

Political "isms" Quick Reference

Absolutism: the principle or the exercise of complete and unrestricted power in government

Anarchism: theory that equality and justice are to be sought through the abolition of the state and the substitution of free agreements between individuals

Capitalism: economic system based on private ownership of the means of production, in which personal profit can be acquired through investment of capital and employment of labor

Collectivism: the political principle of centralized social and economic control, esp. of all means of production

Communism: fundamentally, a system of social organization in which property (especially real property and the means of production) is held in common

- As a political movement, communism sought to overthrow capitalism through a workers' revolution and establish a system in which property is owned by the community as a whole rather than by individuals. In theory, communism would create a classless society of abundance and freedom, in which all people enjoy equal social and economic status. In practice, communist regimes have taken the form of coercive, authoritarian governments that cared little for the plight of the working class and sought above all else to preserve their own hold on power.

Conservatism: the desire to maintain, or conserve, the existing order

- Conservatives advocated belief in faith over reason, tradition over free inquiry, hierarchy over equality, collective values over individualism, and divine or natural law over secular law.

Constitutionalism: the principles or practice of government regulated by a constitution, especially a written one

Democratism: philosophy that insists on the right and the capacity of a people, acting either directly or through representatives, to control their institutions for their own purposes

Despotism: government by an absolute ruler unchecked by effective constitutional limits to his power

Fascism: a governmental system led by a dictator having complete power, forcibly suppressing opposition and criticism, regimenting all industry, commerce, etc., and emphasizing an aggressive nationalism and often racism

Federalism: political system in which two levels of government control the same territory and citizens (central and state)

- as opposed to *unitary systems*, with laws giving virtually all authority to the central government.

Feudalism: strict division into social classes, i.e., nobility, clergy, peasantry, and, in the later Middle Ages, burgesses; private jurisdiction based on local custom; and the landholding system dependent upon the fief or fee

Liberalism: philosophy or movement that has as its aim the development of individual Freedom

Libertarianism: supports the rights of individuals to exercise virtual sole authority over their lives and sets itself against the traditional services and regulatory and coercive powers of federal, state, and local governments

Marxism: "scientific socialism"; The proletariat, after becoming the ruling class, was "to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state" and to increase productive forces at a rapid rate

Mercantilism: premise that national wealth and power were best served by increasing exports and collecting precious metals in return

- national strength is increased by a preponderance of exports over imports
- the fundamental focus of mercantilism was on the self-interest of the sovereign (that is, the state), and not the self-interest of the individual owners of economic resources

Monarchism: form of government in which one person has the hereditary right to rule as head of state during his or her lifetime

Nationalism: political or social philosophy in which the welfare of the nation-state as an entity is considered paramount

Nazism: "National Socialism"; extreme nationalism, racism and some socialist concepts

Republicanism: form of state based on the concept that sovereignty resides in the people, who delegate the power to rule in their behalf to elected representatives and officials

Socialism: a theory or system of social organization that advocates the vesting of the ownership and control of the means of production and distribution, of capital, land, etc., in the community as a whole

- In a broader sense, the term socialism is often used loosely to describe economic theories ranging from those that hold that only certain public utilities and natural resources should be owned by the state to those holding that the state should assume responsibility for all economic planning and direction
- The socialist doctrine demands state ownership and control of the fundamental means of production and distribution of wealth, to be achieved by reconstruction of the existing capitalist or other political system of a country through peaceful, democratic, and parliamentary means

Stalinism: the principles of communism associated with Joseph Stalin, characterized esp. by the extreme suppression of dissident political or ideological views, the concentration of power in one person, and an aggressive international policy

Statism: the principle or policy of concentrating extensive economic, political, and related controls in the state at the cost of individual liberty

Syndicalism: advocates control of the means and processes of production by organized bodies of workers (trade unions)

Theocratism: The belief in a political unit governed by a deity (or by officials thought to be divinely guided)

Totalitarianism: a modern autocratic government in which the state involves itself in all facets of society, including the daily life of its citizens.

- A totalitarian government seeks to control not only all economic and political matters but the attitudes, values, and beliefs of its population, erasing the distinction between state and society. The citizen's duty to the state becomes the primary concern of the community, and the goal of the state is the replacement of existing society with a perfect society.
- In the older forms of autocracy people could live and work in comparative independence, provided they refrained from politics. In modern totalitarianism, however, people are made utterly dependent on the wishes and whims of a political party and its leaders. The older autocracies were ruled by a monarch or other titled aristocrat who governed by a principle such as divine right, whereas the modern totalitarian state is ruled by a leader, or dictator, who controls a political party.
- Common traits: monopoly of mass communications, a terroristic secret-police apparatus, a monopoly of all effective weapons of destruction, and a centrally controlled economy.

Comparisons:

Capitalism stresses competition and profit; **socialism** calls for cooperation and social service.

Communism stresses change through revolution, **socialism** changes through evolution and peaceful means.

- Marx and Engels came to see **socialism** as merely an intermediate stage of society in which most industry and property were owned in common but some class differences remained. They reserved the term **communism** for a final stage of society in which class differences had disappeared, people lived in harmony, and government was no longer needed.

Often opposed to **liberalism** is the doctrine of **conservatism**, which, simply stated, supports the maintenance of the status quo.

In a **republic**, officials are expected to act on their own best judgment of the needs and interests of the country. The officials in a **democracy** more generally and directly reflect the known or ascertained views of their constituents, sometimes subordinating their own judgment.