michael Bakunin in the early 1870s. While Marx favored State-run Socialism, Bakunin argued for the total destruction of the State as the primary goal for those who want to guarantee freedom. Soon anarchism and Marxism went in different directions.

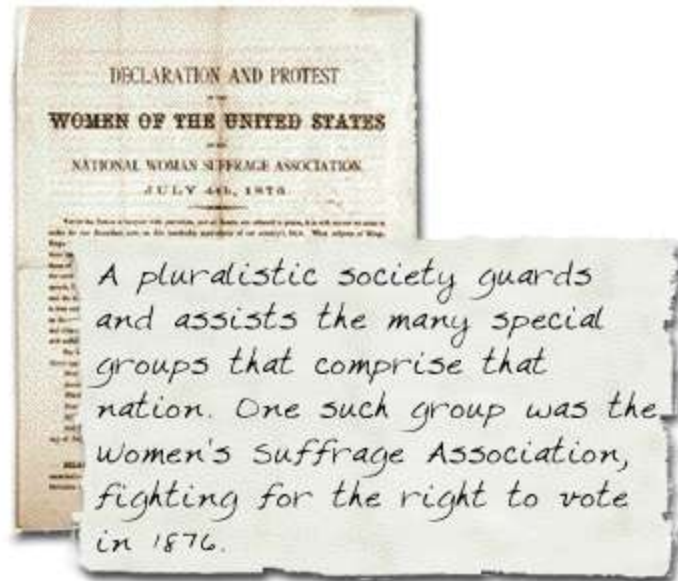
Anarchism had a great impact in Russia, where many anarchist groups participated in the revolutionary movement both before and during the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

*Pluralism* is a form of government where the public can have input in various areas of interest of the country. The United States, Great Britain, and Canada are all pluralistic countries. A pluralistic society guards the rights of its citizens carefully while giving the government certain powers as borne out in constitutions and other articles of conduct. Special interest groups have an opportunity to propose legislation, whether it be for racial, ethnic, or business reasons. The diversity of the many peoples and their interests constantly mix into the politics of a pluralistic society so that no particular group takes over. The latter part of the 19th century saw a number of factors which set up the pluralistic flavor of the United States. The nation was no



**William James**

longer considered an agricultural country as much as an industrial one. Cities sprang up as immigrants poured in from Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and Asia. Within the next three decades following the Civil War, the number of cities over 10,000 in population grew by tenfold. America soon grew to become a nation of diverse cultures and backgrounds. Writer William James called it Pluralism. In his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James encouraged support for this new era in American diversity. Pluralism, he argued, opened thinking to new horizons of acceptance and challenge.



*Totalitarianism* is the opposite extreme from anarchism. In a totalitarian government, the authorities want complete obedience and total submission. Totalitarian governments try to regulate everything in a person's life. If you were under a government like this, your workplace, school, and even your family would be under severe restrictions and regulations. Totalitarian governments have no limits in their power within the country. Their control is not only over personal freedoms but also personal thoughts, for many of these rulers want the citizens to adhere and agree to a strict set of ideas.

*Communism* is a system which proclaims to be for the "common man" but in practice has shown to be an oppressive government. The communist government, which we will study later, calls for everyone to give up selfish rights for the common good of the populace. However, in doing so, the freedoms that are offered in a capitalistic society are almost unheard of under communism.

**Dictator.** A dictator is a leader who is unrestrained by law, and who has total control over a country. Dictator Saddam Hussein of Iraq tolerated no opposition within the country, and his decisions went unquestioned by citizens, lest they face fearful consequences. His regime systematically executed, tortured, imprisoned, and terrorized the Iraqi people. He managed to keep control over Iraq even though his country had been humiliated by the United States in continual conflicts since the initial attacks of the Persian Gulf in the early 1990s.

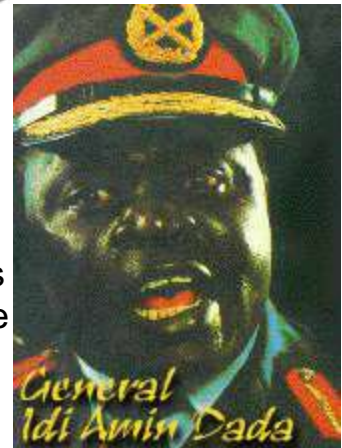
In March of 2003, President George W. Bush ordered a military invasion of Iraq with the goal of toppling Hussein from power. The goal of removing Hussein from power was accomplished on December 13, 2003, when



soldiers, including U.S. special operations forces, found him hiding in a 6-by-8-foot hole. Saddam had challenged his followers to fight to the death before, during, and after the war that eventually removed him from power, but in the end, he quickly surrendered when facing American soldiers. Hussein was captured with weapons and about \$750,000 in \$100 bills.



General Idi Amin was another dictator like Saddam Hussein; he ruled the African country of Uganda with an *unrelenting* and iron-like fist. He came to power in 1971 and quickly declared Uganda to be a Muslim country. Many non-Muslim foreigners were given 24 hours to leave the country. Even native non-Muslim Ugandans were not allowed to meet together for religious purposes. Many who were in disagreement with him were quickly killed. In 1972, he expelled all Asians from Uganda, including over 60,000 businessmen and professionals. Amin would tolerate



no *insubordination* whatsoever, and the multitudes feared and *loathed* him.

In 1979, when Uganda was at war with neighboring Tanzania, Ugandan rebels allied with Tanzanian troops and drove Amin from the country. Amin was allowed to escape and settle in Saudi Arabia, where he died in August of 2003.

**Monarchy/Autocracy.** An autocracy gives one person complete control over all branches of government. Whenever George Washington was first considered for leadership of our country, there was talk of making him King of America. After all, an



autocracy under Washington would work out quite well, wouldn't it? Of course, that idea was never carried out. The citizens of the United States wanted an active role in the workings of the government.

Louis XVI was an autocrat that ruled France. As the picture to the right attests, Louis XVI not only held sway over the clergy and the nobility, he ruled with complete authority over the common people as well. In many autocracies in history, the ruling powers could appoint and dismiss members of governmental branches whenever they desired.

**The people of the United States voted for incumbent Democrat Bill Clinton over Republican challenger Bob Dole in the 1996**

**presidential election.** It was another coast-to-coast example of American democracy at work. Every time a senior citizen enters the voting booth at a local high school to vote on a town mayor, it's democracy in action. Every time a father makes a voting mark on the ballot for the next county sheriff, democracy is being exercised. Every time a college sophomore receives her voter's registration in the mail and heads to her precinct for voting, we see democracy working. America's democratic government has survived well over 200 years, but it is a concept that goes back thousands of years.

**Democracy is a great idea that started with the Greeks and Romans.** The city-states of ancient Greece and the Rome republic had citizens voting *indirect democracies*. A democracy is a system of politics in which the people of a nation actually rule by their voting power. They may choose a form of government which might be different from other countries in order to meet their particular needs, but it is still government by the people. In modern democracies, elected *representatives* are sent to the government seat to do the will of the people from their designated *districts*. The representatives may even be replaced by the people according to the voting process called *recall*. Elected officials are directly accountable to the *electorate*.

**What makes a modern democracy so great?** Four powerful pillars of democracy include the citizen's freedom, equality before the law, voting rights, and opportunity for education. Independent countries flock to the democratic system which, even with its flaws, still remains an immensely popular form of government, since there is a great margin for correction if the need arises.

Ruins of the Terrace of Lions in Delos, Greece.



Greece was one of the birthplaces of Democracy.

Courtesy of the  
National Library of Medicine.

**So what is the difference between a direct democracy and a representative democracy?** A Direct Democracy is only possible in a small community, such as your school classroom. Say there was an issue in the class that the teacher allowed the class to pick a solution to. You would each have an opportunity to vote upon the issue after getting educated as to the possible solutions. This system simply would be too challenging for all 300 million Americans to use as we cannot all get educated on each subject that our nation faces or find the time to vote on each and every issue, so, instead, we are a Representative Democracy, electing representatives to vote in our place.

## **FIVE FUNDAMENTALS OF DEMOCRACY**

When we talk about democracy we automatically draw up the fundamental belief that each individual has a value. The free enterprise system that the United States has is parallel to democracy, because the free enterprise system is also based on individualism.

Democracy is not something that will be found in all countries. It is here in the United States because Americans believe in its basic concepts. There are 5 basic concepts of American democracy:

1. Worth of the Individual
2. Equality of All Persons
3. Majority Rule, Minority Rights
4. Necessity of Compromise
5. Individual Freedom

### **Worth of the Individual**

Democracy is heavily based upon the concept that every individual is important and is a separate and unique being. This is probably the most important concept of democratic thought. This concept of democracy is about serving the many individuals that make up a society.

### **Equality of All Persons**

Democracy greatly stresses the importance of the equality of all individuals just as much as the worth of the individual. However, let's be clear that democracy doesn't impose that the condition of all persons are equal. Not everybody is physically or mentally equal. Really, this concept is about giving individuals equality of opportunity and equality before the law. This means that race, color, religion, and gender are obsolete.

### **Majority Rule, Minority Rights**

In a democracy, public policy is determined by the will of the people and not the voices of the few that rule. And we determine the popular will of the people through the rule of the majority. Democracy insists that the majority of people will be right more often than any small ruling group. However, it does not say that the majority's will is always right at making the decisions of the public policies of the government. In other words, democracy is a trial and error process for finding ways to find satisfactory solutions to problems. The good news is that minority rights keeps majority rule under check. The majority must always recognize the rights of the minority by listening and welcoming suggestions from the minority.

### **Necessity of Compromise**

A democracy cannot go anywhere or even function with the slightest movement without the necessity of compromise. In a democracy, the people must always find the position that is acceptable to the largest number. Compromise is important in a democracy because a democracy puts the individual first and the answers to different public questions are not always black or white. Compromise is a process in which a democracy can work on achieving a majority agreement.

### **Individual Freedom**

Democracy is all about individual freedom. However, democracy never insists on the complete freedom of the individual. There is no such thing as absolute freedom under a government. This can only exist under an anarchy, where there is no established government. Individual freedom gives all individuals the freedom to do as they will as long as it does not violate the majority will. Finding the balance between the rights of one individual the rights of the other is not an easy thing. Democracy only strives to find that balance.