

## **Authoritarian Regimes**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

A political regime or political system encompasses not only the organs of the government and the political institutions of the state but also the structures, processes, and values through which these interact with the civil society.

Authoritarian regimes are based on submission to authority, characterized by ruling elites, limited political pluralism, centralized political control, intolerance of opposition, and human rights abuses. Authoritarianism is a practice of government "from above". Authoritarian regimes are distinguished from totalitarian regimes.

A totalitarian regime is one that successfully controls all aspects of society, abolishing the distinction between public and private, aspiring even to control the most intimate aspects of an individual's life and thoughts. This term has been applied to the three radical dictatorial regimes of the inter-war period: *Italian Fascism, German National Socialism, and Stalinism in Russia*. Totalitarianism is an extreme version of authoritarianism.

Authoritarian regimes tend to tolerate a significant range of economic, religious, and other freedoms. So, we can say that "all totalitarian regimes are authoritarian but all authoritarian regimes are not necessarily totalitarian". Totalitarianism seeks to obliterate the distinction between the state and civil society.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTHORITARIAN REGIME:**

1. Authoritarian regimes have a very controlled power structure; it usually has a centralized power structure. It is not just political power that is centralized, even economic power may be highly centralized. In authoritarian regimes, a lot of the rules are left to the rulers to decide and not independent bodies. The authoritarian regimes exercise sufficient power to dispense with any constitutional limitations.
2. Those in power in an authoritarian regime claim to derive their authority not necessarily and always from the consent of governed but from some special quality that they claim to possess.
3. While in power, authoritarian leaders normally exploit four key control devices: the military, patronage, coercion, and media.
4. Change of government or even of a leader is not smooth and peaceful under authoritarian regimes. Such changes take place either through a coup or as a result of evolutions. The coup has been a normal feature as far as the authoritarian regimes in Africa are concerned.
5. Authoritarian regimes are likely to employ force also in their relations with other countries. 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. So, authoritarian regimes do not help much, the cause of international peace.
6. A poor record on representative government, with elections- where they are held- often accompanied by fraud, manipulation, and violence.
7. Weak, immature, or poorly defined political institutions and processes.
8. Authoritarian regimes lack political pluralism. Such regimes lack a spirit to accommodate any opposition or presence of alternative institutions. So, the opposition is usually constrained, and subject to coercion and even violence. Authoritarian regimes are less tolerant of diverse ethnic and religious compositions.
9. Authoritarian regimes are characterized by low and limited political mobilization. No guarantee that the voice of citizens will be heard effectively.
10. Control over media and freedom of the press/speech, and limited civil liberties are other features of this type of regime.

### **TYPES OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE**

Majorly, there are five different types of authoritarian rules, as follows:

- Absolute Monarchy,
- Personal Rule,
- Ruling parties (single-party regimes),
- Military government, and

- Theocracy

### **1. ABSOLUTE MONARCHY:**

A form of government in which a monarch wields absolute power over a state, and in which all other institutions of government are marginal. A ruling sovereign exerts control, with other members of the royal family in key political and military posts. While undemocratic, and absolute monarchy can provide a stable framework for the exercise of traditional authority, in which rulers show paternalistic concern for their subjects. For example, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, etc.

### **2. PERSONAL RULE:**

This is the dictatorship of an individual and is more likely to be based on traditional or charismatic, rather than legal, authority. In this arrangement, politics takes precedence over government, and personalities matter more than institutions. Personal rules remain potentially unstable because of their dependence upon people rather than institutions. For example, several former Soviet republics (including Russia, Belarus, etc.), and Sub-Saharan African states (including Angola, Zimbabwe, etc.).

### **3. RULING PARTIES:**

It is a rule by a single party, often combined with a strong president. The ruling party model can still be found in the last remaining communist states and a few African states where a single dominating party continues to win the vast majority of seats at elections. A single-party regime has one party identified with the state and permits no others to operate or the regime might be having a dominant party to run an authoritarian state. The parties have their own security structures or militias, and other variables. For example, China, North Korea, etc.

### **4. MILITARY GOVERNMENT**

It's an illegal seizure of political power by the military. It includes a great range of systems. The military may rule directly, often ruling through a junta comprising the leaders of each branch of the armed forces. Maybe through a dictator or ruling council. It may rule indirectly, through an alliance with a civilian politician that it chooses and who rule at its pleasure or through a 'front party'. For example, Myanmar, Mali, etc.

### **5. THEOCRACY**

A rare form of rule in which religious leaders govern directly. It is a traditional system, where the government claims to be directed by God or divinely blessed. It was typical of early civilizations. For example, current- Iran, Vatican city, etc.

### **ADVANTAGES OF AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES**

- It has the capacity to produce consistent results nationwide.
- It saves time during the decision-making process.
- It stops the threat of a business obtaining a monopoly.
- It provides an increase in productivity.
- It creates more clarity within the government hierarchy, creating clarity within the chain of command.

### **DISADVANTAGES OF AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES**

- Authoritarian governments want to stay in power indefinitely.
- Authoritarian governments invite rebellion in society.
- Authoritarian governments can impair societal morale.
- A rule often without feedback.
- No protection of human rights.
- Rely highly on the experience of their leadership.
- Tries to create equality in inadequate ways.
- No individual freedom.

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