

Types of Governmental Control

Totalitarianism is a form of government control that swept across Europe in the early 20th century. It eventually spread to other parts of the globe but is generally characterized by the major personalities that helped to define totalitarianism. Leaders like Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini became synonymous with the control they held over their nations and people.

Introduction

The essence of totalitarianism can be found in its very name -- it is a form of rule in which the government attempts to maintain total control over society as well as all aspects of the public and private lives of its citizens. There are several characteristics that are common to totalitarian regimes, including the following:

- Rule by a single party
- Total control of the military
- Total control over means of communication (newspapers, propaganda, etc.)
- Police control with the use of terror as a control tactic
- Control of the economy

However, even though there were common characteristics of the different totalitarian regimes, it didn't look the same in all the countries in which it was employed. So, how did totalitarianism look?

Many totalitarian states are officially labeled as **Fascist**.

Fascism: a way of organizing a society in which a government ruled by a dictator controls the lives of the people and in which people are not allowed to disagree with the government.

Other totalitarian states are labeled as Communist.

Communism: strictly speaking, communism means a system of equalizing the social conditions of life. Specifically, communism is a practiced system that contemplates the abolition of inequalities in the possession of property, as by distributing all wealth in common for the equal use and advantage of all. The means to achieve this is by collectivization of all private property. Although meant to indicate the means of production, to be consistent, communism requires that no individual may own anything exclusively or privately – Not the product of his work or any personal material benefit he may achieve as a result of it. All material is centralized and distributed by legislators, the intention being to achieve equal utility (of material) by all. Freedom of expression tends also to be mediated by state for the same reasons and to maintain the “integrity” of the collective.

Historical Contexts

Nazi Germany

Perhaps the most famous example of totalitarianism is Nazi Germany under the rule of Adolf Hitler. Hitler came to power in 1933 after being elected by the German people; however, he illegally assumed more power than was granted under German law. By doing so, he held complete control of the government, both national and local. Under Hitler's regime if a citizen spoke against the government then they would be arrested and often sent to a concentration camp. Concentration camps were part of a system used for the imprisonment and murder of people the Nazis deemed undesirable. The concentration camps were used in the Holocaust and held millions of Jews, political prisoners, gypsies, homosexuals, mentally handicapped, and any other person the Nazis deemed undesirable before they were sent or worked to their deaths. The Nazis also made stipulations as to what people were allowed to do in their daily lives. Several examples included the following: artists had to create paintings portraying Nazi values, jazz music was banned, and books written by people deemed undesirable under the Hitler regime were burned. Youth organizations indoctrinated girls and boys with Nazi ideology from a young age, and the Nazi police organization, known as the SS, intimidated and terrorized people in an attempt to control them. The final quality of Hitler's regime that signaled the Nazi government held total control was the extensive use of propaganda. Hitler's picture was everywhere, newspapers were censored, and radio broadcasts were controlled by the government.

Stalinist Soviet Union

Another famed example of a totalitarian regime is the leadership of the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin. Stalin came to power following the death of Vladimir Lenin. Stalin gained control by blackmailing many of the leaders in the communist government and eventually murdered his main rival, Leon Trotsky.

Artists painted pictures and authors wrote novels that glorified Stalin, and people were expected to have a picture of him in their homes, often replacing former pictures of Jesus and other religious figures. He took on the nickname 'Uncle Joe' in an effort to give off a kind and friendly personality. In reality, Stalin ran a country in which he held total, oppressive control.

Checking for Understanding

- 1) Which of the following is an accurate definition of a totalitarian government?
 - A) A government that allows citizens to play a role in the development of laws
 - B) A government that allowed private ownership of business
 - C) A government that allows basic freedoms to its citizens
 - D) A government that holds total control over the citizens of its nation

2) All of the following are characteristics of totalitarianism except...

A) State is run by a single party

B) State controls the economy

C) State relinquishes control of armed forces to military leaders

D) State censors newspapers and other forms of media