

## Political Science

Q. Give a critical analysis of Aristotle's classification of governments.

Ans.: Introduction

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, is one of the most influential philosophers in history. He extensively examined the concept of governance and classified governments based on their characteristics and principles. In his renowned work "Politics", Aristotle explored the nature of political systems, their merits, and their potential pitfalls. His classifications were grounded in the belief that the purpose of government is to promote the common good and ensure the well-being of society as a whole.

2. Classification of Governments

Aristotle categorized governments based on two key criteria: the number of rulers and the rulers' pursuit of the common good or their own self-interest. He identified three pure forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy, and polity, and three corresponding corrupt forms: tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy.

A. Monarchy

Aristotle defined monarchy as the rule of one individual, who acts in the best interest of the entire community.

While Aristotle recognized the potential benefits of a benevolent ruler, he failed to address the issue of succession and the potential for abuse of power. Hereditary monarchies, in particular, often suffer from the problem of incompetent

or tyrannical ruler. Additionally, Aristotle's assumption that one person can effectively govern a large community without a system of checks and balances is questionable.

One current example that reflects Aristotle's definition of monarchy is the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, where the king, currently King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, holds ultimate political power and governs the country. The king serves as the head of state of government, and his authority extends to all branches of the government. Moreover, the king has power to make and enforce laws, appoint government officials, and serve as the final decision maker on important matters.

Having said that, it is worth noting that the concept of monarchy varies across different cultures and can take on different forms. Some monarchies have constitutional limitations and share power with other governing bodies, while others may have more autocratic rule. Nonetheless, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia offers an example that aligns with Aristotle's traditional definition of monarchy.

### B, Aristocracy

According to Aristotle, aristocracy is the rule of a virtuous and educated elite, which governs with the common good in mind. Power is vested in a small group of qualified individuals, who are considered the best rulers due to their wisdom, intelligence, and moral character. While the concept of rule by the best seems appealing, aristocracies ~~are~~ often suffer from elitism, favoritism, and exclusion of the majority. The definition of "virtuous" and

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"educated" can also be subjective and prone to manipulation, leading to entrenchment of a privileged class.

For better understanding of what aristocracy is, let us look into a contemporary example. Switzerland's political system reflects elements of Aristotle's definition of aristocracy. Switzerland practices a form of government known as a direct democracy combined with a federal system. Political decisions are made through referendums and popular votes. It has a system of rotating federal presidency, where the country's seven-member Federal Council serves as the collective head of state and government.

The Federal Council members are elected by the Federal Assembly, consisting of two chambers representing the Swiss people and the cantons.

Furthermore, the Federal Council members are elected based on their qualifications and expertise, and they are expected to act in the best interest of the Swiss people. The system aims to ensure that decisions are made by a group of individuals who are considered knowledgeable and capable of governing effectively. While Switzerland's political system is not a traditional aristocracy in the strict sense, it shares some characteristics with Aristotle's definition. The emphasis on the wisdom and qualifications of the elected representatives, along with the participatory nature of decision-making, reflects certain elements of aristocracy as defined by Aristotle.

## C, Polity

Aristotle defined polity as a form of government that represents the interests of the middle ~~and~~ class & the majority of citizens. It is a mixed form of government that combines the elements of democracy and oligarchy, in which the middle class holds power and governs with a focus on the common good. Aristotle regarded polity as the ideal form of government due to its mixed nature. However, his notion of the middle class as the virtuous and stabilizing force in society has been criticized for its exclusionary implications and lack of consideration for the lower classes.

To comprehensively understand polity, taking a look at Germany's political system would be appropriate. Germany operates under a federal parliamentary republic system, where power is distributed among the federal government, state governments, and the citizens. In Germany, citizens elect representatives to the Bundestag (Federal Diet) through a mixed-member proportional representation system. The Bundestag is responsible for passing legislation and overseeing the federal government. Additionally, the country has a bicameral system with the Bundesrat (Federal Council), which represents the interests of the states. The Bundesrat consists of delegates from the sixteen German states and plays a significant role in the legislative process.

Besides that, Germany's political system reflects a mix of democratic and oligarchic elements. The ~~and~~ citizens have the power to elect representatives who govern on their behalf, and their interests are taken into account through

the electoral process. At the same time, the involvement of the Bundestag, representing the interests of the states, introduces an oligarchic aspect into the system. Incorporating elements of both democracy and oligarchy, the German political system aims to strike a balance between the interests of the majority and regional representation. This mixed nature of the German political system exhibits certain aspects of Aristotle's concept of polity.

#### D, Tyranny

Aristotle considered tyranny to be the perverted form of monarchy, where a ruler pursues personal interests at the expense of the community. While his assessment of tyrannical rule accurately captures its negative aspects, he does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that lead to the rise of tyranny, such as socioeconomic inequality or the erosion of democratic institutions.

An example that reflects elements of Aristotle's definition of tyranny is the government of North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. North Korea operates as an authoritarian state, with supreme power concentrated in the hands of the ruling Kim family. The country's leader Kim Jong Un, holds ultimate authority and exercises control over all aspects of governance and the lives of its ~~citizens~~ citizens. The ruling party, the Workers' Party of Korea, maintains a dominant position and operates with limited transparency. The government strictly restricts political dissent, suppresses opposition, and maintains a pervasive system of surveillance and control.

Along with that, the concentration of power in the hands of the ruling family, the absence of checks and balances, and the disregard for individual liberties align with Aristotle's definition of tyranny. The government's suppression of dissent and control over the lives of its citizens also reflect the absence of adherence to the rule of law and a lack of consideration for the best interests of the people.

### F/ Oligarchy

~~According~~ Aristotle defined oligarchy as the rule of a wealthy few who prioritize their own interests. Similar to tyranny, his characterization of oligarchy is limited to its negative aspects without exploring the underlying causes or potential remedies. Moreover, his assumption that wealth equates to competence in governance is questionable and fails to address the potential for corruption and exploitation by the ruling elite.

Russia serves as an example, which reflects elements of Aristotle's definition of oligarchy. While Russia operates as a semi-presidential republic on paper, the country has been criticized for its concentration of power among a small group of influential individuals and oligarchs. These are a select group of politically connected individuals and wealthy business leaders, who exert significant influence over the country's political and economic spheres. These oligarchs, through their connections, control major industries, influence policymaking, and hold considerable power and wealth. This concentration of power has raised concerns about corruption, lack of transparency, and the potential

for the interests of the few to dominate over those of the broader population.

While India's political system does incorporate elements of democracy and the presence of elected bodies, the significant influence and power wielded by the oligarchs aligns with Aristotle's definition of oligarchy. The concentration of wealth and political influence in the hands of a privileged few can result in decision-making that prioritizes their own interests rather than the well-being of the majority.

#### F) Democracy

As per Aristotle, democracy is considered as the perversion of polity, where the majority rules for their own benefit rather than the common good. He expressed concerns about the instability and potential for mob rule within democracies. However, his critique neglects the positive aspects of democracy, such as equal representation and the potential for social progress and inclusion. Also neglecting that in a democracy, power is vested in the hands of the people as a whole, allowing for broad participation and decision-making through voting and deliberation.

For example, the political system of India reflects elements of Aristotle's definition of democracy. India operates as a federal parliamentary democratic republic, where power is shared between the central government and the states, and citizens have the right to vote and participate in the political process. Citizens over the age of 18 have the right to ~~vote~~ vote in regular elections held at the national, state, and local levels. These elections are free and fair, allowing citizens to elect

their representatives and participate in decision making. India also has a multi-party system, providing diverse choices and opportunities for political engagement.

### 3. Critical Analysis

From my perspective, Aristotle's classification of governments provides a valuable framework for understanding different forms of governance, however, it has its limitations. His classifications oversimplify complex political systems, fail to account for social and economic factors, and neglect the dynamic nature of political arrangements. Additionally, his assumptions about the virtuousness and competence of rulers can be subjective and exclusionary. Nevertheless, Aristotle's work remains influential and serves as a basis for further analysis and development in political theory.

### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Aristotle's categorization provides insights into the nature of power and the pursuit of the common good, but it has several criticisms. Despite the limitations, his work has had a profound impact on political theory and continues to be studied and debated. It provides a starting point for further analysis and development, encouraging scholars to explore the complexities of governance and the challenges of achieving the common good.