



# Glossary

**ABSOLUTE MONARCHY:** A form of government in which a king or queen rules without constitutional or other restrictions.

**ANARCHISM:** A political philosophy maintaining that government is unnecessary.

**ANARCHY:** Lawlessness due to the absence of government.

**APARTHEID:** Literally “separateness”; the system of institutionalized racism that existed in South Africa from 1948 to 1994.

**APPELLATE COURT:** A superior court that reviews the decision of a lower court at the request of the losing party.

**AUTOCRACY:** A government in which one person holds absolute power.

**BICAMERAL:** Having two chambers; used to describe a legislature.

**CABINET:** A body of government officials most often comprising the heads of the departments making up the executive branch. Under different systems of government cabinet members may determine policy or serve primarily as advisors to the head of state.

**CALIPH:** The supreme ruler of all Muslim lands. The state ruled by a caliph is called a caliphate.

**CAPITALISM:** An economic system based on private ownership of goods and the idea that prices and production should be set by the workings of a “free market” rather than by centralized planning.

**CASTE SYSTEM:** A system of social stratification based on hereditary rank, wealth, race, occupation, or other criteria.

**CAUDILLO:** An autocratic leader in Spain or Latin America.

**CITY-STATE:** A sovereign state comprising a city and surrounding regions.

**CIVIL LAW:** A legal system based on laws enacted by a legislature.

**COLD WAR:** An ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union that spanned the years 1945 to 1991.

**COLLECTIVIZATION:** A system of agricultural production in which workers share control of a farm and receive a portion of the harvest as compensation for their labor. Collectivization has often been implemented by communist governments.

**COMMON LAW:** A legal system based on decisions made by judges, rather than on laws enacted by a legislature.

**COMMUNISM:** A political and economic system intended to foster a classless society through communal ownership of property and shared rewards. Much of the ideology of communism derives from the writings of the German political philosopher Karl Marx and is also referred to as Marxism.

**CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY:** A form of government that operates according to a constitution but recognizes a monarch as head of state.

**COUP D'ÉTAT:** The sudden, violent overthrow of a government.

**CULT OF PERSONALITY:** Public adulation of a political leader who is glorified through propaganda.

**DEMOCRACY:** A government ruled by the majority.

**DIASPORA:** The scattering of a group that has emigrated or been forced from their traditional homeland; this term refers in particular to the settlement of Jews exiled from Palestine by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

**DIET:** The name for the legislature in some countries.

**DIRECT DEMOCRACY:** A democratic system in which citizens participate in government decisions directly rather than electing representatives to govern on their behalf.

**DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS:** The idea that monarchs receive their mandate to rule directly from God.

**DOGE:** The head of government in city-states of Renaissance Italy.

**DUUMVIRATE:** A government in which rule is shared between two people.

**ECONOMIC SANCTIONS:** Economic actions taken by one government to exert pressure on another; examples include halting financial or military aid, instituting trade embargoes, or increasing tariffs.

**EGALITARIANISM:** A social and political philosophy based on the idea that all people are equal.

**ELECTORAL COLLEGE:** A group of electors; this term is used in particular to describe the body of representatives that elects the president and vice president in the United States.

**EMERGING DEMOCRACY:** A country in the process of moving from an authoritarian to a democratic government.

**EMIR:** An Islamic ruler. The state ruled by an emir is called an emirate.

**EXECUTIVE:** The branch of government responsible for executing the laws and managing the operations of the state.

**FASCISM:** An authoritarian political ideology characterized by a centralized government headed by a dictator, strong national unity (often based on the celebration of national ethnicity or culture), and the suppression of opposition.

**FEDERATION:** A union of smaller political entities.

**FEUDALISM:** A system of political organization in which land was owned by lords who granted the use of the land to vassals; in return, the vassals were obligated to serve as soldiers for the lord.

**FREE MARKET:** An economy operating on principles of supply and demand, not controlled by the government.

**GENOCIDE:** The systematic extermination of an ethnic or cultural group.

**HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:** The chief of the executive branch of government, such as the president or prime minister.

**HEAD OF STATE:** The chief public representative of a government, such as the monarch in a constitutional monarchy. Head of state is often a ceremonial role with little decision-making power. Under the presidential system of government, the president is usually both head of state and head of government.

**IMPEACHMENT:** The trial of a public official for misconduct.

**INSURGENCY:** An anti-government revolt that is not centrally organized.

**JUDICIAL PRECEDENT:** The body of principles established in earlier cases that are referred to when deciding a new case.

**JUDICIARY:** The court system.

**JUNTA:** A ruling group, particularly after a political coup.

**KHAN:** A ruler or chieftain on the Central Asian steppe and in other Asian countries. A khan rules over a khanate.

**LEGISLATURE:** A body responsible for enacting laws.

**MARTIAL LAW:** Law administered by the military.

**MONARCHY:** Rule by a sovereign.

**MULTIPARTY SYSTEM:** A system in which three or more political parties participate in government.

**MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT:** A local governing body, as in a county, city, or village.

**NATIONALISM:** A strong sense of patriotism or a movement in favor of a nation's independence. Also, an extreme form of patriotism that leads to the exclusion of perceived outsiders.

**NATIONALIZE:** To transfer from private ownership to government control.

**OLIGARCHY:** A government ruled by a small group.

**ONE-PARTY SYSTEM:** A system in which a single political party dominates the government.

**PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM:** A system in which the head of government is selected from the members of the legislative branch and may be dismissed at the will of the legislature.

**PLUTOCRACY:** A government controlled by the wealthy.

**PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM:** A system in which the head of government is elected separately from the legislature and is not accountable to the legislature.

**PRIME MINISTER:** The chief executive under a parliamentary system of government.

**PRINCIPALITY:** A country or territory ruled by a prince.

**PROTECTORATE:** A sovereign state granted the protection of a stronger country in exchange for political and economic allegiance.

**REFERENDUM:** Direct vote by the people on a legislative initiative.

**REPUBLIC:** A government in which citizens and elected representatives make governing decisions.

**SHARIA:** Islamic law derived from the Muslim holy book, the Koran.

**SHOGUN:** A Japanese military ruler. The shogun's territory was called a shogunate.

**SOVEREIGNTY:** The authority to rule or independence from outside control.

**SUFFRAGE:** The right to vote. The term "universal suffrage" is used when the right to vote is extended to all adult citizens of a country.

**TERM LIMITS:** A limit on the number of terms a person may serve in a particular office.

**THEOCRACY:** A government ruled by religious leaders or officials claiming divine guidance.

**TWO-PARTY SYSTEM:** A system in which political power is divided between two strong political parties.

**UNICAMERAL:** Having a single chamber; used to describe a legislature.