

TYPES OF GOVERNMENT—DICTATORSHIP



North Koreans Bowing before the Statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il

Unit Overview

A dictatorship is a form of government in which one, strong leader or a small group of people have all the power. The dictator controls not only the government but also every aspect of the country's society, including education, religion, media and the economy. People often obey this type of leader out of fear. In this unit, you will learn about past and present rulers who lead by this method of governing. Let's get started.

What is a Dictatorship?

A **dictatorship** is a form of government in which one person or a small group of people hold all the power. Dictatorship come from the Latin word *dicere*, which means *to speak* in English. Under this system, one person, the dictator, speaks for everyone. Citizens have no say in how their government operates. People are expected to do what the leader orders. The government emphasizes the importance of loyalty and duty. For average citizens, civil liberties and political rights are extremely limited. Dictators do not accept

criticism. They rely on the country's military and police officers to enforce their policies. Dictatorships are often described as **totalitarian**. This means that the government has control over all aspects of people's lives. This includes schools, churches, television, radio, Internet access, films, books, magazines and newspapers. If they are going to exist, all institutions and forms of media must not question the ruler.



Dictators achieve power by undermining traditional governments. There are several ways to do this. During periods of unrest or violence, powerful leaders sometimes take control of a country's army. Then, they can use force and fear to convince the citizens to follow them. Dictators also achieve power by offering simple solutions to complex problems. They can be very persuasive and know how to create interest and excitement. As a result, these leaders gain large numbers of supporters, who form a political party. This often happens in times when people are desperate for change. Eventually, the leader and his party have a very large majority. They can ban all other political parties and change the country's constitution. Those who oppose the dictator's policies are arrested, imprisoned or killed. Dictatorships put the good of the country before the good of individual citizens.

Famous Dictators of the 1930s and 1940s

The idea of a **dictator** dates all the way back to ancient Rome. In times of crisis, Romans believed in decisive and immediate action. They did not want to waste time debating the issue. For this reason, they appointed a dictator for six months. During this time, he had

the power to make and to carry out decisions for solving the problem. The dictator did not have to wait for the approval of the Roman Senate to carry out his plans. Of course, not all Roman dictators were willing to give up their authority after six months. Sometimes, this led to a civil war.

**A Nazi Party Rally
Adolph Hitler with Benito Mussolini
(Dictator of Italy)**



Some of the most famous dictators in history rose to power in the 1930s and 1940s. Let's look at some examples. After World War I, **Germany** faced many serious problems. The treaty that ended the war forced the country to decrease its army, to give up some of its land and to pay for damages caused by the war. German citizens were angry and insulted by these terms. They tried to solve their problems by printing more money, but this only made matters worse. The National Socialist German Worker's Party, or **Nazi Party**, encouraged people to blame Germany's Jewish population for the nation's difficulties.

The Nazi Party and its leader, **Adolf Hitler**, became more and more popular. Eventually, Hitler became **Chancellor**, one of Germany's highest government officers. This enabled Adolf Hitler to outlaw all other political parties and to control the government. Only newspapers, books, magazines and films that said positive things about Hitler and the Nazi Party were allowed to be published. Those who opposed the Nazi Party, along with millions of Jews, were imprisoned or put to death. Hitler ruled Germany until his death in 1945 at end of World War II. Today, Germany has a democratic government.

Joseph Stalin at his Desk: 1935
Soviet Poster Praising Stalin: 1938



Joseph Stalin was another dictator who seized power during this era. He became the leader of the **Soviet Union**, which was made up Russia and several other countries. Stalin used secret police to spy on those who opposed him. He eliminated his rivals by placing them in prison or by murdering them. When compared to other countries, the Soviet Union had a small number of industries and factories. Most people made a living by farming their own land. Stalin was determined to turn the Soviet Union into a modern, industrialized nation. He ordered a takeover of small forms and combined them into government-owned businesses. The farmers no longer owned their lands. They were forced to work on the farms and in factories that belonged to the government. Workers who rebelled were severely punished or killed. Stalin remained in power until his death in 1953. In later years, his policies were condemned. The city of **Stalingrad**, which had been named after him, was once again called **Volgograd**. Stalin's name was also removed from public buildings. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and became fifteen, independent nations.

North Korea: A Twenty-first Century Dictatorship

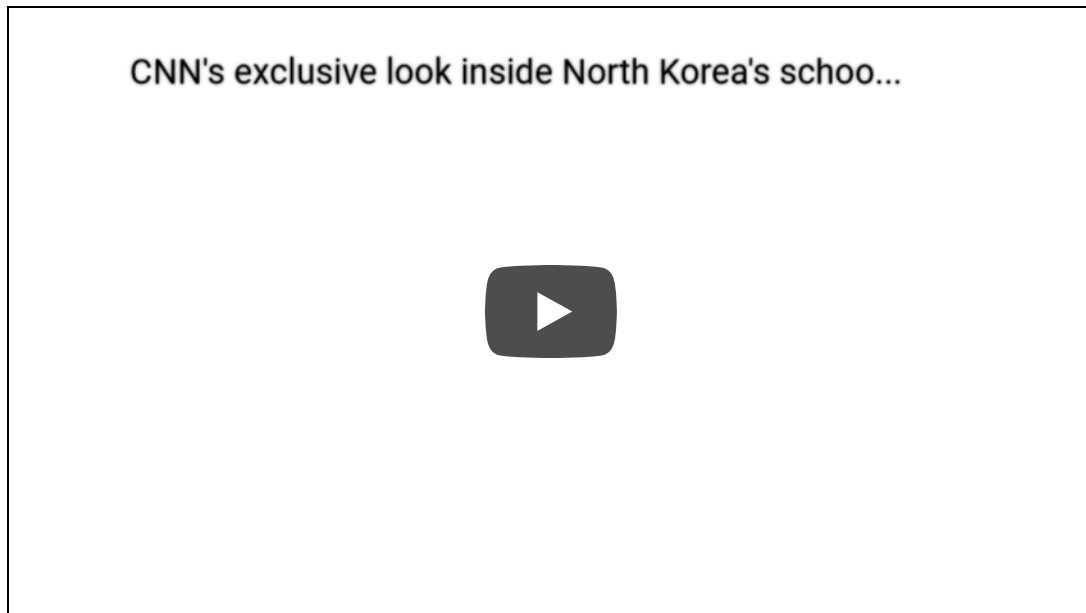
Currently, several countries around the world are governed by dictatorships. **North Korea**, established in 1948, is one example. The **Kim Dynasty** has controlled the nation's government for three generations. **Kim Il-sung** was the country's first leader. After his death in 1994, he was followed by his son, **Kim Jong-Il**, and his grandson, **Kim Jong-un**. For this reason, North Korea is sometimes called a **hereditary dictatorship**. Today, Kim Jong-un is the political, economic and military leader of the country. North Korea's official name is the **Democratic People's Republic of North Korea**. It has a written constitution and holds elections. Nevertheless, North Korea has one of the world's least democratic governments.



The **Korean National Worker's Party** is the only political party permitted under the constitution. Kim Jong-Un is the party's chairman. A few other small parties exist, but they are controlled by the KNWP. Although the country holds elections, almost all candidates run unopposed. In other words, there is only one candidate on the ballot for each office. The North Korean constitution does mention the freedoms of speech, press and religion, but people do not actually have these rights. Citizens who criticize the political system and its leaders are arrested. The government tries to keep the ideas and cultures of other countries out of North Korea.

People have only one source for news, the **Korean Central News Agency**. Owned by the government, it controls the television stations, radio stations and newspapers. The agency also runs the nation's only available internet server. Just a few, high-ranking officials have access to the world-wide web. Citizens are not allowed to travel freely within the country

or to visit other countries. Foreign visitors are closely monitored. The government strictly regulates education. Click on the graphic below to see how this impacts students.



Review the three dictatorships that you read about in this unit. Then, click on the graphic below and complete the worksheet.



Advantages and Disadvantages of Dictatorships

Like all forms of government, dictatorships have both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, they usually provide stable leadership. A dictatorship operates efficiently in a crisis, such as an unexpected military attack, a natural disaster or a health epidemic. There is no waiting for another branch of government to approve a spending plan. Dictators can take action quickly and are not concerned with keeping the citizens happy. After all, they do not have to worry

about being re-elected. Because people are threatened with harsh punishments, dictatorships generally have lower crime rates than other forms of government.

At the same time, there are some major disadvantages to living in a dictatorship. Because there are no limits to his or her authority, dictators often abuse their power. It is easy for them to imprison or to kill people that stand in their way. Dictatorships do not tolerate different points of view. This discourages new ideas, cultural exchange and advancements in technology. The system restricts personal rights, and laws can be changed at any time. Eventually, citizens may attempt to overthrow the dictator. This often results in unrest, violence and civil war.

Time for a Quick Review

Before moving on the Unit 22, review the names and terms found in Unit 21. Be sure you can answer the “Can I” questions with a loud “yes”.

Can I

...explain the relationship between those governing and those governed in a dictatorship?

...explain how power is attained and held in a dictatorship?

...explain why actual systems of government are not easily categorized?

...give examples of past and present dictatorships?

...discuss the advantages and disadvantages of dictatorships?



Additional Resources and Activities

[Unit 21 Organizer](#)

[Adolf Hitler](#)