

## **AP COMPARATIVE STUDY GUIDE by Ethel Wood**

Comparative government and politics provides an introduction to the wide, diverse world of governments and political practices that currently exist in modern times. Although the course focuses on specific countries, it also emphasizes an understanding of conceptual tools and methods that form a framework for comparing almost any governments that exist today. Additionally, it requires students to go beyond individual political systems to consider international forces that affect all people in the world, often in very different ways. Six countries form the core of the course: Great Britain, Russia, China, Mexico, Iran, and Nigeria. The countries are chosen to reflect regional variations, but more importantly, to illustrate how important concepts operate both similarly and differently in different types of political systems: "advanced" democracies, communist and post communist countries, and newly industrialized and less developed nations. This book includes review materials for all six countries.

### **WHAT IS COMPARATIVE POLITICS?**

Most people understand that the term government is a reference to the leadership and institutions that make policy decisions for the country. However, what exactly is politics? Politics is basically all about power. Who has the power to make the decisions? How did they get the power? What challenges do leaders face from others &ndash; both inside and outside the country's borders &ndash; in keeping the power? So, as we look at different countries, we are not only concerned about the ins and outs of how the government works. We will also look at how power is gained, managed, challenged, and maintained.

College-level courses in comparative government and politics vary, but they all cover topics that enable meaningful comparisons across countries. These topics are introduced in the pages that follow, and will be addressed with each of the countries covered separately.

The topics are:

- The Comparative Method
- Sovereignty, Authority, and Power
- Political and Economic Change
- Citizens, Society, and the State
- Political Institutions
- Public Policy

Government and politics are only part of the many facets of a complex society. Religion, ethnic groups, race, social and economic classes - all of these interact with the political system and have a tremendous impact on policy-making. These divisions - theoretically out of the realm of politics - are called social cleavages.

- **Bases of social cleavages** -What mix of social classes, ethnic and racial groups, religions, languages does a country have? How deep are these cleavages, and to what degree do they separate people from one another (form social boundaries)? Which of these cleavages appear to have the most significant impact on the political system?
- **Cleavages and political institutions** - How are the cleavages expressed in the political system? For example, is political party membership based on cleavages? Do political elites usually come from one group or another? Do these cleavages block some groups from fully participating in government?

## COMPARING CITIZEN/STATE RELATIONSHIPS

Governments connect to their citizens in a variety of ways, but we may successfully compare government-citizen relationships by categorizing, and in turn noting differences and similarities among categories. For example, citizens within democracies generally relate to their governments differently than do citizens that are governed by authoritarian rulers. Or, different countries may be compared by using the categories below:

- **Attitudes and beliefs of citizens** - Do citizens trust their government? Do they believe that the government cares about what they think? Do citizens feel that government affects their lives in significant ways?
- **Political socialization** - How do citizens learn about politics in their country? Does electronic and print media shape their learning? Does the government put forth effort to politically educate their citizens? If so, how much of their effort might you call "propaganda"? How do children learn about politics?
- **Voting behavior** - Do citizens in the country have regular elections? If so, are the elections truly competitive? If not, what is the purpose of the elections? What citizens are eligible to vote, and how many actually vote? Do politicians pay attention to elections, and do elections affect policy-making?
- **Factors that influence political beliefs and behaviors** - Consider the important cleavages in the country. Do they make a difference in citizens' political beliefs and behaviors? For example, do the lower classes vote for one political party or the other? Are women's beliefs and behaviors different from those of the men? Are younger people as likely to vote as older people are? Do people in rural areas participate in government?

## CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is a term that refers to organizations outside of the state that help people define and advance their own interests. Civil society is usually strong in liberal democracies where individual freedoms are valued and protected. The organizations

that compose it may represent class, religious, or ethnic interests, or they may cross them, creating a strong bond among people that exists outside of government controls. By their very nature, authoritarian states do not encourage civil society, and they often feel that their power is threatened by it. Advocacy groups, social networks, and the media all may exist within the civil society, and if they are strong enough, they may place considerable pressure on the state to bring about reform. By the early 21st century, a global civil society has emerged, with human rights and environmental groups providing international pressures that have a significant effect on government-citizen relations.

According to [\*Social Cleavages in Nigeria\*](#), what are the most important social cleavages in Nigeria? What political problems do they cause?

Get a taste of "[Elections around the World](#)" by checking out the latest news as well as elections from the past.

Want to know what the Russians think about politics and politicians? Visit "[Russia Votes.](#)"

All political systems set policy, whether by legislative vote, executive decision, judicial rulings, or a combination of the three. In many countries interest groups and political parties also play large roles in policy-making. Policy is generally directed toward addressing issues and solving problems. Many issues are similar in all countries, such as the needs to improve or stabilize the economy or to provide for a common defense against internal and external threats. However, governments differ in the approaches they take to various issues, as well as the importance they place on solving particular problems.

Common policy issues include:

- **Economic performance** - Governments are often concerned with the economic health/or problems within their borders. Most also participate in international trade, so their economies are deeply affected by their international imports and exports. The six core countries provide a variety of approaches that states may take, as well as an assortment of consequences of both good and poor economic performances.
- **Social welfare** - Citizens' social welfare needs include health, employment, family assistance, and education. States provide different levels of support in each area, and they display many different attitudes toward government responsibility for social welfare.
- **Civil liberties, rights, and freedoms** - The constitutions of many liberal democracies guarantee civil liberties and rights, and most communist, post-communist, developing, and less developed countries pay lip service to them. Freedom House, an organization that studies democracy around the world, ranks countries on a 1 to 7 freedom scale, with countries given a 1 being the most free and those given a 7 being the least free. A number of post communist countries have made significant strides in this area in recent years, but many others remain highly authoritarian.

**Environment** - Many modern democratic states take a big interest in protecting the environment. European countries in particular have had a surge of interest expressed through the formation of "green" parties that focus on the environment.

An important part of studying comparative government and politics is developing an understanding of political institutions, structures of a political system that carry out the work of governing. Some governments have much more elaborate structures than others, but they often have similarities across cultures. However, just because you see the same type of institution in two different countries, don't assume that they serve the same functions for the political system. For example, a legislature in one country may have a great deal more power than a comparable structure in another country. Only by studying the way that the structures operate and the functions they fill will you be able to compare them accurately. Common structures that exist in most countries are legislatures, executives, judicial systems, bureaucracies, and armies.

## **LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT**

Every state has multiple levels of authority, though the geographic distribution of power varies widely. A unitary system is one that concentrates all policymaking powers in one central geographic place; a confederal system spreads the power among many sub-units (such as states), and has a weak central government. A federal system divides the power between the central government and the sub-units. All political systems fall on a continuum from the most concentrated amount of power to the least. Unitary governments may be placed on the left side, according to the degree of concentration; confederal governments are placed to the right; and federal governments fall in between. Most countries have unitary systems, including all six of the core countries, although Britain is moving toward more federalism and the Nigerian state is generally too weak to effectively concentrate its power in one place.

## **SUPRANATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

All political systems exist within an environment that is affected by other governments, but more and more they are affected by supranational organizations that go beyond national boundaries. Some have more international and/or regional contacts than others, but most countries in the world today must cope with influences from the outside and interactions with others. In the 20th century, many national governments established relationships with regional organizations &ndash; such as NATO, the European Union, NAFTA, and OPEC &ndash; and with international organizations, such as the United Nations. These supranational organizations reflect a strong tendency toward globalization - an integration of social, environmental, economic, and cultural activities of nations that has resulted from increasing international contacts. On the other hand, many political scientists point out a counter trend &ndash; fragmentation &ndash; a tendency for people to base their loyalty on ethnicity, language, religion, or cultural identity. Although globalization and fragmentation appear to be opposite concepts, they both transcend political boundaries between individual countries.

## EXECUTIVES

The executive office carries out the laws and policies of a state. In many countries the executive is split into two distinct roles: the head of state and the head of government. The head of state is a role that symbolizes and represents the people, both nationally and internationally, and may or may not have any real policymaking power. The head of government deals with the everyday tasks of running the state, and usually directs the activities of other members of the executive branch. The distinction is clearly seen in a country such as Britain, where formerly powerful monarchs reigned over their subjects, but left others (such as prime ministers) in charge of actually running the country. Today Britain still has a monarch that is head of state, but the real power rests with the prime minister, who is head of government. Likewise, the Japanese emperor still symbolically represents the nation, but the prime minister runs the government. In the United States, both roles are combined into one position — the president. However, in other countries, such as Italy and Germany, the president is the head of state with weak powers, and the prime minister is the head of government. In still others, such as Russia and France, the president is head of state with strong powers, and the prime minister is the head of government with subordinate powers.

## BUREAUCRACIES

Bureaucracies consist of agencies that generally implement government policy. They usually are a part of the executive branch of government, and their size has generally increased over the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries. This is partly due to government efforts to improve the health, security, and welfare of their populations.

German political philosopher Max Weber created the classic conception of bureaucracy as a well-organized, complex machine that is a "rational" way for a modern society to organize its business. He did not see them as necessary evils, but as the best organizational response to a changing society.

According to Weber, a bureaucracy has several basic characteristics:

- **Hierarchical authority structure** - A chain of command that is hierarchical; the top bureaucrat has ultimate control, and authority flows from the top down.
- **Task specialization** - A clear division of labor in which every individual has a specialized job
- **Extensive rules** - Clearly written, well-established formal rules that all people in the organization follow
- **Clear goals** - A clearly defined set of goals that all people in the organization strive toward
- **The merit principle** - Merit-based hiring and promotion; no granting of jobs to friends or family unless they are the best qualified
- **Impersonality** - Job performance that is judged by productivity, or how much work the individual gets done

Bureaucracies have acquired great significance in most contemporary societies and often represent an important source of stability for states.

## **LEGISLATURES**

The legislature is the branch of government charged with making laws. Legislatures may be bicameral, with two houses, or unicameral, or only one. The most usual form is bicameral, and may be traced back to Britain's House of Lords and House of Commons. Despite the fact that one house is referred to as "upper" and the other as "lower," the upper house does not necessarily have more power than the lower house. In the United States, it is debatable which house is more powerful than the other, and in Britain, Russia, and France, the upper house has very little power.

Memberships in the legislature may be determined in different ways, with many houses being elected directly by voters. However, others are selected by government officials, or their membership may be determined by political parties. The six core countries offer a variety of contrasting methods for determining legislative memberships.

## **JUDICIARIES**

Court systems that decide the guilt or innocence of lawbreakers go back to the days of medieval England, but constitutional courts that serve to defend democratic principles of a country against infringement by both private citizens and the government are a much more recent phenomenon. Judicial review, the mechanism that allows courts to review laws and executive actions for their constitutionality, was well established in the United States during the 19th century, but it has developed over the past decades in other democracies. The growth of judicial power over the past century has been spurred in part by the desire to protect human rights. The judiciary is still a relatively weak branch in most of the six core countries of the comparative government and politics course, but it takes a variety of forms in each of them.

## **LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS**

In many countries we may identify groups that connect the government to its citizens, such as political parties, interest groups, and print and electronic media. Appropriately, these groups are called linkage institutions. Their size and development depends partly on the size of the population, and partly on the scope of government activity. The larger the population, and the more complex the government's policy-making activities, the more likely the country is to have well developed linkage institutions.

### **Political Parties**

Political parties perform many functions in democracies. First, they help bring different people and ideas together to establish the means by which the majority can rule. Second, they hold politicians accountable to the electorate and other political elites. Most democracies have multi-party systems, with the two-party system in the United States being a more unusual arrangement. Communist states have one-party systems that dominate the governments, but non-communist

countries have also had one-party systems. An example is Mexico during most of the 20th century as it was dominated by PRI.

## **Electoral Systems**

Electoral systems are the rules that decide how votes are cast, counted, and translated into seats in a legislature. All democracies divide their populations by electoral boundaries, but they use many different arrangements. The United States, India, and the Great Britain use a system called first-past-the-post, in which they divide their constituencies into single-member districts in which candidates compete for a single representative's seat. It is also called the plurality system, or the winner-take-all system, because the winner does not need a majority to win, but simply needs to get more votes than anyone else. In contrast, many countries use proportional representation that creates multi-member districts in which more than one legislative seat is contested in each district. Under proportional representation, voters cast their ballots for a party rather than for a candidate, and the percentage of votes a party receives determines how many seats the party will gain in the legislature. South Africa and Italy use a system based solely on proportional representation, and many countries, including Germany, Mexico, and Russia, used a mixed system that combines first-past-the-post and proportional representation.

## **POLITICAL ELITES AND RECRUITMENT**

All countries have political elites, or leaders that have a disproportionate share of policy-making power. In democracies, these people are selected by competitive elections, but they still may be readily identified as political elites. Every country must establish a method of elite recruitment, or ways to identify and select people for future leadership positions. Also, countries must be concerned about leadership succession, or the process that determines the procedure for replacing leaders when they resign, die, or are no longer effective.

Do you want to see the real thing? Read Karl Marx's [\*Communism Manifesto\*](#) on line!

Visit [Europa](#) for information from the European Union.

For a review of a book that argues the point that globalization does not necessarily destroy particular cultures, see "[Brave New McWorld](#)," <http://www.calendarlive.com/books/bookreview/cl-bk-barber2feb02,0,7127434.story?coll=>

Read a provocative article about "[illiberal democracy](#)."

Comparativists are interested not only in the causes and forms of change, but also in the various impacts that it has on the policymaking process. Profound political and economic changes have characterized the 20th and early 21st centuries, and each of the six core countries of the AP Comparative Government and Politics course illustrate this overall trend toward change. More often than not, political and economic changes occur together and influence one another. If one occurs without the other, tensions are created that have serious consequences. For example, rapid

economic changes in China have strongly pressured the government to institute political changes. So far, the authoritarian government has resisted those changes, a situation that leaves us with the question of whether or not authoritarian governments can guide market economies.

## TYPES OF CHANGE

Change occurs in many ways, but it may be categorized into three types:

- **Reform** is a type of change that does not advocate the overthrow of basic institutions. Instead, reformers want to change some of the methods that political and economic leaders use to reach goals that the society generally accepts. For example, reformers may want to change business practices in order to preserve real competition in a capitalist country, or they may want the government to become more proactive in preserving the natural environment. In neither case do the reformers advocate the overthrow of basic economic or political institutions.
- **Revolution**, in contrast to reform, implies change at a more basic level, and does involve either a major revision or an overthrow of existing institutions. A revolution usually impacts more than one area of life. For example, the Industrial Revolution first altered the economies of Europe from feudalism to capitalism, but eventually changed their political systems, transportation, communication, literature, and social classes. Likewise, the French and American Revolutions were directed at the political systems, but they significantly changed the economies and societal practices of both countries, and spread their influence throughout the globe.
- **Coup d'etats** generally represent the most limited of the three types of change. Literally "blows to the state," they replace the leadership of a country with new leaders. Typically coups occur in countries where government institutions are weak and leaders have taken control by force. The leaders are challenged by others who use force to depose them. Often coups are carried out by the military, but the new leaders are always vulnerable to being overthrown by yet another coup.

## ATTITUDES TOWARD CHANGE

The types of change that take place are usually strongly influenced by the attitudes of those that promote them. Attitudes toward change include:

- **Radicalism** is a belief that rapid, dramatic changes need to be made in the existing society, often including the political system. Radicals usually think that the current system cannot be saved and must be overturned and replaced with something better. For example, radicalism prevailed in Russia in 1917 when the old tsarist regime was replaced by the communist U.S.S.R. Radicals are often the leaders of revolutions.
- **Liberalism** supports reform and gradual change rather than revolution. Do not confuse a liberal attitude toward change with liberalism as a political ideology. The two may or may not accompany one another. Liberals generally do not believe that the political and/or economic systems are broken, but they do believe that they need to be repaired or



improved. They may support the notion that eventual transformation needs to take place, but they almost always believe that gradual change is the best.

- **Conservatism** is much less supportive of change in general than are radicalism and liberalism. Conservatives tend to see change as disruptive, and they emphasize the fact that it sometimes brings unforeseen outcomes. They consider the state and the regime to be very important sources of law and order that might be threatened by making significant changes in the way that they operate. Legitimacy itself might be undermined, as well as the basic values and beliefs of the society.
- **Reactionary beliefs** go further to protect against change than do conservative beliefs. Reactionaries are similar to conservatives in that they oppose both revolution and reform, but they differ in that they also find the status quo unacceptable. Instead, they want to turn back the clock to an earlier era, and reinstate political, social, and economic institutions that once existed. Reactionaries have one thing in common with radicals: both groups are more willing to use violence to reach their goals than are liberals or conservatives.

### **THREE TRENDS**

In comparing political systems, it is important to take notice of overall patterns of development that affect everyone in the contemporary world. Two of these trends - democratization and the move toward market economies - indicate growing commonalities among nations, and the third represents fragmentation - the revival of ethnic or cultural politics.

#### **1) Democratization**

Even though democracy takes many different forms, more and more nations are turning toward some form of popular government. One broad, essential requirement for democracy is the existence of competitive elections that are regular, free, and fair. In other words, the election offers a real possibility that the incumbent government may be defeated. By this standard, a number of modern states that call themselves "democracies" fall into a gray area that is neither clearly democratic nor clearly undemocratic. Examples are Russia, Nigeria, and Indonesia. In contrast, liberal democracies display other democratic characteristics beyond having competitive elections:

- Civil liberties, such as freedom of belief, speech, and assembly
- Rule of law that provides for equal treatment of citizens and due process
- Neutrality of the judiciary and other checks on the abuse of power
- Open civil society that allows citizens to lead private lives and mass media to operate independently from government
- Civilian control of the military that restricts the likelihood of the military seizing control of the government

Countries that have regular, free, and fair competitive elections, but are missing these other qualities (civil liberties, rule of law, neutrality of the judiciary, open civil society, and civilian control of the military) are referred to as illiberal democracies.

According to political scientist Samuel Huntington, the modern world is now in a "third wave" of democratization that began during the 1970s. The "first wave" developed gradually over time; the "second wave" occurred after the Allied victory in World War II, and continued until the early 1960s. This second wave was characterized by de-colonization around the globe. The third wave is characterized by the defeat of dictatorial or totalitarian rulers from South America to Eastern Europe to some parts of Africa. The recent political turnover in Mexico may be interpreted as part of this "third wave" of democratization.

- Why has democratization occurred? According to Huntington, some factors are:
- The loss of legitimacy by both right and left wing authoritarian regimes
- The expansion of an urban middle class in developing countries
- A new emphasis on "human rights" by the United States and the European Union
- The "snowball" effect has been important: when one country in a region becomes democratic, it influences others to do so. An example is Poland's influence on other nations of Eastern Europe during the 1980s.

One of the greatest obstacles to democratization is poverty because it blocks citizen participation in government. Huntington gauges democratic stability by this standard: democracy may be declared when a country has had at least two successive peaceful turnovers of power.

## **2) Movement Toward Market Economies**

Many political economists today declare that the economic competition between capitalism and socialism that dominated the 20th century is now a part of the past. The old command economies, with socialist principles of centralized planning and state ownership are fading from existence, except in combination with market economies. The issue now is what type of market economy will be most successful: one that allows for significant control from the central government - a "mixed economy" - or one that does not - a pure market economy. For example, modern Germany has a "social market economy" that is team-oriented and emphasizes cooperation between management and organized labor. In contrast, the United States economy tends to be more individualistic and anti-government control.

Marketization is the term that describes the state's re-creation of a market in which property, labor, goods, and services can all function in a competitive environment to determine their value. Privatization is the transfer of state-owned property to private ownership.

## **3) Revival of Ethnic or Cultural Politics**

Until recently, few political scientists predicted that fragmentation - divisions based on ethnic or cultural identity - would become increasingly important in world politics. A few years ago nationalism - identities based on nationhood - seemed to be declining in favor of increasing globalization. However, nationality questions almost certainly did in Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to resuscitate the Soviet Union, and national identities remain strong in most parts of the world. Perhaps most dramatically, the politicization of religion has dominated world politics of the early 21st century. Most Westerners have been caught off guard by this turn of events,

especially in the United States, where separation of church and state has been a basic political principle since the founding of the country.

Samuel Huntington argues that our most important and dangerous future conflicts will be based on clashes of civilizations, not on socioeconomic or even ideological differences. He divides the world into several difference cultural areas that may already be poised to threaten world peace: the West, the Orthodox world (Russia), Islamic countries, Latin American, Africa, the Hindu world, the Confucian world, the Buddhist world, and Japan. Some political scientists criticize Huntington by saying that he distorts cultural divisions and that he underestimates the importance of cultural conflicts within nations. In either case - a world divided into cultural regions or a world organized into multicultural nations - the revival of ethnic or cultural politics tends to emphasize differences among nations rather than commonalities.

For quotes on nationalism and patriotism, see <http://www.quotegarden.com/patriotism.html>

## **THE COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION**

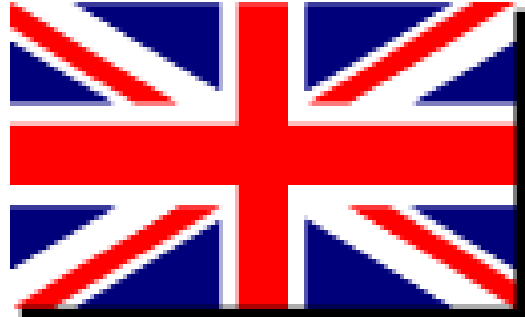
The examination administered by the College Board in May lasts for two hours and 25 minutes and consists of the following parts:

- 60 multiple choice questions (45 minutes allow)
- a free response section with four mandatory questions (a total of 100 minutes, or 25 minutes per question)

The multiple choice questions cover all the topics listed above, and test knowledge of comparative theory, methods, and government and politics in Britain, France, Russia, and China. Since students are expected to study EITHER Mexico, Nigeria, or India, no multiple choice questions will address politics in these countries specifically.

Each of the four mandatory questions generally covers different topics, and together they address government and politics of all or most of the countries. At least one question requires knowledge of ONE of the three developing countries, and often a second question requires the student to compare something in the developing country with its counterpart in one of the four core countries.

# GREAT BRITAIN OR LITTLE ENGLAND?



Britain clearly has had one of the most influential and powerful political systems in world history. It was the first country in Europe to develop a limited monarchy, achieved gradually so as to maintain stability. Modern democratic institutions and modern industrialization have their roots in English soil, and English influence spread all over the world during the 18th and 19th centuries throughout her far-flung empire. At the beginning of the 20th century, Britain was undoubtedly the most powerful country in the world. Truly the name "Great Britain" applies to her many accomplishments.

Yet many British subjects refer to their homeland affectionately as "Little England." Perhaps there is something of the "David and Goliath" appeal - the little island that conquered the world! At any rate, the two names aptly define Britain's dilemma at the dawn of the 21st century. As a precursor in the development of modern democracy, industrialization, and imperialism, it is now a model in the art of growing old gracefully. Britain has lost much of her empire and has slipped out of the front rank of the economies of Western Europe, and yet the country is still a major player in world politics.

The world watches as Britain helps define the meaning of progress. Perhaps it is not unilateral - onward ever, backward never. Instead, Britain is adjusting to its new reality as one European country among many, and yet the nation's influence remains strong. Many believe that regeneration is in the making - politically, economically, and socially.

To explore British government and politics, click on the arrow below, or follow the links to the left.

For an extensive website on British government and politics in general, visit [The UK Politics Directory](#).

## **SOVEREIGNTY, AUTHORITY and POWER**

Great Britain has the oldest democratic tradition of any country in the world, and as a result, has many sources of authority and power that provide stability and legitimacy. This section is divided into three parts:

- Social Compacts and Constitutionalism
- Historical Evolution of National Political Traditions
- Political Culture

### **SOCIAL COMPACTS AND CONSTITUTIONALISM**

The legitimacy of the government has developed gradually, so that today tradition is a primary source of stability. Although the tradition includes a monarchy, the limitation of the king's power began early, until the power of Parliament gradually eclipsed that of the king by the end of the 17th century. Today most British citizens accept democracy as a basic component of their government. With the notable exception of Protestant/Catholic conflicts in Northern Ireland, most British citizens accept a church/state relationship in which the church does not challenge the authority of the government.

Ironically, the country that influenced the development of so many other modern democracies has never had a written constitution as such. Instead, the "constitution" has evolved over time, with important documents, common law, legal codes, and customs combining to form what is often called the "Constitution of the Crown."

Two important documents that are central to the British "constitution" are:

- **Magna Carta** - In 1215 King John signed this document, agreeing to consult nobles before he made important political decisions, especially those regarding taxes. Magna Carta, then, forms the basis of limited government that places restrictions on the power of monarchs.
- **The Bill of Rights** - This document bears little resemblance to the American Bill of Rights, because it lists rights retained by Parliament, not by individual citizens. William and Mary signed this document in 1688, giving important policy-making power to Parliament, including the power of the purse.

### **HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL POLITICAL TRADITIONS**

The British political system is influenced by many traditions from the country's long history. Britain's political culture has developed for the most part gradually and consensually, although not totally without conflict. However, many current political conflicts result from unresolved issues from the dramatic changes brought by the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The evolution of British political traditions may be analyzed in these historical categories:

- **The shaping of the monarchy** - The British monarchy has been in place for many centuries and has survived many transformations. Britain established a limited monarchy as early as the 13th century when nobles forced King John to sign the Magna Carta. During the English Civil War of the 1640s, the monarch, Charles I, was beheaded, but the monarchy was brought back later in the 17th century with powers seriously restricted by Parliament. Today, the monarchy has no decision-making power but plays an important ceremonial role in British society.
- **The ascendancy of Parliament** - The English Civil War was a conflict between the supporters of the king, Charles I, and those of Parliament (the Roundheads). Parliament won, the king was executed, and the Roundhead leader, Oliver Cromwell, took over the country. However, the "Protectorate" that followed was short-lived, and the monarchy was restored when Parliament brought Charles II, the beheaded king's son, to the throne. Succeeding kings did not always respect the power of Parliament, so the balance of power was decided by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. This bloodless revolution established the constitutional monarchy when William and Mary agreed to written restrictions on their power by signing the Bill of Rights. Parliament and its ministers continued to gain strength as the monarchy lost it through succeeding kings. The power of the king's prime minister was firmly established in the 18th century by Robert Walpole, minister to Kings George I and George II.
- **Challenges of the Industrial Revolution** - During the 18th century, two very important economic influences - colonial mercantilism and the industrial revolution - established England as a major economic power. The results radically changed traditional English society and its economic basis in the feudal relationship between lord and peasant. The brisk trade with colonies all over the world and the manufacture of goods created unprecedented wealth held by a new class of merchants and businessmen. Lives of peasants were transformed as they left rural areas, moved to cities, and went to work in factories. New merchants, businessmen, and workers all demanded that the political system respond by including them in decision-making. The 19th century reforms reflect their successes.
- **Britain in the 20th and early 21st centuries** - At the dawn of the 20th century, Britain was the greatest imperialist nation in the world. By the early 21st century, her power had been diminished by two world wars, serious economic problems of the 1970s, and the rising power of the United States. After World War II, Britain developed a strong welfare state, that was curtailed during the 1980s by a wave of "Thatcherism," a conservative, capitalist backlash led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Modern Britain, then, is adjusting to a new level of world power, and is trying to find the right balance between the benefits of the welfare state and the trend toward greater reliance on a market economy.

## POLITICAL CULTURE:

This fortress built by Nature herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
Against the envy of less happier lands;  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

William Shakespeare's *Richard II*

This famous quote from Shakespeare tells us a great deal about the political culture of Great Britain. It reflects a large amount of nationalism, or pride in being English. It also reflects insularity, or the feeling of separation from the continent of Europe. In modern times, insularity has caused Britain to have a cautious attitude toward participation in the European Union. When most of the EU members accepted the euro as a common currency in January 2002, Britain refused, and instead kept the English pound. However, despite Shakespeare's joy in this "fortress" state, his country has been far from isolated and has spread its influence around the world.

England's geographic features have shaped her political culture through the years. Important features include:

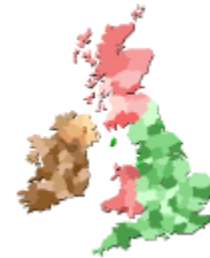


- **An island** - far enough away from mainland Europe to protect her as long as she has had a good navy. Yet the island is close enough to the mainland to allow interaction.
- **Small size** - As a result, her resources are limited. This geographical fact shaped her efforts to colonize other lands and become an imperial power.
- **A short supply of fertile soil, short growing season** - Britain's ability to feed her population is limited as a result.
- **Temperate climate, but cold, chilly, and rainy** —; Britain's population density is one of the highest in the world, but it is considerable lower in northern areas.
- **No major geographical barriers** (mountains, raging rivers) to hamper transportation/ communication within the country

Other characteristics of the political culture include

**Noblesse Oblige and social class** - Although the influence of social class on political attitudes is not as strong as it has been in the past, a very important tradition in British politics is noblesse oblige, the duty of the upper classes to take responsibility for the welfare of the lower classes. The custom dates to feudal times when lords protected their serfs and their land in return for labor. Today, noblesse oblige is reflected in the general willingness of the British to accept a welfare state, including the National Health Service. During the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher's government brought this willingness into question by cutting social services significantly. However, some of these services have been restored in recent years.

**Multi-nationalism** - Although Britain has a relatively large amount of cultural homogeneity, its boundaries include England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, all of which have been different nations in the past, but are united under one government today. Although English is a common language, it is spoken with different dialects, and religious differences between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland remains a major source of conflict today. These national identities are still strong today, and they greatly impact the way that the political system functions.



Is noblesse oblige a thing of the past? See how *Slate Magazine* applies the concept to the Bush family in the U.S. - <http://slate.msn.com/id/31470/>

George Orwell's 1941 comments about the political culture of Britain are still timely [http://orwell.ru/library/essays/lion/e/e\\_eye.htm](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/lion/e/e_eye.htm)

## POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Political change in Britain has always been characterized by its gradual nature. Gradualism in turn established strong traditions. This process helps to explain the transition in policy-making power from the king to Parliament. That transition may be traced to the days shortly after William the Conqueror defeated Harold II at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. In order to ensure his claims to English lands, William (a Norman) gathered support from the nobility by promising to consult them before he taxed them. This arrangement led to a gradual acceptance of a "House of Lords," and as commercialism created towns and a new middle class, eventually the establishment of a "House of Commons." Both were created through evolution, not revolution. Of course, there are important "marker events" that demonstrate the growing power of Parliament &ndash; the signing of the Magna Carta, the English Civil War, and the Glorious Revolution &ndash; but the process was gradual and set strong traditions as it developed.



Despite the overall pattern of gradualism, Britain's political system has had to adjust to internal economic changes, as well as international crises. Some sources of change have been the Industrial Revolution, imperialistic aspirations, the two world wars of the 20th century, and the economic crisis of the 1970s. These events have had significant consequences for Britain's political system.

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## **ADJUSTING TO THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

The Industrial Revolution that began in England during the late 18th century created two new social classes that were not accommodated under the parliamentary system: the middle class and laborers. At first, Parliament resisted including them, thinking that it might lead to disaster, perhaps even a revolution like the one that France had in 1789. However, the tradition of gradualism guided their decision to incorporate the new elements into the political system. The decision is a reflection of noblesse oblige. Starting in 1832, the franchise gradually broadened:

### **EXTENSION OF VOTING RIGHTS**

- **Great Reform Act of 1832** - About 300,000 more men gained the right to vote, and the House of Commons gained more power in relation to the House of Lords.
- **Reform Act of 1867**- The electorate reached 3,000,000, as many working class people were allowed the right to vote.
- **Representation of the People Act of 1884** - The electorate is further expanded so that the majority of the voters are working class.
- **Women's suffrage**- All women over the age of 28 and all men over 21 were granted the right to vote in 1918. By 1928, all women over the age of 21 were allowed to vote.

The gradual inclusion of the people in the political process meant that Marxism did not take root as it did in many other European countries.

### **19TH CENTURY WORK AND WELFARE REFORMS**

During the 19th century, labor unions formed to protect workers' rights on the job. By the end of the 19th century, some basic provisions were made for social services. For example, in 1870, mandatory elementary education was put into law. From 1906 until 1914, laws were enacted providing for old age pensions.

### **POLITICAL EFFECTS OF THE EXTENSION OF RIGHTS TO THE "COMMON MAN"**

The balance of power between the House of Commons and the House of Lords changed slowly but surely, as the new commercial elites became Members of Parliament. By 1911, the House of Lords was left with only one significant power - to delay legislation. The House of Commons was clearly the dominant legislative house by the early 20th century. By then political party membership was determined largely by class lines. The Labour Party was created in 1906 to

represent the rights of the newly enfranchised working man, and the Conservative Party drew most of its members from middle class merchants and businessmen.

With the enfranchisement of the working class, a demand for welfare measures put pressure on the political system to change. Reform measures were passed by Parliament, including legislation for public education, housing, jobs, and medical care. With these demands came a new party - Labour. By the end of World War I, Labour had pushed the Liberals into third place where they have remained ever since. Labour was never Marxist, but it combined militant trade unionism with intellectual social democracy to create a pragmatic, gradualist ideology that sought to level class differences in Britain. The Trade Union Council emerged as a coalition of trade unions that has been a major force in British politics since. The British labor movement has always been tough, resentful of being treated like inferiors. That militancy carries through to today, only to be softened in very recent years by party leaders Neil Kinnock, John Smith, and Tony Blair.

## **EFFECTS OF WORLD WAR II; COLLECTIVE CONSENSUS**

Under the leadership of Winston Churchill Britain united behind the World War II effort. Churchill emphasized the importance of putting class conflicts aside for the duration of the war. Although he gained the Prime Minister's post as leader of the Conservative party, he headed an all-party coalition government with ministers from both major parties. The primary objective was to win the war. After the war was over, the spirit of collective consensus continued until well into the 1960s, with both Labour and Conservative parties supporting the development of a modern welfare system. Before the war was over, both parties accepted the Beveridge Report, which provided for a social insurance program that made all citizens eligible for health, unemployment, pension, and other benefits. One goal of the Beveridge Report was to guarantee a subsistence income to every British citizen. In 1948, the National Health Service was created under the leadership of the Labour Party. Even when Conservatives regained control in 1950, the reforms were not repealed. Although the electorate was divided largely by social class, with 70% of working class voting Labour and even larger percentages of middle class voting Conservative, both parties shared a broad consensus on the necessity of the welfare state.

## **CHALLENGES TO THE COLLECTIVE CONSENSUS SINCE 1970**

During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Britain has experienced considerable economic and political turmoil. The era began with a serious decline in the economy, followed by a growing divide between the Labour and Conservative parties. Labour took a sharp turn to the left, endorsing a socialist economy and serving as a mouthpiece for labor union demands. The Conservatives answered with a sharp turn to the right, advocating denationalization of industries and support for a pure market economy. During the 1990s, both parties moderated their stances, and the economy showed some signs of recovery.

## **ECONOMIC CRISIS OF THE 1970s**

The collective consensus began to break apart with social and economic problems beginning in the late 1960s. Britain's economic problems included declining industrial production and a decline in international influence, both exaggerated by the loss of colonies and the shrinking of the old empire. The impact of OPEC (Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries) was devastating. The quadrupling of oil prices and the oil embargo by oil producing countries caused recession, high unemployment rates, a drop in the GNP, and inflation.

The economic problems led labor unions to demand higher wages, and crippling strikes, such as the coal strike of 1972-73, plagued the nation. The Labour Party lost membership, and many voters turned to the Liberals, the Conservatives, or the various nationalist parties. Many middle class voters reacted against Labour, and the Conservatives selected Margaret Thatcher as their leader. Her very conservative stance on political issues was appealing enough to sweep the conservatives to power in 1979.

## **THATCHERISM**

Margaret Thatcher blamed the weakened economy on the socialist policies set in place by the government after World War II. Her policies were further influenced by a distinct movement left by the Labour Party that gave a great deal of power to labor unions. In response, she privatized business and industry, cut back on social welfare programs, strengthened national defense, got tough with the labor unions, and returned to market force controls on the economy. She was a controversial prime minister for eleven years. Her supporters believed her to be the capable and firm "Iron Lady", but her critics felt that her policies made economic problems worse and that her personality further divided the country. Thatcher resigned office in 1990 when other Conservative Party leaders challenged her leadership.

## **TONY BLAIR'S THIRD WAY**

After the jolts of the economic crisis of the 1970s and Margaret Thatcher's firm redirection of the political system to the right, moderation again became characteristic of political change in Britain. Thatcher's hand-picked successor, John Major, at first followed her policies, but later moderating them by abolishing Thatcher's poll tax, reconciling with the European Union, and slowing social cutbacks and privatization. The Conservative Party retained the majority in the 1993 parliamentary elections, but only by a very slim margin. Then, in 1997, Labour's gradual return in the center was rewarded with the election of Tony Blair, who promised to create a "New Labour" Party and rule in a "third way" — a centrist alternative to the old Labour Party on the left and the Conservative Party on the right.

# CITIZEN, STATE and SOCIETY

In many ways, Britain is a homogeneous culture. English is spoken by virtually all British citizens, and only about 5% of Britain's population of 60 million are ethnic minorities. The major social cleavages that shape the way the political system works are based on multi-national identities, social class distinctions, and the Protestant/Catholic split in Northern Ireland. In recent years some critics believe that new tensions are developing regarding Muslim minorities, as evidenced in race riots in May 2001 in the northern town of Oldham, and similar disturbances in Burnley, Leeds, and Bradford a few weeks later.

## MULTI-NATIONAL IDENTITIES

The "United Kingdom" evolved from four different nations: England, Wales, Scotland, and part of Ireland. England consists of the southern 2/3 of the island, and until the 16th century, did not rule any of the other lands. By the 18th century, England ruled the entire island, and became known as "Great Britain." In the early 20th century, Northern Ireland was added, creating the "United Kingdom." These old kingdoms still have strong national identities that greatly impact the British political system.

- **England** - The largest region of Great Britain is England, which also contains the majority of the population. Throughout most of the history of the British Isles, the English have dominated the other nationalities, and they still have a disproportionate share of political power. Today the challenge is to integrate the nationalities into the country as a whole, but at the same time allow them to keep their old identities.
- **Wales** - west of England - became subject to the English king in the 16th century, and has remained so till the present. Modern Welsh pride is reflected in their flag - the Plaid Cymru - and in the fact that the language is still alive and currently being taught in some Welsh schools. Even though Wales accepted English authority long ago, some resentment remains, as well as some feelings of being exploited by their richer neighbors.
- **Scotland** - For many years the Scots resisted British rule, and existed as a separate country until the early 1600s. Ironically, Scotland was not joined to England through conquest, but through intermarriage of the royalty. When Queen Elizabeth I died without an heir in 1603, the English throne went to her nephew James I, who also happened to be king of Scotland. A century later both countries agreed to a single Parliament in London. However, Scots still have a strong national identity, and tend to think of themselves as being very different from the English. The Scots too have their own national flag, and the Scottish Parliament has recently been revived.
- **Northern Ireland** - England and Ireland have a long history of arguing about religion. After Oliver Cromwell won the English Civil War in the mid 17th century, he tried to impose Protestantism on staunchly Catholic Ireland to no avail. English claims to Irish lands were settled shortly after World War I ended, when Ireland was granted home rule, with the exception of its northeast corner, where Protestants outnumbered Catholics by about 60% to 40%. Home rule came largely because of pressure from the Irish Republican Army (the IRA), who used guerilla warfare tactics to convince the British to allow Irish independence. Finally, in 1949, the bulk of Ireland became a totally

independent country, and Northern Ireland has remained under British rule, but not without a great deal of conflict between Protestants and Catholics.

## **SOCIAL CLASS DISTINCTIONS**

Distinctions between rich and poor have always been important in Britain, with the most important distinction today being between working and middle class people. The two classes are not easily divided by income, but psychologically and subjectively, the gulf between them is still wide. German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf explains the divide in terms of solidarity, particularly among the working class. The sense is that keeping the old job and living in the old neighborhood &ndash; the sense of family and friends &ndash; is more important than individual success.

## **EDUCATING THE ELITE: "PUBLIC" SCHOOL AND "OXBRIDGE"**

"Public schools" were originally intended to train boys for "public life" in the military, civil service, or politics. They are expensive, and they have educated young people to continue after their parents as members of the ruling elite. A large number of Britain's elite have gone to "public" boarding schools such as Eton, Harrow, Rugby, St. Paul's, and Winchester. Middle classes commonly attend private grammar schools, where students wear uniforms but do not live in. Only 65 percent of British seventeen-year-olds are still in school, the lowest level of any industrialized democracy.

The most important portal to the elite classes is through Oxford and Cambridge Universities, or Oxbridge. Nearly half of all Conservative Members of Parliament went to Oxbridge, as have about one quarter of all Labour MPs. Percentages in cabinet positions are even higher, and prime ministers almost always graduate from one or the other school. Since World War II, more scholarships have been available to Oxbridge, so that more working and middle class youths may attend the elite schools. Also, the number of other universities has grown, so that higher education is more widespread than before. Still, university attendance in Britain is much lower than in other industrialized democracies.

## **ETHNIC MINORITIES**

According to the 2001 census, only about 7.1% of the British population is of non-European origin, with most coming from countries that were formerly British colonies. However, the minority ethnic population grew by 53 percent between 1991 and 2001, from 3 million in 1991 to 4.6 million in 2001. The main groups are:

- **Indian** - 23% of all non-European population
- **Pakistani** - 16%
- **Afro-Caribbean** - 12.2%
- **Black African** - 10.5%

Because of tight immigration restrictions in the past, most ethnic minorities are young, with about half of the population under the age of 25. The growth in percentages of minorities has

grown despite the restrictions that were placed on further immigration during the Thatcher administration of the 1980s. Immigration restrictions are currently under debate, but the Labour government has allowed the restrictions to remain in place.

Britain has often been accused of adjusting poorly to their new ethnic population. Reports abound of unequal treatment by the police and physical and verbal harassment by citizens. The May 2001 race riots in several cities increased tensions, and new fears of strife have been stoked by post 9/11 world politics. Today there is some evidence that whites are leaving London to settle in surrounding suburban areas, resulting in a higher percentage of minority population living in London. Despite this segregation, the mixed race population appears to be increasing, with the census of 2001 offering for the first time in British history a category for mixed race people.

## **POLITICAL BELIEFS AND VALUES**

In the early 1960s political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba wrote that the "civic culture" (political culture) in Britain was characterized by trust, deference to authority and competence, pragmatism, and harmony. The economic crisis of the 1970s and the continuing conflicts regarding Northern Ireland have challenged this view of citizenship in Britain, but the overall characteristics seem to still be in place today.

British citizens reflect what Almond and Verba saw as good qualities for democratic participation: high percentages of people that vote in elections, acceptance of authority, tolerance for different points of view, and acceptance of the rules of the game. However, social and economic changes during the 1970s altered these characteristics so that today British citizens are less supportive of the collective consensus and more inclined to values associated with a free market economy. Many observers believe that the "politics of protest" — or the tendency to disagree openly and sometimes violently with the government — have become increasingly acceptable.

Some manifestations of changing political beliefs and values include:

- **Decreasing support for labor unions** - British labor unions have strong roots in the Industrial Revolution, and class solidarity supports union membership. However, when unions staged crippling strikes during the 1970s, public opinion turned against them, as people began to view unions as "bullies" to both the government and the general population. Margaret Thatcher's tough stance against the unions intensified strife between unions and the Conservative government.
- **increased violence regarding Northern Ireland** - The issues surrounding British claims to Northern Ireland intensified during the early 1970s after British troops killed thirteen Catholics in a "bloody Sunday" incident in January 1972. The IRA and Protestant paramilitaries stepped up their campaigns of violence. Although in recent years the groups have consented to negotiate with the government, the threat of violent eruptions remains strong today.
- **Thatcherism** - The Conservative Party controlled British government from 1979 until 1997. Although later modified by Prime Minister John Major, Margaret Thatcher's

"revolution" toward a free market economy certainly affected political attitudes. She rejected collectivism and its emphasis on the redistribution of resources from rich to poor and government responsibility for full employment. Thatcherism fostered entrepreneurial values of individualism and competition over the solidarity of social classes and the tradition of noblesse oblige.

- **New Labour** - Despite these radical changes of the 1970s and 80s, Britain has not deserted its traditional political culture. Tony Blair now leads a Labour Party that has loosened its ties to labor unions, and a new "Good Friday" Agreement on Northern Ireland was reached in 1998. Thatcherism has been incorporated into political attitudes, but in the early 21st century, both parties are more inclined to a middle path, or "third way."

## VOTING BEHAVIOR

Like most other Europeans, British citizens have relatively high percentages of qualified voters who go to the polls. Although there was a notable decline in the elections of 2001 and 2005, more than 70% of eligible citizens normally vote in parliamentary elections. Today voters have less party loyalty than they once did, but voting behavior is still clearly tied to social class and region.

- **Social class** - Until World War II, voting in Britain largely followed class lines. The working class supported the Labour Party, and the middle class voted Conservative. However, today the lines of distinction are blurred, partly because the society and the parties themselves have changed. For example, some middle class people who grew up in working class homes still vote the way their parents did. On the other hand, many in the working classes have been attracted to the Conservative platform to cut taxes, and to keep immigrants out. In recent years, both parties have come back to the center from the extreme views of the 1970s and 1980s, as reflected in Labour leader Tony Blair's program to provide a "third way," or a centrist alternative. However, the Labour victories of 1997, 2001 and 2005 show that the party is strongest among people who feel disadvantaged: the Scots, the Welsh, and the poor.
- **Regional factors** - The Labour Party usually does well in urban and industrial areas and in Scotland and Wales. The industrial cities of the north - around Liverpool, Manchester, and Newcastle, and in Yorkshire - almost always support the Labour candidates, as do people that vote in central London. The areas where Conservatives usually win are mostly in England, especially in rural and suburban areas. These voting patterns are tied to social class, but they also reflect urban vs. rural values.

## POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS:

Strong political traditions and institutions that have been in place for hundreds of years guide Britain's stable democratic regime. The monarch still rules as head of state, but the prime minister and his/her cabinet form the policy-making center. The system is parliamentary, which means that the prime minister and cabinet ministers are actually members of the legislature. In this section, we will explore the parts of the British political system and the ways that they interact to make policy.

### LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

Linkage institutions play a very important role in British government and politics. Political parties, interest groups, and print and electronic media have long connected the government to British citizens. The British government's policy-making activities are complex, and its linkage institutions are well developed.

### POLITICAL PARTIES

Britain's political parties began to form in the 18th century, and their organization and functions have shaped the development of many other party systems (including the United States) through the years. At first they were simply caucuses, or meetings of people from the same area or of like mind. Only in the 19th century did a two-party system emerge with roots in the electorate. The labels "Whig" and "Tory" first appeared under Charles II, with the Tories supporting the king and the Whigs opposing. Both were derisive names: Whigs were Scottish bandits, Tories Irish bandits. The Whigs eventually became the Liberal Party and the Tories (still a nickname today) the Conservatives. The Labour Party emerged in the early 20th century in response to new voter demands created by the Industrial Revolution.

Today the two major political parties are Labour and Conservative, but several other significant parties are represented in Parliament. Historically, Britain has had strong third parties that significantly affect election results. For example, in the 1980s, the Liberal Democratic Alliance Party, garnered as much as 26% of the popular vote, but because of Britain's single-member plurality election system (one member per district who only has to get more votes than anyone else, not a majority), never claimed more than 62 seats in the House of Commons. The House of Commons is dominated by the two largest parties, but three or four way elections for MPs are usual.

### THE LABOUR PARTY

The largest party on the left is the Labour Party. It has controlled the British government since 1997 when their leader, Tony Blair became Prime Minister. The party began in 1906 as an alliance of trade unions and socialist groups that were strengthened by the expansion of rights for the working class during the 19th century. Traditionally, labor unions have provided most party funds, although Blair has loosened the union ties and has sought to broaden the base of party membership.



The early history of the party was defined partially by the controversial "Clause 4" that called for nationalization of the "commanding heights" of British industry. The growing moderation of the party was reflected by the removal of the clause from the Labour Party Constitution in the early 1990s. The shift in policies toward the center became apparent shortly after Neil Kinnock became the party leader in the early 1980s, and has continued under leaders John Smith (1993-1994) and Tony Blair (1994-present).

Labour's 1992 loss in an election that they were widely predicted to win almost certainly was a turning point in its development. Its failure to capture the majority led to the resignation of Neil Kinnock as party leader, and the appointment of John Smith, a moderate Scotsman who the party hoped would solidify support from Scottish nationalist groups. Smith died suddenly in 1994, and was replaced by Tony Blair, a young leader that did not come from union ranks. Instead, he was an Oxford educated barrister-turned-politician who hoped to bring more intellectuals and middle class people into the party. Labour won the elections of 1997, 2001, and 2005, and has tried to redefine itself as a moderate party with support from many different types of voters.

## THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

The Conservative Party was the dominant party in Britain between World War II and 1997, holding the majority in Parliament for all but sixteen years during that period. The Conservative Party is the main party on the right, but they prospered partly because they traditionally have been a pragmatic, rather than an ideological party. Although the party supported a market controlled economy, privatization, and fewer social welfare programs during the 1980s under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, the Conservatives moved back toward the center under Prime Minister John Major (1990-1997).

The party is characterized by noblesse oblige, and its power is centered in London. The organization of the party is usually viewed as elitist, with the MPs choosing the party leadership. No formal rules for choosing their leader existed until recently, but now the leadership must submit to annual leadership elections. This new process proved to be problematic for Margaret Thatcher in 1990, when she was challenged strongly in the election and virtually forced to resign. The senior party members formed the cabinet and were chosen by the party leader.

Since Labour seized control of the government in 1997, the Conservative Party has been weakened by deep divisions between two groups:

- The traditional wing (one-nation Tories) values noblesse oblige and wants the country ruled by an elite that takes everybody's interests into account before making decisions. This wing generally supports Britain's membership in the European Union.
- The Thatcherite wing of strict conservatives wants to roll back government and move to a full free market. The members of this wing are often referred to as Euroskeptics because they see the EU's move toward European integration as a threat to British sovereignty.

## THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Two parties; the Liberals and the Social Democrats - formed an alliance in the 1983 and 1987 elections, and formally merged in 1989, establishing the Liberal Democrats. Their goal was to establish a strong party in the middle as a compromise to the politics of the two major parties: Thatcher's extremely conservative leadership and Labour's leftist views and strategies. The party won an impressive 26% of the votes in 1983, but because of the single member district plurality voting system (see the section on Elections) in Britain, they only won 23 seats (3.5%). They campaigned for proportional representation, which would have given them an equal percentage of the MP seats, and for a Bill of Rights modeled after the first ten amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

The party's strength declined in the early 1990s as both the Conservative and Labour Parties moved to the center of political opinion, and in the 1992 election the party picked up only about 17% of the total votes cast. The party held on, though, partly due to the popularity of its leader, Paddy Ashdown, and to some strong stands on the environment, health, and education. Ashdown retired in 1999, and was replaced by a Scottish MP, Charles Kennedy, and the Liberal Democrats picked up seven seats in the 2001 election. The party also benefited from public disillusionment with the Blair government's support for the war in Iraq when it picked up 11 more MPs in the election of 2005. However, the party still remains tremendously underrepresented in Parliament, considering their relative popularity at the polls. After the 2005 elections, the Liberal Democrats had 62 MPs (out of 646), even though they won more than 22% of the vote.

## OTHER PARTIES

Britain has many smaller parties including nationalist groups for Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Plaid Cymru in Wales and the Scottish National Party in Scotland both won seats in the House of Commons during the 1970s, and they have managed to virtually shut the Conservative Party out in the elections in their regions in 1997, 2001 and 2005. However, Labour is strong in the two regions, and the two parties combined won only nine seats in the House of Commons in 2005. The parties' fortunes were strengthened after Labour's return to power in 1997, when the Blair leadership created regional assemblies for Scotland and Wales. The Plaid Cymru currently has 12 of 60 seats in the Welsh Assembly, and the Scottish National Party has 27 of 129 seats in the Scottish Assembly.

Northern Ireland has always been dominated by regional parties, including Sinn Fein (the political arm of the IRA) and the Democratic Unionist Party, led by Protestant clergymen. Together they captured nine parliamentary seats in 2005.

## ELECTIONS

The only national officials that British voters select are Members of Parliament. The prime minister is not elected as prime minister but as an MP from a single electoral district, averaging about 65,000 registered voters. Elections must be held every five years, but the prime minister may call them earlier. Officially, elections occur after the Crown dissolves Parliament, but that always happens because the prime minister requests it. The power to call elections is very

important, because the prime minister as head of the majority party; always calls them when (s)he thinks that the majority party has the best chance of winning. Like the United States, British parliamentary elections are "winner-take-all," with no runoff elections. Within this single-member plurality system, each party selects a candidate to run for each district post, although minor parties don't always run candidates in all districts. The person that wins the most votes gets the position, even if (s)he does not receive the majority of votes in the district. The British nickname this system "first- past-the-post" (like a race horse). Since MPs do not have to live in the districts that they represent, each party decides who runs in each district. So party leaders run from safe districts &ndash; or districts that the party almost always wins. Political neophytes are selected to run in districts that a party knows it will lose. They are usually happy to just make a good showing by receiving more votes than the party usually gets.

The "winner-take-all" system often exaggerates the size of the victory of the largest party and reduces the influence of minor parties. This system is the main reason that the Liberal Democrats have not been able to get a good representation in Parliament. Regional parties tend to fare better. For example, The Scottish National Party generally has a good chance of picking up some districts in Scotland. However, Parliament still remains a two-party show, even though many other parties may get a sizeable number of votes. For example, in the election of 2005, the Labour party received 35.3% of the vote (not a majority), but they received 356 out of 646 seats (a majority). Some signs of change in the electoral system have emerged in very recent years. For example, in the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998, Britain agreed to give Northern Ireland a regional government, in which all parties would be represented on a proportional basis. In other words, the religion-based parties would each have a percentage of representatives that matches the percentage of the total vote each received. In later agreements with Scotland and Wales, their regional parliaments also are based on proportional representation. Also, the mayor of London is now elected directly for the first time.

<b>U.S. vs. British Elections*</b>	
United States	Britain
Parties are less powerful.	Party determines who runs where.
Members must live in districts.	Members usually don't live in their districts.
Party leaders run in their respective districts.	Party leaders run in "safe districts."
Individual votes for four officials on the national level.	Individual votes for only one official on the national level.
Between 30 and 50 percent of the eligible voters actually vote.	About 70-80 percent of the eligible voters actually vote (less in 2001 and 2005).
First past the post, single-member districts; virtually no minor parties get representation	First past the post, single-member districts; some representation from minority parties, but still less than if they had proportional representation

\*Note: The Comparative AP Exam does not require knowledge of U.S. government, but this chart is intended to help students understand British elections.

## **INTEREST GROUPS**

Not surprisingly, the most influential interest groups have been those linked to class and industrial interests. Between 1945 and the 1970s, business interests and trade union organization fiercely competed for influence over the policy-making process. The powerful Trade Unions Congress (TUC), that represents a coalition of unions, had a great deal of clout because the government often consulted them on important decisions. While no comparable single group represents business interests, they too had an open door to inner government circles. For example, in 1976, Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healy negotiated with TUC and a coalition of business groups &ndash; CBI - to limit TUC's wage demands in exchange for 3% reduction in income tax rates. All of this changed when Margaret Thatcher took control in 1979. Thatcher wanted to reduce the power of interest groups in general, but she slammed the door shut on TUC. As labor unions lost public support, they also lost political sway, and the Labour Party loosened their ties to unions and began to broaden its voter base. Since Thatcher left in 1990, interest groups have regained power, but Blair's "third way" partners not only with unions, but with businesses as well.

## **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

Not surprisingly, British newspapers reflect social class divisions. They are sharply divided between quality news and comment that appeals to the middle and upper class, and mass circulation tabloids that carry sensational news. Radio and television came to life during the collective consensus era, so originally they were monopolized by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The BBC sought to educate citizens, and it was usually respectful of government officials. Commercial television was introduced in the 1950s, and now there are five stations that compete, as well as cable. A variety of radio stations also exist. Despite the competition from private companies, the government strictly regulates the BBC and the commercial stations. For example, no advertisements may be sold to politicians, parties, or political causes.

The BBC had a significant clash with the Blair government in 2003 over support for the war in Iraq. BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan wrote that a government statement that Iraqi forces could deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes was based on false intelligence that officials knew was unreliable. The conflict grew into a crisis when weapons inspector Michael Kelly (the alleged source of the "false intelligence") committed suicide. Tony Blair appointed appeals judge Lord Hutton to investigate the death, and the judge ended the crisis when he exonerated the Blair government in early 2004 and criticized BBC for its reporting. The report prompted the chairman of BBC board of governors to resign, an action that signaled an almost unprecedented embarrassment for the network.

## **THE INSTITUTIONS OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT**

Just as most other countries of the world today, the British government has three branches of government and a bureaucracy. Furthermore, the legislature is divided into two houses, a model that the British invented, and now widely copied. However, their system is parliamentary, and the interactions among the branches are very different from those in a presidential system, such

as the United States. In a parliamentary system, the executive branch is fused with the legislative branch because the prime minister and his cabinet are actually the leaders of parliament. As a result, separation of powers - a major principle of American government - does not exist. Also, the judicial branch lacks the power of judicial review, so they have no role in interpreting the "Constitution of the Crown."

**THE CABINET AND THE PRIME MINISTER**

The cabinet consists of the prime minister and ministers, each of which head a major bureaucracy of the government. Unlike the U.S. cabinet, the British cabinet members are party leaders from Parliament chosen by the prime minister. The collective cabinet is the center of policy-making in the British political system, and the prime minister has the responsibility of shaping their decisions into policy. The cabinet does not vote, but all members publicly support the prime minister's decisions. In other words, as the leaders of the majority party elected by the people, they take "collective responsibility" for making policy for the country. The unity of the cabinet is extremely important for the stability of the government.

The prime minister is the "first among equals", but he/she stands at the apex of the unitary government. Despite many recent changes, political authority in Britain is still centralized in the London-based government. The prime minister is not directly elected by the people, but is a Member of Parliament and the leader of the majority party. Currently, the Labour Party is in power, and has been since 1997.

The prime minister

- speaks legitimately for all Members of Parliament
- chooses cabinet ministers and important subordinate posts
- makes decisions in the cabinet, with the agreement of the ministers
- campaigns for and represents the party in parliamentary elections

<b>COMPARATIVE EXECUTIVES*</b>	
Prime Minister of Britain	President of the United States
Serves only as long as he/she remains leader of the majority party	Elected every four years by an electoral college based on popular election
Elected as a member of parliament (MP)	Elected as President
Has an excellent chance of getting his/her programs past Parliament	Has an excellent chance of ending up in gridlock with Congress
Cabinet members are always MPs and leaders of the majority party	Cabinet members usually don't come from Congress (although they may)
Cabinet members not experts in policy areas; rely on bureaucracy to provide expertise	Some expertise in policy areas; one criteria for their appointment; head vast bureaucracies

\*Note: The Comparative AP Exam does not require knowledge of U.S. government, but this chart is intended to help students understand the British executive.

## **PARLIAMENT**

Although British government consists of three branches, little separation of powers exists between the cabinet and parliament.

### **The House of Commons**

Even though Britain has multiple political parties, the House of Commons is based on the assumption that one party will get the majority number of seats, and another will serve as the "opposition." So, one way to look at it is that Britain has a multi-party system at the polls, but a two-party system in the House of Commons. Whichever party wins a plurality at the polls becomes the majority party, and the second party becomes the "loyal opposition."

#### Set-up of the House of Commons

The House of Commons is set up with long benches facing one another with a table in between that is by tradition two-sword-lengths wide. The prime minister &ndash; who is elected as an MP like all the rest &ndash; sits on the front bench of the majority side in the middle. He or she becomes prime minister because all the members of the majority party have made that selection. The majority party may vote to change their leader, and the prime minister will change as a result. Right across from the prime minister sits the leader of the "opposition" party, who sit on benches facing the majority party. Between them is the table. Cabinet members sit on the front rows on the majority side, and the "shadow cabinet" faces them on the opposition side. On the back benches sit less influential MPs - the "backbenchers" - and MPs from other political parties sit on the opposition side, but at the end, far away from the table.

#### Debate

The "government", then, consists of the MPs on the first rows of the majority party side, and they are the most important policy-makers as long as they hold power. Debate in the House is usually quite spirited, especially once a week during Question Time. During the hour the prime minister and his cabinet must defend themselves against attack from the opposition, and sometimes from members of their own party. The speaker of the House presides over the debates. Unlike the speaker in the U.S. House of Representatives, the speaker is supposed to be objective and often is not a member of the majority party. The speaker's job is to allow all to speak, but not to let things get out of hand. (S)he often has to gavel MPs down that get too rowdy.

One reason that debate can be so intense is that the floor of Parliament is the place where MPs can gain attention from others, possibly casting themselves as future leaders. Also, the opposition is seen as the "check" on the majority party, since checks and balances between branches do not exist.

#### Party Discipline

Because the majority party in essence is the government, party discipline is very important. If party members do not support their leadership, the government may fall into crisis because it

lacks legitimacy. Above all, the majority party wants to avoid losing a "vote of confidence," a vote on a key issue. If the issue is not supported, the cabinet by tradition must resign immediately, and elections for new MPs must be held as soon as possible. This drastic measure is usually avoided by settling policy differences within the majority party membership. If a party loses a vote of confidence, all MPs lose their jobs, so there is plenty of motivation to vote the party line. A recent vote of confidence occurred in early 2005, when the Labour government's Higher Education Bill squeaked by with an approval vote of 316 to 311. The bill proposed raising university fees, a measure criticized by not only the opposition, but also by some outspoken Labour MPs. The vote narrowly allowed Blair's government to continue to control Commons. The policy-making power of the House is very limited since many government decisions are ratified by the Cabinet and never go to Parliament.

Parliament has some substantial powers because its members

- debate and refine potential legislation
- are the only ones who may become party leaders and ultimately may head the government.
- scrutinize the administration of laws
- keep communication lines open between voters and ministers

### **House of Lords**

The House of Lords is the only hereditary parliamentary house in existence today. Although historically it was the original parliament, today it has minimal influence. The House of Commons established supremacy during the 17th century, and Lords gradually declined in authority. Since the turn of the 20th century, the only powers that Lords has had was to delay legislation, and to debate technicalities of proposed bills. Lords may add amendments to legislation, but the House of Commons may delete their changes by a simple majority vote. The chamber also includes five law lords who serve as Britain's highest court of appeals, but they cannot rule acts of Parliament unconstitutional. Until 1999 about one-half of the membership of Lords were hereditary peers, or hold seats that have been passed down through family ties over the centuries. The remainder were life peers, people appointed to nonhereditary positions as a result of distinguished service to Britain.

In 1999 the Labour government took seats away from most of the hereditary peers, so that today only 92 hereditary seats remain among 567 life peers. In late 2001, the government announced plans for a new upper house with about 550 mostly appointed members, but with no hereditary posts. Despite these changes and proposals, the fact remains that the House of Lords has very little policy-making power in the British government.

### **THE BUREAUCRACY**

Britain has hundreds of thousands of civil servants who administer laws and deliver public services. The largest number of civil servants do clerical work and other routine work of a large bureaucracy. However, a few hundred higher civil servants directly advise ministers and oversee

work of the departments. They coordinate the policies that cabinet members set with their actual implementation by the bureaucracy.

The British bureaucracy is a stable and powerful force in the political system. Top level bureaucrats almost always make a career of government service, and most are experts in their area. Because the ministers are party leaders chosen by the prime minister, they understand a great deal about British politics, but they generally are not experts in particular policy areas. In contrast, the top bureaucrats usually stay with their particular departments, and the ministers rely on their expertise. As a result, the top civil servants often have a great deal of input into policy-making. The minister has a powerful position on the cabinet, but he/she relies heavily on the advice of the bureaucrats. Bureaucrats almost never run for public office and are usually not active in party politics. Therefore, as cabinets come and go, the bureaucrats stay and fulfill an important role in government.

## **THE JUDICIARY**

English ideas about justice have shaped those of many other modern democracies. For example, the concept of trial by jury goes back to the time of Henry II in the 13th century. Britain has had a judicial branch for centuries, but ironically, the modern judiciary has much more limited powers than those in the United States, France, and Germany. In Britain, the principle of parliamentary sovereignty (parliament's decisions are final) has limited the development of judicial review (the courts' ability to determine actions, laws and other court decisions unconstitutional). British courts can only determine whether government decisions violate the common law or previous acts of Parliament. Even then, the courts tend to rule narrowly because they defer to the authority of Parliament. By tradition, the courts may not impose their rulings on Parliament, the prime minister, or the cabinet.

British courts do make distinctions between original and appellate jurisdiction. District Courts hear cases that may be appealed to the High Courts, which may in turn be appealed to the highest court in the land - the law lords. They are actually members of the House of Lords who are designated as a "Supreme Court" to settle disputes from lower courts. Of course, the law lords do not have the power of judicial review, so their authority is limited. The role of the law lords will almost certainly be changing soon, as a result of the Constitutional Reform Act of 2005 that provides for a Supreme Court of the United Kingdom to take over the existing role of the law lords.

By and large, judges have the reputation of being independent, impartial, and neutral. Few have been MPs, and almost none are active in party politics. Judges are appointed on "good behavior," but they are expected to retire when they reach the age of 75. Most judges are educated at public schools and at Oxford and Cambridge, and their positions are prestigious.

Despite the limited policy-making power of the judiciary, Britain's membership in the European Union has given judges a new responsibility that promises to become even more important in the future. Since Britain is now bound by EU treaties and laws, it is the judges' responsibility to interpret them and determine whether or not EU laws conflict with parliamentary statutes. Since the British tend to be skeptical about their EU membership, the way that possible conflicts



between supranational and national laws are settled by British judges could impact the policy-making process considerably.

## PUBLIC POLICY

The election of 2005 secured an historic third term for Tony Blair and the Labour Party. However, Blair's support of the war in Iraq was very controversial among British voters, and probably cost Labour a good many votes. Labour MPs slipped from 403 to 356, a loss of 47 members. The biggest beneficiary was the Liberal Democratic Party that picked up 11 MPs for a total of 62. Conservatives picked up 33, but their total numbers rose to 198, still far behind Labour's lead. For now, Tony Blair still has a solid majority, and his government gained enough votes to continue the course they have followed since 1997. Many issues confront the British political system today, but four of the most important are:

- The evolving relationship between government and the economy
- British relationships with the European Union
- Blair's balancing act between the U.S. and the EU
- Devolution

**BRITISH RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION** British insularity has always meant that they tend to keep their allies at arm's length. The British government did not enter the Common Market (a precursor to the European Union) when it was established in 1957. When Britain finally decided to enter in the early 1960s, her membership was vetoed twice by French President Charles DeGaulle. Finally, in 1978, Britain joined the Common Market, but the Thatcher government was opposed to rapid integration of European markets. She was adamantly opposed to the adoption of the euro in place of the pound. Under Prime Minister John Major, Britain signed the Maastricht Treaty that created the European Union, and under Labour's Tony Blair, the government is still more favorable. However, the Conservative Party is openly split over EU matters, and the majority of the British public still wants to hold on to the British pound.

### **BLAIR'S BALANCING ACT BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE EU**

When Tony Blair became prime minister of the United Kingdom in 1997, he took on a very ambitious agenda. Domestically, he wanted to sustain economic prosperity and increase social equality, as well as reinforce traditional British national identity and political institutions. Internationally, he sought to develop a new relationship with Europe in which the United Kingdom would play a central and self-confident role, and yet maintain a special relationship with the United States that had been in place since World War II.

Blair's efforts seemed to succeed until the Iraq crisis drove Washington in the opposite direction from Paris and Berlin. France and Germany were outspoken in their criticism of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and of Britain's support for the war under Blair's watch. The crisis challenged the cornerstone of Tony Blair's vision that the United Kingdom could act as a bridge across the Atlantic. It damaged Britain's relationship with France and raised questions about the wisdom of its special relationship with the United States. It caused dissent within the Labour leadership, and seriously undermined Blair's popular support, a situation that resulted in the party losing many seats in the House of Commons in the election of 2005.

The British government is still a unitary one, with the most authority emanating from London. However, continuing desire by Scots and the Welsh for their independence and the problems with Northern Ireland have led to the development and implementation of the policy of devolution. Even before Margaret Thatcher delayed the process when she took office in 1979, the Labour party supported devolution, or the turning over of some political powers to regional governments. However, a 1977 referendum to create Scottish and Welsh assemblies failed. In 1999, though, referendums in both regions passed, and each now has its own regional assembly, which has powers in taxation, education, and economic planning. In the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, a parliament was set up for Northern Ireland as well, although London shut down its activities after violence broke out in 2003. Just how much these new parliaments will affect London's authority is yet to be seen.

Other reforms under consideration include a written Bill of Rights for individual citizens, a written constitution, freedom of information, and possible a new electoral system. Whatever reforms are made, Britain still retains a strong attachment to her many traditions, and the government's long lists of accomplishments are not all in the past. As the nation redefines both external and internal political relationships, Britain still serves as a role model for the development of democratic traditions in the modern world.

Visit the official home page for the [Scottish Parliament](#). The Northern Ireland Parliament was suspended in October 2002, but their [website](#) is still up. You can take a tour of their buildings!

## **RUSSIA: AUTHORITARIAN OLIGARCHY OR BUDDING DEMOCRACY?**

Between 1945 and 1991 global politics was defined by intense competition between two superpowers: the Soviet Union and the United States. The competition encompassed almost all areas of the world and affected a broad range of economic, political, social, and cultural patterns. As a result, when the Soviet Union surprisingly and suddenly collapsed in 1991, the reverberations were heard everywhere. In the wake of its demise, its component republics broke apart, leaving the Russian Federation as the largest piece, with a population cut in half, but with a land space that allowed it to remain the largest country in the world.

The first president of the Russian Federation was Boris Yeltsin, a former member of the old Soviet Politburo who declared the end of the old Soviet-style regime. The "**shock therapy**" reforms that he advocated pointed the country in the direction of democracy and a free-market economy. Yet Yeltsin was an uneven leader, often ill or under the influence of alcohol, who reverted to authoritarian rule whenever he was lucid. A small group of family members and advisers took control from the weakened president, and they ran the country as an **oligarchy**, granting themselves favors and inviting economic and political corruption. However, despite this development, a new constitution was put into place in 1993, and regular, competitive elections have taken place since then. A new President, Vladimir Putin, was elected in 2000, and many observers believe that the influence of the oligarchy has declined since then.

Modern Russia, then, is a very unpredictable country. Its historical roots deeply influence every area of life, but Russia has almost no experience with democracy and a free market. Is democracy finally taking hold in Russia, or is the new regime just a smoke and mirrors imitation of the old historic authoritarianism that has characterized Russia for centuries? No one knows at this point, but Russian history and political culture leave room for both. Slavic roots provide the tendency toward autocratic rule, but the desire to modernize and compete for world power has been apparent since the late 17th century.

### **SOURCES OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY AND POLITICAL POWER:**

For most of the 20th century, public authority and political power emanated from one place: the **Politburo** of the Communist Party. The Politburo was a small group of men who climbed the ranks of the party through **nomenklatura**, an ordered path from local party soviets to the "commanding heights" of leadership. When the Soviet Union dissolved, its authority and power vanished with it, leaving in place a new government structure with questionable legitimacy. Still, the political culture and historical traditions of Russia are firmly entrenched and have shaped the genesis of the new regime, and undoubtedly will determine the nature of its future.

## LEGITIMACY OF THE GOVERNMENT

In these early years of the 21st century, the legitimacy of the Russian government is at very low ebb, partly because the regime change is so recent, and partly because the change appears to be a drastic departure from the past. However, there is some evidence that the system has stabilized since Vladimir Putin was elected president in 2000, although it is too soon to know.

Traditionally, political legitimacy has been based on strong, autocratic rule, first by centuries of tsars, and then by the firm dictatorship of party leaders during the 20th century. Under communist rule, **Marxism-Leninism** provided the legitimacy base for the party, with its ideology of **democratic centralism**, or rule by a few for the benefit of the many. Although it theoretically only supplemented Marxism-Leninism, **Stalinism** in reality changed the regime to totalitarianism, a more complete, invasive form of strong-man rule than the tsars ever were able to implement. After Stalin, two reformers &ndash; Nikita Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev &ndash; tried to loosen the party's strangle-hold on power, only to facilitate the downfall of the regime.

In its attempt to reconstruct the country's power base, the **Constitution of 1993** provided for a strong president, although the power of the position is checked by popular election and by the lower house of the legislature, the Duma. The institution of the presidency only dates back to the late 1980s, but the Duma actually existed under the tsars of the late 19th century. In its short history, the Constitution's legitimacy has been seriously tested by attempted coups and intense conflict between the president and the Duma. However, the 2000 presidential transition from Yeltsin to Putin went smoothly, an accomplishment that may indicate that the Constitution may be more resilient than it seemed to be a few years ago.

To see a copy of the Russian Constitution, click [here](#).

**HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON POLITICAL TRADITIONS:** Several legacies from Russian history shape the modern political system:

**Absolute, centralized rule** - From the beginning, Russian **tsars** held absolute power that they defended with brutality and force. One reason for their tyranny was based on geography: the Russian plain was overrun and conquered by a series of invaders, including the Huns, Vikings, and Mongols. The chaos caused by these takeover convinced Russian leaders of the importance of firm, unchallenged leadership in keeping their subjects in control. The long line of Romanov tsars emerged from a "Time of Troubles" when Russian nobility (boyars) fought for power and almost brought the kingdom to an end. Centralized power also characterized the Communist regime of the 20th century.

**Extensive cultural heterogeneity** - Until the 17th century Russia was a relatively small inland culture, but even then, the numerous invasions from earlier times meant that the area was home to people of wide cultural diversity. This cultural heterogeneity was intensified as Russia rapidly expanded her borders, until by the end of the 19th century, the empire stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. Since then, the borders of Russia have been in an almost constant state of change, so that ethnicities have been split, thrown together with others, and then split apart again. The name "Russian Federation" reflects the diversity, with countless "**republics**" and "**autonomous regions**" based on ethnicity, but with borders impossible to draw because of the blend and locations of people. This heterogeneity has always been a special challenge to Russian rulers.

**Slavophile v. westernizer** - American diplomat George Kennan identified this conflicting set of political traditions as a major source of problems for Russia during the mid-20th century. The **slavophile** ("lover of slavs") tradition has led to a pride in Slavic customs, language, religion, and history that causes Russia to resist outside influence. This tendency to value isolation was challenged first by Tsar Peter the Great in the late 17th century. Peter greatly admired Western European nations, and he longed to lift Russia from the "backwardness" of its Slavic roots. He used the western model to "modernize" Russia with a stronger army, a navy, an infrastructure of roads and communication, a reorganized bureaucracy, and a "**Window on the West.**" The window was St. Petersburg, a city built by Peter on newly conquered lands on the Baltic Sea. His efforts to build Russia's power were followed by those of Catherine the Great of the late 18th century, so that by the time of her death, Russia was seen as a major empire. However, their efforts set in place a conflict, since the affection for Slavic ways did not disappear with the changes.

**Revolutions of the 20th century** - The long, autocratic rule of the tsars suddenly and decisively came to an end in 1917 when **Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks** seized power. Tsar Nicholas II and his family were executed, and Lenin's new country was named the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Communist leaders replaced the tsars, and they ruled according to socialist principles, although the tendency toward absolute, centralized rule did not change. The old social classes, however, were swept away, and the new regime tried to blend elements of westernization (industrialization, economic development, and technological innovation) with those of the slavophile (nationalism, resistance to Western culture and customs). A second revolution occurred in 1991, when the USSR dissolved, and its fifteen republics became independent nations. The Russian Federation, born in that year, is currently struggling to replace the old regime with a new one.

Learn more about [Peter the Great and Catherine the Great...](#)

## **POLITICAL CULTURE:**

Russia's political culture has been shaped by its geographic setting, cultural orientation, and conflicting attitudes toward the state.

**Geographical Setting** - Russia is the largest country in the world and encompasses many different ethnicities and climates. Its republics and regions border the Black Sea in the Southwest, the Baltic Sea in the Northwest, the Pacific to the East, the Arctic Ocean to the North, and China to the south. Its borders touch many other nations with vastly different political cultures and customs. Russia is also one of the coldest countries on earth, partly because of northern latitude, but also because so many of its cities are inland. Ironically for a country of its size, warm water ports are few, and its history has been shaped by the desire to conquer countries that block Russian access to the sea. Russia has many natural resources, including oil, gas, and timber, but much of it is locked in Siberia, frozen and very difficult to extract.

**Eastern Orthodoxy** - Early in its history, Russians cast their lot with the flourishing city of Constantinople, establishing trade routes in that direction, and adopting the Eastern Orthodox religion. As Constantinople's influence waned, the influence of Western Europe increased, but Russia's orientation meant that it did not share the values generated by the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment. Instead of individualism, Russians came to value a strong state that could protect them from their geographic vulnerabilities. In contrast to Russian statism, the West developed a taste for a civil society, or spheres of privacy free from control by the state. Eastern Orthodoxy also was inextricably linked to the state, so the principle of separation of church and state never developed. Even when the Communist state abolished practicing religion, the acceptance of government control remained.

**Equality of result, not equality of opportunity** - The Communist regime instilled in the Russian people an appreciation for equality, a value already strong in a country of peasants with similar living standards. Russian egalitarianism has survived the fall of the Soviet Union, and most Russians resent differences of wealth or income. This "equality of result" is very different from western "equality of opportunity" that sees "getting ahead" as a sign of initiative, hard work, and talent. As a result, the Russian political culture is not particularly conducive to the development of capitalism

**Hostility toward the Government** - Despite their dependence on government initiative, Russian citizens can be surprisingly hostile toward their leadership. Mikhail Gorbachev found this out the hard way when he initiated glasnost &ndash; a new emphasis on freedom of speech and press &ndash; in the 1980s. He received torrents of complaints from citizens that almost certainly contributed to the breakup of the Soviet Union. Years of repression have sparked resentment, and modern Russians often badmouth their leaders and express pessimism regarding their political and economic future.

**The importance of nationality** - Even though cultural heterogeneity has almost always been characteristic of the Russian political culture, people tend to categorize others based on their

nationality, and they often discriminate against groups based on long-held stereotypes. Russians generally admire the Baltic people for their "civility" and sophistication, but they sometimes express disdain for the Muslim-Turkic people of Central Asia. In return, governments in those areas have passed laws discouraging Russians from remaining within their borders. Anti-Semitism was strong in tsarist Russia, and today some nationalists blame Jews for Russia current problems.

[Russia Net](#) provides great maps that show political geography, including autonomous regions and ethnic groups.

### **POLITICAL CHANGE:**

Russia's history is characterized by 3 distinct periods:

#### **a long period of autocratic rule by tsars**

- Tsars ruled Russia from the 14th to the early 20th century. Control of Russia was passed down through the Romanov family from the 17th century on, but transitions were often accompanied by brutality and sometimes assassination.



**20th century rule by the Communist Party** - Communist rule began in 1917 when Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks seized control of the government after the last tsar, Nicholas II, was deposed. The regime toppled in 1991 when a failed coup from within the government created chaos.

**an abrupt regime change to democracy and a free market in 1991** - President Boris Yeltsin put western-style reforms in place to create the Russian Federation.



The two transition periods between time periods were sparked by revolution and quick, dramatic change. The Slavic influence has brought some continuity to Russia's history, but in general change has rarely been evolutionary and gradual. Instead, long periods of authoritarian rule have been punctuated by protest and violence.

## **TSARIST RULE**

The first tsars were **Princes of Moscow**, who cooperated with their 13th century Mongol rulers, and were rewarded for their assistance with land and power. But when Mongol rule weakened, the princes declared themselves "tsars" in the tradition of the "Caesars" of ancient Rome. The tsars were autocratic from the beginning, and tightly controlled their lands in order to protect them from other invasions and attacks. The tsars also headed the **Orthodox Church**, so that they were seen as both political and religious leaders. Early Russia was isolated from Western Europe by its orientation to the Eastern Orthodox world, and geographical distances separated Russian cities from major civilizations to the south and east.

**WESTERN INFLUENCE** - In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, Tsar **Peter the Great** introduced western technology and culture in an attempt to increase Russia's power and influence. From his early childhood, he was intrigued by the West, and he became the first tsar to travel to Germany, Holland, and England. There he learned about shipbuilding and other types of technology. He brought engineers, carpenters, and architects to Russia, and set the country on a course toward world power. **Catherine the Great**, who originally came from Germany, ruled Russia during the late 18th century, and managed to gain warm water access to the Black Sea, an accomplishment that had eluded Peter. Both looked to the West to help develop their country, but neither abandoned absolute rule. Catherine read widely, and was very interested in Enlightenment thought, but she checked any impulses she had to apply them to her rule. Instead, she became an **enlightened despot**, or one who rules absolutely, but with the good of the people in mind. Tsars after Peter and Catherine alternated between emphasizing Slavic roots and tolerating western style reform, although none of them successfully responded to the revolutionary movement growing within their country during the 19th century.

**NINETEENTH CENTURY TSARS** - Russia was brought into direct contact with the West when Napoleon invaded in 1812. Alexander I successfully resisted the attack, but at great cost to the empire. Western thought also influenced Russian intellectuals who saw no room for western political institutions to grow under the tsars' absolutism. Their frustration erupted in the **Decembrist Revolt of 1825**, which was crushed ruthlessly by Nicholas I. By mid-century the Russian defeat in the Crimean War convinced many of the tsar's critics that Russian ways were indeed backward and in need of major reform. Nineteenth century tsars reacted to their demands by sending the **secret police** to investigate and by exiling or executing the dissenters.

Of all the 19th century tsars, the only one who seriously sponsored reform was Alexander II. However, even though he freed Russia's serfs and set up regional zemstvas (assemblies), the increasingly angry intelligentsia did not think his actions went far enough. Alexander II was assassinated in 1881 by his critics, and his son Alexander III reacted by undoing the reforms and intensifying the efforts of the secret police.



Link to a [Portrait Gallery](#) of all the Russian tsars!

## LENIN AND STALIN

The most immediate cause of the Revolution of 1917 was Russia's ineffectiveness in fighting the Russo-Japanese War and World War I. Tsar Nicholas II was indeed in the wrong place at the wrong time, but he also was a weak ruler who had no control over the armies. The first signs of the revolution were in 1905, when riots and street fighting broke out in protest to Russian losses in the war with Japan. The tsar managed to put that revolution down, but the state finally collapsed in 1917 in the midst of World War I. Russian soldiers were fighting without guns or shoes, and mass defections from the war front helped send the state into chaos.

## LENIN AND THE BOLSHEVIKS

By the 1890s some of the revolutionists in Russia were **Marxists** who were in exile, along with other dissidents. However, according to Marxism, socialist revolutions would take first place not in Russia, but in capitalist countries like Germany, France, and England. At the turn of the century, Russia was still primarily an agricultural society with no industrial development. The Mensheviks, who believed that Russia was not yet ready for revolution, took this approach. A Marxist named Vladimir Lenin disagreed. In his 1905 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* he argued for democratic centralism, or a "**vanguard**" leadership group that would lead the revolution in the name of the people. Lenin believed that the situation in Russia was so bad that the revolution could occur even though it was a non-industrialized society. Lenin's followers came to be called the Bolsheviks, and they took control of the government in late 1917. Russia was then renamed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Bolsheviks negotiated the Brest-Litovsk Treaty to end to the war with Germany. Many Russians did not accept the treaty since the Bolsheviks ceded almost a third of Russia's arable land to Germany.

By 1918 a civil war had broken out between the **White Army**, led by Russian military leaders and funded by the Allied Powers, and the Red Army led by Lenin. The Reds won, and in 1920 Lenin instituted his **New Economic Policy**, which allowed a great deal of private ownership to exist under a centralized leadership. The plan brought relative prosperity to farmers, but it did not promote industrialization. Would Lenin have moved on to a more socialist approach? No one knows, and Lenin died in 1924 before his plans unfolded and before he could name a successor. A power struggle followed, and the "Man of Steel" that won control led the country to the heights of totalitarianism.

## STALINISM

Stalin vastly changed Lenin's democratic centralism (also known as Marxism-Leninism). Stalin placed the Communist Party at the center of control, and allowed no other political parties to compete with it. Party members were carefully selected, with only about 7% of the population actually joining it. Communists ran local, regional, and national governments, and leaders were identified through nomenklatura, or the process of party members selecting promising recruits

from the lower levels. Most top government officials also belonged to the **Central Committee**, a group of 300 party leaders that met twice a year. Above the Central Committee was the **Politburo**, the heart and soul of the Communist Party. This group of about twelve men ran the country, and their decisions were carried out by government agencies and departments. The head of the Politburo was the general secretary, who assumed the full power as dictator of the country. Joseph Stalin was the general secretary of the Communist Party from 1927 until his death in 1953.

## Collectivization and Industrialization

After Lenin's death in 1924, the struggle for power focused on **Leon Trotsky**, who believed that the Communist Party's first responsibility was to spread socialist revolutions around the world. Stalin believed that the Party should promote internal development instead. When Stalin won control, he announced that Russia must industrialize quickly and thoroughly, accomplishing in a few years what Western European nations and the United States had taken many years to do. His plan had two parts: collectivization and industrialization.



Stalin replaced the NEP with "**collective farms**" that were state run and supposedly more efficient. Private land ownership was done away with, and the farms were intended to feed workers in the cities who contributed to the industrialization of the nation. Some peasants resisted, particularly those that owned larger farms. These kulaks were forced to move to cities or to labor camps, and untold numbers died at the hands of government officials.

With the agricultural surplus from the farms, Stalin established his first **Five Year Plan**, which set ambitious goals for production of heavy industry, such as oil, steel, and electricity. Other plans followed, and all were carried out for individual factories by **Gosplan**, the Central State Planning Commission. Gosplan became the nerve center for the economy, and determined production and distribution of virtually all goods in the Soviet Union.



**Stalinism**, then, is this two-pronged program of collectivization and industrialization, carried out by central planning, and executed with force and brutality.

## Stalin's Foreign Policy

During the 1930s Stalin's primary focus was internal development, so his foreign policy was intended to support that goal. He advocated "socialism in one country" to emphasize his split with traditional Marxism, and he tried to ignore the fascist threat from nearby Germany and Italy. Stalin signed a nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, only to be attacked by Germany the following year. Russia then joined sides with the Allies for the duration of World War II, but tensions between east and west were often apparent at conferences, and as soon as the war ended, the situation escalated into the Cold War. These significant shifts in foreign policy all accommodated his main goal: the industrial development of the USSR.

## The Purges

Joseph Stalin is perhaps best known for his purges: the execution of millions of citizens, including up to one million party members killed. He became obsessed with disloyalty in the party ranks, and he ordered the execution of his own generals and other members of the Politburo and Central Committee. Stalin held total power, and by the time of his death in 1953, many speculated that he had gone mad. His successor, Nikita Khrushchev, set about to reform Stalinism by loosening its totalitarian nature and publicly denouncing the purges.

Read Lenin's own words in [\*What is to be Done?\*](#), read notes from an [English journalist's conversation](#) with Lenin in 1919, and see some old [photographs](#) of Lenin.

There's even an internet archive with lots of information about [Leon Trotsky](#).

Read about the [Secret Police](#), and see a [memorandum](#) in Stalin's own handwriting, ordering a deportation

## REFORM UNDER KHRUSHCHEV AND GORBACHEV

After Stalin died in 1953, a power struggle among top Communist Party leaders resulted in **Nikita Khrushchev** being chosen as Party Secretary and Premier of the USSR. In 1956 he gave his famous secret speech, in which he revealed the existence of a letter written by Lenin before he died. The letter was critical of Stalin, and Khrushchev used it to denounce Stalin's rules and practices, particularly the purges that he sponsored. This denouncement led to **deStalinization**, a process that led to reforms, such as loosening government censorship of the press, decentralization of economic decision making, and restructuring of the collective farms. In foreign policy, Khrushchev advocated "**peaceful coexistence**," or relaxation of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. He was criticized from the beginning for the suggested reforms, and his diplomatic and military failure in the Cuban Missile Crisis ensured his loss of control. Furthermore, most of his reforms did not appear to be working by the early 1960s. He was replaced by the much more conservative **Leonid Brezhnev**, who ended the reforms and tried to cope with the increasing economic problems that were just under the surface of Soviet power.

When Brezhnev died in 1982, he was replaced by a reformer from a younger generation, **Mikhail Gorbachev**. Gorbachev was unlike any previous Soviet leader in that he not only looked and acted more "western," but he also was more open to western-style reforms than any other, including Khrushchev. Gorbachev inherited far more problems than any outsider realized at the time, and many of his reforms were motivated by sheer necessity to save the country from economic disaster. His program was three-pronged:

- **Glasnost** - This term translates from the Russian as "openness," and it allowed more open discussion of political, social and economic issues as well as open criticism of the government. Although this reform was applauded by western nations, it caused many problems for Gorbachev. After so many years of repression, people vented hostility toward the government that encouraged open revolt, particularly among some of the republics that wanted independence from Soviet control.
- **Democratization** - Gorbachev believed that he could keep the old Soviet structure, including Communist Party control, but at the same time insert a little democracy into the system. Two such moves included the creation of 1) a new Congress of People's Deputies with directly elected representatives and 2) a new position of "President" that was selected by the Congress. The reforms did bring a bit of democracy. However, many of the new deputies were critical of Gorbachev, increasing the level of discord within the government.
- **Perestroika** - This economic reform was Gorbachev's most radical, and also his least successful. Again, he tried to keep the old Soviet structure, and modernize from within. Most significantly, it transferred many economic powers held by the central government to private hands and the market economy. Specific reforms included authorization of some privately owned companies, penalties for underperforming state factories, leasing of farm land outside the collective farms, price reforms, and encouragement of joint ventures with foreign companies.

None of Gorbachev's reforms were ever fully carried out because the Revolution of 1991 swept him out of office.

## **REVOLUTION OF 1991**

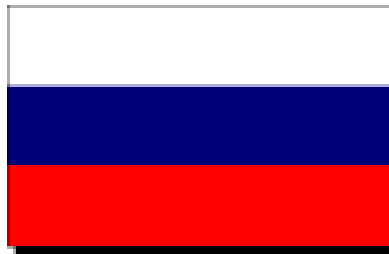
In August 1991 "conservatives" (those that wanted to abandon Gorbachev's reforms) from within the Politburo led a coup d'etat that tried to remove Gorbachev from office. The leaders included the Vice-President, the head of the KGB(Russian secret police), and top military advisers. The coup failed when popular protests broke out, and soldiers from the military defected rather than support their leaders. The protesters were led by Boris Yeltsin, the elected President of the Russian Republic and former Politburo member. Yeltsin had been removed from the Politburo a few years earlier because his radical views offended the conservatives. Yeltsin advocated more

extreme reform measures than Gorbachev did, and he won his position as Russian Republic President as a result of new voting procedures put in place by Gorbachev.

Gorbachev was restored to power, but the USSR only had a few months to live. By December 1991 eleven republics had declared their independence, and eventually Gorbachev was forced to announce the end of the union, which put him out of a job. The fifteen republics went their separate ways, but Boris Yeltsin emerged as the President of the largest and most powerful republic, now renamed the Russian Federation.

Read a minute by minute account of the [August 1991 coup](#).

## RUSSIAN FEDERATION 1991 - PRESENT



Once the Revolution of 1991 was over, Boris Yeltsin proceeded with his plans to create a western-style democracy. The old Soviet structure was destroyed, but the same problems that haunted Gorbachev were still there. **The Constitution of 1993** created a three-branch government, with a President, a Prime Minister, a lower legislative house called the **Duma**, and a **Constitutional Council**. Conflict erupted between Yeltsin and the Duma, and the Russian economy did not immediately respond to the "shock therapy" ( an immediate market economy) that the government prescribed. Yeltsin also proved to be a much poorer president than he was as a revolutionary leader. His frequent illnesses and alcoholism almost certainly explain the erratic behavior that led him to hire and fire prime ministers in quick succession. Yeltsin resigned in the months before the election of 2000, and his prime minister, **Vladimir Putin** became acting president. An encouraging sign occurred when Putin was elected President, and a peaceful transition of power followed. Although Putin supported Yeltsin's reforms, he was widely seen as a more conservative leader who many hoped would bring stability to the newly formed government.

Read an account of [Boris Yeltsin's life](#) with many links to other Russian leaders, or read a shorter version from [CNN](#).

ABC news provides a biography of [Vladimir Putin](#).

## SOCIETY AND POLITICS

**NATIONALITY** - The most important single cleavage in the Russian Federation is nationality. Although almost 82% are Russians, the country included sizeable numbers of Tatars, Ukrainians, Chuvashes, Bashkis, Byelorussians, and Modavians. These cleavages determine the organization of the country into a "federation," with "autonomous regions," republics, and provinces whose borders are based on ethnicity. Like the breakaway republics of 1991, many would like to have their independence, although most have trade benefits from the Russian government that induce them to stay within the Federation. A notable exception is Chechnya, a primarily Muslim region that has fought for several years for their freedom. The Russian government has had considerable difficulty keeping Chechnya a part of Russia, and the independence movement there is still very strong. Almost certainly, other regions are watching, and the government knows that if Chechnya is successful, other independence movements may break out in the country.



**RELIGION** - Tsarist Russia was overwhelmingly Russian Orthodox, with the tsar serving as spiritual head of the church. In reaction, the Soviet Union prohibited religious practices of all kinds, so that most citizens lost their religious affiliations during the twentieth century. Boris Yeltsin encouraged the Russian Orthodox Church to reestablish itself, partly as a signal of his break with communism, but also as a reflection of old Russian nationalism. Today most citizens are still nonreligious, with only about 16% claiming affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church. Other religious are represented by tiny percentages — Roman Catholic, Jews, Muslim and Protestant. Since the current regime is so new and political parties so uncertain, no clear pattern has emerged that indicate political attitudes of religious v. nonreligious citizens.

**SOCIAL CLASS** - The Soviet attempts to destroy social class differences in Russia were at least partially successful. The old noble/peasant distinction of Tsarist Russia was abolished, but was replaced by another cleavage: members of the Communist Party and nonmembers. Only about 7% of the citizenry were party members, but all political leaders were recruited from this group. Economic favors were granted to party members as well, particularly those of the Central Committee and the Politburo. However, egalitarian views were promoted, and the nomenklatura process of recruiting leaders from lower levels of the party was generally blind to economic and social background. Today Russian citizens appear to be more egalitarian in their political and social views than people of the established democracies.

Many observers of modern Russia note that a new socio-economic class may be developing within the context of the budding market economy: entrepreneurs that have recently amassed

fortunes from new business opportunities. However, the fortunes of many of these newly rich Russians were wiped away by the 1997 business bust, so it is difficult to know how permanent this class may be. Boris Yeltsin's government contributed to this class by distributing huge favors to them, and many believe that a small but powerful group of entrepreneurs sponsored the presidential campaign of Vladimir Putin in 2000.



**RURAL VS. URBAN** - Industrialization since the era of Joseph Stalin has led to an increasingly urban population, with about 77% of all Russians now living in cities, primarily in the western part of the country. The economic divide between rural and urban people is wide, although recent economic woes have beset almost all Russians no matter where they live. City dwellers are more likely to be well-educated and in touch with western culture, but the political consequences of these differences are unclear in the unsettled current political climate.

Read about the Chechnyan crisis from both sides - [Human Rights Watch](#), and a [former Speaker of the Duma](#).

## **CITIZEN AND STATE**

In the old days of the Soviet Union, citizens' beliefs and attitudes toward their government were molded by Communist Party doctrines. At the heart of this doctrine was **Marxism**, which predicted the demise of the capitalist west. This belief fed into Russian nationalism and supported the notion that the Russian government and way of life would eventually prevail. The ideals of the early revolutionary period envisioned a world transformed by egalitarianism and the elimination of poverty and oppression. As **Stalinism** set in, the ideals shifted to pragmatic internal development, and many of the old tendencies toward absolutism and repression returned. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought out much hostility toward the government that is reflected in the population today.



## BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

- **MISTRUST OF THE GOVERNMENT** -Political opinion polls are very recent innovations in Russian politics, so information about citizens' attitudes and beliefs toward their government is scarce. However, the limited evidence does reflect a great deal of alienation toward the political system. Most polls show that people support democratic ideals, including free elections and widespread individual civil liberties and rights. However, most do not trust government officials or institutions to convert these ideals to reality. Alienation is also indicated by a low level of participation in interest groups, including trade unions and other groups that people belonged in the days of the Soviet Union.
- **STATISM** - Despite high levels of mistrust in government, Russian citizens still expect the state to take an active role in their lives. For most of Russian history, citizens have functioned more as subjects than as participants, and the central government of the Soviet Union was strong enough to touch and control many aspects of citizens' lives. Today Russians expect a great deal from their government, even if they have been disappointed in the progress of reform in recent years.
- **ECONOMIC BELIEFS** -Boris Yeltsin's market reforms have created divisions in public opinion regarding market reform. Nearly all parties and electoral groups support the market transition, but those with more favorable opinions of the old Soviet regime are less enthusiastic. At the other end of the spectrum are those that support rapid market reform, including privatization and limited government regulation. The latter approach was favored by Yeltsin, and his "**shock therapy**" marketization was blamed by his critics for the steep economic decline that characterized the 1990s.
- **WESTERNIZATION** - Political opinion follows the old divide of **slavophile vs. westernizer**. Some political parties emphasize nationalism and the defense of Russian interests and Slavic culture. These parties also tend to favor a strong military and protection from foreign economic influence. On the other hand, reform parties strongly support the integration of Russia into the world economy and global trade.

Economic beliefs and attitudes toward the west also shape attitudes about whether or not the modern regime should integrate elements of the old Soviet government into its policy-making. Some citizens are nostalgic about the "good old days" when everyone had a guaranteed income, and they are most likely to support the Communist Party that still exists within the competitive election system. Some observers are seeing a generational split between those that remember better times under Soviet power, and those that have come of age during the early days of the Russian Federation.

Read what the Russian public thinks about Vladimir Putin in a [public opinion poll](#).

Read about what Russian think is news worthy in [Russia Today](#) or in [Pravda](#), the old official newspaper of the Soviet government that is still around today.



## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Russian citizens did actually vote during Soviet Rule in the 20th century. In fact, their voting rate was close to 100% because they faced serious consequences if they stayed home. However, until Gorbachev brought about reforms in the late 1980s, the elections were not competitive, and citizens voted for candidates that were hand-picked by the Communist leadership. Gorbachev created competitive elections in the Soviet Union, but because no alternate political parties existed yet, voter choice was limited to the designated party candidate vs. anyone from within party ranks that wanted to challenge the official candidate. In some cases, this choice made a real difference, because Boris Yeltsin himself was elected as an "alternate candidate" to be President of the then Russian Republic.

Since 1991 voter turnout in the Russian Federation is fairly high: higher than that in the United States, but somewhat lower than turnout rates in Britain and France. Political alienation is reflected in the 50.3% rate in the 1993 Duma elections, but those elections followed a failed attempt by the Duma to take over the country. Since then turnout in national elections has been above 60%, indicating that Russian citizens take their voting responsibilities in the new competitive party system seriously.

Look at the election results for the [Duma in 1995 and the President in 1996](#).

See [1999 Duma election results and 2000 Presidential results](#).

## POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

Russian history includes a variety of regime types, but the tradition is highly authoritarian. The reforms that began in the early 1990s are truly experimental, and only time will tell whether democracy and a free market economy will take root. Even if they do, the nature of the regime must take into account Russian political culture and traditions. Current political parties, elections, and institutions of government are all new, and their functions within the political system are very fluid and likely to change within the next few years. However, the Russian Federation has survived its first few rocky years, and many experts believe that at least some aspects of Russian government and politics are beginning to settle into a pattern.

Even though the Soviet Union was highly centralized, it still maintained a **federal government structure**. The Russian Federation has retained this model, and the current regime consists of **eighty-nine regions**, twenty-one of which are ethnically non-Russian by majority. Each region is bound by treaty to the Federation, but not all

- including Chechnya - have signed on. Most of these regions are called "**republics**," and because the central government was not strong under Yeltsin, many ruled themselves almost independently. However, Vladimir Putin has cracked down on them recently, ordering the army to shell even Chechnya into submission. Also, a new law allows the president to remove a governor from office that refuses to subject local law to the national constitution. As a result, the "federation" is still highly centralized.

## **PARTIES**

Most established democracies had many years to establish and develop party and electoral systems. However, Russians put theirs together almost overnight after the Revolution of 1991. Many small, factional political parties ran candidates in the first Duma elections in 1993, and by 1995, 43 parties were on the ballot. Many of the parties revolved around a particular leader or leaders, such as the "Bloc of General Andrey Nikolaev and Academician Svyatoslav Fyodorov," the "Yuri Boldyrev Movement," or "Yabloko," which is an acronym for its three founders. Others reflected a particular issue, such as the "Party of Pensioners," "Agrarian Party of Russia," or "Women of Russia." By 1999 the number of parties who ran Duma candidates had shrunk to 26, but many of the parties were new ones, including Vladimir Putin's Unity Party. Needless to say, with these fluctuations going on, citizens have had no time to develop party loyalties, leadership in Russia continues to be personalistic, and political parties remain weak and fluid.

Within this context, the most influential parties in the 1999 Duma elections and the 2000 presidential elections were:

**The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)** - The Communist Party of the old Soviet Union survives today as the strongest party in the Duma, even though they have not yet won a presidential election. After the election of 1995, they held 157 of the Duma's 450 members, and even though they lost seats in the 1999 election, the party is still an important force in Russian politics. The party's leader, **Gennady Zyuganov**, came in second in both presidential elections, but his percentage in the second round fell from 40.3% in 1996 to 29.21% in 2000. The CPRF is not exactly like the old Communist Party, but it is far less reformist than other parties are. Zyuganov opposed many reforms during the Gorbachev era, and he continues to represent to supporters the stability of the old regime. The party emphasizes centralized planning and nationalism, and implies an intention to regain territories lost when the Soviet Union broke apart.

**Unity** - This party was formed just before the 1999 Duma elections, and has become the second largest, but arguably the most influential party today. It was probably put together by oligarch Boris Berezovsky and other entrepreneurs to support then Prime Minister **Vladimir Putin**,

whose popularity rose sharply as people supported his decisive actions in conducting the war in Chechnya. Unity has only 73 representatives in the Duma, but as long as Putin is President, the party will have power. Ideologically, Unity is hard to define except that it is pro-Putin.

Russia has three parties that have been consistently reformist, although all of them are in jeopardy of disappearing off the political scene before the next election.

**Yabloko** - This party has survived all elections since 1993, and it has been consistently reformist. Its name is an acronym for its three founders, but "yabloko" also means "apple" in Russian. It has taken the strongest stand for pro-democracy, and it generally does best among intellectuals who have supported reform since the days of Gorbachev rule. The leader &ndash; Grigori Yavlinski &ndash; came in third in the Russian presidential election of 2000, but he received only 5.8% of the vote.

**Union of Right Forces** - This party is not "rightist" in orientation. The name only implies that they are "right" in the sense of understanding the truth. It emphasizes the development of a free market, and backs further privatization of industry. They have 29 representatives in the Duma.

**Fatherland-All Russia** - Like Unity, this party is a new coalition put together for the 1999 election. It has two leaders: Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and former Prime Minister and KGB head Yevgeni Primakov. The coalition did not run a presidential candidate in 2000, but they captured 68 Duma seats in 1999.

**Liberal Democrats** - This misnamed party is by far the most controversial. It is headed by **Vladimir Zhirinovskiy** who has made headlines around the world for his extreme nationalist positions. He regularly attacks reformist leaders, and particularly disliked Yeltsin. He has implied that Russia under his leadership would use nuclear weapons on Japan, and he makes frequent anti-Semitic remarks (despite his Jewish origins). He has also brought the wrath of Russian women by making blatantly sexist comments. His party was reformulated as "Zhirinovskiy's bloc" for the 2000 presidential election, when he received on 2.7% of the vote.

## **ELECTIONS:**

The Russian political system supports three types of national votes:

- **Referendum** - The Constitution of 1993 allowed the President to call for national referenda by popular vote on important issues. Even before the Constitution was written, Boris Yeltsin called for a referendum on his job performance. The people clearly supported his reforms, but his majorities were not overwhelming. The second referendum was held later in the year, and the people voted in favor of the new Constitution.
- **Duma elections** - Russian citizens have gone to the polls three times to elect Duma representatives (1993, 1995, and 1999). The Duma has 450 seats, half of which are elected by proportional representation, and the other half by single-member districts. Parties must get at least 5% of the total vote to get any seats according to proportional representation, but many of the single-member district seats are held by local power

brokers with no major party affiliation. Since 1993 only four parties have run candidates in all three elections, and together they held only about a third of all votes on the proportional side. Elections follow the two-round pattern of the French, with the top two candidates competing in a runoff two weeks after the first round.

- **Presidential elections** - Presidential elections also follow the two-round model that the Duma has. In 2000 Putin received 52.94% of the vote, so no run-off election was required, since he captured a majority on the first round. Communist Gennady Zyuganov received 29.21%, and no other candidates garnered more than 5.8%. Some observers have questioned the honesty of elections, particularly since the media obviously promoted Yeltsin in 1996 and Putin in 2000. A 2001 law seriously restricts the right of small, regional parties to run presidential candidates, so critics question how democratic future presidential elections may be.

See the results of the 1995 [Duma election and the 1996 presidential election](#).

See the results of the [1999 Duma election and the 2000 presidential election](#).

## **INTEREST GROUPS**

Of course, interest groups were not formally allowed in the Soviet Union. Decision-making took place within the Central Committee and the Politburo, and if any outside contacts influenced policy, they generally were confined to members of the Communist Party. When market capitalism suddenly replaced centralized economic control in 1991,

the state-owned industries were up for grabs, and those that bought them for almost nothing were generally insiders (members of the nomenclatura) who have since become quite wealthy. This collection of oligarchs may be defined loosely as an interest group because they have been a major influence on the policy-making process during the formative years of the Russian Federation.

## **THE OLIGARCHY**

The power of the oligarchy became obvious during the last year of Boris Yeltsin's first term as President of the Federation. The tycoons were tied closely to members of Yeltsin's family, particularly his daughter. Together they took advantage of Yeltsin's inattention to his presidential duties, and soon monopolized Russian industries and built huge fortunes. One of the best-known oligarchs is Boris Berezovsky, who admitted in 1997 that he and six other entrepreneurs controlled over half of the Russian GNP. Berezovsky's businesses include giant holdings in the oil industry and in media, including a TV network and many newspapers. He used the media to insure Yeltsin's reelection in 1996, and he and the "family" clearly controlled the presidency. When Yeltsin's ill health and alcoholism triggered events that led to his resignation in 2000, Berensky went to work with other oligarchs to put together and finance the Unity Party. When Unity's presidential candidate Vladimir Putin easily won the election with more than 50% of the vote in the first round, it looked as if the oligarchs had survived Yeltsin's demise.

Putin, however, has shown some resistance to oligarchic control. He has clashed with the entrepreneurs on several occasions, and when television magnate Vladimir Gusinsky harshly criticized Putin's reform plans, Gusinsky was arrested for corruption and his company was given to a state-owned monopoly. Both Berezovsky and Gusinsky are now in exile, but they still have close political and economic connections in Russia.

## **THE RUSSIAN MAFIA**

A larger and even more shadowy influence than the oligarchs is known as the "mafia," but this interest group controls much more than underworld crime. Like the oligarchs, they gained control during the chaotic time after the Revolution of 1991, and they control local businesses, natural resources, and banks. They thrive on payoffs from businesses ("protection money"), money laundering, and deals that they make with Russian government officials, including members of the former KGB. They have murdered bankers, journalists, businessmen, and members of the Duma.

The huge fortunes made by the oligarch and mafia offend the sensibilities of most Russian citizens, who tend to value equality of result, not equality of opportunity. In Russia's past, lawlessness has been dealt with by repressive, authoritarian rule, and these groups represent a major threat to the survival of the new democracy.

Link to the British Broadcasting Corporation's analysis of [Russian Mafia](#) influence in 1998.

The *Moscow Times* comments on the influence of the [oligarchs](#).

## INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT:

The structure of the government was put in place by the Constitution of 1993. It borrows from both presidential and parliamentary systems, and like France, the resulting hybrid government is meant to allow for a strong presidency, but at the same time place some democratic checks on executive power. Its brief history has been stormy, but it is too early to say whether the difficulties centered on Yeltsin's ineffective presidency, or that they reflect inherent flaws within the system.

Branches of Government:

## PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER

Russian voters directly elect the president for a four-year term, with a limit of two terms he/she may serve. Since Russian political parties are in flux, anyone who gets a million signatures can run for president. In both 1996 and 2000, many candidates ran on the first ballot, and in 2000 Putin won without a second-round vote. The president's has the power to:

- **appoint the prime minister and cabinet** - The Duma must approve the prime minister's appointment, but if they reject the president's nominee three times, the president may dissolve the Duma. In 1998, Yeltsin replaced Prime Minister Kiriyenko with Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the Duma rejected him twice. On the third round &ndash; under threat of being dissolved &ndash; they finally agreed on a compromise candidate, Yevgeni Primakov.
- **issue decrees that have the force of law** &ndash; The president runs a cabinet that has a great deal of concentrated, centralized power. According to the Constitution, the Duma has no real power to censure the cabinet, except that they may reject the appointment of the prime minister.
- **dissolve the Duma** &ndash; This power was tested even before the Constitution was put in place. In 1993 Yeltsin ordered the old Russian Parliament dissolved, but the conservative members staged a coup, and refused to leave the "White House." (the parliament building). He ordered the army to fire on the building until the members gave up, but the chaos of the new regime was revealed to the world through the images of a president firing on his own parliament.

Like the French, Russia has a prime minister as well as a president. The relationship between the two executives is far from clear. There is no vice-president, so if a president dies or resigns before his term is up, the prime minister becomes acting president. This situation occurred in 1999 when Prime Minister Vladimir Putin took over presidential duties when Yeltsin resigned.

For more about the Russian presidency and much more, visit the [Nuclear Threat Initiative's site](#).

Does Russia actually have separation of powers that limits the president's powers. Read a [point of view](#) that says that it does.

## BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE

So far, the Russian legislature has proved to be only a very weak check on executive power. The lower house, the **Duma**, has 450 deputies, half by **proportional representation**, and half from **single-member districts**. The Duma passes bills, approves the budget, and confirms the president's political appointments. However, these powers are very limited, since the president may rule by decree, and the Duma's attempts to reject prime ministers has failed. In another confrontation with Yeltsin, the

Duma tried to use their constitutional power to impeach him, but the process is so cumbersome that it failed.

The upper house, called the **Federation Council**, consists of two members elected locally from each of the eighty-nine regions of the federation. However, like most other upper houses in European governments, it seems to only has the power to delay legislation. On paper, it also may change boundaries among the republics, ratify the use of armed forces outside the country, and appoints and removes judges. However, these powers have not been used yet.

Visit the [Federation Council's Homepage](#).

## **THE JUDICIARY**

No independent judiciary existed under the old Soviet Union, with courts and judges serving as pawns of the Communist Party. The Constitution of 1993 attempted to build a judicial system that is not controlled by the executive by creating a Constitutional Court modeled after the French Constitutional Council. The Court's nineteen members are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Federation Council, and it is supposed to make sure that all laws and decrees are constitutional. The Constitution also created a Supreme Court to serve as a final court of appeal in criminal and civil cases. It is too soon to tell if they will be effective, but both have been actively involved in policy-making, although their independence from the executive is questionable. One problem is that most prosecutors and attorneys were trained under the Soviet legal system, so the judiciary currently suffers from a lack of expertise in carrying out the responsibilities outlined in the constitution.

Read about the Constitutional Court's visit to [New York University](#) .

## **MILITARY**

The army was a very important source of Soviet strength during the Cold War era from 1945 to 1991. The Soviet government prioritized financing the military ahead of almost everything else. The armed forces at one time stood at about 4 million men, considerably larger than the United States combined forces. However, the military generally did not take a lead in politics, and generals did not challenge the power of the Politburo. Even though some of the leaders of the

attempted coup of 1991 were military men, the armed forces themselves responded to Yeltsin's plea to remain loyal to their government.

Under the Russian Federation, the army shows no real signs of becoming a political force. It has suffered significant military humiliation, and many sources confirm that soldiers go unpaid for months and have to provide much of their own food. Even as early as 1988, under Gorbachev, Soviet forces had to be withdrawn in disgrace from Afghanistan, and in 1994-1996, Chechen guerrillas beat the Soviet forces. More recently, the army restored its reputation by crushing Chechen resistance in 1999-2000.

One prominent former general, **Alexander Lebed**, gained a political following before the election of 1996, and Yeltsin had to court his favor in order to win reelection. However, most political leaders have been civilians, so a military coup appears to be unlikely in the near future. Even so, some observers are wary of a military takeover, especially considering the tentative nature of the current "democracy."

Visit a site devoted to [Russian military links](#).

## POLICY

These first few years of the Russian Federation have been very difficult ones, characterized by a great deal of uncertainty regarding the regime's future. Any regime change creates legitimacy issues, but Russia's case has been extreme, with public policy directed at some very tough issues and seemingly intractable problems.

## ECONOMY:

The Soviet Union faced many challenges in 1991, but almost certainly at the heart of its demise were insurmountable economic problems. Mikhail Gorbachev enacted his perestroika reforms, primarily consisting of market economy programs inserted into the traditional centralized state ownership design of the Soviet Union. These plans were never fully implemented, partly because dissent within the Politburo led to the attempted coup that destroyed the state.

Today leaders of the Russian Federation face the same issue: How much of the centralized planning economy should be eliminated, and how should the market economy be handled? Yeltsin's "shock therapy" created chaotic conditions that resulted in a small group of entrepreneurs running the economy. In 1997 the bottom fell out of the economy when the government defaulted on billions of dollars of debts. The stock market lost half of its values, and threatened to topple other markets around the globe. Meanwhile, the Russian people suffered from the sudden introduction of the free market. Under the Soviet government, their jobs were secure, but now the unemployment rate soared. The ruble &ndash; once pegged by the government at \$1.60 &ndash; lost its value quickly, so that by early 2002, it took more than 30,000 rubles to equal a dollar. The oligarchs and mafia members prospered, but almost everyone else faced a new standard of living much worse than what they had had before.



Since 1997, some signs indicated that "shock therapy" may be starting to work. The economy improved slightly during 1999 and 2000, particularly in the new areas of privatized industries. However, most people are still disillusioned with the new regime, and question the wisdom of current policymakers.

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Russia's foreign policy may be divided into two interrelated types:

- **Relations with the near-abroad** -The weak Confederation of Independent States unites the fifteen former republics of the Soviet Union, and Russia is the clear leader of the group. However, the organization has little formal power over its members, and Russia's motives are almost always under strict scrutiny by the other countries. Still, trade agreements still bind them together, although nationality differences keep the members from reaching common agreements. These nationality differences also threaten the Federation itself, with the threat of revolution from Chechnya spreading to other regions. In short, the CIS is a long way from being a regional power like the European Union, and many experts believe that the confederation will not survive.
- **Relations with the rest of the world** - The biggest adjustment for Russia is the loss of its superpower status from the Cold War era. The United States emerged as the lone superpower in 1991, and the two old enemies &ndash; Russia and the United States &ndash; had to readjust their attitudes toward one another. U.S. Presidents George H. Bush and Bill Clinton both believed that it was important to maintain a good working relationship with Russia. They also knew that the economic collapse of Russia would have disastrous results for the world economy. Both presidents sponsored aid packages for Russia, and they also encouraged foreign investment in the country's fledgling market economy. The United States and the other G-7 political powerhouses of Europe welcomed Russia into the organization, now known as the G-8, acknowledging the political importance of Russia in global politics. Most recently, Russia supported France in blocking the UN Security Council's approval of the U.S.-sponsored war on Iraq in early 2003. Whether the move was a wise one is yet to be seen, but it does indicate Russia's willingness to assert its point of view, even if it opposes that of the United States.

Russia's ambassador to the United States comments on [Russian/U.S. relations](#).

## DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The notion of **civil society** starts with the acceptance of two areas of life: a public one that is defined by the government, and a private one, in which people are free to make their own individual choices. In a country with a strong civil society, people follow rules, operate with a degree of trust toward others, and generally have respectful dealings with others even if the government is not watching. Even though these ideals may not always be met, citizens are aware of both the rule of law in the public realm and their own privacy that exists outside it. Democracy and capitalism both depend on the civil society for their successful operation.

Russians do not necessarily share the assumptions that civil society rests on: the inherent value of life, liberty, and property. Instead, they have been much more influenced by traditions of **statism** &ndash; have a strong government or die. Their history began with this truth &ndash; survival amidst the invasions across the Russian plains and the rebellions of the many ethnicities depends on a strong, protective government. In the twentieth century, Russia became a superpower in the same way &ndash; through a strong, centralized government. Is it possible for stability, power, and prosperity to return to Russia through a democratic state and a capitalist economy?

In many ways the answer to that question tests the future of democracy as a worldwide political model. Were John Locke and other Enlightenment philosophers correct in their assumptions



## CHINA

"Let China sleep. For when China wakes, it will shake the world." Napoleon Bonaparte

Ancient China was arguably one of the strongest, richest empires in existence - so much so that her rulers saw little value in contacting anyone else in the world. So it was easy for western leaders like Napoleon to see China as a sleeping giant.

Since western countries first began exploring the world several centuries ago, they have tended to either ignore or exploit China in world politics. And yet the presence of China is deeply felt, sometimes promising riches and cooperation, and other times threatening competition and destruction. Today China stands as one of the few remaining communist nations, with few signs of renouncing communism. China is by some standards a less developed country, but on the other hand the country is emerging as a major world power, partly because of recent dramatic improvements in GNP and standards of living. And China no longer sleeps. Her leaders seek membership in the World Trade Organization, travel frequently to other countries, and take active part in the United Nations.

### **SOURCES OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY AND POLITICAL POWER**

Until the 20th century China's history was characterized by dynastic cycles - long periods of rule by a family punctuated by times of "chaos", when the family lost its power and was challenged by a new, and ultimately successful, ruling dynasty. Power was determined by the mandate of heaven, or the right to rule as seen by the collective ancestral wisdom that guided the empire from the heavens above. For many centuries public authority rested in the hands of the emperor and an elaborate bureaucracy that exercised this highly centralized power. After a time of chaos in the early 20th century, Communist leader Mao Zedong took over China in 1949, bringing in a new regime whose values often disagreed with traditional concepts of power. How different is the new China from the old? Have the changes brought instability, or have they successfully transformed the country into a modern world power?

## LEGITIMACY:

Under dynastic rule, Chinese citizens were subjects of the emperor. Legitimacy was established through the **mandate of heaven**, and power passed from one emperor to the next through hereditary connections within the ruling family. As long as things went well, the emperor's authority was generally accepted, but when problems occurred and the dynasty weakened, rival families challenged the throne, claiming that the emperor had lost the mandate. Legitimacy was not for peasants to determine, although popular rebellions and unrest in the countryside served as signs that the emperor was failing.

The Revolution of 1911 gave birth to the Chinese Republic, with western-educated **Sun Yat-sen** as its first president. The new regime was supposed to be democratic, with legitimacy resting on popular government. However, regional warlords challenged the government, much as they always had done in times of political chaos. Emerging from the mayhem was **Mao Zedong**, with his own version of authority, an ideology known as Maoism. The People's Republic of China was established in 1949, and Mao led the Communist Party as the new source of power until his death in 1976.

**Maoism** was idealistic and egalitarian, and even though it endorsed centralized power exercised through the top leaders of the party, it stressed the importance of staying connected to the peasants through a process called mass line. Mass line required leaders to listen to and communicate with ordinary folks, and without it, the legitimacy of the rulers was questionable.

Since Mao's death, the **Politburo** remains the legitimate source of power in China, but the leadership has come under a great deal of criticism in recent years. The Party is said to be corrupt and irrelevant, holding authoritarian power over an increasingly market-based economy. In truth, rebellions against the party have flared up throughout PRC history, but the rumblings have been louder and more frequent since the Tiananmen incident in 1989. How serious a threat these criticisms are to the current regime is a matter of some debate, especially as new, largely unknown Communist leaders took the helm in 2003.



毛泽东



One important source of power in the People's Republic of China has been the military. The military played an important role in the rise of the Communist Party, and it is represented in the government structure by the **Central Military Commission**. The head of this commission plays an important role in policymaking. For example, Deng Xiaoping was never general secretary of the Communist Party, but he headed the Central Military Commission.

## HISTORICAL TRADITIONS:

Despite the fact that the last dynasty (the Qing) fell in the early 20th century, many traditions from the dynastic era influence the modern political system:

**Centralized, authoritarian power** - China's borders have changed over time, but it has long been a huge, land-based empire ruled from a central place by either an emperor or a small group of people. Chinese citizens have traditionally been subjects of, not participants in, their political system.

**Confucianism** - This philosophy has shaped the Chinese political system since the 6th century B.C.E. It emphasized the importance of order and harmony, and encouraged Chinese citizens to submit to the emperor's power, and reinforced the emperors' responsibility to fulfill his duties conscientiously. This aspect of Confucianism may be tied to democratic centralism, or the communist belief in a small group of leaders who rule for the good of the people.

**The "Middle Kingdom"** - Since ancient times, Chinese have referred to their country as *zhongguo*, meaning "Middle Kingdom", or the place that is the center of civilization. Foreigners were seen as "barbarians" whose civilizations are far inferior to China's, not just in terms of power, but also in ethics and quality of life. All countries are ethnocentric in their approaches to other countries, but China almost always assumed that no one else had much to offer them. After the empire's 19th century weakness was exploited by the imperialist powers, these traditional assumptions were challenged, but not destroyed.

**The 20th century** brought the new influence of Maoism that emphasized the "right thinking" and moralism of Confucianism, but contradicted the hierarchical nature of the old regime with its insistence on egalitarianism. The late 20th century brought Deng Xiaoping Theory, a practical mix of authoritarian political control and economic privatization.

**Bureaucratic hierarchy based on scholarship** - The emperors surrounded themselves with highly organized bureaucracies that formed an elite based on Confucian scholarship. Government jobs were highly coveted and extremely competitive, with only a small percentage of candidates mastering the examination system. The exams were knowledge-based, and bureaucrats had to be well-versed in Confucianism and many related philosophies.

What about those [examinations](#)?

Check out a list of [China's dynasties](#).

Reading some of Confucius' sayings in [The Analects](#)

## POLITICAL CULTURE:

China's political culture has been shaped by geographical features and by the many eras of her history: dynastic rule, control by imperialist nations and its aftermath, and communist rule.

## GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES

Today China has the largest population by far of any country on earth, and its land surface is the third largest, after Russia and Canada. Some of its important geographical features include



- access to oceans/ice free ports
- many large navigable rivers
- major geographical/climate splits between north and south
- geographic isolation of the western part of the country
- mountain ranges, deserts, and oceans that separate China from other countries



These geographic features have shaped Chinese political development for centuries. China's location in the world and protective mountain ranges allowed the Chinese to ignore the rest of the world when they wanted to until the 19th century. The rugged terrain of the western part of the country has limited population growth there. The large navigable rivers and good harbors of the east have attracted population, so that the overwhelming majority of people in China have lived in these areas. Differences in climate and terrain have also created a cultural split between the north and the south

## HISTORICAL ERAS

**1. Dynastic rule** - The political culture inherited from centuries of dynastic rule centers around Confucian values, such as order, harmony, and a strong sense of hierarchy - "superior" and "subservient" positions. China has traditionally valued scholarship as a way to establish superiority, with mandarin scholars filling bureaucratic positions in the government. China's early relative isolation from other countries contributes to a strong sense of cultural identity. Related to Chinese identity is a high degree of ethnocentrism - the sense that China is central to humanity (the "middle kingdom") and superior to other cultures. Centuries of expansion and invasion have brought many other Asian people under Chinese control, resulting in long-standing tensions between "Han" Chinese others groups. A modern example is Tibet, where a strong sense of Tibetan ethnicity has created resistance to Chinese control.

**2. Resistance to imperialism** - During the 19th century China's strong sense of cultural identity blossomed into nationalism and persistent attempts by imperialist nations - such as England, France, Germany, and Japan - to exploit China's natural resources and people. This nationalism was secured by the Revolution of 1911, and the hatred of the "foreign devils" has led China to be cautious and suspicious in her dealings with capitalist countries today.

**3. Maoism** - Mao Zedong was strongly influenced by Karl Marx and Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin), but his version of communism is distinctly suited for China. Whereas Lenin emphasized the importance of a party vanguard to lead the people to revolution and beyond, Mao resisted the

inequality implied by Lenin's beliefs. He believed in the strength of the peasant, and centered his philosophy around these central values:

- **collectivism** - valuing the good of the community above that of the individual. This belief suited the peasant-based communities that have existed throughout Chinese history, but scholars (valued by the old culture) have often been drawn to individualism.
- **struggle and activism** - Mao encouraged the people to actively pursue the values of socialism, something he understood would require struggle and devotion.
- **mass line** - Mao conceptualized a line of communication between party leaders, members, and peasants that would allow all to struggle toward realization of the goals of a communist state. The mass line involved teaching and listening on everyone's part. Leaders would communicate their will and direction to the people, but the people in turn would communicate through the mass line their wisdoms to the leaders.
- **egalitarianism** - Hierarchy was the key organizing principle in Chinese society before 1949, and Mao's emphasis on creating an egalitarian society was in complete opposition to it.
- **self-reliance** - Instead of relying on the elite to give directions, people under Maoist rule were encouraged to rely on their own talents to contribute to their communities.

**Deng Xiaoping Theory** - "It doesn't matter whether a cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice." This famous 1962 statement by Deng reflects his practical approach to solving China's problems. In other words, he didn't worry too much about whether a policy was capitalist or socialist as long as it improved the economy. The result of his leadership was a dramatic turnaround of the Chinese economy through a combination of socialist planning and the capitalist free market. His political and social views, however, remained true to Communist tradition - the party should supervise all, and no allowances should be made for individual freedoms and/or democracy.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMAL RELATIONSHIPS

Especially among the political elite, power and respect depend not so much on official positions as on who has what connections to whom. During the days of the early PRC, these ties were largely based on reputations established during the Long March, a 1934 -1936 cross-country trek led by Mao Zedong as Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist army pursued his communist followers. Today those leaders are dead, but factions of their followers still compete for power, and informal relationships define each change in leadership. This informal network - a version of a patron-client system - is not apparent to the casual outside observer. As a result, whenever new leaders come to power, such as the 2003 transition, it isn't easy to predict how policymaking will be affected. However, an important principle is to study their relationships with past leaders. For example, it probably is significant that Hu Yaobang, a reformer whose death was mourned by the students that led the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989, mentored Hu Jintao, the new general secretary of the CCP.

[The 50 Places that Define China](#) - *Asia Time Magazine's* tour of 50 places to visit that help you to understand China .

[The CIA Factbook](#)- Geography facts about China from the CIA.

[What are the differences between Mandarin and Cantonese?](#)

### **POLITICAL CHANGE:**

Until the 19th century **dynastic cycles** explained the patterns of political change in China. A dynasty would seize power, grow stronger, and then decline. During its decline, other families would challenge the dynasty, and a new one would emerge as a sign that it had the mandate of heaven. This cycle was interrupted by the Mongols in the 13th century, when their leaders conquered China and ruled until the mandate was recaptured by the Mings who restored Han Chinese control. The Manchus were also a conquering people from the north, who established the Qing (or "pure") dynasty in the 17th century. This last dynasty toppled under European pressure in the early 20th century.

Change during the first half of the 20th century was radical, violent, and chaotic, and the result was a very different type of regime: communism. Did European intrusions and revolutions of the 20th century break the Chinese dynastic cycles forever? Or is this just another era of chaos between dynasties? It is hard to imagine that dynastic families might reappear in the 21st century or beyond, but Chinese political traditions are strong, and they almost certainly will determine what happens next in Chinese political development.

### **CHANGE BEFORE 1949:**

China's oldest cultural and political traditions have long provided stability and longevity for the empire/country. These traditions come from the dynastic rule that lasted for many centuries. However, in recent years two disruptive influences - control by imperialistic nations (19th century) and revolutionary upheavals (20th century) have threatened that stability and provide challenges to modern China.

**Control by Imperialistic Nations** - During the 19th century, the weakened Qing Dynasty fell prey to imperialistic nations - such as England, Germany, France, and Japan - who carved China into "spheres of influence" for their own economic gain. This era left many Chinese resentful of the "foreign devils" that they eventually rebelled against.

**Revolutionary upheavals** - Major revolutions occurred in China in 1911 and 1949, with many chaotic times in between. Three themes dominated this revolutionary era:



**Nationalism** - The Chinese wished to recapture strength and power from the imperialistic nations that dominated them during the 19th century. The Revolution of 1911 - led by Sun Yat-sen - was a successful attempt to reestablish China as an independent country.

**Establishing a new political community** - With the dynasties gone and the imperialists run out, what kind of government would modern China adopt? One answer came from Chiang Kai-shek, who founded the Nationalist Party (Gumindang) and the other from Mao Zedong, the founder of the Chinese Communist Party.

**Socioeconomic Development** - A major challenge of the 20th century has been the reestablishment of a strong economic and social fabric after the years of imperialistic control. During the 1920s, the newly formed Soviet Union served as a model for policymaking, but the Nationalists broke with them in 1928. Chiang Kai-shek became the President of China, and Mao Zedong and his communists were left an outlaw party.



**The Legend of the Long March** - Strength for Mao's Communist Party was gained by the Long March - the 1934-36 pursuit of Mao's army across China by Chiang and his supporters. Chiang was trying to depose his rival, but his attempt to find and conquer Mao had the opposite effect. Mao eluded him until finally Chiang had to turn his attentions to the invading Japanese. Mao emerged as a hero of the people, and many of his loyal friends on the March lived on to be prominent leaders of the People's Republic of China after its founding in 1949.

Take a look at a map that shows the path of the [Long March](#).

**THE FOUNDING OF THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA: 1949 – 1966**

The Japanese occupied China during World War II, but after the war ended, the forces of Chiang and Mao met in Civil War, and Mao prevailed. In 1949 Chiang fled to Taiwan, and Mao established the People's Republic of China under Communist rule.

The People's Republic of China was born from a civil war between the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists under Mao Zedong. After many years of competitive struggle, Mao's army forced Chiang Kai-shek and his supporters off the mainland to the island of Taiwan (Formosa). Mao named his new China the "People's Republic of China," and Chiang claimed that his headquarters in Taiwan formed the true government. The "Two Chinas", then, were created, and the PRC was not to be recognized as a nation by the United Nations until 1972.

The early political development of the PRC proceeded in two phases:

**1) The Soviet Model (1949-1957)** - The Soviet Union had been supporting Mao's efforts since the 1920s, and with his victory in 1949, they began pouring money and expertise into the PRC. With the help, Chairman Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) quickly turned their attention to some of the country's most glaring social problems.

- **Land Reform** - This campaign redistributed property from the rich to the poor and increased productivity in the countryside.
- **Civil Reform** - They set about to free people from opium addiction, and they greatly enhanced women's legal rights. For example, they allowed women to free themselves from unhappy arranged marriages. These measures helped to legitimize Mao's government in the eyes of the people.

**Five-Year Plans** - Between 1953 and 1957, the CCP launched the first of its Soviet-style Five-Year plans to nationalize industry and collectivize agriculture, implementing steps toward socialism.

**2) The Great Leap Forward (1958-1966)** - Mao changed directions in 1958, partly in an effort to free China from Soviet domination -the spirit of nationalism is a force behind Mao's policy here - and partly because he was still unhappy with the degree of inequality in Chinese society. The Great Leap Forward was a utopian effort to transform China into a radical egalitarian society. It's emphasis was mainly economic, and it was based on four principles:

- **All-around development** - Not just heavy industry (as under Stalin in the USSR), but almost equal emphasis to agriculture.
- **Mass mobilization** - An effort to turn the sheer numbers of the population into an asset - better motivation, harder, work, less unemployment.
- **Political unanimity and zeal** - An emphasis on party workers running government, not bureaucrats. Cadres - party workers at the lowest levels - were expected to demonstrate their party devotion by spurring the people on to work as hard as they could.
- **Decentralization** - encouraged more government on the local level, less central control. The people can do it!

The Great Leap Forward was a big flop. Mao's efforts ran counter to the traditional political culture (bureaucratic centralism), and the people lacked skills to contribute to industrialization. Some bad harvests conjured up fears of the loss of the mandate of heaven.

Read a [telegram](#) from Mao to Joseph Stalin.

Read an excerpt from Mao's ["Hundred Flowers" speech](#) that launched the Great Leap Forward.

## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: 1966 – 1976



Between 1960 and 1966, Mao allowed two of his faithful - Liu Shaoqi and **Deng Xiaoping** - to implement market-oriented policies that revived the economy. but Mao was still unhappy with China's progress toward true egalitarianism. And so he instituted the **Cultural Revolution** - a much more profound reform in that it encompassed political and social change, as well as economic. His main goal was the purify the party and the country through radical transformation. Important principles were

- **the ethic of struggle**
- **massline**
- **collectivism**
- **egalitarianism**
- **unstinting service to society (see [political culture](#) for definitions).**

A primary goal of the Cultural Revolution was to remove all vestiges of the old China and its hierarchical bureaucracy and emphasis on inequality. Scholars were sent into the fields to work, universities and libraries were destroyed. Emphasis was put on elementary education - all people should be able to read and write - but any education that created inequality was targeted for destruction.

Mao died in 1976, leaving his followers divided into factions:

- **Radicals** - led by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, one of the "Gang of Four," who supported the radical goals of the Cultural Revolution.
- **The Military** - Always a powerful group because of the long-lasting 20th century struggles that required an army, the military was led by Lin Biao, who died in a mysterious airplane crash in 1971.
- **The Moderates** - led by Zhou Enlai, who emphasized economic modernization and limited contact with other countries, including the United States. Zhou influenced Mao to invite President Richard Nixon to China in 1972. He died only a few months after Mao.

### **XIAOPINGS'S MODERNIZATION: 1978 - 1997**

The Gang of Four was arrested by the new CCP leader, Hua Guofeng, whose actions helped the Moderates take control. Zhou's death opened the path for new leadership from the Moderate Faction. By 1978, the new leader emerged - Deng Xiaoping. His vision drastically altered China's direction through "**Four Modernizations**" invented by Zhou Enlai before his death - industry, agriculture, science, and the military. These modernizations have been at the heart of the country's official policy ever since. Under Deng's leadership, these policies have helped to implement the new direction:

- **"Open door" trade policy** - Trade with everyone, including capitalist nations like the U.S., that will boost China's economy.
- **Reforms in education** - higher academic standards, expansion of higher education and research (a reversal of the policy during the Cultural Revolution)
- **Institutionalization of the Revolution** - restoring the legal system and bureaucracy of the Old China, decentralizing the government, modifying elections, and infusing capitalism.

Read more about the [Four Modernizations](#).

## SOCIETY AND POLITICS:



China's ethnic population is primarily Han Chinese, the people that historically have formed the basis of China's identity, first as an empire, and eventually as a country. China's borders have long included other ethnicities, primarily through conquest and expansion of land claims in Asia. Minority groups now comprise about 8 percent of the PRC's population. There are 55 officially recognized minority groups, and no one minority is very large. Even so, the Chinese government has put a great deal of time and effort into its policies regarding ethnic groups.

Most minorities live on or near China's borders with other countries, and most of their areas are sparsely populated. For example, Mongols live in both Mongolia and China, and Kazakhs live in both the Kazakh republic and China. Because of their distance from areas of dense population, China worries that dissidents may encourage independence, or join with neighboring countries. Tibet &ndash; with its long history of separate ethnic identity &ndash; has been especially problematic for China since they conquered it in the early days of the PRC. The former government of Tibet never recognized Chinese authority, and some Tibetans today campaign for independence.

Even though the percentages are not high, China does have about 100 million citizens who are members of minorities groups, a huge number by anyone's calculations. By and large, the government's policy has been to encourage economic development and suppress expressions of dissent in ethnic minority areas. Ethnic dissent continues into the present, although many groups appear to be content to be part of the Chinese empire.

Visit the website of the [Tibetan Government in Exile](#).

## CITIZEN AND STATE:

According to Chinese tradition before 1949, citizens are subjects of government, not participants in a political system. The communist state redefined political participation by creating a relationship between the Communist party and citizenship, and by defining the economic relationship between citizens and the government. Nevertheless, old traditions that governed personal ties and relationships still shape China's political processes, and influence the actions and beliefs of elites and citizens alike. In recent years popular social movements that support democracy, religious beliefs, and community ties over nationalism have influenced Chinese politics and helped to define China's relationships with other countries.

## **PARTY AND PARTICIPATION**

The **Chinese Communist Party** is the largest political party in the world in terms of total formal membership, with about 58 million members at the turn of the century. However, as was true in the USSR, its members make up only a small minority of the country's population. Only about 8 percent of those over eighteen (the minimum age for joining the party) are members of the CCP. Only those that are judged to be fully committed to the ideals of communism and who are willing to devote a great deal of time and energy to party affairs may join. Party membership is growing, with new members recruited largely from the CCP's **Youth League**. About 68 million Chinese youths belonged to the Youth League by the late 1990s.

The economic reforms begun by Deng Xiaoping paved the way for a milestone transition in the backgrounds of party members. During the Maoist era (before 1976) **revolutionary cadres** whose careers depended on party loyalty and ideological purity led the CCP at all levels. Most cadres were peasants or factory workers, and few were intellectuals or professionals. Since Deng's reforms, the party has been led increasingly by "**technocrats**," people with technical training who have climbed the ladder of the party bureaucracy. All seven members of the current Standing Committee have academic and professional backgrounds in technical fields, and five of them were trained as engineers.

Today less than 40 percent of party members come from the peasantry, although peasants still make up the largest single group within the CCP. The fastest growing membership category consists of officials, intellectuals, technicians, and other professionals. Women make up only about 20 percent of the membership and only about 4 percent of the Central Committee.

## **PROTESTS**

In recent years the control mechanisms of the party has loosened as new forms of associations appear, like Western-style discos and coffeehouses. Communications through cell phones, fax machines, TV satellite dishes, and internet have made it more difficult for the party-state to monitor citizens.

The **Tiananmen Square massacre** of 1989 showed the limits of protest in China. Massive repression was the government's way of letting people know that democratic movements that defy the party leadership will not be tolerated. In recent years, major protests have been staged by religious groups, but none have risen to the level of conflict apparent in 1989. Village protests have made their way into the news, and thousands of labor strikes have been reported. Some observers believe that protests will pose serious threats to the party in the near future.



#### POLITICAL FRAMEWORK:



China's political regime is best categorized as authoritarian, one in which decisions are made by political elites &ndash; those that hold political power &ndash; without much input from citizens. Leaders are recruited through their membership in the Communist Party, but personal relationships and informal ties to others are also important in deciding who controls the regime. However, this authoritarian regime has the same problem that emperors of past dynasties had &ndash; how to effectively govern the huge expanse of land and large population from one centralized place.

The political framework of the People's Republic of China is designed to penetrate as many corners of the country as possible through an elaborately organized Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As in the old Soviet Union, government structures are controlled by party personnel. Unlike the Soviet Union, however, the CCP also integrates its military into the political hierarchy. Political elites are often recruited from the military, and the head of the Central Military Commission is often the most powerful leader in China.

#### CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY:



## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CCP

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is organized hierarchically by levels - village/township, county, province, and national. At the top of the system is the supreme leader (Deng Xiaoping's phrase was "the core"), who until 1976 was Chairman Mao Zedong. The title "chairman" was abandoned after Mao's death, and the head of the party is now called the "general secretary." The party has a separate constitution from the government's constitution of 1982, and its central bodies are:

**National Party Congress** - This body consists of more than 2000 delegates chosen primarily from congresses on lower levels. It only meets every five years, so it is obviously not important in policy-making. It usually rubberstamps decisions made by the party leaders, although in recent years it has acted somewhat more independently. Its main importance remains in its power to elect members of the Central Committee.

**Central Committee** - The Committee has about 340 members (some of them are alternates) that meet together annually for about a week. They carry on the business of the National Party Congress between sessions, although their size and infrequent meetings limit their policy making powers. Their meetings are called plenums, and they are important in that they are gatherings of the political elites, and from their midst are chosen the Politburo and the Standing Committee.

**Politburo/Standing Committee** - These most powerful political organizations are at the very top of the CCP structure. They are chosen by the Central Committee, and their decisions dictate government policies. The Politburo has 24 members and the Standing Committee - chosen from the Politburo membership - has only 7. They meet in secret, and their membership reflects the balance of power among factions and the relative influence of different groups in policy making.

## NONCOMMUNIST PARTIES

Even though China effectively has a one-party system, the CCP does allow the existence of eight "democratic" parties. Each party has a special group that it draws from, such as intellectuals or businessmen. Their total membership is about a half million, and they are tightly controlled by the CCP. They do not contest the CCP for control of the government, but they do serve an important advisory role to the party leaders. Some members even attain high government positions, but organizationally these parties serve only as a loyal non-opposition. Attempts to establish independent democratic parties outside CCP control have been squashed, with the party doling out severe prison sentences to the independent-minded leaders.

Reading about the [PNC's 2002 meetings - the 16th Congress.](#)



## **ELECTIONS:**

The PRC holds elections in order to legitimize the government and the CCP. The party controls the commissions that run elections, and it reviews draft lists of proposed candidates to weed out those it finds politically objectionable. The only direct elections are held at the local level, with voters choosing deputies to serve on the county people's congress. The people's congresses at higher levels are selected from and by the lower levels, not directly by the people. Since the 1980s the party has allowed more than one candidate to run for county positions, and most candidates are nominated by the people. One move toward democracy has occurred at the village level, where local officials are no longer appointed from above, but are chosen in direct, secret-ballot elections.

## **GUANGXI AND FACTIONS:**

Mao Zedong's place in Chinese history was sealed by the Long March of 1934-36. He emerged from the ordeal as a charismatic leader who brought about great change. His compatriots that made the journey with him became known as the "Old Guard," a group of friends that networked with one another for many years through *guanxi*, or personal connections. These personal connections are still the glue that holds Chinese politics together today.

China, like the USSR, recruits its leaders through *nomenklatura*, a system of choosing cadres from lower levels of the party hierarchy for advancement based on their loyalty and contributions to the well-being of the party. However, Chinese leaders communicate with one another through a patron-client network called *guanxi*. These linkages are similar to "old boys' networks" in the West, and they underscore the importance of person career ties between individuals as they rise in bureaucratic or political structures. Besides bureaucratic and personal ties, *Guanxi* is based on ideology differences and similarities, and as a result, has been the source of factions within the party. *Guanxi* is also pervasive at the local level, where ordinary people link up with village leaders and lower party officials.

## **FACTIONALISM**

Factionalism in the years before Mao's death in 1976 is demonstrated in the splits among the radicals (led by Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four), the military under Lin Biao, and the reformers under Zhou Enlai. All three men were part of the "Old Guard" that went on the Long March in the 1930s, but by 1976, all were dead. Deng Xiaoping emerged as the new leader of China, partly because he was able to unite the factions in a course toward economic reform.

Even before Deng's death in 1997, however, factional strife was apparent within the leadership, most notably during the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. In general, the factions have split in at least three ways:

- **Conservatives** - Although all factions supported economic reform, conservatives worry that perhaps the power of the party and the central government has eroded too much. They are particularly concerned about any movement toward democracy and generally support crackdowns on organizations and individuals who act too independently. Their most prominent leader is Li Peng, the former premier and chair of the National People's Congress. His retirement in 2003 leaves the leadership of this faction in doubt.
- **Reformers/open door** - This faction supports major capitalist infusion into the PRC's economy and generally promote an open door trade policy. These leaders have pushed for membership in the World Trade Organization and have courted the U.S. to grant "most-favored trading" status to China. They don't necessarily support democratic reform, but their focus is on economic growth and development, so their political attitudes tend to be pragmatic. Two important leaders of the reformers are Jiang Zemin - the PRC President and CCP General Secretary until 2003 - and Zhu Rongji - the former governor of the central bank and PRC Premier.
- **Liberals** - This faction has been out of power since the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, but they are generally more accepting of political liberties and democratic movements than are the other factions. They support economic and political reform. The two most famous leaders of this faction are Hu Yuobang - whose death started the protests in 1989 - and Zhao Ziyang - the Premier and General Secretary who was ousted for being too sympathetic with the Tiananmen protestors.
- The factions follow the process of fang-shou - a tightening up, loosening up cycle - a waxing and waning of the power of each. In some ways, the cycle is similar to the old dynastic cycle, when ruling families were challenged when they lost the mandate of heaven.

Which faction does the new Chinese leader Hu Jintao belong to? Opinions vary, partly because no one is sure how much political reform he may tolerate or encourage. However, his mentor, Hu Yaobang was a liberal.

## **CORRUPTION**

The combination of guanxi and the economic boom of the past twenty years has brought about rampant corruption within the Chinese economic and political system. Bribes are common, and corruption is widely regarded as a major problem. President Jiang Zemin acknowledged in 1997, "The fight against corruption is a grave political struggle vital to the very existence of the party and the state...If corruption cannot be punished effectively, our Party will lose the support and confidence of the people."

## INTEREST GROUPS:

Organized interest groups and social movements are not permitted to influence the political process unless they are under the party-state authority. The party-state tries to preempt the formation of independent groups by forming mass organizations in which people may express their points of view within strict limits. These mass organizations often form around occupations or social categories. For example, most factory workers belong to the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, and women's interests are represented in the All-China Women's Federation. In urban areas, the party maintains social control through danwei - social units usually based on a person's place of work. People depend on the units for their jobs, income, and promotion, but also for medical care, housing, daycare centers, and recreational facilities.

## INSTITUTIONS:

The political structure of the People's Republic of China can best be seen as three **parallel hierarchies** that are separate yet interact with one another

- the Communist Party
- the state or government
- the People's Liberation Army

The party dominates the three yet the organizations are separate. The relationship between the party and the government is controlled by the principle of dual role - vertical supervision of the next higher level of government and horizontal supervision of the Communist Party at their own level.

The organization of party and state are similar on paper to those of the former USSR, largely because the PRC's structure was designed by the Soviets during the period between 1949 and 1958. In reality, China's policy making is governed more directly by factions and personal relationships.

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## STRUCTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT:

The government structure of the People's Republic of China has three branches - a legislature, an executive, and a judiciary. But all branches are controlled by the party, so they are not independent, nor does a system of checks and balances exist. All top government positions are held by party members, as are many on the lower levels.

## The People's Congresses

Government authority is formally vested in a system of people's congresses, which begins with a **People's National Congress** at the top and continues in hierarchical levels down through the provincial, city, and local congresses. Theoretically they are the people's legislatures, but in reality they are subject to party authority. The National People's Congress choose the President and Vice President of China, but there is only one party-sponsored candidate for each position. Although the Congress itself has little power, its meetings are important to watch because the Politburo's decisions are formally announced then. For example, during the 10th National People's Congress in 2003, China's new president and general secretary (**Hu Jintao**) and chief of Parliament (**Wu Bangguo**) were announced. Although their appointments were widely known before the meeting began (partly because their leadership had been announced at the 2002 CCP meeting), the PNC meeting was the chosen format for introducing the new leaders to the world.

## Executive/Bureaucracy

The President and Vice President serve five year terms, are limited to two terms, and must be at least 45 years old. The positions are largely ceremonial, though senior party leaders have always held them. Currently, Jiang Zemin is both the president and the general secretary of the CCP.

The **Premier** is the head of government, formally appointed by the president, but again, the position is always held by a member of the Standing Committee. Zhu Rongji has held this position since 1998. He directs the State Council, which is composed of ministers who direct the many ministries and commissions of the bureaucracy. These are controlled by the principle of dual role - supervision from higher bodies in the government and by comparable bodies in the CCP.

The bureaucracy exists on all levels - national, provincial, county, and local. These lower level positions are held by cadres, people in positions of authority who are paid by the government or party. Many are both government officials and party members, but not all. In all, about 30 million cadres around China see that the leaders' policies are carried out everywhere.

## The Judiciary

China has a 4-tiered "**people's court**" system, organized hierarchically just as the people's Congresses are. A nationwide organization called the "people's procuratorate" provides public prosecutors and defenders to the courts.

During the Cultural Revolution the judicial system came under attack as a bastion of elitism and reform. In recent decades, the judiciary has been revitalized, and more than 100,000 new judges and lawyers have been trained. New law codes have also been instituted. However, no structure exists for judicial review.

The criminal justice system works swiftly and harshly, with a conviction rate of more than 99% of all cases that come to trial. Prison terms are long and subject to only cursory appeal. Hundreds, perhaps 1000s of people have been executed during periods of government-sponsored

anti-crimes campaigns. Human Rights organizations criticize China for its extensive use of the death penalty.

## PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY: PLA

"Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

The military grew hand in hand with communism, as Mao's famous statement reflects. The People's Liberation Army encompasses all of the country's ground, air, and naval armed services. Although plans for a cutback were announced in 1998, the army is huge, with about 3 million active personnel and about 12 million reserves. Yet in proportion to its population, the Chinese military presence is smaller than that of the United States. China has about 2.4 military personnel for every 1000 people, whereas the U.S. has 6.1. Military spending is only about 4 percent of that of the U.S., although some analysts suspect that the government deliberately underestimates the military budget.

The military has never held formal political power in the People's Republic of China, but it has been an important influence on politics and policy. All of the early political leaders were also military leaders. For example, Mao and the other members of the "Old Guard", led the Long March of the 1930s primarily by military moves.

The second half of Mao's famous quote above is less often quoted:

"Our principle is that the party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the party."

Clearly, the military has never threatened to dominate the party. It is represented in the government by the Central Military Commission, which has been led by many prominent party leaders, including Deng Xiaoping.

The Tiananmen crisis in 1989 greatly harmed the image of the PLA, since the military was ordered to recapture the square and do so with brutal force. But the PLA continues to play an important role in Chinese politics. In 2002 two of the 24 members of the Politburo were military officers, and PLA representatives make up over 20 percent of the Central Committee membership. In 2003, Jiang Zemin's retention of his position as head of the Central Military Commission, despite his stepping down as president, indicates that he still has significant policymaking power.

See a [Russian missile, Chinese style](#).

**POLICY MAKING PROCESS:**

Deng Xiaoping's carefully balanced blend of socialist central planning with a capitalist market economy has not been without its critics. The tensions within the system - both economic and political - are evidenced in fang-shou, a letting go, tightening-up cycle evidenced even under Mao in his reaction to the Hundred Flowers Campaign. The cycle consists of three types of actions/policies - economic reform, democratic movements (letting go), and a tightening-up by the CCP. With each new economic reform, liberal factions react with a demand for political reforms, which the Party responds to with force. Some examples through time are as follows:

<b>FANG-SHOU IN MODERN CHINA</b>		
<b>ECONOMIC PROGRAM</b>	<b>DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS</b>	<b>CCP RESPONSE</b>
<a href="#"><u>Four Modernizations (1978-1985)</u></a>		
	Democracy Wall Movement (1978-1979)	
		De-Legalization of Protest (1979-80)
		Socialist Spiritual Civilization (1981-83)
Second Revolution (1986-1001)		
	Student Democracy Protest (1986-1987)	
		Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization (1987-1988)
	<a href="#"><u>Tiananmen Democracy Demonstrations (1989)</u></a>	
		"Massacre" (1989)
		Arrests (1989-1990)
		Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization (1987-1988)
		Attacks on political dissidents (1993-present)
	<a href="#"><u>Falun Gong Demonstrations (1999 - 2000)</u></a>	
		Outlaw of Falun Gong; arrest/execution of leaders (1999-2000)

## DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:



The Tiananmen Crisis began as a grief demonstration for the death of Hu Yaobang - a liberal who had earlier resigned from the Politburo under pressure from the conservatives. Most of the original demonstrators were students and intellectuals, but they were joined by other groups, and the wake turned into democratic protests. They criticized corruption and demanded democratic reforms, and hundreds of thousands joined in. Protests erupted all over China, and Tiananmen became the center of international attention for almost two months. How would the Politburo react?

The answer came with guns, as Deng sent the People's Liberation Army to shut down the protests, using whatever means necessary. The army made its way to the square, killing hundreds of protesting citizens. They recaptured control, but the fatalities and arrests began a broad new wave of international protests from human rights advocates. Unofficial estimates of fatalities range from 700 to several thousands.

Since then, China has been under a great deal of pressure from international human rights organizations to democratize their political process and to abide by human rights standards advocated by the groups. Deng Xiaoping showed little impulse to liberalize the political process, as did the government that followed under Jiang Zemin, at least publicly. Factional disagreements are kept from the public eye, and most discussion of the direction the government will take under Hu Jintao is still largely speculative.

## ECONOMIC POLICY

### **Agricultural Policy**

**The People's Communes** - During the early days of the PRC - in an effort to realize important socialist goals - virtually all peasants were organized into collective farms of approximately 250 families each. During the Great Leap Forward, farms were merged into gigantic people's communes with several thousand families. These communes were one of the weakest links in

Mao's China, with production and rural living standards showing little improvement between 1957 and 1977. Many communes were poorly managed, and peasants often didn't see the need to work hard, contrary to Mao's hopes of developing devotion through the mass line.

**Household Responsibility System** - In the early 1980s, Deng dismantled the communes and replaced them with a household responsibility system, which is still in effect today. In this system individual families take full charge of the production and marketing of crops. After paying government taxes and contract fees to the villages, families may consume or sell what they produce.

### **"Private Business"**

In 1988 the National People's Congress officially created a new category of "private business" under the control of the party. It included urban co-ops, service organizations, and rural industries that largely operate as capitalist enterprises. Private businesses have grown by leaps and bounds since that time, and are far more profitable and dynamic than are the state-owned ones.

The fastest growing sector of the Chinese economy is rooted in township and village enterprises (TVEs), rural factories and businesses that vary greatly in size, and are run by local government and private entrepreneurs. Although they are called collective enterprises, they make their own decisions and are responsible for their profits and losses. The growth of the TVE system has slowed the migration of peasants to the cities, and has become the backbone of economic strength in the countryside.

## **FOREIGN POLICY**

Since 1998 Chinese foreign policy has undergone profound changes that have brought the country closer into the mainstream of international politics. China still resists pressure from other countries to improve its human rights record, and Chinese leaders continue to threaten to invade Taiwan now and again. However, especially in the areas of trade, China has integrated itself into the world community in almost unprecedented ways.

### **FOREIGN POLICY UNDER MAO**

Until Mao's death in 1976, the PRC based its foreign policy on providing support for third world revolutionary movements. It provided substantial development assistance to a handful of the most radical states. Examples are Korea and Vietnam. Under Mao, China's relationship with the USSR changed dramatically in the late 1950s from one of dependence to independence.

During the 1920s and 1950s, the USSR gave large amounts of money, as well as technical and political advice to China. The countries broke into rivalry during the late 1950s when Mao decided that the Soviets had turned their backs on Marx and revolution. The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution affirmed China's independent path from Moscow's control.



## US/CHINESE RELATIONS

The chill in China/USSR relationships encourage the U.S. to eye the advantages of opening positive interactions with China. As long as Mao was in control, his anti-capitalist attitudes - as well as U.S. containment policy - meant that the countries had no contacts until the early 1970s. Then, with Mao sick and weak, reformist Zhou Enlai opened the door to western contact. President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger engineered negotiations, and Nixon's famous 1972 visit to China signaled a new era. Relations opened with a ping pong match between the two countries, but after Deng Xiaoping's leadership began in 1978, his open door policy helped lead the way to more substantial contact.

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND BUSINESS TODAY

Another integral part of the economic reform of the past quarter century has been the opening of the Chinese economy to international forces. Four Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were established in 1979. In these regions, foreign investors were given preferential tax rates and other incentives. Five years later fourteen more areas became SEZs, and today foreign investments and free market mechanisms have spread to most of the rest of urban China.

Since 1978 China's trade and industry have expanded widely. With this expansion has come a rapidly growing GDP, entrepreneurship, and trade with many nations. A wealthy class of businessmen has emerged, and Chinese products have made their way around the world. They seek - and are close to getting - membership in the World Trade Organization, as well as "most favored nation status" for trading with the U.S. A monumental recognition of China's new economic power came in 1997, when the British officially "gave" the major trading city of Hong Kong back to Chinese control.

Deng Xiaoping emphasized economic reform, but he continued to believe that the Party should be firmly in command of the country. In general, he did not support political reforms that included democracy and/or more civil liberties for citizens. Freedoms and incentives were granted to entrepreneurs, but they have operated largely under the patron-client system (guangxi).

[China: A World Power Again?](#) An article from the Atlantic Monthly magazine that assesses China's place in the world today.

## POLICY SINCE 1997:

The Chinese leaders that came to power after Deng's death in 1997 did not stray significantly from Deng's path of economic reform and resistance to political reform. Jiang Zemin was the General Secretary of the CCP from 1989-2003 and the President from 1993 to 2003, but he did not consolidate his power until after Deng's death in 1997. Zhu Rongji - Premier from 1998 to 2003 and former governor of the central bank - also emerged as an influential leader. Jiang was often criticized for being a weak leader and did not have the same stature as Deng or Mao - the two men who dominated China during the second half of the 20th century.

Despite the continuing tensions between economic and political policy, some democratic reforms can be seen in these ways:

- Some input from the National People's Congress is accepted by the Politburo
- More emphasis is placed on laws and legal procedures
- Village elections are now semi-competitive, with choices of candidates and some freedom from the party's control

Will the new leadership announced in 2003 change Deng's policy of political conservatism? Will China continue to expand its international contacts and its free market economy? If so, will tensions increase between economic and political sectors of the country? During the 20th century many countries have struggled to define the relationship between free market economies and political leadership styles. Most obviously, the Soviet Union collapsed rather than reconcile market liberalization with centralized political power. Will the same thing happen to China, or will their policy of introducing market principles gradually work out in the end? This challenge and many more await answers from Hu Jintao and his new leadership team.

# MEXICO

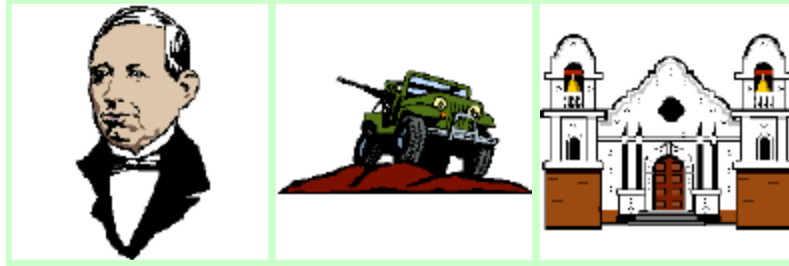
## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS:



Not too many years ago, many observers considered Mexico to be a model for LDCs (less developed countries) around the world. The "Mexican miracle" described a country with a rapidly increasing GNP in orderly transition from an authoritarian to a democratic government. Then, the economy soured after oil prices plummeted in the early 80s, the peso took a nosedive, and debt mounted during the decade. Ethnic conflict erupted in the mid-90s when the Zapatistas took over the capital of the southern state of Chiapas and refused to be subdued by the Mexican army. On the political front, the leading presidential candidate was assassinated, and top political officials were arrested for bribery, obstructing justice, and drug pedaling. Then under new leadership Mexico surprised the world by recovering some financial viability through paying back emergency money they borrowed from the United States. In 2000, under close scrutiny by western democracies, Mexico held an apparently honest, competitive presidential election, and confirmed the emergence of a competitive electoral system.

This "developing" nation called Mexico is full of apparent contradictions that make its politics sometimes puzzling, but always interesting and dynamic. Mexico is generally described economically as a developing country and politically as a "transitional democracy." In both cases it is at an "in-between" stage when compared with other countries globally.

## SOURCES OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY AND POLITICAL POWER:



Like many other Latin American countries, Mexico's sources of public authority have fluctuated greatly over time. From the time that the Spanish arrived in the early 16th century until independence was won in 1821, Mexico was ruled by a viceroy, or governor put in place by the Spanish king. The rule was centralized and authoritarian, and it allowed virtually no participation by the indigenous people. After Mexican independence, this ruling style continued, and all of Mexico's presidents until the mid-20th century were military generals. The country was highly unstable in the early 20th century, and even though a constitution was put into place, Mexico's president dictated policy until very recent years

#### LEGITIMACY:

By and large, most Mexican citizens consider their government and its power legitimate. An important source of legitimacy is the Revolution of 1910-1917, and Mexicans deeply admire revolutionary leaders throughout their history, such as Miguel Hidalgo, Benito Juarez, Emilio Zapata, Pancho Villa, and Lázaro Cárdenas. Revolutions in general are seen quite positively, and charisma is highly valued as a leadership characteristic.

The revolution was legitimized by the formation of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 1929. The constitution that was written during that era created a democratic, three-branch government, but PRI was intended to stabilize political power in the hands of its leaders. PRI, then, served as an important source of government legitimacy until other political parties successfully challenged its monopoly during the late 20th century. After the election of 2000, PRI lost the presidency and one house of Congress, so that today, sources of public authority and political power appear to be changing rapidly.

What is the Mexican [national anthem](#) like?

See a copy of the [Mexican Constitution of 1917](#).

## HISTORICAL TRADITIONS:

Mexico's historical tradition may be divided into three stages of its political development - colonialism, the chaos of the 19th and early 20th century, and the emphasis on economic development during its recent history. However, some characteristics carry through from one era to the next.

**authoritarianism** - Both from the colonial structure set up by Spain and from strong-arm tactics by military-political leaders such as Porfirio Diaz, Mexico has a tradition of authoritarian rule. Currently, the president still holds a great deal of political power.

**populism** - The democratic revolutions of 1810 and 1910 both had significant peasant bases led by charismatic figures that cried out for more rights for ordinary Mexicans, particularly Amerindians. The modern Zapatista movement is a reflection of this historical tradition.



**power plays/divisions within the elite** - The elites who led dissenters during the Revolutions of 1810 and 1910, the warlords/caudillos of the early 20th century, and the politicos vs. tecnicos of the late 20th century are all examples of competitive splits among the elite.



**instability and legitimacy issues**- Mexico's political history is full of chaos, conflict, bloodshed, and violent resolution to political disagreements. As recently as 1994, a major presidential candidate was assassinated. Even though most Mexicans believe that the government is legitimate, the current regime still tends to lean toward instability.

## POLITICAL CULTURE:

### **Sense of National Identity**

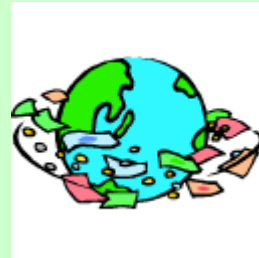
Mexicans share a strong sense of national identification based on a common history, as well as a dominant religion and language.



**The importance of religion** - Until the 1920s, the Catholic Church actively participated in politics, and priests were often leaders of populist movements. During the revolutionary era of the early 20th century, the government developed an anti-cleric position, and today the political influence of the church has declined significantly. However, a large percentage of Mexicans are devout Catholics, and their beliefs strongly influence their political values and actions.

**patron-clientism** - This system of cliques based on personal connections and charismatic leadership has served as the glue that has held an agrarian Mexico together through practicing "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." The network of camarillas (patron-client networks) extends from the political elites to vote-mobilizing organizations throughout the country. Corruption is one by-product of patron-clientism.

**economic dependency** - Whether as a Spanish colony or a southern neighbor of the domineering United States, Mexico has almost always been under the shadow of a more powerful country. In recent years Mexico has struggled to gain more economic independence.



## Geographical Influences

Mexico is one of the most geographically diverse countries in the world, including high mountains, coastal plains, high plateaus, fertile valleys, rain forest, and desert within an area about three times the size of France.

Some geographical features that have influenced the political development of Mexico are:

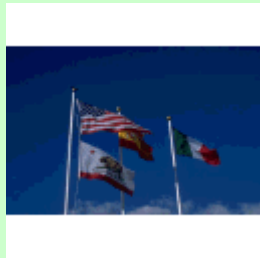


**Mountains and deserts** have made communication and transportation between regions difficult. Rugged terrain also limits areas where productive agriculture is possible. Regionalism, then, is a major characteristic of the political system.

**Varied climates** - Partly because of the terrain, but also because of its great distance north to south, Mexico has a wide variety of climates - from cold, dry mountains to tropical rain forests.



**Natural resources** - Mexico has an abundance of oil, silver, and other natural resources, but has always struggled to manage them wisely. These resources undoubtedly have enriched the country (and the United States), but they have not brought general prosperity to the Mexican people.



**A long (2000-mile-long) border** with the United States means that relationships - including conflicts and migration and dependency issues - between the two countries are inevitable.

**Almost 100 million population** - Mexico is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world, and among the ten most populous of all. Population growth has slowed to about 1.8 percent, but population is still increasing rapidly.

**Urban population** - About 3/4 of the population lives in cities of the interior or along the coasts. Mexico City is one of the largest cities in the world, with about 18 million inhabitants. The shift from rural to urban population during the late 20th century disrupted traditional Mexican politics, including the patron-client system



Read more about [Mexican political culture](#).

#### POLITICAL CHANGE:

Mexican history dates back to its independence in 1821, but many influences on its political system developed much earlier. We will divide our study of these influences into three parts:

- **colonialism**
- **independence until the Revolution of 1910**
- **the 20th century after the revolution.**

## COLONIALISM:

From 1519 to 1821 Spain controlled the area that is now Mexico. The Spanish placed their subjects in an elaborate social status hierarchy, with Spanish born in Spain on top and the native Amerindians on the bottom. Colonialism left several enduring influences:



**cultural heterogeneity** - When the Spanish arrived in 1519, the area was well-populated with natives, many of whom were controlled by the Aztecs. When the conquistador Hernan Cortes captured the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, the Spanish effectly took control of the entire area. Even though status differences between native and Spanish were clearly drawn, the populations soon mixed, particularly since Spanish soldiers were not allowed to bring their families from Spain to the New World. Today about 60 percent of all Mexicans are mestizo (a blend of the two peoples), but areas far away from Mexico City - particularly to the south - remained primarily Amerindian.

**Catholicism** - Most Spaniards remained in or near Mexico City after their arrival, but Spanish Catholic priests settled far and wide as they set about converting the population to Christianity. Priests set up missions that became population centers, and despite the differences in status, they often developed great attachments to the people that they led.



**economic dependency** - The area was controlled by Spain, and served the mother country as a colony, although the territory was so vast that the Spanish never realized the extent of Mexico's natural resources.

Read an account of Cortez' [conquest of the Aztecs](#).

See some of the old Catholic missions that still exist today.



## INDEPENDENCE: 1810 – 1911

In 1810 a parish priest named Miguel Hidalgo led a popular rebellion against Spanish rule. After eleven years of turmoil (and Father Hidalgo's death), Spain finally recognized Mexico's independence in 1821. However, stability and order did not follow, with a total of thirty-six presidents serving between 1833 and 1855.

## THE NEW COUNTRY

Important influences during this period were:

**instability and legitimacy issues** - When the Spanish left, they took their hierarchy with them, and reorganizing the government was a difficult task.



**rise of the military** - The instability invited military control, most famously exercised by Santa Anna, a military general and sometimes president of Mexico.

**domination by the United States** - The U.S. quickly picked up on the fact that her neighbor to the south was in disarray, and chose to challenge Mexican land claims. By 1855, Mexico had lost half of her territory to the U.S. What is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, and part of Colorado fell under U.S. control after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848.



**liberal vs. conservative struggle** - The impulses of the 1810 revolution toward democracy came to clash with the military's attempt to establish authoritarianism (as in colonial days). The Constitution of 1857 was set up on democratic principles, and a liberal president, **Benito Juarez**, is one of Mexico's greatest heroes. Conservatism was reflected in the joint French, Spanish, and English takeover of Mexico under Maximilian (1864-1867.) His execution brought Juarez back to power, but brought no peace to Mexico.

## "THE PORFIRIATO" (1876-1911)

**Porfirio Diaz** - one of Juarez's generals - staged a military coup in 1876 and instituted himself as the President of Mexico with a promise that he would not serve more than one term of office. He ignored that pledge and ruled Mexico with an iron hand for 34 years. He brought with him the *cientificos*, a group of young advisors that believed in bringing scientific and economic progress to Mexico. Influences of the "Porfiriato" are

- **stability** - With Diaz came an end to years of chaos, and his dictatorship brought a stable government to Mexico.
- **authoritarianism** - This dictatorship allowed no sharing of political power beyond the small, closed elite.
- **foreign investment and economic growth** - The *cientificos* encouraged entrepreneurship and foreign investment - primarily from the United States - resulting in a growth of business and industry.
- **growing gap between the rich and the poor** - As often happens in developing countries, the introduction of wealth did not insure that all would benefit. Many of the elite became quite wealthy and led lavish life styles, but most people in Mexico remained poor.

Eventually even other elites became increasingly sensitive to the greed of the Porfirians and their own lack of opportunities, and so Diaz' regime ended with a coup from within the elite, sparking the Revolution of 1910.

The Revolution of 1910 marked the end of the "Porfirio" and another round of instability and disorder.

Read about Mexico's [war with the United States](#), and its [Revolution of 1910-11](#).

## CHANGE AFTER 1911

### THE CHAOS OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY



In 1910 conflict broke out as reformers sought to end the Diaz dictatorship. When Diaz tried to block a presidential election, support for another general, Francisco Madero - a landowner from the northern state of Coahuila - swelled to the point that Diaz was forced to abdicate in 1911. So the Revolution of 1910 began with a movement by other elites to remove Diaz from office. In their success, they set off a period of warlordism and popular uprisings that lasted until 1934.

The influence of this era include:

- **Patron-client system** - In their efforts to unseat Diaz, caudillos - political/military strongmen from different areas of the country - rose to challenge one another for power. Two popular leaders - Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa - emerged to lead peasant armies and establish another dimension to the rebellion. Around each leader a patron-client system emerged that encompassed large numbers of citizens. Many caudillos (including Zapata and Villa) were assassinated, and many followers were violently killed in the competition among the leaders.
- **Constitution of 1917** - Although it represents the end of the revolution, the Constitution did not bring an end to the violence. It set up a democratic government - complete with three branches and competitive elections - but political assassinations continued on into the 1920s.
- **Conflict with the Church** - The Cristeros Rebellion broke out in the 1920s as one of the bloodiest conflicts in Mexican history, with hundreds of thousands of people killed, including many priests. Liberals saw the church as a bastion of conservatism and put laws in place that forbid priests to vote, put federal restrictions on church-affiliated schools, and suspended religious services. Priests around the country led a rebellion against the new rules that contributed greatly to the chaos of the era.
- **The Establishment of the PRI** - Finally, after years of conflict and numerous presidential assassinations, President Calles brought caudillos together for an agreement in 1929. His plan - to bring all caudillos under one big political party - was intended to bring stability through agreement to "pass around" the power from one leader to the next as the presidency changed hands. Each president could only have one six year terms (sexenios), and then must let another leader have his term. Meanwhile, other leaders would be given major positions in the government to establish their influence. This giant umbrella party - PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) - "institutionalized" the revolution by stabilizing conflict between leaders.

## **THE CARDENAS UPHEAVAL - 1934 - 1940**

When Calles' term as president was up, **Lazaro Cardenas** began a remarkable sexenio that both stabilized and radicalized Mexican politics. Cardenas (sometimes called by Americans "the Roosevelt of Mexico") gave voice to the peasant demands from the Revolution of 1910, and through his tremendous charisma, brought about many changes:

**Redistribution of land** - Land was taken away from big landlords and foreigners and redistributed as ejidos - collective land grants - to be worked by the peasants.

**Nationalization of industry** - Foreign business owners who had been welcomed since the time of Diaz were kicked out of the country, and much industry was put under the control of the state. For example, PEMEX - a giant government-controlled oil company - was created.

**Investments in public works** - The government built roads, provided electricity, and created public services that modernized Mexico.

**Encouragement of peasant and union organizations** - Cardenas welcomed the input of these

groups into his government, and they formed their own camarillas with leaders that represented peasants and workers on the president's cabinet.

**Concentration of power in the presidency** - Cardenas stabilized the presidency, and when his sexenio was up, he peacefully let go of his power, allowing another caudillo to have the reigns of power.

## **THE EMERGENCE OF THE TECNICOS AND THE PENDULUM THEORY**

Six years after Cardenas left office, Miguel Aleman became president, setting in place the **Pendulum Theory**. Aleman rejected many of Cardenas' socialist reforms and set about on a path of economic development, again encouraging entrepreneurship and foreign investment. He in turn was followed by a president who shifted the emphasis back to Cardenas-style reform, setting off a back-and-forth effect - socialist reform to economic development and back again. As Mexico reached the 1970s the pendulum appeared to stop, and a new generation of **tecnicos** - educated, business-oriented leaders - appeared to take control of the government and the PRI with a moderate, free-market approach to politics.

By the 1950s, Mexico was welcoming foreign investment, and the country's GNP began a spectacular growth that continued until the early 1980s. This "**Mexican Miracle**" - based largely on huge supplies of natural gas and oil - became a model for less developed countries everywhere. With the "oil bust" of the early 1980s, the plummeting price of oil sank the Mexican economy and greatly inflated the value of the peso. Within PRI, the division between the "**politicos**" - the old style caciques who headed camarillas - and the tecnicos began to grow wider.

Read more about [Lazaro Cardenas](#). Read an article that compares him to [Abraham Lincoln](#).

See a [timeline of important 20th century events](#) in Mexican history.

### **POLITICS AND SOCIETY:**

Cleavages that have the most direct impact on the political system are urban v. rural, and north v. south.

**Urban v. rural** - Mexico's political structure was put into place in the early 20th century &ndash; a time when most of the population lived in rural areas. PRI and the patron-client system were intended to control largely illiterate peasants who provided political support in exchange for small favors from the politicos. Today Mexico is more than 75% urban, and the literacy rate is about 90%. Urban voters are less inclined to support PRI, and they have often been receptive to political and economic reform.

**North v. south** - In many ways, northern Mexico is almost a different country than the area south of Mexico City. The north is very dry and mountainous, but its population is much more prosperous, partly because they benefit from trade with the United States. The north has a substantial middle class with relatively high levels of education. Not surprisingly, they are generally more supportive of a market-based economy. The south is largely subtropical, and its people are generally less influenced by urban areas and the United States. Larger numbers are Amerindian, with less European ethnicity, and their average incomes are lower than those in the north. Although their rural base may influence them to support PRI, some southerners think of the central government as repressive. The southernmost state of Chiapas is the source of the Zapatista Movement, which values the Amerindian heritage and seeks more rights for natives.

CITIZENS AND STATE:

## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

### **THE PATRON-CLIENT SYSTEM**

Traditionally, Mexican citizens have participated in their government through the informal and personal mechanisms of the **patron-client system**. Since the formation of the PRI in 1929, the political system has emphasized compromise among contending elites, behind the scenes conflict resolution, and distribution of political rewards to those willing to play by the informal and formal rules of the game.

The **patron-client system** keeps the control in the hands of the government elite, since they have the upper hand in deciding who gets favors and who doesn't. Only in recent years have citizens and elites begun to participate through competitive elections, campaigns, and interest group lobbying.

Patron-clientism has its roots in warlordism and loyalty to the early 19th century caudillos. Each leader had his supporters that he - in return for their loyalty - granted favors to. Each group formed a camarilla, a hierarchical network through which offices and other benefits were exchanged. Still today - or at least until the election of 2000 - within PRI, most positions within the President's cabinet are filled either by supporters or by heads of other camarillas that the President wants to appease. Peasants in a camarilla receive jobs, financial assistance, family advice, and sometimes even food and shelter in exchange for votes for the PRI.

Despite trends toward a modern society, the patron-client system is still very important in determining the nature of political participation. Modernization tends to break up the patron-client system, as networks blur in large population centers, and more formal forms of participation are instituted.

## PROTESTS

When citizen demands have gotten out of hand, the government has generally responded by not only accommodating their demands, but by including them in the political process. For example, after the 1968 student protests in Mexico City ended in government troops killing an estimated two hundred people in **Tlatelolco Plaza**, the next president recruited large numbers of student activists into his administration. He also dramatically increased spending on social services, putting many of the young people to work in expanding antipoverty programs in the countryside and in urban slums.



Social conditions in Mexico lie at the heart of the Chiapas rebellion that began in 1994. This poor southern Mexican state sponsored the **Zapatista Uprising**, representing Amerindians that felt disaffected from the more prosperous mestizo populations of cities in the center of the country. The Chiapas rebellion reminded Mexicans that some people lived in appalling conditions with little hope for the future. Indeed, the average length of schooling is still under five years nationwide, and only about half of the eligible students are enrolled in secondary schools.

## VOTER BEHAVIOR

Before the political changes of the 1990s, PRI controlled elections on the local, state, and national levels. Voting rates were very high because the patron-client system required political support in exchange for political and economic favors. Election day was generally very festive, with the party rounding up voters and bringing them to the polls. Voting was accompanied by celebrations, with free food and entertainment for those that supported the party. Corruption abounded, and challengers to the system were easily defeated with "tacos," or stuffed ballot boxes.

Despite PRI's control of electoral politics, competing parties have existed since the 1930s, and once they began pulling support away from PRI, some distinct voting patterns emerged. Voter rates have declined in recent elections, but a respectable 61% of those eligible actually voted in the election of 2000.

Some factors that appeared to influence voter behavior in the election of 2000 were:

- **Age** - Younger voters were more likely than older voters to support Vicente Fox's PAN, and older voters were more likely to support PRI. 59% of all voters who were students voted for PAN, in contrast to 19% that voted for PRI.

- **Education** - The higher the amount of education, the more likely voters were to vote for Fox, with about 60% of all voters with college educations voting for Fox. In contrast, only 22% of those with university educations voted for Labastida (the PRI candidate).
- **Region** - Voters for PRI were fairly evenly distributed over the regions of the country, but voters in the north and center-west were more likely to support PAN.

Link to an article that argues that [Mexico's voter registration process](#) could teach the United States a thing or two.

**POLITICAL FRAMEWORK AND INSTITUTIONS:** Mexico appears to be a country in economic and political transition. As a result, it is difficult to categorize its regime type. For many years its government was highly authoritarian, with the president serving virtually as a dictator for a six year term. Mexico's economy has also been underdeveloped and quite dependent on the economies of stronger nations, particularly that of the United States. However, in recent years Mexico has shown strong signs of economic development, accompanied by public policy supportive of a free market economy. Also, the country's political parties are becoming more competitive, and the dictatorial control of PRI was soundly broken by the elections of 1997 and 2000. Although the political structures themselves remain the same as they were before, significant political and economic reforms have greatly altered the ways that government officials operate.

#### REGIME TYPE

Traditionally, Mexico has had a corporatist structure - central, authoritarian rule that allows input from interest groups outside of government. Through the camarilla system, leaders of important groups, including business elites, workers, and peasants, actually served in high government offices. Today political and economic reform appear to be leading toward a more democratic structure. Is the modern Mexican government authoritarian or democratic? Is the economy centrally controlled, or does it operate under free market principles? The answers are far from clear, but the direction of the transition is toward democracy and capitalism.

#### "DEVELOPED," "DEVELOPING," OR "LESS DEVELOPED"?

Categorizing the economic development of countries can be a tricky business, with at least four different ways to measure it:

**GNP Per Capita** - This figure is an estimate of a country's total economic output divided by its total population, converting to a single currency, usually the U.S. dollar. This measure is often criticized because it does not take into account what goods and service people can actually buy

with their local currencies.

**PPP - Purchasing Power Parity** - This measure takes into account the actual cost of living in a particular country by figuring what it costs to buy the same bundle of goods in different countries.

**HDI - Human Development Index** - The United Nations has put together this measure based on a formula that takes into account the three factors of longevity (life expectancy at birth), knowledge (literacy and average years of schooling), and income (according to PPP).

**economic dependency** - A less developed country is often dependent on developed countries for economic support and trade. Generally speaking, economic trade that is balanced between nations is considered to be good. A country is said to be "developing" when it begins relying less on a stronger country to keep it afloat financially.

No matter which way you figure it, Mexico comes out somewhere in the middle, with some countries more developed and some less. Since these indices in general are moving upward over time for Mexico, it is said to be "developing."

## **A TRANSITIONAL DEMOCRACY**

Politically, Mexico is said to be in transition between an authoritarian style government and a democratic one. From this view, democracy is assumed to be a "modern" government type, and authoritarianism more old-fashioned. Governments, then, may be categorized according to the degree of democracy they have. How is democracy measured? Usually by these characteristics:

- **Political accountability** - In a democracy, political leaders are held accountable to the people of a country. The key criterion is usually the existence of regular, free, and fair elections.
- **Political competition** - Political parties must be free to organize, present candidates, and express their ideas. The losing party must allow the winning party to take office - peacefully.
- **Political freedom** - The air to democracy's fire is political freedom - assembly, organization, and political expression, including the right to criticize the government.

**Political equality** - Signs of democracy include equal access to political participation, equal rights as citizens, and equal weighting of citizens' votes.

Mexico - especially in recent years - has developed some democratic characteristics, but still has many vestiges of its authoritarian past, as we have seen. Another often used standard for considering a country a democracy is the longevity of democratic practices. If a nation shows consistent democratic practices for a period of 40 years or so (a somewhat arbitrary number), then it may be declared a stable democracy. Mexico does not fit this description.



## **PARTIES:**

For most of the 20th century, Mexico was virtually a one-party state. Until 2000 all presidents belonged to the PRI, as were most governors, representatives, senators, and other government officials. Over the past twenty years or so other parties have gained power, so that today competitive elections are a reality, at least in some parts of Mexico.

The three largest parties in Mexico today are:

**PRI - The Partido Revolucionario Institucional** was in power continuously from 1920 until 2000, when an opposition candidate finally won the presidency. PRI was founded as a coalition of elites who agreed to work out their conflicts through compromise rather than violence. By forming a political party that encompassed all political elites, they could agree to trade favors and pass power around from one cacique to another. The party is characterized by:

- **a corporatist structure** - Interest groups are woven into the structure of the party. The party has the ultimate authority, but other voices are heard by bringing interest groups under the broad umbrella of the party. This structure is not democratic, but it allows more input into the government than do other types of authoritarianism. Particularly since the Cardenas sexenio (1934-1940), peasant and labor organizations have been represented in the party and hold positions of responsibility.
- **patron-client system** - The party traditionally gets its support from rural areas where the patron-client system is still in control. As long as Mexico remained rural-based, PRI had a solid, thorough organization that managed to garner overwhelming support. Until the election of 1988, there was no question that the PRI candidate would be elected president, with 85-90 % victories being normal.

**PAN - The National Action Party**, or PAN, was founded in 1939, making it one of the oldest opposition parties. It was created to represent business interests opposed to centralization and anti-clericism (PRI's practice of keeping the church out of politics.) PAN is strongest in the north, where the tradition of resisting direction from Mexico City is the strongest. PAN's platform includes

- regional autonomy
- less government intervention in the economy
- clean and fair elections
- good rapport with the Catholic Church
- support for private and religious education

PAN is usually considered to be PRI's opposition to the right.

**PRD - The Democratic Revolutionary Party**, or PRD, is generally thought of as PRI's

opposition on the left. Their presidential candidate in 1988 and 1994 was **Cuauhtemoc Cardenas**, the son of Mexico's most famous and revered president. He was ejected from PRI for demanding reform that emphasized social justice and populism. In 1988 Cardenas won 31.1% of the official vote, and PRD captured 139 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (out of 500). Many observers believe that if the election had been honest, Cardenas actually would have won.

PRD has been plagued by a number of problems that have weakened it since 1988. They have had trouble defining a left of center alternative to the market-oriented policies established by PRI. Their leaders have also been divided on issues, and have sometimes publicly quarreled. The party has been criticized for poor organization, and Cardenas is not generally believed to have the same degree of charisma as did his famous father.

Read more about Mexico's [political parties](#).

#### ELECTIONS:

Citizens of Mexico directly elect their president, Chamber of Deputy Representatives, and Senators, as well as a host of state and local officials.

Although the parties have overlapping constituencies, typical voter profiles are:

**PRI** - small town or rural, less educated, older, poorer

**PAN** - from the north, middle-class professional or business, urban, better educated (at least high school, some college)

**PRD** - younger, politically active, from the central states, some education, small town or urban

Elections in Mexico today are competitive primarily in urban areas. Under PRI control, elections have typically been fraudulent, with the patron-client system encouraging bribery and favor-swapping. Since 1988, Mexico has been under pressure to have fairer elections. Part of the demands have come from a more urban, educated population, and some have come from international sources as Mexico has become more and more a part of world trade.

The elections of 2000 brought the PAN candidate, Vicente Fox, into the presidency. PAN captured 208 of the 500 deputies in the lower house (Chamber of Deputies), but PRI edged them out with 209 members. 46 of the 128 senators elected were from PAN, as opposed to 60 for PRI. The newly created competitive electoral system has encouraged coalitions to form to the left and right of PRI, and the split in votes may be encouraging gridlock, a phenomenon unknown to Mexico under the old PRI-controlled governments.

Take a closer look at [Election Results 2000](#).

## INTEREST GROUPS:

The Mexican government's corporatist structure generally responds pragmatically to the demands of interest groups. As a result, political tensions among major interests have rarely escalated into the kinds of serious conflict that can threaten stability. Where open conflict has occurred, it has generally been met with efforts to find a solution.

In the past 30 years or so, business interests have networked with political leaders to protect the growth of commerce, finance, industry and agriculture. These business elites have become quite wealthy, but they were never incorporated into the PRI. However, political leaders have listened to and responded to their demands. Labor has been similarly accommodated within the system. Wage levels for unionized workers grew fairly consistently between 1940 and 1982, when the economic crisis prompted by lowering oil prices caused wages to drop. The power of union bosses is declining, partly because unions are weaker than in the past, and partly because union members are more independent.

## INSTITUTIONS:

Mexico is a **federal republic**, though the state and local governments have little independent power and few resources. Historically, the executive branch with its strong presidency has had all the power, while the legislature and judiciary followed the executive's lead, rubber-stamping executive decisions. Though Mexico is democratic in name, traditionally the country has been authoritarian and corporatist. Since the 1980s, the government and its citizens have made significant changes, so that - more and more - Mexico is practicing democracy.

According to the Constitution of 1917, Mexican political institutions resemble those of the U.S. The three branches of government theoretically check and balance one another, and many public officials - including the president, both houses of the legislature, and governors - are directly elected by the people. In practice, however, the Mexican system is very different from that of the United States. The Mexican constitution is very long and easily amended, and the government can best be described as a strong presidential system.

Does Mexico have real checks and balances now? and even [gridlock?](#)

#### EXECUTIVE:

A remarkable thing happened in the presidential election of 2000. The PRI candidate did not win. Instead, Vicente Fox, candidate for the combined PAN/PRD parties won with almost 43 percent of the vote. He edged out Francisco Labastida, the PRI candidate, who garnered not quite 36 percent. This election has far-reaching implications, since the structure of the government is built around the certainty that the PRI candidate will win. This election may mark the end of patron-clientism and the beginning of a true democratic state.

Since the formation of PRI, policy making in Mexico had centered on the presidency. The president - through the patron-client system - was virtually a dictator for his **sexenio**, a non-renewable six year term. The incumbent always selected his successor, appointed officials to all positions of power in the government and PRI, and named PRI candidates for governors, senators, deputies, and local officials. Until the mid 1970s, Mexican presidents were considered above criticism, and people revered them as symbols of national progress and well being. Despite recent changes, the Mexican president remains very powerful.

As head of PRI, the president managed a huge patronage system and controlled a rubber stamp Congress. The president almost always was a member of the preceding president's cabinet.

Now, Vicente Fox holds the power of the presidency, but must manage a new Mexico without the supporting patron-client system of PRI behind him. Can he do it? Will he be able to establish new connections or alter the old ones. Does he reflect the emergence of a truly democratic and modern Mexico? Only time will tell.

Read about the [Mexican President's cabinet](#) (in Spanish).

#### BUREACRACY:

Almost 1 1/2 million people work in the federal bureaucracy, most of them in Mexico City. More government employees staff the schools, state-owned industries, and semi-autonomous agencies of the government, and hundreds of thousands of bureaucrats fill positions in state, and local governments.

Officials are generally paid very little, but those at high and middle levels have a great deal of power. Under PRI control, all were tied to the patron-client system and often accepted bribes and used insider information to promote private business deals.

#### THE LEGISLATURE:

The Mexican legislature is bicameral, with a 500-member **Chamber of Deputies** and a 128-member **Senate**. All legislators are directly elected - 300 deputies from single-member districts, 200 by proportional representation, and 4 senators from each of 31 states and the federal district (Mexico City). Although legislative procedures look very similar to those of the United States, until the 1980s the legislature remained under the president's strict control.

PRI's grip on the legislature slipped earlier than it did on the presidency. The growing strength of opposition parties, combined with legislation that provided for greater representation of minority parties (proportional representation) in congress, led to the election of 240 opposition deputies that year. After that, presidential programs were no longer rubber stamped, but were open to real debate for the first time. President Salinas' reform programs, then, were slowed down, and for the first time, the Mexican government experienced some gridlock. In 1997 PRI lost a majority in the Chamber of Deputies when 261 deputies were elected from opposition parties. The election of 2000 gave PRI a bare plurality &ndash; but far from a majority - in both houses.

As a competitive multiparty system begins to emerge, the Mexican congress has become a more important forum for various points of view. PRI candidates are facing more competitive elections in many locales, and the number of "safe seats" is declining. The legislature has challenged Fox on a number of occasions, but whether or not a true system of checks and balances is developing is still unclear.

Visit the official web site of the [Chamber of Deputies](#)

**THE JUDICIARY:** A strong judicial branch is essential if a country is to be ruled by law, not by the whim of a dictator. Mexico does not yet have an independent judiciary, nor does it have a system of judicial review. Even though the Constitution of 1917 is still in effect, it is easily amended and does not have the same level of legitimacy as does the U.S. Constitution.

Mexico has both federal and state courts, but because most laws are federal, state courts have played a subordinate role. If states continue to become more independent from the central government, the state courts almost certainly will come to play a larger role.

The Supreme Court is the highest federal court, and on paper it has judicial review, but in reality, it almost never overrules an important government action or policy. Historically, then, the courts have been controlled by the executive branch, most specifically the president. As in the United States, judges are officially appointed for life. In practice, judges resign at the beginning of each sexenio, allowing the incoming president to place his loyalists on the bench as well as in the state houses, bureaucratic offices, and party headquarters.

But change is in the wind. The administration of Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) tried to strengthen the courts by emphasizing the rule of law. Increasing interest in human rights issues by citizens' groups and the media has added pressure to the courts to play a stronger role in protecting basic freedoms. Citizens and the government are increasingly resorting to the courts as a primary weapon against corruption, drugs, and police abuse. President Zedillo often refused to interfere with the courts' judgments, and Vicente Fox has vowed to work for an independent judiciary.

#### **MILITARY:**

Military generals dominated Mexican politics throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century. The military presided over the chaos, violence, and bloodshed of the era following the Revolution of 1910, and it was the competitiveness of their generals that caused PRI to dramatically cut back their political power. Although all presidents of Mexico were generals until the 1940s, they still acted to separate the military from politics. Even critics of PRI admit that gaining government control of the military is one of the party's most important accomplishments. Over the past fifty years, the military has been turned into a relatively disciplined force with a professional officer corps.

Much credit for de-politicizing the military belongs to Plutarco Calles and Lazaro Cardenas, who introduced the idea of rotating the generals' regional commands. By moving generals from one part of the country to another, the government kept them from building regional bases of power. And true to the old patron-client system, presidents traded favors with military officers - such as business opportunities - so that generals could enjoy economic, if not political power.

The tendency to dole out favors to the military almost certainly has led to the existence of strong ties between military officers and the drug trade. In recent years, the military has been heavily involved in efforts to combat drug trafficking, and rumors abound about deals struck between military officials and drug barons. Such

fears were confirmed when General Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, the head of the anti-drug task force, was arrested in February 1997 on accusations of protecting a drug lord.

#### POLICIES AND ISSUES:

Mexican government and politics has changed dramatically since the 1980s. Today Mexico has taken serious steps toward becoming a democracy, and the economy has shown signs of improvement since the collapse of 1982. The country is trying to move from being a regionally vulnerable area to a globally reliable one. Still, stubborn problems remain. PRI has been entangled with the government so long that creating branches that operate independently is a huge task. The gap between the rich and poor is still wide in Mexico, despite the growth of the middle class in the north. And Fox faces a big challenge in shaping Mexico's relationship with the United States. How does Mexico retain the benefits of trade and cooperation with its neighbor to the north, and yet steer its own independent course?

Read an article that describes many issues: [Murder, Money, and Mexico.](#)

#### ECONOMY:

Mexico's economic development has had a significant impact on social conditions in the country. Overall, the standard of living has improved greatly since the 1940s. Rates of infant mortality, literacy, and life expectancy have steadily improved. Health and education services have expanded, despite severe cutbacks after the economic crisis of 1982.

#### "The Mexican Miracle"

Between 1940 and 1960 Mexico's economy grew as a whole by more than 6 percent a year. Industrial production rose even faster, averaging nearly 9 percent for most of the 1960s. Agriculture's share of total production dropped from 25 percent to 11 percent, while that of manufacturing rose from 25 percent to 34 percent. All this growth occurred without much of the inflation that has plagued many other Latin American economies.

#### Problems

- **A growing gap between the rich and the poor was a major consequence of the rapid economic growth** - Relatively little attention was paid to the issues of equality and social justice that had led to the revolutions in the first place. Social services programs were limited at best. From 1940 to 1980 Mexico's income distribution was among the most

unequal in all the LDCs, with the bottom 40 percent of the population never earning more than 11 percent of total wages.

- **Rapid and unplanned urbanization accompanied the growth** - The Federal District, Guadalajara, and other major cities became urban nightmares, with millions of people living in huge shantytowns with no electricity, running water, or sewers. Poor highway planning and no mass transit meant that traffic congestion was among the worst in the world. Pollution from cars and factories make Mexico City's air so dirty that it is unsafe to breathe.

## The Crisis

In its effort to industrialize, the Mexican government borrowed heavily against expectations that oil prices would remain high forever. Much of the rapid growth was based on the oil business, especially since Mexico's production became increasing just as that of OPEC countries was decreasing during the early 1970s. When the price of oil plummeted in 1982, so did Mexico's economy. By 1987, Mexico's debt was over \$107 billion, making it one of the most heavily indebted countries in the world. The debt represented 70 percent of Mexico's entire GNP.

## Reform

President Miguel de la Madrid began his sexenio in 1982 with all of these economic problems before him. He began a dramatic reform program that reflected the values of the new tecnico leaders. This program continued through the presidencies of Salinas and Zedillo, and it has brought about one of the most dramatic economic turnarounds in modern history.

- **Sharp cuts in government spending** - According to agreements with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the U.S. government, and private banks, Mexico set off on an austerity plan that greatly reduced government spending. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were cut, subsidies to government agencies were slashed, and hundreds of public enterprises were eliminated.
- **Debt reduction** - Mexico's debt still continues to plague her, although the U.S. spearheaded a multinational plan to reduce interest rates on loans and allow more generous terms for their repayment. Mexico still pays an average of about \$10 billion a year in interest payments.
- **Privatization** - In order to allow market forces to drive the Mexican economy, Madrid's government decided to give up much of its economic power. Most importantly, the government privatized many public enterprises, especially those that were costing public money. The banks were returned to the private sector by President Salinas in 1990. By the late 1980s a "mini silicon valley" was emerging in Guadalajara where IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Wang, and other tech firms set up factories and headquarters. Special laws - like duty-free importing of components - and cheap labor encouraged U.S. companies to invest in Mexican plants.

Still, the problems persist today, particularly those of income inequality, urban planning, and pollution.



## FOREIGN POLICY:

The crisis that began in 1982 clearly indicated that a policy of encouraging more Mexican exports and opening markets to foreign goods was essential. In the years after 1982 the government relaxed restrictions on foreign ownership of property and reduced and eliminated tariffs. The government courted foreign investment and encouraged Mexican private industry to produce goods for export.

Drug trafficking between Mexico and the United States has been a major problem for both countries for many years. The drug trade has spawned corruption within the Mexican government, so that officials have often been bribed to look the other way or even actively participate in the trade. Fox has vowed to stamp out the corruption and some major arrests have been made, but the problem is far from resolved.

Since the mid-1980s, Mexico has entered into many trade agreements and organizations in order to globalize her economy and pay her way out of debt:

**GATT/WTO** - In 1986, Mexico joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), a multilateral agreement that attempts to promote freer trade among countries. The World Trade Organization was created from this agreement.

**NAFTA** - The North American Free Trade Agreement was signed by Mexico, Canada, and the United States. Its goal is to more closely integrate the economies by eliminating tariffs and reducing restrictions so that companies can expand into all countries freely. Mexico hopes to stimulate its overall growth, enrich its big business community, and supply jobs for Mexicans in new industries. On the other hand, American firms gain from access to inexpensive labor, raw materials, services and tourism, as well as new markets to sell and invest in. Mexico runs the risk of again being overshadowed by the United States, but hopes that the benefits will outweigh the problems. President Fox has generally supported freer flow of labor and goods between Mexico and its northern neighbors, although some of his advisers are more skeptical of NAFTA.

Mexican President Vicente Fox was critical of [U.S. President George W. Bush's policy on the death penalty for drug smugglers](#)

Visit [NAFTA's home page](#).

Read about a [border dispute](#) between Mexico and the United States regarding the Rio Grande River.

## DEMOCRACY:

Part of the answer to Mexico's economic and foreign policy woes lies in the development of democratic traditions within the political system. Mexico's tradition of authoritarianism works against democratization, but modernization of the economy, the political value of populism, and the democratic revolutionary impulses work for it. One of the most important indications of democracy is the development of competitive, clean elections in many parts of the country.

### **Election Reforms**

Some election reforms include

campaign finance restrictions - laws that limit contributions to campaigns

critical media coverage, as media is less under PRI control

international watch teams, as Mexico has tried to convince other countries that elections are fair and competitive

election monitoring by opposition party members

The 1994 campaign for the presidency got off to a very bad start when PRI candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio was assassinated in Tijuana. PRI quickly replaced him with Ernesto Zedillo, but the old specters of violence and chaos threatened the political order. The incumbent president's brother was implicated in the assassination, and high officials were linked to drug trafficking. Despite this trouble, Zedillo stepped up to the challenge, and PRI won the election handily. Many observers believe that the elections of 1994 and 2000 have been the most competitive, fair elections in Mexico's history. The election of 2000 broke all precedents when a PAN candidate - Vicente Fox - won the presidency, finally displacing the 71 year dominance of PRI.

Vicente Fox

The 2000 presidential victory of Vicente Fox represents one of the most profound changes in Mexican politics in many years. Fox is typical of the small and medium-sized entrepreneurs who became actively engaged in politics in the early 1980s out of their frustration with PRI's mismanagement of the economy. Before the economic crisis of 1982, Fox focused his energies on working his way from his family's ranch in Guanajuato to the head of the Coca Cola's Latin American operations. After the crisis Fox became active in PAN, supporting its pro-democratic doctrine and opposition to state intervention in the economy. Fox stressed pragmatic politics over ideology, stressing greater flexibility with regard to membership growth and cooperation with other opposition parties.

In 1991 Fox ran for governor of his state of Guanajuato, but lost in a context of widespread fraud, but he ran again in 1995 and won after significant electoral reforms. In 1997 Amigos de Fox formed - a Mexican-style PAC - to help Fox seek the presidency. Through promotional radio and television "infomercials" (like Ross Perot's), globetrotting to meet with international leaders, and a charismatic denim-and-boots cowboy demeanor, Fox won the hearts of the Mexican voters. His pragmatic approach steered the conservative party more toward the middle, and even captured PRD support, after PRD became disenchanted with Cardenas.

Although Fox has served less than three years of his sexenio, he appears to have these goals:

- **Pluralism** - Fox has incorporated diverse political perspectives into his administration. He has looked outside PAN to fill important government posts.
- **Decentralization** - Fox advocates a more active role for the legislature and the judiciary, and greater authority for state and local governments.
- **Electoral Reform** - Some possible further reforms include limited reelection of local, state, and legislative officials,
- **Rule of law** - One of the most significant missing pieces in the puzzle of Mexico's democratic growth has been a strong, trustworthy judicial system. Fox's search for legal expertise will undoubtedly be one of the most important talent searches of his administration
- **Anti-Narcotics** - One of Mexico's most intractable problems is its web of crime syndicates with their connections to drug rings. Fox is trying to break the connection between the government and Mexico's drug lords, and he probably will urge the U.S. to make his job easier by finding ways to reduce the demand for drugs north of the border.

Vicente Fox showed his independence from the United States by criticizing the [War in Iraq](#).

Connect to a [biography of Vicente Fox](#).

Mexican citizens don't always agree with their president. Here's a [Vicente Fox protest song](#).

#### ETHNIC REBELLIONS:

In his first year of office, Fox made several efforts to negotiate with the Zapatistas to settle their dispute with the government. The EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Front) began in 1994 in the southern state of Chiapas in protest to the signing of the NAFTA treaty. They saw the agreement as a continuation of the exploitation of voracious landowners and corrupt bosses of PRI. Their army captured four towns, including a popular tourist destination, and they demanded jobs, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. Their

rebellion has spread, and Zapatista supporters wear black ski masks to hide their identity from the government.

The Zapatista rebellion was based on ethnicity - the Amerindian disaffection for the mestizo, urban-based government. It has since spread to other areas and ethnicities, and it represents a major threat to Mexico's political stability.

What will the future bring? Will Mexico be able to sustain a strong, stable economy? Will the political system emerge from its peasant-based patron-client system and corporatism as a modern democracy? Will more social equality be granted to peasants and city workers? Many observers await the answers to these questions, including people in less developed countries that look to Mexico as an example of development. More powerful countries - particularly the United States - realize that international global politics and economies are tied to the successes of countries like Mexico. Despite the instabilities of its past, Mexico does have strong traditions, a well-developed sense of national pride, many natural resources, and a record of progress, no matter how uneven.

What does Mexico teach their children about [human rights](#)?

Read more about the [Zapatistas](#) and their hero [Emiliano Zapatista](#).