

STUDY TASK CARD 9

Democracy versus Totalitarianism

There are many definitions that are used to describe and explain the different forms of governance that exists around the world today. It can get quite confusing as many terms are linked together to describe systems that have evolved over time.

However, it is important to remember they all fall under two main systems of rule:
rule of law or rule by law

DEMOCRACY (supported by the rule of law)

Democracy works best when supported by the rule of law and basic human rights. All people have the right to



- Live
- Own and control their own property
- Have access to fair and transparent justice according to the law at the time
- Follow their own beliefs, religion, and customs
- Freedom from torture or slavery

To achieve this, a country must put into place a system where the law of the land protects human rights and rule society

So, what would that look like?



The most obvious example today is *democratic* rule. The word *democracy* comes from the ancient Greek words meaning *people* and *rule of the government*. It is a system of government where the leaders have been elected by the people, therefore the power is with the people.

There are many types of *democracies*, but all have the main feature of the people being able to decide who will lead and represent their interests and issues of concern in their communities. This happens through the process of free and fair elections.

A *parliamentary democracy* is one example where the elected representatives are required to regularly meet in parliament to make laws. The people also have equal opportunity to become a representative of government themselves, regardless of their social background, religious beliefs, or ethnic status. An example of this is Australia's system of governance – the *Westminster System*.

Democracy with the rule of law respects human rights and protects its citizens

A *democracy* works best when it is supported by the rule of law. That is, all people including the government are ruled by the law and obey it. In such as *democracy* there are independent and effective legal systems that protect human rights and balance those who hold power.



TOTALITARIAN (rule by law)

The opposite of democratic rule is called *totalitarianism*

Also known as *the state*, a **totalitarian** government imposes a set of beliefs on its people who must conform or face unpleasant, and often violent consequences. This is called **oppression**.



The state holds *absolute power* to maintain control over all areas in the lives of its citizens. The law does not apply to the state and they ignore basic human rights.

Here are the main points of a **totalitarian** state:

- *Individual freedoms or ownership of personal property is restricted or not permitted in any way.*
- *Personal beliefs and faith in religion other than the ideals of the state, is met with severe consequences.*
- *Information or any form of media from outside the state is not permitted. The state only releases information that promotes its own point of view or political cause. Citizens are denied access to any information that can cause a revolt.*
- *All legal traditions are discarded as the role of lawmaker is taken by the ruler. Police operate under the state's law. Decisions and judgements are passed according to the interpretations of the ruler. Fair and equal justice is denied.*
- *Opposition to the state is punishable and considered evil. Large scale organised violence is permitted by the state to force the people into conforming.*
- *Limiting or withholding the supply of food to its citizens. The fear of starvation is a powerful strategy that reinforces the reliance of the people on the ruler for all their needs, therefore developing loyalty towards the ideals of the state.*
- *Social gatherings and traditions are banned. The state controls who people can visit and for what reason. This suppresses any community discussion and eliminates any forces of influence beyond the control of the state. As a result, the society becomes weakened.*

Some examples of totalitarianism include:



STATE	RULER	PERIOD
Soviet Union	Joseph Stalin	1922 – 1943
Nazi Germany	Adolf Hitler	1933 – 1945
The People's Republic of China	Mao Zedong	1949 – 1976
North Korea	Kim Dynasty	1948 – present

Totalitarianism rules by law as it arbitrarily controls its citizens

A **totalitarian** state is **ruled by law**. The people must obey the law created by the leader whilst the leader and law enforcement are not required to obey. Human rights are ignored.