

Who Governs? What Kind of People Are in the Bureaucracy?

Robert A. Dahl's 罗伯特·达尔 1961 book *Who Governs?* is a classic, empirical 经验的 look at political power in a liberal democracy, based on evidence from one U.S. city. Different styles of governance and "political cultures" make certain arrangements more likely and attract different kinds of people to public office.

Two important **suffixes** 后缀 when talking about government are "-cracy" and "-archy". These describe the kinds of people who ostensibly (外表上地 appear to) "rule" a polity.

Examples: *democracy* = "rule by the people" *autocracy* = "rule by an autocrat" (like dictatorship/dictator)

plutocracy 富豪或财阀统治 = "rule by the very rich" *aristocracy* 贵族阶级 = high-class people with political power, often maintained by blood relations as in a status of nobility
theocracy 神权政体; 神权政治; 神权国家 = "rule by religious leaders and dogma 教条"

kleptocracy 盗贼统治(的国家) = a thieving, predatory state which tries to steal or otherwise extract as much as possible from the people (i.e. from high taxes, confiscation 没收 or expropriation 征用 of private property 私有财产 and resources)

gerontocracy 老人政府 = rule by old people (usually used by younger people to criticize the advanced age of top leaders or those who don't yield to a younger generation)

technocratic 技术专家统治论的 = ruled by those with high technical or other specialized skills (technocrats)

meritocratic 英才管理的 = ruled by those who have proved their merit (excellence and/or worthiness). Many consider Qin Shihuang as the first leader to use a meritocratic, rather than personalistic/nepotistic, system of promotion to higher ranks in government. Imperial exams traditionally and an ongoing "testing culture" are evidence of China's attempts to be a meritocracy. An antonym 反义词 and pun 双关语 is the title of the movie "Idiocracy," which alters the word "idiocy" 愚蠢 to become "rule by the stupid" or "rule by idiots." Also note that technocrats may be just as corrupt (and thereby not meritocratic) as other politicians; a government of technocrats is not equivalent to a meritocracy simply because the bureaucrats are highly skilled and smart!

If we take apart the word "bureaucracy," we see that it could literally mean that government bureaus and agencies hold the most power. If they remain rational and impartial, this would be Max Weber's ideal form of "legitimate authority," however critics often find that "bureaucratic dominance" is a requirement of modernity, regardless of regime type. Bureaucracies, like any structural organization, eventually find it difficult to be apolitical and take on predictable self-interests of defending and expanding their power.

Feminists of recent centuries have pointed out the problem of **patriarchy** 家长统治; 父系社会, the predominance of men in power and leadership and the common but pernicious 有害的 association between power and maleness. While feminism mainly advocates male/female equality in individual power and at least "passive representation" in positions of power, some actively wish to subvert 颠覆 and replace "the patriarchy" with matriarchal societies and gynarchies (governments ruled by a woman or women).

Prefixes 前缀 like "mon-", "oli-", and "poly-" tell us how widely political power is dispersed 散布. A **monarchy** is the same as a kingdom, ruled by a king or a monarch, and only one person really has political power. Such systems find evidence and support in statements like Louis XIV's "L'etat, c'est moi 国家就是我" or Machiavelli's *The Prince*. The polar opposite of this is "**polyarchy**," used by Dahl and many comparative politics scholars as an approximation 近似 or minimum standard 最低标准 of liberal democracy, or "rule by the many." Liberal democracies like the U.S. are often criticized as falling far short of the polyarchic ideal, criticized by Marxists and other Left-wingers as "**oligarchic**" 寡头政治的 or "plutocratic," ruled by a very few, very rich elites who try to establish and maintain an illusion of democracy 民主的假面具, especially because national elections which appear to be "free and fair" don't offer citizens real choices or representation. The prefix "a-" appears in "**anarchy**" to mean literally the absence of government, though it has unfortunately also taken on a connotation 涵义 with general disorder and even chaos 大乱, one which anarchists try to dispel 驱散.

Figures like Robert McNamara, featured in the documentary "The Fog of War," are considered technocrats because they are polymathic 博学的, skilled elites who represent "the best and the brightest" of society. The documentary shows that McNamara's technical skills with statistical analysis 统计分析 were put to use in World War II, then in business to help the Ford Motor Company. These experiences built his reputation 名声 and led to President Kennedy offering him the position of Secretary of Defense, despite not having the usual background of U.S. bureaucrats.

To enter politics in the USA, the most traditional path is to earn a law degree. By contrast, a large number of contemporary 当代 Chinese politicians were trained as engineers and scientists. To what extent do you think this represents differing social values and expectations of "what it takes to govern"?

Donald Trump's election as an "outsider" shows a populist reaction 反应 against "know-it-all 自称无所不知的" politicians and also something of a desire for an autocratic "strongman" who is expected to stop endless debates, break through gridlock, and "get things done." Having no background in law, military, or government, his reputation as a businessman was attractive to voters who felt left behind by the "knowledge economy" of globalization. Other businessmen have run for the presidency in the past, often as third-party candidates who believe in low taxes, balanced budgets, and generally running the government more like a business. Trump's administration, at very least, will test whether the first and last of these three are good ideas, but balancing the U.S. national budget does not appear to be a priority. Perhaps a new "-cracy" will need to be created to describe "rule for the purpose of increasing (personal) business revenue," though this is supposed to be prevented by laws governing corruption conflicts of interest.

Prepared for Chinese learners in courses at NENU as a linguistic guide to political terms. Only minimal value judgment is intended.