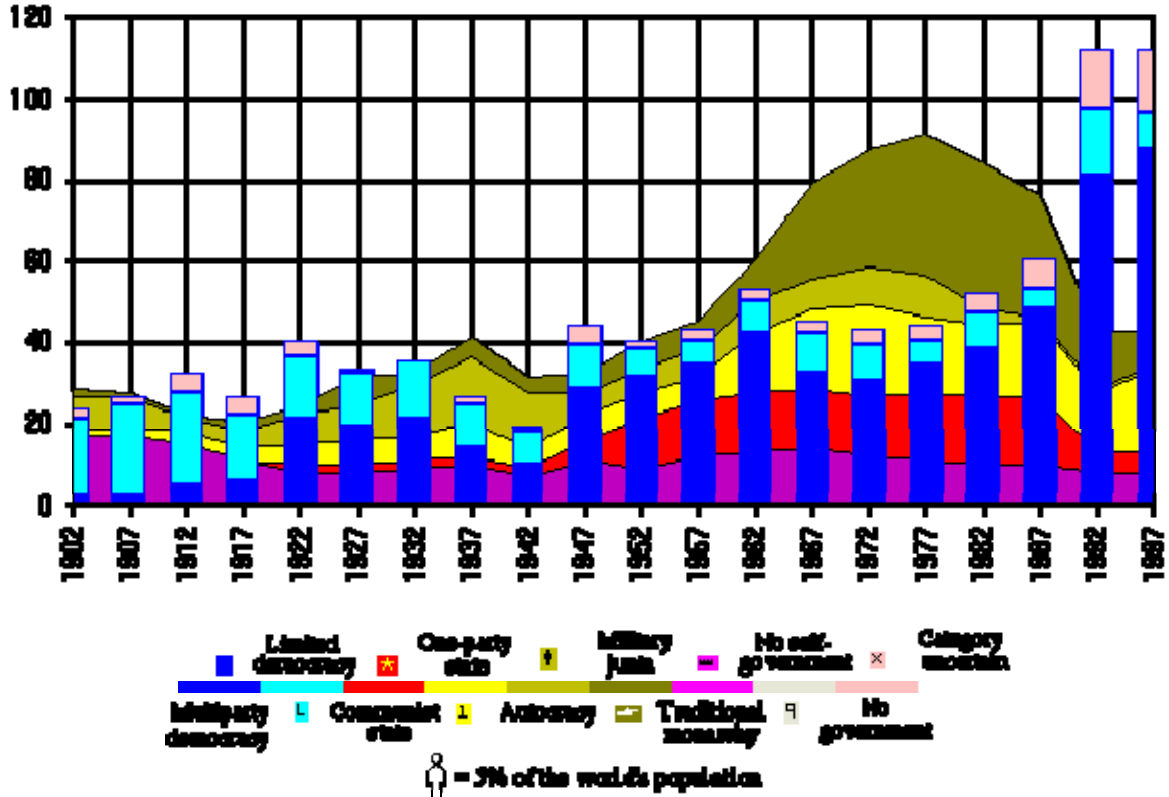


Types of Governments

Number of Independent Governments:



Definition of Terms:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Democracies](#)
 - Multiparty
 - Limited
- [Communist States](#)
- [Authoritarian Regimes](#)
 - Military Junta
 - Single-party State
 - Autocracy
- [Traditional Monarchies](#)
- [Unclassifiable](#)
 - No Self-Government
 - No Government
 - Uncertain

- [Not Included](#)
 - Constitutional Monarchies
 - Fascist
 - Totalitarian
-

Definitions:

There are always shades of gray in any government. Even the most liberal democracies limit rival political activity to one extent or another, and even the most tyrannical dictator must organize a broad base of support, so it is very difficult to pigeonhole every government of the Twentieth Century into seven narrow categories. In some extremely borderline cases, I have added icons to indicated alternate categories, but only if the icon will fit comfortably on the map.

Purists, of course, will howl in anguish at the sloppiness of my categories, but Internet's a big place. There's plenty of room for them to put their own classification systems out there. (If you'd like to see a few example of alternative classifications, click [here](#).)

- **DEMOCRACIES:**
 - [Multiparty Democracy](#)
 - The first question that most people [\[n.1\]](#) ask about a government is whether it's democratic -- that is, whether its leaders are chosen by means of fair, competitive elections, and whether its citizens are allowed basic civil rights. Therefore, my very first cut divides the world into democratic and non-democratic nations. As far as this category is concerned, it doesn't matter whether the ultimate head of state is a monarch or president as long as the day-to-day policy decisions are in the hands of elected representatives.
 - FAQ: *These aren't "democracies"; they're "republics"*. By strict high school government class definition, the citizens of a "democracy" exercise power directly, whereas the citizens of a "republic" delegate power to elected representatives. This, of course, is easily the stupidest thing that we were taught in high school. They've taken a perfectly fine word like democracy and defined it so narrowly that it applies to absolutely no working government whatsoever. All they've left us is the word republic, which they've defined so broadly that it encompasses such diverse nations as the US, France, China and Iran -- and yet is *still* too narrow to include constitutional monarchies like Japan and Sweden. In any case, since there is no mandatory authority on the meaning of English words, I've chosen to use the common meaning of democracy: any government which derives it's power through the consent of the governed, regardless of how that power is structured.

- ALTERNATIVE NAMES: Some scholars prefer calling these governments "polyarchic" or "parliamentary". The first term, however, isn't even in the dictionary, while the second term implies that the *English* legislature is the archetype -- which is a bit ironic considering that the English parliament was generally opposed to the liberal revolutions in America and France. If we're going to label these governments after some specific legislature, let's call them Congressional or Assemblytarian or somesuch.
 - **Limited Democracy**
 - These are governments which come close to being full democracies, but they fall short in one critical field. For my purposes, it doesn't really matter *how* they fall short. It usually varies from country to country. Some have freely elected legislatures subject to the veto power of a military junta, a monarch or a strong president . Others are provisional governments run by coalitions pending new elections. Many are fully tolerant democracies which disenfranchise a substantial percentage of their adult population -- especially [women](#) early in the century.
- **COMMUNIST STATES:**
 - The economy of these nations is centrally planned and operated by fiat. All industry is owned by the state. Power is monopolized by a centrally organized party which supports its legitimacy by quoting Marxist dogma.
 - FAQ: *Communism is not the opposite of democracy. The proper dichotomy is communism vs. capitalism.* Yes, technically, Communism is an economic system rather than a political system, but we just can't escape the fact that the 20th Century has seen this big block of countries that have had a lot in common with one another and less in common with the rest of the world. In fact, this block has been one of the century's most distinctive cluster of countries, so it seems rather evasive to not set up a category to cover them.
 - FAQ: *These countries are not at all what Marx envisioned, so they aren't really Communist.* Maybe not, but a lot of what passes for Christianity nowadays has nothing to do with the teachings of Jesus, and a lot of what passes for constitutional has nothing to do with Madison. Ideologies evolve, and I'd call any government Communist if it supports its arguments by quoting chapter and verse from Marx (just as I'd call any government Christian if it supports its arguments by quoting the Bible) regardless of whether they quote correctly.
 - ALTERNATIVE NAMES: Some scholars prefer to call them "socialist republics" or "people's republics", but the first alternative can sully the good name of real socialists, while the second is just silly.
- **AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES:**
 - These are regimes which severely limit who may participate in politics and stifle dissent with varying degrees of brutality. I've split these into three distinct categories, but they have so many similarities that I've used similar colors to indicate them.
 - [Military Junta](#)
 - The regime came into power through force of arms, and policies are set by one or more career military officers.
 - [Single Party State](#)

- Power is restricted to a single faction with a unified goal.
 - NOTE: For awhile, I classed Communism in this category, but later I decided that Communism was distinctive enough to deserve its own category. Even so, the difference between your average single-party authoritarian regime and your typical communist state is not as great as you might think.
 - **Autocracy**
 - A single leader rules by decree.
 - This is probably the trickiest category because *all* governments have one person who wields more power than others. Generally I have categorized a regime as autocratic if the civilian head of state has challenged the forces that originally brought him into power -- for example, by purging of the ruling party in a one-party state, or by declaring martial law in a democracy. I have tried to avoid putting leaders of military coups into this category, but I have labelled a few as autocrats if they survived long enough to centralize power into their own hands, or if my research to date has only turned up the presence of a "dictator" with no explanation of how he achieved and exercised power.
 - ALTERNATIVE NAMES: dictatorship, despotism, tyranny
- **TRADITIONAL MONARCHY:**
 - The state is considered the private estate of a single family. It is ruled at the discretion of the monarch and passed down from father to son throughout eternity.
 - NOTE: Often the monarch himself is not the real ruler. Instead, power may be in the hands of courtiers, ministers, regents and chamberlains, and allocated by means of palace intrigues. This sometime makes it difficult to decide whether a nation with a personally weak (but legally strong) monarch -- like, say, Willhelmine Germany or Imperial Japan -- is an absolute monarchy or junta or limited democracy or what.
 - ANOTHER NOTE: I used to call this category "absolute monarchy", but this name implied that the king's word was unchallenged law, so I changed it. Instead, I mean this category to include any system of government where the monarchy (rather than, say, a parliament or a dictator) is the center of the government apparatus.
 - FAQ: *Monarchy is not the opposite of democracy. The proper dichotomy is monarchy vs. republic.* In my system of classification, the first cut is between democratic and non-democratic, but many political scientists would make the first cut between monarchy and republic, and *then* make a four-fold cut into democratic and non-democratic monarchies, democratic and non-democratic republics. While this might have been the best way to classify governments in the 19th Century -- when all the monarchs of Europe were cousins who tended to stick together, and republics were an aberration -- it would be a bit anachronistic to retain this system much past the First World War. Nowadays the monarchies are the aberration, and democracies tend to stick together.
- **UNCLASSIFIED:**

- There are three categories for regimes which don't really have a classifiable government:
 - **No Self-Government**
 - The region is under the authority of an alien and geographically detached nation.
 - ALTERNATIVE NAMES: colonies, dependencies.
 - **No Government**
 - Because of widespread civil war, the authority of the central government does not reach throughout the nation. Policy decisions are determined by firepower.
 - ALTERNATIVE NAMES: anarchy, feudalism, tribalism.
 - **Category Uncertain**
 - I haven't yet been able to find enough information to even guess at what kind of government these countries have.

NOT INCLUDED:

I'll try to head off a few questions by pointing out some categories of government I **don't** use in the main sequence of political maps.

Constitutional Monarchy

Classical political theory would divide the world something like this:

	Rule of Law	Rule by Whim
Monarchy	Constitutional Monarchy	Absolute Monarchy
Republic	Democratic Republic	Tyrant

This classification scheme was probably at its most valid between the American and Russian Revolutions, 1776-1917. Before that period, there were too few republics and constitutions to bother with, but after that period, monarchies went into precipitous decline. Also, during much of the twentieth century, a single category of *tyranny* is just too restrictive, ignoring as it does the way that oppressive republican governments exploded into a rich variety of fascists, communists, juntas, kleptocrats and sharia theocracies.

Totalitarianism

During the heyday of the Communist menace, 1917-1991, political theory tended to divide governments this way:

		Property Rights	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Personal Rights	<i>High</i>	Socialist	Free Market Democracy
	<i>Low</i>	Totalitarian	Authoritarian

In American political discourse of that era, it was generally agreed that, yes, free market democracy was good and totalitarianism was bad, but the middle ground was not nearly as clear. The debate over which regimes were the second greatest threat to civilization seemed to snag on the importance of property rights. The right wing - the "haves" - considered both types of rights to be equal, bringing socialism and authoritarianism into moral equilibrium. Thus, a case like Chile, where a dictator overthrew a socialist in 1973, was seen as a lateral move rather than a step backward. On the other hand, the left wing -- the "have-nots" -- judged regimes more purely on personal rights, which meant that socialism was morally equal to democracy, and the difference between totalitarian and authoritarian dictators was negligible. Therefore, supporting capitalist dictators like Batista, Somoza and Thiêu as the antidote to communist rebels like Castro, Ortega and Ho made no moral sense whatsoever.

In any case, it has always struck me as rather artificial to bundle Communism and Fascism into a single category called "Totalitarianism" -- rather like bundling birds and bats into the category of "flying creatures". Despite a few superficial similarities, they have very different origins, histories, structures and goals. I have chosen to map communism as distinctly different from fascism.

Fascism

- Pure fascism is rather rare. In fact, many scholars would call only Mussolini, Hitler and a few of their contemporary satellites fascist. In this case, it seems rather pointless to set up a whole category for a narrow subset of autocratic regimes which existed in a handful of countries for less than a single generation.
- On the other hand, metaphorical fascism is quite common -- so common, in fact, that I've heard just about every regime in history denounced as "fascist" at one time or another. In this case, it's almost meaningless.

Contemporary Context:



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- [Examples of other classification systems](#)
 - [1900s](#)
 - [1910s](#)
 - [1920s](#)
 - [1930s](#)
 - [1940s](#)
 - [1950s](#)
 - [1960s](#)
 - [1970s](#)
 - [1980s](#)
 - [1990s](#)
 - [Democratic Governments, 1945-95](#)
 - [Military Governments, 1945-95](#)
 - [One Party States, 1945-95](#)
 - [Monarchies](#)
 - Specialized Authoritarianism

Notes:

[n.1]

Well, most *Americans* anyway.

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