**CLASS SET**

**Theocracy**

Government by divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided. In many theocracies, government leaders are members of the clergy, and the state's legal system is based on religious law. Theocratic rule was typical of early civilizations. The [Enlightenment](http://www.answers.com/topic/enlightenment%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) marked the end of theocracy in most Western countries. Contemporary examples of theocracies include Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Vatican. *See also* [church and state](http://www.answers.com/topic/separation-of-church-and-state%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top); [divine kingship](http://www.answers.com/topic/divine-kingship%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top).

A nation or state in which the clergy exercise political power and in which religious law is dominant over civil law. [Iran](http://www.answers.com/topic/iran%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) led by the Ayatollah [Khomeini](http://www.answers.com/topic/ruhollah-khomeini%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) was a theocracy under the Islamic clergy. (*See* Islam.)

**Theocracy** is a form of government. Theocracies are either [oligarchies](http://www.answers.com/topic/oligarchy%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) or [autocracies](http://www.answers.com/topic/autocracy%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) by the ruling [priests](http://www.answers.com/topic/priest%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top). For believers, theocracy is a [form of government](http://www.answers.com/topic/list-of-forms-of-government%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) in which divine power governs an earthly human state, either in a personal [incarnation](http://www.answers.com/topic/incarnation%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) or, more often, via religious institutional representatives (i.e.: a [church](http://www.answers.com/topic/church%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top)), replacing or dominating civil government. [[1]](http://www.answers.com/Theocracy#wp-_note-0) Theocratic governments enact [theonomic](http://www.answers.com/topic/theonomy-1%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) laws.

Theocracy should be distinguished from other secular forms of government that have a [state religion](http://www.answers.com/topic/state-religion%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top), are influenced by theological concepts, and [monarchies](http://www.answers.com/topic/monarchy%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) held "[By the Grace of God](http://www.answers.com/topic/by-the-grace-of-god-1%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top)".

**Current states with theocratic aspects**

**Iran**

Most observers would consider [Iran](http://www.answers.com/topic/iran%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) a theocracy,[*citation needed*] since the elected president and legislature are constitutionally subject to the supervision of two offices reserved for [Shia](http://www.answers.com/topic/shia-islam%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) clerics: the [Supreme Leader](http://www.answers.com/topic/supreme-leader-of-iran%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) of Iran (Rahbar) and the [Guardian Council](http://www.answers.com/topic/guardian-council%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top), which even decide who may run for office. However, Iranian authorities themselves consider Iran a theo-democracy or [religious democracy](http://www.answers.com/topic/religious-democracy%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top).[[2]](http://www.answers.com/Theocracy#wp-_note-1) The Supreme Leader is considered as the ultimate [head of state](http://www.answers.com/topic/head-of-state-1%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) and [government](http://www.answers.com/topic/head-of-government%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top), whereas the President is granted as the prime executor of policy. However, in the recent years [Mohammad Khatami](http://www.answers.com/topic/mohammad-khatami%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) has called Iranian political system as an alternative democratic model so called [religious democracy](http://www.answers.com/topic/religious-democracy%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top).[*citation needed*]

**Saudi Arabia**

[Saudi Arabia](http://www.answers.com/topic/saudi-arabia%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) is run according to a version of [shari'a](http://www.answers.com/topic/sharia%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) (traditional Islamic legislation) with the [Quran](http://www.answers.com/topic/qur-an%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) declared to be the constitution and is therefore sometimes classified as theocratic, but it is officially and in political fact a hereditary monarchy, with the King wielding near-absolute power and the organs of official religion subservient to them, which is rather [caesaropapism](http://www.answers.com/topic/caesaropapism-1%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top): a state structure in which the government ('Caesar') is also in control of the main religious institutions.

**The Vatican**

The [Vatican City State](http://www.answers.com/topic/vatican-city%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top) is theocratic in a very limited sense, since it has temporal rule over a small territory, but that is not its primary function. As per the [Lateran Treaty](http://www.answers.com/topic/lateran-treaty%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top), secular laws and practices in the Vatican follow those of Italy. Responsibility for security, including keeping outside invaders at bay and prosecution of criminals, is shared by the Vatican's own armed force, the [Swiss Guard](http://www.answers.com/topic/swiss-guard%22%20%5Ct%20%22_top), and the Italian state.