



◀ Francisco Franco in 1948

## How have dictators assumed and maintained power?

One easy way to compare forms of government is to divide them into two categories: democracies and dictatorships. In democracies the people tell the leaders what to do, and in dictatorships the leaders tell the people what to do. Not all dictators are fascist, like Mussolini was. However, Mussolini, like Stalin and Hitler, was a classic dictator. Each took all political power for himself and used brutal police or military forces to maintain that power. None was held responsible to the will of the people. Consider these other examples of dictators, ancient and modern:



▲ Julius Caesar on a Roman coin, c. 44 B.C.

### Julius Caesar, Ancient Rome

During the Roman Republic, the Roman Senate would appoint a dictator to serve as Rome's top official in times of civil strife. Dictators had broad powers, but usually served for only six months. Some Roman rulers, including Julius Caesar, found the law too restrictive. In 49 B.C., Caesar and his army crossed the Rubicon River and marched on Rome. As a result of the civil war that followed, Caesar took control of Rome and declared himself dictator. By 44 B.C., he had gained enough power to have himself made dictator for life. He had also gained enemies in the Senate, many of whom joined in a successful scheme to assassinate him.

### Francisco Franco, Spain

Civil war raged in Spain during the 1930s. Loyalists fought to preserve Spain's republican government. They fought against the conservative Nationalists, who were made up largely of military groups, led by General Francisco Franco.

During the war, Franco accepted military help from Hitler and Mussolini. After his victory, Franco created a dictatorship based on fascism. One of his first actions was to kill or imprison thousands of former Loyalists. He remained in power into the 1970s by limiting dissent and by satisfying the varied factions on whom he relied for support.

### Fidel Castro, Cuba

In 1952, an army revolt brought Fulgencio Batista to power in Cuba. Batista promised to end government corruption. Instead, he looted the treasury, threw his opponents in jail, and stifled the press. In 1956, Fidel Castro and a small group of rebels began a guerrilla war against the Batista regime. In 1959, Batista fled and Castro took control. However, Castro did not restore political and civil rights, as he had promised. Instead, he began a communist dictatorship. His regime killed political opponents and jailed anyone suspected of disloyalty. The Soviet Union supported Castro by giving Cuba economic and military aid.



◀ Fidel Castro visiting a school in 1961