

Oligarchy

Oligarchies are governments in which a collection of individuals rules over a nation. A specific set of qualities, such as wealth, heredity, and race, are used to give a small group of people power. Oligarchies often have authoritative rulers and an absence of democratic practices or individual rights.

Real-World Example

The government that ruled South Africa from 1948 to 1991 was a racially constructed oligarchy. The minority white population exercised dominance and imposed segregation over the nation's majority Black population, controlling policy, public administration, and law enforcement. Following an anti-apartheid movement, the country adopted a liberal democracy that ultimately gave all ethnic and linguistic groups in South Africa political representation.

Aristocracy

Aristocracy refers to a government form in which a small, elite ruling class — the aristocrats — have power over those in lower socioeconomic strata. Members of the aristocracy are usually chosen based on their education, upbringing, and genetic or family history. Aristocracies often connect wealth and ethnicity with both the ability and right to rule.

Real-World Example

Aristocracy originated in ancient Greece; the term derives from the Greek word, *aristokratia*, meaning "rule of the best." Aristocracies were the dominant governments during most medieval and modern periods across Europe. Aristocrats led major countries, including Britain, Germany, and Russia, until World War I, when other government forms gained popularity.

Monarchy

Monarchy is a power system that appoints a person as head of state for life or until abdication. Authority traditionally passes down through a succession line related to one's bloodline and birth order within the ruling royal family, often limited by gender. There are two types of monarchies: constitutional and absolute. Constitutional monarchies limit the monarch's power as outlined in a constitution, while absolute monarchies give a monarch unlimited power.

Real-World Example

Today, 45 nations have some form of monarchy, though the concept has become increasingly diluted with the evolution of democratic principles. In the United Kingdom, Queen Elizabeth II's role as a monarch is largely symbolic. But monarchs in other countries, including Morocco, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, still have far-reaching political authority.