

# Comparison between Authoritative and Democratic Regimes

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**Abstract:** *The paper focuses upon the comparison made between the contemporary Authoritative and Democratic regimes. Beginning from the basic understanding of the regimes, it focuses upon their inherent characteristics that differentiate the both of them. Tracing the historical trajectory of these regimes in various countries, the paper outlines the changing circumstances after the world wars and the process of Globalisation and Liberalisation. In contemporary times, the lines between both regimes have been blurred given the democratic regimes increasing tendency to acquire authoritative characteristics. Samuel Huntington's three waves of democracy resulted from evolutions, decolonization, religious and economic circumstances. Along with the differences, the paper also notes down the critique of the regimes.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Authoritative, globalisation, political systems, nature of state

## 1. Introduction

The present day political systems can largely be positioned under two categories namely the authoritarian and democratic. Authoritarian systems prevail in one form or the other in North Korea and China, democratic system prevails and functions in Great Britain, the USA and India. **Authoritarian Political System, it's meaning and nature:** Authoritarianism is characterized by highly concentrated and centralised power maintained by political repression and the exclusion of potential challengers. It uses political parties and mass organisations to mobilize people around the goals of the regime and emphasizes on the rule of the few. Since institutions of such regimes are not based on the participation of the people, and are not accountable to people, the moderating influence of public opinion is not effective. As such the authoritarian regimes do not help the cause of international peace. Hence, they are likely to employ force also in their relations with other countries.

In Authoritarian systems, there is only a limited form of politics, for power struggles among factions in one party regime and disagreements among soldiers or bureaucrats are not the same as real politics, which must operate in the context of a Civic culture.

Although the absence of democracy is at the heart of the definition of authoritarianism, it is important not to equate authoritarianism simply with the absence of elections. There are many techniques whereby an election or a referendum can be manipulated to achieve the outcome desired by the incumbents or to limit the outcome to a circumscribed range of possibilities. Hence, authoritarianism tends to embrace the informal and unregulated exercise of political power, a leadership that is self appointed and even if elected cannot be displaced by citizens' free choice among competitors, the arbitrary deprivation of civil liberties, and little tolerance for meaningful opposition.

### **Democratic Political System, it's meaning and nature:**

According to Robert Dahl<sup>1</sup>, democracy is concerned with the political process by which ordinary citizens exert a

relatively high degree of control over their leaders. Equality before law, equal opportunity, equal protection and absence of discrimination form the essence of a democracy and one man-one vote is the basis of it. A Remarkable feature of democracy is that it is based on the principle of tolerance of minority views. It is that form of government in which the ruling power of a state is legally vested, not in any particular class or classes but in the members of the community as a whole. Also, almost every government policy is left to the opinion, choice and criticism of the masses.

Liberal Democratic States have two broad patterns of functioning namely through parliamentary system and presidential systems.

## 2. Historical Background

**Authoritarianism:** Its origin dates back to around 15th century AD. It took roots in Europe as a form of government. Since then, it has evolved tremendously and spread across many nations through the ages.

Although the theoretical origins of modern authoritarianism may be found in classics of political thought, including Plato's 'Republic', Hobbes's 'Leviathan', Rousseau's 'On the Social Contract', most modern political science analysis is informed at least implicitly by Max Weber's<sup>2</sup> concept of legitimate authority. According to him, there are three types of legitimate authority namely legitimacy on the basis of rational, traditional, charismatic grounds.

Throughout modern history, anti-liberal governments have been the norm, not the exception. The most profound authoritarian moment in modern global history was the crisis of liberalism in the interwar years, which gave rise to the likes of Atatürk, Franco, Salazar, Mussolini, Chiang Kai-shek, Hitler and Stalin. Yet this triumph of authoritarianism, as historian Mark Mazower has shown, was not seen as inevitable after the First World War.

The Second World War was followed by a brief period of global liberalisation, with the end of authoritarian rule in

countries like West Germany, Italy, Austria and Japan. But the postwar era was by no means an age of unequivocal freedom. Many parts of the world remained ruled by authoritarian strongmen – not just in the Soviet bloc but also in the anti-communist ‘free world’, from Pahlavi Iran to Pinochet’s Chile.

A turning point came in the 1970s and 1980s, when no fewer than 30 authoritarian regimes across southern Europe – Portugal, Spain, Greece – Latin America and Asia fell. Societies became more open. This was the time when Huntington sat down to write *The Third Wave*. The current global wave of anti-liberal populism suggests that this ‘third wave’ might come to a halt and that it might even reverse. This is a moment of demagogues, marked by the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, Prayut Chan-o-cha in Thailand - and now Donald Trump in the United States. Their movements have much in common: **the centrality of a strongman, nationalism, xenophobia and hatred of migrants and minorities, anti-intellectualism, anti-establishment posturing, contempt for the free press, economic isolationism and hostility towards the liberal world order and international organisations.** Authoritarian regimes have been mostly established in the developing states of Latin America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. These regions more than political, economic, cultural or ideological factors have been dependent on the use of military power and systematic repression.

**Democratisation:** The first Nation and modern history to adopt a democratic Constitution was the short-lived Corsican Republic in 1755. Australian Colonies became democratic during the mid 19th century, with South Australia being the first government in the world to introduce women's suffrage in 1861. 20th century transitions to liberal democracy have come in successive waves of democracy variously resulting from war, revolutions, decolonization, religious and economic circumstances. A wave of democratization is a group of transitions from non democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period. Three waves of democratization have occurred in the modern world. The first modern democracies emerged in the first long wave of democratization between 1828 and 1926. During this **first wave** nearly 30 countries established at least minimally democratic national Institutions, including Argentina, Australia, Britain, Canada, USA etc. However democracy did consolidate in earliest 19th century democratization, including in the United States and the United Kingdom. While USA emphasized liberal democracy, Britain give priority to its representative element.

Huntington’s<sup>3</sup> **second wave of democratization** began in the Second World War and continued until the 1960s Like the first ways, some of the new democracies created at this time did not consolidate for example elected rulers in several Latin American states were quickly overthrown by military coups, but established democracies did emerge

after 1945 from the ashes of defeated dictatorships, not just in West Germany but also in Austria, Japan and Italy. Their liberal traditions were somewhat weaker as representation through parties proved to be the strongest suit. Congress in India, the Christian Democrats in Italy, the LDPs in Japan and Labour in Israel.

The **third wave of democratization** began in 1974 and continued until 1991. Its main diverse elements were-the end of right wing dictatorships in Southern Europe, retreat of the generals in much of Latin America, the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s.

Huntington’s Waves of Democratisation:

Wave	Period	Examples
First	1828-1926	Britain, France, USA
Second	1943-62	India, Israel, Japan, West Germany
Third	1974-91	Southern and Eastern Europe, Latin America

### Exposition-Comparison and Contrast

- Liberal democracy is based on legal authority, the legitimacy granted by the results of free and fair elections held according to procedures to which, at least notionally, all citizens have given their assent. Most authoritarian regimes rely on a mix of legitimacy and coercion, one of them being elections as well. The tools available to a regime in control of a modern state both to communicate legitimacy and to apply coercion far outstrip what was available to historical autocrats, even absolutist Monarchs such as Louis XIV of France. Modern states are capable of organizing a whole society, through Technology, pervasive bureaucracy, or sheer firepower.
- Those systems in which there is a high subsystem<sup>4</sup> autonomy, represent a higher level of differentiation and secularization than do those classified under the limited and low autonomy categories. In capability terms, those with high subsystem autonomy have relatively versatile and continuous capability, while those characterised by limited subsystem autonomy tend to have a fluctuating pattern of capability. If democratic systems and authoritarian systems are to be compared, regimes with low subsystem autonomy go through suppression of responsive capability. In other words, these systems reduce their responsiveness to their environments in order to increase their capacity to shape and alter them.
- Turning to a general comparison of democratic and authoritarian forms, one of the approaches to compare can be by examining the extreme varieties-the democratic systems with high subsystem autonomy at one extreme and radical totalitarianism at the other. A structural comparison between the two can lead to the following conclusions-A totalitarian system in a nominal sense has all the structures and subsystems of roles that exist in a democratic system, but rather than being autonomous, the interaction of these political structures is hierarchically controlled. In conversion or process terms, the flow of inputs from the society is

suppressed or strictly regulated. Consequently, we cannot speak of interest groups, media of communication, and political parties as constituting an autonomous political infrastructure. They are to be viewed more as mobilization structures contributing to the regulative, extractive, and symbolic capabilities than as sub structures creating the basis for a responsive capability.

- A comparison of the political cultures suggests the following conclusions: The dominant and legitimate culture of totalitarian systems is ideological in its intellectual characteristics. There are limits on rational calculation and analysis. The ideology sets certain ends as absolute, decision making thus, tends to be relatively rigid in comparison with the more open process of balancing and combining ends and means characteristic of the political process in fully differentiated and secularised democracies. There are at the same time ideological rigidities in the democratic political process but in high subsystem-autonomy version of democracy, there can be little question that we are dealing with a more open and secular form of political process.
- An important feature of democratic government is rule of law and Equality before the law. Thus the leaders and the officials are not permitted to take arbitrary decisions and the law of land equally governs all the individuals irrespective of their status. However authoritarian regime is characterized by arbitrary exercise of powers especially by police and Para military forces because authoritarian regimes depend on the extensive use of arbitrary police power. They are often referred to as police state. In a democracy political leaders rely more on persuasion and less on coercion.

### Critiques of Authoritarianism and Democratisation-

Authoritarian governments bear an enormous social cost. Dictator-led countries have higher rates of mental illness, lower levels of health and life expectancy, and, as Amartya Sen famously argued, higher susceptibility to famine. Their citizens are less educated and file fewer patents. Clearly, the suppression of free expression and creativity has harmful effects on innovation and economic growth. Citizens of free and open societies such as Germany, South Korea and Chile witness advances in business, science and technology that Belarusians, Burmese and Cubans can only dream of. Free nations do not go to war with each other. History has shown this to be the only ironclad law of political theory. Meanwhile, dictators are always at war, often with a foreign power and always with their own people. Despite the fact that dictatorship is at the root of many global ills—poor health, failing education systems and global poverty among them—authoritarianism is hardly ever addressed at major conferences worldwide. And no wonder: many, including the World Economic Forum and the now-defunct Clinton Global Initiative, receive ample funding from authoritarians. Few human rights groups focus exclusively on authoritarianism, and most establishment ones spend significant chunks of their budgets on criticizing democratic governments and their policies. Dictators are rarely in the spotlight.

Critics of democracy, mostly elitists propose the Elite theory and reject the pluralist theory that power can be diffused, divided and spread among different groups of society. Elite theory argues that the power rests in the hands of the few, who are wealthy. They assert that the average person cannot be heard because the power is usually concentrated in a few at the top.

Another critique is that democracy "separates decision and action", that power can be misused even though there are laws and normative ideals that are set up.

## 3. Conclusion

### Authoritarian Regimes in an Age of Democratisation

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite regimes, and the wave of liberalization in Latin America that together make up what Samuel Huntington described as the third wave of democratization, much attention has been paid to transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Contrary to some who saw in the end of the Cold War and end to ideological competition and the beginning of an age in which liberal democracy and free market capitalism would spread worldwide, political scientists interested in authoritarianism have plenty of material to study in the 21st century. There are aborted or semi transitions, yielding to what many call illiberal democracies or semi authoritarian regimes, such as Russia. While there have been very real transition to democracy in parts of the world, authoritarianism persists in China, North Korea, Central Asia, much of the Middle East and many countries of sub Saharan Africa. The discourse of democracy has been co-opted by accident or design in a way that does not engage with core democratic ideas of values. Rather, a populist discourse on democracy has come to dominate, and populism is an ally of authoritarianism, not least because of the identification of **the people** with the state.

The core questions of how regimes arise and sustain power, how they perform, and the circumstances under which they become vulnerable to challenge are susceptible to more than one methodological approach.

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