Comparing Totalitarianism and Democracy

**Totalitarianism**

Totalitarianism is a form of government that exercises complete political, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual control over its subjects. A charismatic leader, or dictator, who controls the one allowable political party, usually heads it. This form of rule requires complete subordination of the individual to advance the interests of the state. People are made dependent on the wishes and whims of the political party and its leader. The governments of Italy & Nazi Germany was an example of a Fascist, totalitarian state. Its ideology and practice included a racial theory that denigrated, persecuted, and murdered “non-Aryans,” particularly Jews. It also advocated extreme nationalism that called for the unification of all German-speaking peoples and required the centralization of decision-making by, and loyalty to, a single, all-powerful leader. The use of paramilitary secret organizations to stifle dissent and terrorize opposition ensured complete compliance.

Information and ideas were effectively disseminated through government-controlled propaganda campaigns using radio, the press, and education at all levels. Propaganda: The systematic, widespread dissemination or promotion of particular ideas, doctrines, or practices to further one’s own cause or to damage an opposing one. Writers, speakers, actors, composers, and poets were licensed and controlled by the government. The centrally controlled economy enabled the government to control its workers, making them dependent on the government. All workers were required to possess a work permit, which could be withdrawn for offenses such as objecting to poor working conditions. In a totalitarian dictatorship there is no legal means of effecting a change of government. Civil rights and human rights are not guaranteed.  

**Fear and Propaganda = Control**

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**Democracy**

Democracy is a system of government in which ultimate political authority is vested in the people. Representatives elected by popular suffrage (voting) exercise the supreme authority. In democracies such as the United States, both the executive head of government (president) and the legislature (Senate and House of Representatives) are elected. The powers of government are based on the consent of the governed. Groups or institutions typically exercise the democratic theory in a complex system of interactions that involve compromises and bargaining in the decision process. The major features of a modern democracy include government only by the consent of the governed, individual freedom guaranteed by a constitution, equality before the law, which maintains that all persons are created equal with minority rights protected, universal suffrage, and education for all. Citizens are free to join any political party, union, or other legal group if they choose. Elected representatives may be supplanted by the electorate according to the legal procedures of recall and referendum, and they are, at least in principle, responsible to the electorate. Citizens retain the right to alter or abolish a government that becomes destructive and form a new government. There are no paramilitary organizations sanctioned by the government to suppress those citizens who voice opposition to the government. The cornerstones of democracy are freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.
1) Create and fill in the Venn diagram and then answer all of the following questions:

2) For both political systems, who makes and carries out the rules? How are these rules created?
3) What does each group believe about Gov’t & Freedom?
4) How do these beliefs impact its citizens?
5) What is Propaganda?
6) How does Totalitarian gov’ts control their people?
7) What happens to citizens of each government if they disagree with the group in power?

8) Which of the two types of Gov’ts does this Political Cartoon represent?
In Europe the Great Depression caused many citizens to lose faith in their democratic governments. In many countries, people turned to extremist political groups. Some turned to communism; others turned to fascism. People began looking for new leaders to help them solve their problems and rebuild their countries. Sometimes these new leaders became dictators, or rulers with complete power and control over their countries. Benito Mussolini in Italy, Adolf Hitler in Germany (called theirs Nazism), and Francisco Franco in Spain were three such Fascist dictators. However, the Fascist governments of Mussolini and Hitler drew their support from industrialists and the military, while Spanish Fascists under Franco drew support from the military and the wealthy landowners.

After World War I, Benito Mussolini of Italy organized the Fascist movement. He derived the word Fascist from the ancient Roman symbol of authority, the fasces— a bundle of rods surrounding an ax. This symbol represented a strong central government uniting its entire people in one goal. Fascists favored dictatorship and nationalism; they opposed democracy and communism.

**Characteristics of Totalitarianism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fascism/Nazism</th>
<th>Communism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• leader identified with state</td>
<td>• Leninism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• authoritarian</td>
<td>• Marxism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• action-oriented</td>
<td>• dictatorship of the proletariat (urban working class)</td>
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- **Basic Principles**
  - Fascist
    - racist (nazism)
    - nationalist
    - militarist
  - Communism
    - nationalist
    - internationalist

- **Social**
  - Fascist
    - supported by industrialists and the military
  - Communism
    - supported by peasants (China) and workers (Soviet Union)

- **Economic**
  - Fascist
    - control by state corporations or state governments
    - private property
  - Communism
    - government (state) planning
    - collective ownership

- **Cultural**
  - Fascist
    - censorship
    - indoctrination
    - secret police
  - Communism
    - censorship
    - indoctrination
    - secret police

- **Examples**
  - fascism in Italy and Spain
  - naziism in Germany
  - communism in China and in the Soviet Union

**Directions: Answer the following questions.**

9. Why did some people turn to extremist political groups?
10. What is Fascism and how did Mussolini get his power?
11. Using the six categories (running down the side of the chart), What two things standout to you and explain why?