A HISTORICAL PRESENTATION

Marxism, **Communism,** Fascism, Socialism, oh and Feminism

What it promised. How it took power.
What it meant to live inside the system.

BEFORE 1900

Roots and communal experiments

1900-2000

Revolutions, party-states, and lived experience

2001-2026

Continuity, reform, and modern variations

36 CHAPTERS / 47 TIMELINE EVENTS / 75 SOURCES

Reviewed HTML edition: 22 October 2026 | PDF edition: 24 October 2026

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Reading this edition

This PDF carries the reviewed presentation into a portable, shareable reading format. The historical coverage and source numbering follow the HTML edition.

Use the clickable contents or your PDF reader’s bookmarks to move between chapters. Bracketed source numbers lead to the references, where linked titles open the original material online.

The six examples from the “Who decides?” explorer appear as complete reading profiles. The selected timeline appears in full. Reading notes that expand in the HTML are included openly here.

The record distinguishes communist ideals, communist movements, and governments ruled by communist parties. It covers Marxism, socialist traditions, fascism as a comparison, and the effects of institutions on individuals, households, and communities.

Historical snapshot: 22 October 2026. This PDF preserves that edition rather than silently updating its historical claims.

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I · Understand the language / CHAPTER 01

One word. Three different meanings.

Start with the distinction that makes the rest of the history readable.

Communism is a family of ideas about replacing class society and private control of productive wealth with common ownership. In the Marxist tradition, its ultimate aim is a society without economic classes and, eventually, without a coercive state standing above society. That imagined destination is different from the powerful states that communist parties actually built. [2][3]

When the word means…	What we are examining
An ideal	Common ownership, the end of class domination, and production directed toward human needs.
A movement	Organizations and people trying to bring about that transformation, sometimes through revolution, sometimes through other strategies.
A party-state	A government dominated by a communist party, usually calling its existing order socialist and its final goal communist.

This presentation uses **communist party-state** for that third meaning. It does not assume that a party's name describes every feature of its economy. A country can have a communist ruling party while shops, wage labor, private fortunes, and international investment remain important. [45]

> A useful question
>
> Whenever someone calls a policy "communist," ask: Who owns productive assets? Who makes decisions? Who can challenge or replace those decision-makers? A label alone answers none of those questions.

I · Understand the language / CHAPTER 02

Marxism: the framework behind the movement

Marx did not invent sharing. He proposed an explanation of how societies change.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels developed their ideas amid industrial capitalism: factories, urban working populations, expanding markets, and stark inequalities of wealth and power. Marxism is broader than a preferred form of government. It is a way of analyzing production, class relations, historical change, and the possibilities of human emancipation. [4]

Historical materialism

How people produce their livelihood helps shape institutions, politics, and social life. This is an account of historical relationships, not a claim that every event has a single economic cause.

Class struggle

Groups occupy different positions within production. Marx treats conflict between those positions as a central force in history.

Capital and wage labor

Owners control productive assets; workers generally sell their capacity to work. The distinction concerns a social relationship, not simply whether someone is rich or poor.

Exploitation

In Marx’s theory, workers produce more value than they receive in wages, and owners appropriate the surplus. This technical argument is distinct from the everyday meaning of unusually cruel treatment.

Alienation

Work can confront a worker as an activity controlled by others, producing things and relationships that feel detached from the worker’s own purposes.

Revolutionary change

Capitalism creates productive capacities and conflicts that Marx believed could make a new social order possible. Later Marxists disagreed about timing, organization, and political strategy.

[4][65][66][67]

Marx’s analysis and his predictions are separate matters. Accepting that ownership shapes power does not require accepting his account of value, his expectations about revolution, or the institutions later rulers built in his name. Marxism became a living argument, with competing schools rather than one unchanging instruction manual.

Where the roots begin

Common-property traditions predate Marx by centuries. Modern Marxist communism, however, draws its central language of class, capital, revolution, and historical transformation from Marx and Engels.

I · Understand the language / CHAPTER 03

From capitalism to communism

The transition is where theory and political power meet.

The Communist Manifesto of 1848 called for workers to gain political power and transform the ownership of capital. Its target was property that allows a class to command the labor of others. The text explicitly distinguished that from people consuming and using the products needed for life. This distinction matters, although actual governments often reached far into farms, shops, housing, and household livelihoods. [1]

In his 1875 Critique of the Gotha Programme, Marx described a lower phase of communist society still marked by its capitalist origins and a higher phase in which production and social relations would permit distribution according to need. Lenin later helped standardize the practice of calling the lower phase “socialism” and the higher phase “communism.” The vocabulary was not identical across every author and period. [2][15]

Marx also described a transitional political period using the phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat.” He meant the political rule of a class replacing capitalist class rule. That formula left major questions about institutions and political opposition. It should neither be silently translated into modern liberal democracy nor treated as a detailed blueprint for Stalin’s government. [3]

Why speak of a “communist state” if the goal is stateless?

It is a historical shorthand for a state governed by a communist party. Such parties justified a strong transitional state as the means of defeating opponents, reorganizing production, and preparing for a future without class conflict. In practice, the transition became durable government. The state’s promised disappearance and its actual expansion form one of the central tensions in this history. [15]

> An important boundary
>
> No modern nation-state has achieved the full Marxist end-state of a classless, stateless communist society. That does not erase the history of governments acting under communist programs; it tells us which claim we are evaluating.

I · Understand the language / CHAPTER 04

Communism, socialism, capitalism, and democracy

Ownership and political accountability are different dimensions.

Term	Core distinction	What the label does not settle
Communism, as an ideal	Common ownership and the overcoming of class society.	The institutions or route that could realize it.
Socialism	A broad family seeking social control of production; versions include public, cooperative, and worker ownership.	Whether markets, pluralist elections, or centralized planning are used.
Democratic socialism	Socialist transformation pursued with democratic participation and political liberties.	A single economic blueprint or agreement about how much ownership must change.
Social democracy	In much contemporary usage, regulation, labor protections, redistribution, and public services within a substantially market economy.	The abolition of private productive property. Its historical roots include socialist movements.
Capitalism	Predominantly private productive ownership, wage labor, markets, and investment for profit.	Whether the political system is democratic or authoritarian.
Democracy / authoritarianism	How political power is authorized, contested, constrained, and replaced.	Who owns factories, land, or banks.

The definitions of socialism are contested, but a large welfare budget alone does not establish social ownership. Public roads, a public hospital, progressive taxes, or an emergency government intervention are not enough to classify a whole society as communist. Conversely, an economy's use of markets does not by itself guarantee political freedom. [5][6]

State ownership and social control also need to be distinguished. If a ministry owns a factory while workers cannot influence its management or replace the rulers directing it, ownership is public in law without necessarily being democratic in practice. Many socialist critics of communist party-states make exactly that objection. [5]

> Comparison rule
>
> Compare real institutions with real institutions, and ideals with ideals. Measuring one system's promises against another system's worst episodes produces a misleading comparison.

I · Understand the language / CHAPTER 05

The branches did not all grow in one direction

Some disagreements were fierce enough to lead to imprisonment, exile, and war.

Current	Distinctive emphasis	Historical relationship to power
Marxism	Class relations, capitalism, historical change, and emancipation.	An intellectual tradition, not itself a single state design. [4]
Leninism	A disciplined revolutionary party and the conquest of state power.	The Bolshevik model became an international template. [15][71]
Marxism-Leninism	The official doctrinal tradition consolidated under Stalin and retained, with revisions, by many later communist parties.	Vanguard-party leadership and a state-led socialist transition. Using this label does not establish that every period reproduced Stalin’s terror. [20][73]
Stalinism	The specific governing order associated with Stalin: leader supremacy, coercive transformation, and extensive political terror.	Forced collectivization, rapid industrialization, purges, and the expansion of the forced-labor system. Later communist leaders could reject Stalin’s cult while maintaining one-party rule. [20][63][64][73]
Trotskyism	International revolution and opposition to Stalinist bureaucracy.	Trotsky defended the revolution’s socialized property while condemning its bureaucratic rulers. His own revolutionary record was not libertarian. [16]
Maoism	A revolutionary strategy rooted in peasant mobilization, protracted struggle, and continuing class conflict.	Adaptation to China influenced insurgencies far beyond China. [18]
Anarchist communism	Common ownership and needs-based distribution without a centralized coercive state.	Voluntary federation and opposition to party dictatorship. [14]
Council communism	Workers’ councils and direct working-class organization.	Criticism of party substitution for workers’ own power. [17]

Current	Distinctive emphasis	Historical relationship to power
Yugoslav self-management	Social ownership, enterprise councils, and more decentralized allocation.	A one-party state experimenting with markets and workplace participation. [30]
Market-oriented party-state socialism	Markets and private enterprise inside continued communist-party political leadership.	Especially important for understanding contemporary China, Vietnam, and Laos. [45][47][49]

These are useful guideposts, not sealed boxes. A party can change its program while keeping its name. A government can combine revolutionary language, nationalism, developmental policy, and the defense of its own leadership.

I · Understand the language / CHAPTER 06

Fascism and the authoritarian overlap

Similar tools of control do not make different ideologies identical.

Fascism is an authoritarian, ultranationalist tradition that places a supposedly unified nation above individual rights and political pluralism. Its best-known historical regimes developed in Mussolini's Italy and Nazi Germany. It rejected communism; Nazism made racial hierarchy and antisemitism central to its project. [57]

Marxist communism formally sought to overcome economic classes and ultimately the state. Fascism celebrated national hierarchy, unity, and power. Nazi use of the word "socialist" in its party name did not make it Marxist; communists were among the regime's persecuted political opponents. [58]

Fascist economic direction also differed from a program to abolish capitalist ownership. In Nazi Germany, private firms and profits persisted under extensive state intervention; research by Germà Bel documents privatization as well. State direction alone therefore does not identify an economy as communist. Mussolini's 1932 ideological statement explicitly rejected Marxian socialism and class struggle. [74][75]

Dimension	Communist party-state traditions	Fascist traditions
Central claim	Rule in the name of workers and a transition to socialism.	National rebirth and unity under authoritarian leadership.
Social ideal	A proclaimed end to class domination, despite enduring hierarchies in practice.	Hierarchy and exclusion as parts of the desired national order.
Shared authoritarian mechanisms	One-party domination, censorship, political policing, and suppression of organized opposition can appear in both.	The overlap concerns governing methods; it does not establish identical purposes or histories.

Authoritarianism describes constrained political competition and accountability. Totalitarianism is used for ambitions to penetrate and reshape nearly all social life. These are analytical categories, not synonyms for a large public sector. This presentation compares mechanisms across the documented cases rather than assigning every dictatorship to fascism.

> A better comparison
>
> Ask which institutions are shared, which goals differ, and whom the regime defines as an enemy. Censorship or leader worship can connect cases analytically without making their ideologies the same.

II · Before 1900 / CHAPTER 07

Before Marx: sharing, faith, and imagined commonwealths

Precursors are part of the story, but they are not Soviet states waiting to happen.

The New Testament describes believers sharing possessions and distributing resources to people in need. Acts 4 is often discussed as an example of religious communalism. Acts 5:4 also recognizes the owner's discretion over property and sale proceeds. Reading these passages as a description of a particular Christian community is different from treating them as a national economic constitution or a Marxist theory of history. [7]

Thomas More's Utopia, published in 1516, imagined a society organized around common property and criticized the social order familiar to its readers. It was a literary and philosophical construction, with hierarchy and institutions modern readers may find troubling. It was not an account of an actual communist country, and the author's fiction should not be reduced to a straightforward party manifesto. [8]

In 1649, during the upheaval of the English Revolution, Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers advanced a religiously grounded vision of common access to land. Their attempt to cultivate land collectively connected material livelihood to liberation from domination. The scale and setting were local; their language came from a very different world than industrial Marxism. [9]

> Keep the categories straight
>
> Shared land, mutual aid, monastic life, and indigenous communal tenure cannot automatically be classified as Marxist communism. Similar ownership arrangements can rest on very different beliefs, authority structures, and rights to leave.

II · Before 1900 / CHAPTER 08

Communal experiments before the party-state

The nineteenth century offered communities as well as theories.

New Harmony in Indiana hosted two distinct experiments. Religious Harmonists built a settlement before selling it in 1825 to Robert Owen and his partners, who sought a model community emphasizing education and social equality. The same location therefore connects religious communal organization with a secular reform project, without making the two identical. [10]

The United States also contained Shaker settlements and the Oneida Community, where common property formed part of a wider religious and social order. Household organization, work, authority, and relations between members could all be reorganized. Their experience makes one question unavoidable: a shared-property community still needs rules about leadership, labor, membership, family, and disagreement. [11]

Small communal experiments traded with surrounding markets and operated inside a larger legal order. Their successes or failures cannot simply be scaled up into proof about a national economy. Joining a community, even under social pressure, is a different kind of political act from being born into a state that claims control over the whole country.

What does “primitive communism” mean?

In older Marxist accounts, the term referred to presumed early forms of shared production and property before class society. Engels’s 1884 study of family, property, and the state helped develop that account. It is a theoretical classification, not evidence that all early peoples lived in the same way. Contemporary analysis needs to examine particular societies rather than impose one universal template. [72]

II · Before 1900 / CHAPTER 09

1848 to 1892: a movement takes shape

The manifesto, the Commune, and arguments over the state.

In 1848 Marx and Engels published the Communist Manifesto. It located communism within an international struggle over ownership and political power. Its ambition reached far beyond founding a voluntary settlement: the proposed transformation concerned the structure of society itself. [1]

The Paris Commune governed Paris briefly from March to May 1871 after military defeat and political crisis in France. Its participants included different socialist and radical currents. It became a powerful reference point for communists and anarchists, but it was neither a settled Marxist national economy nor an early version of a twentieth-century Leninist party-state. [12][13]

The arguments over the Commune exposed a lasting division. Should revolution capture and transform state power, or dismantle centralized domination and build federated self-government? Kropotkin’s The Conquest of Bread, first published in French in 1892, developed an anarchist communist answer, emphasizing common resources and the direct satisfaction of needs. [14]

> What existed before 1900?
>
> Communal practices, intentional communities, revolutionary programs, organized socialist movements, and a brief radical government in Paris. The durable national communist party-state became a defining twentieth-century development.

III · Why movements rise / CHAPTER 10

Why would people support communism?

Support often begins with a concrete grievance rather than a completed ideological conversion.

Land hunger, insecure work, humiliation, inequality, corruption, and exclusion can make promises of a fundamentally different order attractive. War and state breakdown can turn those grievances into immediate questions of survival. In Russia, World War I weakened the monarchy and the government that followed it. In China, civil war and resistance to foreign domination formed part of the revolutionary setting. [19][31]

Communist movements have offered different things to different supporters: land to peasants, power and security to workers, education to young people, national independence to colonized populations, and an explanation of injustice to intellectuals. These motives could coexist. Support for one promise did not necessarily mean consent to every policy later implemented.

Organizational strength also matters. A disciplined movement with armed forces, local networks, and a credible claim to resist an occupying power may be better placed to seize a crisis than fragmented opponents. In Angola, competing liberation movements and foreign intervention shaped the struggle for power; ideology alone cannot explain the outcome. [37]

> Interpretive synthesis
>
> Communism does not have one universal cause. Grievance can create an opening; organization, war, leadership, institutions, and outside powers help determine what happens next. Poverty alone does not make a communist victory inevitable.

III · Why movements rise / CHAPTER 11

Wanting change is not the same as choosing a regime

How a movement wins power changes the meaning of “the people wanted it.”

Route	Examples	What to ask
Revolution during state collapse	Russia, 1917	Which groups supported the seizure of power, and could opponents organize afterward? [19]
Revolutionary war and national struggle	China; anticolonial movements	Was support for independence, land redistribution, party leadership, or all three? [31][37]
Postwar occupation and consolidation	Much of Eastern Europe after World War II	How much room did local voters and rival parties have under Soviet power? [28]
Military seizure of power	Afghanistan, 1978; Ethiopia’s Derg	Did military leaders acquire a mandate, or impose a transformation from above? [39][40]
Competitive elections	Kerala, 1957	Does the party remain bound by a broader multiparty constitutional order? [42]
Negotiated transition from insurgency	Nepal after the 2006 agreement	Can former rebels enter elections and share political space with rivals? [43][44]

A movement can have authentic supporters and still establish a dictatorship. It can win an election and later restrict competition. It can also participate in elections without creating a communist party-state. Consent is a continuing institutional question: can people criticize, organize, vote rulers out, and refuse policies without being treated as enemies?

Revolutionary leaders often argue that emergency powers are necessary to defend gains against sabotage or attack. Sometimes the threats are real. The historical danger is that the ruling organization also decides who counts as a threat, controls the institutions that could challenge that judgment, and never allows the emergency to end.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 12

Russia: revolution becomes a governing system

1917-1920s · From wartime collapse to Bolshevik rule.

The Russian monarchy fell in the February Revolution of 1917. The Bolsheviks later overthrew the Provisional Government in the October Revolution, dated November by the calendar used in much of the world. Keeping these two revolutions separate avoids the common mistake of making Lenin the leader who directly removed the tsar. [19]

The new rulers faced civil war, economic collapse, opposition, and foreign intervention. They also chose coercive institutions and suppressed political rivals. The Cheka political police became an instrument of revolutionary rule. The existence of war explains the setting; it does not make every exercise of repression an unavoidable consequence of that setting. [20]

Economic policy did not move in a straight line. The New Economic Policy, introduced in 1921, permitted a partial return of market activity while the party retained political power and control over major economic institutions. This early retreat from comprehensive economic command is a reminder that communist leadership and uniform economic policy were never the same thing. [21]

Lenin’s revolutionary theory promised a radically transformed state and, eventually, its disappearance. The institutions that endured instead made the ruling party the central gatekeeper of political life. Later communist governments inherited that organizational precedent even when their national circumstances were very different. [15]

> Period marker
>
> The Soviet Union was established in 1922. Revolutionary rule began in Russia in 1917; those dates describe different events.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 13

Stalin: transformation by command

Late 1920s-1953 · Industrialization, collectivization, and terror.

Under Stalin, the Soviet leadership pushed rapid industrial development and forced agricultural collectivization. Peasant households lost control over much of their production as farming was reorganized under collective and state structures. Opposition, resistance, and alleged disloyalty were treated as political threats. The drive to remake the economy was inseparable from the concentration of power at the top. [22][64]

An official report preserved by the Library of Congress describes collective farms suffering seed shortages, famine, and severely weakened livestock. Such a document shows the human and material crisis reaching officials inside the system. It also raises a basic governing question: what happens when leaders can punish the bearers of bad news rather than change a failing policy? [22]

The famine of 1932-1933 devastated Ukraine and other Soviet regions. The Ukrainian catastrophe is known as the Holodomor. Ukrainian institutions and many governments and scholars recognize it as genocide; scholarship debates aspects of intent, scope, and the wider Soviet famine. Naming that debate does not diminish the documented coercion and mass starvation. [23][24]

The Great Terror also consumed officials, military personnel, workers, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens. Executions, prison, forced labor, deportation, and fear extended far beyond former property owners. A movement claiming to end class domination had produced an extraordinarily powerful hierarchy of rulers and coercive institutions. [63][64]

> Personal consequence
>
> A political classification could become a household’s fate: loss of livelihood, a parent’s disappearance, displacement, or the fear that a careless sentence would be reported.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 14

The Soviet experience was longer than Stalin

1953-1991 · Social provision, controlled public life, reform, and collapse.

After Stalin’s death in 1953, the scale of terror diminished, although censorship, political policing, and persecution of dissent continued. This distinction is essential: the late Soviet Union was not simply the Great Terror repeated every year. Institutions and expectations changed, while the ruling party’s monopoly remained. [20]

In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s crimes and personality cult in his “Secret Speech.” The attack came from the leadership of the Communist Party itself. It opened a period of de-Stalinization while preserving the party-state, illustrating why Marxism-Leninism and Stalin’s particular governing practices should be distinguished. [73]

Education expanded dramatically across the Soviet experience. A UNESCO study identifies planning, broader access, women’s education, financial assistance, and connections between vocational and general learning as important elements. These gains helped families move into skilled professions. Educational attainment nevertheless does not by itself measure freedom to publish, organize, worship, or challenge authority. [25]

By the late Soviet period, rigidity, weak incentives, and the difficulty of correcting institutional failure had become serious problems. Gorbachev’s reforms opened political and economic questions that the existing system struggled to contain. In 1991 the Soviet Union dissolved. That ended a particular party-state and union of republics, not every form of socialist thought. [62]

For a family, the collapse of the old order could mean new freedoms and new insecurities at the same time. Evaluating the transition requires its own history of employment, savings, institutions, and political power. The difficulties of what followed do not retroactively erase earlier repression; neither does earlier repression explain every later outcome.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 15

Eastern Europe: imposed systems, local histories

Late 1940s-1989/1991 · Similar structures did not create identical societies.

Communist governments consolidated power across much of Eastern Europe after World War II in the shadow of Soviet military and political influence. Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria developed related party-state systems, but their national histories, religious institutions, leadership, and patterns of resistance differed. [28]

East Germany makes the relationship between a state and everyday life particularly visible. The Stasi sought to penetrate workplaces, universities, and personal networks. Surveillance could make ordinary conversation a political risk. The Berlin Wall, built in 1961, made state control over movement a concrete division between relatives, neighbors, and possible futures. [26][27]

Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 show that opposition did not always take the same form. Reform, national autonomy, and challenges to Soviet control could overlap; people within communist systems could seek a different socialism as well as the end of communist rule. Soviet force sharply limited those possibilities. [28]

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and German reunification in 1990 belong to the broader breakdown of the European communist order. These events were political struggles by people living inside the system, not merely decisions made by superpowers outside it. [27]

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 16

China under Mao: revolution and repeated upheaval

1949-1976 · A rural revolutionary strategy becomes national government.

The Chinese Communist victory in 1949 followed years of civil war and war against Japan. Mao adapted Marxist revolution to a predominantly agrarian setting, making peasant mobilization and national liberation central. His 1940 account of “New Democracy” proposed a class alliance under communist leadership rather than an immediate leap into the final communist ideal. [18][31]

The Great Leap Forward began in 1958 with an attempt to accelerate development through mass mobilization, agricultural reorganization, and industrial campaigns. The ensuing famine was catastrophic. Research emphasizes policy decisions, procurement, distorted reporting, and restrictions that prevented an effective response, rather than treating the disaster as a simple natural shortage. [32][33]

Estimates of famine deaths vary by demographic method and period; scholarship places the loss in the tens of millions. The scale is clear even though a single exact total is not. A useful explanation follows the mechanism: inflated reports helped justify excessive extraction; coercion and restricted information weakened the ability of hungry communities to protect themselves. [32]

The Cultural Revolution, beginning in 1966, brought further political campaigns and attacks on established authorities and cultural life. The period disrupted education and ordinary relationships as political standing could become more important than professional knowledge or personal trust. Mao’s death in 1976 preceded a major change in economic direction. [59]

> The recurring problem
>
> If the cost of contradicting a leader is higher than the cost of reporting a false success, an administrative system can magnify a mistake instead of correcting it. This is an interpretive lesson from the cases, not a law unique to one ideology.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 17

Korea, Vietnam, and Laos: war and state formation

The national pathways behind today’s governments.

Korea’s division after Japanese colonial rule led to separate governments in 1948, with Soviet backing in the North and American backing in the South. North Korea invaded the South in 1950. The war drew in outside powers and devastated the peninsula. North Korea’s later party-state emerged from this divided and militarized setting, not from a voluntary national experiment in communal living. [68]

In Vietnam, the struggle against French colonial rule and the subsequent conflict between North and South shaped communist power. Military victory in 1975 was followed by formal national unification as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976. These are distinct dates: victory and the proclamation of a unified state. The new government later confronted the economic problems that helped produce the Đổi Mới turn. [69][47]

Laos proclaimed the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in December 1975. Revolutionary change there belonged to a regional history of war, decolonization, and competing outside powers. The later economic reforms did not replace the governing revolutionary party. [70][49]

> Historical connection
>
> The wars matter, but they do not explain everything that followed. Postwar rulers also made choices about ownership, political opposition, information, and how much authority families and communities could retain.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 18

Cambodia: remaking society by force

1975-1979 · The Khmer Rouge and the destruction of ordinary life.

The Khmer Rouge attempted an exceptionally radical transformation of Cambodia. Forced movement, coerced labor, persecution, executions, and the dismantling of normal social institutions made the revolution an immediate intrusion into where people lived, how they worked, and whether they could remain with family. This was not merely a change of economic ownership. [34]

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia examined crimes including forced labor, forced marriage, imprisonment, murder, and persecution. The court's findings show why family history belongs at the center of political history: the authorities could intervene in marriage and intimate life, as well as production and residence. [34]

In 2022 the appeals chamber upheld Khieu Samphan's convictions for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The genocide findings concern legally specified protected groups; they should not be casually used as a substitute label for every death under the regime. [35]

Vietnam's overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in 1979 is also a reminder that communist governments did not form a harmonious international family. Revolutionary identity could coexist with intense national antagonism and military conflict.

> Why this case matters
>
> Cambodia illustrates how an ideological promise of equality, combined with coercive social engineering and unchecked power, could attack the relationships and routines on which survival depended.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 19

Cuba: revolution, social mobilization, and one-party rule

1959-2000 · An island revolution acquires a communist institutional form.

The Cuban Revolution overthrew the Batista dictatorship in 1959. The subsequent development of a communist party-state should be distinguished from the entire coalition that opposed Batista. Opposition to an old regime is not automatically agreement on the political and economic order that follows it. [60]

The 1961 national literacy campaign mobilized large numbers of people to extend basic education. UNESCO preserves its documentary record and international legacy. It is a substantial example of a revolutionary government pursuing a widely valued social objective through coordinated public mobilization. [36]

Political organization, however, became centered on communist-party leadership rather than open competition to replace it. Cuba’s later constitutional order formally combines that leadership with socialist economic commitments. The history cannot be understood by examining literacy alone, or by treating restrictions on political choice as if they rendered every educational achievement imaginary. [51]

Cuba also depended on international relationships, particularly its Soviet connection, and faced U.S. sanctions. Their relative effects on different economic outcomes require specific analysis. A serious account should examine domestic policy, access to trade and finance, and external pressure together rather than assume that one factor explains every shortage.

> A household perspective
>
> Education can open a profession; political control can narrow what a person may say or organize; dependence on external support can make a distant geopolitical change arrive at the family table. These effects can coexist.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 20

Beyond the familiar three countries

A selected wider record, not an exhaustive registry of every party or insurgency.

Place and period	What developed	Why it belongs here
Mongolia · 1924-1990	A Soviet-aligned people’s republic with one-party rule, followed by a democratic transition.	An early example outside the USSR, shaped by a powerful neighbor. [41]
Yugoslavia · postwar era-1990/1991	Communist rule with a break from Stalin in 1948 and experiments in worker self-management and markets.	Communist-led systems could diverge sharply in economic organization and foreign alignment. [29][30]
Vietnam · North from 1954; unified state from 1976	A revolutionary party-state formed through anticolonial and military struggle, later turning toward market reform.	National liberation, war, and economic pragmatism intersect. [47]
Laos · from 1975	A revolutionary party-state, followed by market-oriented reform from 1986.	Political continuity can accompany economic transformation. [49][50]
Angola · from independence in 1975; Marxist-Leninist era into the early 1990s	The MPLA governed amid civil war and major foreign intervention.	Decolonization and Cold War power struggles shaped the setting. [37]
Mozambique · socialist one-party era after 1975; transition around 1990	FRELIMO governed after Portuguese rule, amid conflict with RENAMO.	The national struggle and subsequent civil war cannot be reduced to a doctrinal dispute. [38]
Ethiopia · 1974-1991	The military Derg took power and developed a Marxist-Leninist order; the formal state structure changed in 1987.	A military revolution differs from a workers’ party winning a mass electoral mandate. [39]
Afghanistan · 1978-1992	A communist coup, radical reforms and resistance, Soviet intervention, and prolonged war.	External force and local political conflict shaped the attempt to transform society. [40]

These dates summarize political eras. They do not mean that every institution changed on a single day, or that every later government led by a former liberation party retained the same communist program.

IV · The twentieth century / CHAPTER 21

Communists argued against communist rulers, too

The history contains internal critics as well as external opponents.

Trotsky condemned the Soviet bureaucracy while defending nationalized property and the revolutionary project. Anarchist communists rejected the state-centered route more fundamentally. Council communists argued that workers' own organizations should exercise power rather than a party acting in their name. Their criticisms do not all point toward the same alternative. [14][16][17]

Yugoslavia's self-management experiment tried to move economic authority toward enterprises and workers' councils while retaining one-party political leadership. It differed from Soviet central planning without becoming a liberal parliamentary democracy. Workplace participation and national political competition therefore have to be examined separately. [30]

Kerala's elected Communist ministry in 1957 operated within India's larger constitutional system. This example does not demonstrate a national communist end-state; it demonstrates that a communist party can govern through competitive politics within a state whose institutions it does not monopolize. [42]

> Two distinct judgments
>
> "This government claimed communist goals" is a historical classification. "This government realized the emancipatory society its supporters envisioned" is a different claim. Keeping them distinct allows both the official record and the internal criticism to remain visible.

V · Life inside the system / CHAPTER 22

The individual: livelihood and dependence

The decisive issue is often how many parts of life pass through the same gatekeeper.

A state-directed system can promise employment, basic services, and protection from some market risks. It can also make a ministry, enterprise, or party organization central to a person’s work and opportunities. Whether that arrangement feels secure or suffocating depends partly on benefits received, alternatives available, and the consequences of disagreement.

Where employment, housing, education, and political loyalty overlap, a conflict with authority can spread beyond one part of life. Surveillance adds another layer: a conversation, friendship, religious commitment, or effort to leave can become information in a political file. The Stasi records document an institution deliberately reaching into ordinary social spaces. [26]

People nevertheless continued to form friendships, master trades, make art, fall in love, joke, and pursue private ambitions. Daily life should not be reduced to either propaganda images of satisfied citizens or an assumption that every moment was experienced as political terror. Period, location, class background, and access to officials all changed the experience.

> A practical test
>
> Can someone refuse a political demand without also endangering their livelihood? Can they change jobs, obtain information, form an independent association, or appeal to an institution the ruling party does not control? These questions bring abstract freedom into ordinary life.

V · Life inside the system / CHAPTER 23

The family: opportunity, disruption, and memory

Political systems reach into households through more than income.

Expanded education and women’s access to skilled work could change expectations across generations. For a daughter whose mother had little schooling, a professional career could be a concrete gain. The Soviet educational record shows why this part of the story matters. [25]

At the other extreme, deportation, imprisonment, coercive labor, and political persecution could break a household apart. Family identity could become a liability when the state classified relatives as politically suspect. In Cambodia, the court record includes direct coercion over marriage, showing the reach of authority into intimate relationships. [63][34]

Borders also divided families. In Germany, the Wall made a political system physically present in visits, marriages, caregiving, and decisions about where to build a future. The opening of the border in 1989 changed those possibilities in ways that a national production statistic cannot capture. [27]

Family memory can preserve real but different experiences: a scholarship, an apartment, a lost farm, an absent parent, pride in public service, fear of denunciation. Listening to those memories does not require assuming that one household represents an entire country. It requires placing each experience within its institutions and period.

> Interpretive question
>
> When a policy benefits one generation and harms another, or expands education while restricting speech, what must a historical account preserve? The answer here is the specific gain and the specific harm, with neither used to erase the other.

V · Life inside the system / CHAPTER 24

The community: cooperation and the loss of autonomy

Collective action and imposed uniformity can look similar from a distance.

Coordinated campaigns can bring schools, infrastructure, vaccination, or literacy programs to communities that lacked them. Cuba’s literacy mobilization offers a documented example of public organization extending a basic capability. Shared work can also create solidarity and a sense of national participation. [36]

A different issue arises when every legitimate association must operate through the ruling political structure. Independent unions, religious communities, local publications, and civic groups can lose the ability to speak for members against the state. Under Stalin, religious groups and intellectual life faced persecution and censorship; in East Germany, public organizations existed alongside pervasive political surveillance. [20][26]

Land and agricultural policy can transform local relationships even more abruptly. A household farm, a cooperative chosen by its members, and a compulsory collective are different institutions. Calling all three “people working together” hides who controls the decision, who keeps the product, and whether participation can be refused.

> The community test
>
> Does collective organization increase the community’s ability to act, or transfer its authority to officials above it? To answer, examine the right to choose leaders, criticize decisions, control resources, and leave.

V · Life inside the system / CHAPTER 25

What planning can mobilize, and what it can miss

Economic institutions have capabilities as well as failure mechanisms.

Question	Potential capability	Recurring difficulty
How is investment directed?	A state can concentrate resources on a chosen objective.	Political priorities can displace household needs; weak scrutiny can sustain costly mistakes.
How are goods allocated?	Administrative allocation can pursue access without relying only on purchasing power.	Officials need accurate information about needs, supply, quality, and local conditions.
How is performance rewarded?	Public goals can motivate work beyond private profit.	Output targets may reward quantity over quality or encourage misleading reports.
How are errors corrected?	A coordinated system can change direction at scale.	Fear, censorship, and career incentives can prevent accurate feedback.
Who has bargaining power?	Collective institutions can protect people against private employers.	Workers may lack independent bargaining power against a state employer.

The Great Leap famine illustrates the danger of economic targets interacting with coercion and distorted information. It should not be treated as a mere arithmetic mistake: the institutions governing reporting, procurement, and the ability to resist mattered. [33]

China, Vietnam, and Laos later expanded the role of markets and enterprise incentives while preserving party rule. Those changes help distinguish the question “Can a communist party remain in power?” from “Does comprehensive central planning allocate resources effectively?” [46][47][49]

This table is a comparative framework, not a claim that market economies avoid information failures, deprivation, political capture, or coercion. Actual performance depends on institutions, technology, history, and how power is constrained.

V · Life inside the system / CHAPTER 26

Human costs deserve a careful record

Different mechanisms should remain visible instead of becoming one undifferentiated number.

The record includes execution, imprisonment, forced labor, famine, deportation, and persecution. These are related but distinct forms of harm. A famine estimate may measure excess mortality; an execution record measures direct killing; a court’s genocide finding answers a particular legal question about protected groups and intent. [63][24][34]

There is no single uncontested total for “deaths under communism.” Global aggregates depend on which countries and years are included, how war and famine are attributed, and whether categories overlap. This presentation therefore identifies major mechanisms and cases rather than displaying a dramatic total that implies more precision than the evidence can support.

That approach does not weaken accountability. The Cambodian judgments name specific crimes and responsible leaders. Soviet archival material documents coercive institutions and policy. Chinese famine research investigates how administrative and political decisions produced mass death. The strongest record often begins with these specific findings. [22][33][35]

> How to read a mortality claim
>
> Look for the period, geography, category, estimation method, and source. Ask whether a number describes direct killing, famine deaths, excess deaths, or all deaths during a war. Never add overlapping categories without checking.

VI · 2001 to the present / CHAPTER 27

Communism did not disappear in 1991

The past quarter-century combines political continuity with very different economies.

This final historical period begins in 2001, separating it from the twentieth-century record. The institutional snapshot is dated **22 October 2026**. China, Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba retain communist-party leadership. North Korea is commonly grouped with them because of its communist origins and party-state structure, but its dynastic leadership and distinctive ideology require separate treatment. [45][48][50][51][52]

Country	Political continuity	Economic distinction
China	Communist Party leadership.	State enterprises and strategic direction coexist with extensive markets and private enterprise.
Vietnam	Communist Party leadership.	Market-oriented development, private enterprise, and foreign investment.
Laos	Lao People’s Revolutionary Party leadership.	Market transition alongside state direction and major development constraints.
Cuba	Communist Party leadership.	Substantial state organization, recognized private activity, and further reforms announced in 2026.
North Korea	Workers’ Party rule and dynastic leadership.	A distinct, highly controlled system; informal markets complicate any picture of complete administrative allocation. [61]

These are not minor remnants in the sense of being historically irrelevant. China’s scale alone makes communist-party rule a major feature of the contemporary world. But calling these countries “communist” without describing their economies conceals how far several have moved from comprehensive Soviet-style planning.

> Snapshot, not a live feed
>
> Current institutions and reforms are described from dated sources. Announced policy is identified as an announcement; older constitutional translations are labeled by version. The presentation does not imply that every recent measure has already taken effect.

VI · 2001 to the present / CHAPTER 28

China: market transformation under party leadership

Economic change does not automatically produce a competitive political system.

China’s constitution describes a socialist market economy and gives a central role to Communist Party leadership. It also recognizes nonpublic economic activity. These provisions make the combination explicit: market exchange and private enterprise do not mean the ruling party has abandoned its claim to direct the political order. [45]

The World Bank reported in 2022 that, over approximately four decades, close to 800 million people had moved above the then-used international extreme-poverty threshold of $1.90 per day. The report connects the change to broad economic transformation and targeted poverty policy. This is a historical measure using a specified threshold, not a statement that no poverty or insecurity remains. [46]

That transformation occurred across decades of reform, trade, investment, infrastructure development, and changes in farming and enterprise. It cannot be assigned to one slogan, nor used as proof that either Mao-era planning or unconstrained private markets alone caused the result. [46]

Political rights require a separate assessment. In its 2022 Xinjiang assessment, the UN human-rights office concluded that arbitrary and discriminatory detention and related restrictions may constitute international crimes, particularly crimes against humanity. China rejects the assessment. The finding concerns specified policies and populations; it is not a description of every Chinese person’s daily experience. [53]

> What this case teaches
>
> A government can liberalize parts of economic life while preserving or strengthening political control. Economic prosperity, ideological identity, and civil liberties are separate questions that can move in different directions.

VI · 2001 to the present / CHAPTER 29

Vietnam and Laos: reform without a change of ruling party

The economic turn began before 2001; its consequences continued afterward.

Vietnam’s Đổi Mới reforms began in 1986 and encouraged private enterprise, foreign investment, and market mechanisms. The IMF describes this shift as central to the country’s economic turnaround. The later growth story belongs to a reformed economy under continued communist-party rule, not to an unchanged command economy. [47]

The 2013 constitutional text formalized the Communist Party’s leadership role. Current reporting provides a later institutional check: Reuters reported in April 2026 that Vietnam’s party leader was also elected state president, describing a consolidation of power alongside a pro-business agenda. Market-oriented development and concentration of political authority can proceed together. [48][54]

Laos likewise began substantial market reforms in 1986. The IMF’s historical account documents the shift; the OECD’s later review examines development financing and investment challenges. Calling Laos communist does not mean its present economy works like a fully centralized Soviet blueprint. [49][56]

A 2015 constitutional translation identifies the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party as the leading nucleus of the political system. This version is used to explain the institutional tradition, rather than presented as an exhaustive statement of all current constitutional provisions. [50]

> For households
>
> Market reform can widen livelihood options while introducing new inequalities and exposure to prices, debt, and insecure work. Whether people can organize independently to influence those changes remains a separate political question.

VI · 2001 to the present / CHAPTER 30

Cuba and North Korea: two very different continuities

A shared historical category should not erase institutional differences.

Cuba’s 2019 constitutional framework maintains Communist Party leadership and socialist planning while recognizing several forms of ownership. This is a more precise description than saying that every productive activity is directly run by the state. [51]

In June 2026, AP reported proposed measures to decentralize economic administration, give state enterprises more autonomy, widen direct trade, and move further toward market pricing. The reporting describes an emergency reform package amid severe economic pressure. It does not establish that every proposal had been fully implemented by the date of this presentation. [55]

North Korea belongs in the record for different reasons: communist origins, enduring party-state institutions, dynastic succession, and an ideology that has departed significantly from classical Marxist internationalism. It should not be treated as a straightforward example of what Marx described as a stateless society.

The UN Commission of Inquiry reported in 2014 that systematic and widespread violations in North Korea reached the threshold of crimes against humanity. Its documentation includes political repression and discrimination affecting people’s opportunities and security. The report is a dated evidentiary record, not a claim that the commission has continuous access to the country. [52]

> Read the systems separately
>
> Cuba’s market-reform debates and North Korea’s distinct security and dynastic order require different explanations. “Both are communist” is a starting classification, not a sufficient account of either society.

VI · 2001 to the present / CHAPTER 31

Communist parties are not the same as communist states

Movements can enter elections, change programs, or leave armed struggle.

Nepal’s 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended a Maoist insurgency and provided a path toward a constituent assembly and political transition. The UN supported the process through monitoring and electoral assistance. This case belongs in the recent history of communism because revolutionary actors moved into a different institutional arena. [43][44]

It also helps explain why a country should not be classified solely by the name of a governing party. A communist or former communist party taking part in competitive politics is different from a party legally or practically monopolizing national power. Kerala’s earlier experience supplies another example of that distinction. [42]

Communist ideas also persist in labor organizing, publishing, scholarship, small parties, and voluntary communities. Their existence does not establish that a national communist regime is about to emerge. To assess a movement, examine its actual program, means of action, relationship to political pluralism, and plans for ownership.

> Avoid the label trap
>
> “Communist,” “socialist,” “left-wing,” “authoritarian,” and “redistributive” are not interchangeable words. A sound description identifies the institution or policy first, then explains which label fits and why.

VII · Explore and compare / CHAPTER 32

Who decides?

A comparison to separate ownership, allocation, and accountability.

Ownership, economic coordination, and political accountability are separate dimensions. The following six profiles preserve the HTML explorer’s historical and conceptual examples. They are qualitative comparisons, not numerical rankings or predictions.

Marx’s higher communist phase · an ideal

No modern national realization of this full end-state.

Who owns?

Common ownership

How is production coordinated?

Community distribution by need

How is authority challenged?

Envisioned stateless association

This is a theoretical destination, not a historical nation-state. Common production and needs-based distribution presuppose transformed social relations and productive capacity.

Everyday life: The aspiration is freedom from class domination and insecurity; the theory leaves many practical institutional details open. [2] [3]

Stalin-era USSR · especially the 1930s

Soviet Union · especially late 1920s-1953.

Who owns?

Predominantly state ownership

How is production coordinated?

Administrative planning

How is authority challenged?

Ruling-party political monopoly

State-directed industrialization and collectivization operated under a coercive party-state. Formal public ownership did not mean citizens could freely replace the rulers.

Everyday life: Rapid social transformation coexisted with famine, terror, forced labor, and the loss of household control over production. [20] [22] [64]

Yugoslav self-management · post-1950

Yugoslavia · model developed from 1950.

Who owns?

Social / worker / cooperative ownership

How is production coordinated?

Workplace self-management

How is authority challenged?

Ruling-party political monopoly

Social ownership and workers' councils were combined with market mechanisms and continued communist-party dominance. "Worker ownership" here is a simplified guide to social property and self-management, not individual saleable shares.

Everyday life: Enterprise participation could expand without a corresponding right to replace the national ruling party. [29] [30]

China’s reform-era model

China · reform era, including the 2001-2026 period.

Who owns?

Mixed state and private ownership

How is production coordinated?

Markets with state direction

How is authority challenged?

Ruling-party political monopoly

Private enterprise, markets, state firms, and strategic direction coexist within Communist Party leadership. The same label covers an economy very different from Mao-era collectivization.

Everyday life: Expanded incomes and economic opportunities coexist with political restrictions and unequal access to resources. [45] [46]

A voluntary communal settlement · conceptual example

A community within a larger state, rather than a whole country.

Who owns?

Common ownership

How is production coordinated?

Community distribution by need

How is authority challenged?

Voluntary membership and exit

An illustrative arrangement inspired by intentional communities. Actual settlements differ in religion, authority, work rules, treatment of children, and members' ability to leave. This is not a portrait of every historical commune.

Everyday life: Membership, exit, outside legal protection, and control over family decisions distinguish a settlement from a compulsory national system. [10] [11]

A pluralist market economy · conceptual example

An institutional model, not a score for any particular country.

Who owns?

Predominantly private owners

How is production coordinated?

Markets and prices

How is authority challenged?

Competitive political institutions

A conceptual comparison: private firms and market exchange operate alongside competitive political institutions. It is not a claim that every capitalist country is democratic or that every market outcome is fair.

Everyday life: People may have more ways to organize or replace rulers, while still facing economic inequality and insecurity. [5] [6]

Questions to carry into any comparison

Who controls owners or state officials? How are needs and scarce resources negotiated? How does bad news reach decision-makers? Can people organize independently, challenge a decision, replace rulers, or leave without coercion?

The explorer cannot predict incomes, rank moral worth, or determine a system’s historical outcome. Institutions must be studied in context.

VII · Explore and compare / CHAPTER 33

The historical record, in sequence

Follow the entire selected timeline, from early roots to the modern period.

Dates identify major events or institutional changes, not a claim that an entire society transformed overnight. This selective timeline links back to the reading chapters.

1st century / Global

Sharing in an early Christian community

Acts describes a particular religious community, not a national Marxist state. [7]

1516 / Europe

More publishes Utopia

An imagined commonwealth raises questions about property and social order. [8]

1649 / Europe

Winstanley and the Diggers

An agrarian and religious vision of common livelihood takes practical form. [9]

1825 / Americas

Owen purchases New Harmony

A secular communal experiment follows the earlier religious settlement. [10]

1848 / Europe

The Communist Manifesto

Marx and Engels give the movement an international revolutionary program. [1]

1871 / Europe

The Paris Commune

A brief radical government becomes a reference point for competing socialist traditions. [12]

1875 / Europe

Marx writes the Gotha critique

Lower and higher phases of communist society are distinguished. [2]

1884 / Europe

Engels on family, property, and the state

A formative Marxist account of early communal society and class formation. [72]

1892 / Europe

Kropotkin’s The Conquest of Bread

Anarchist communism develops an alternative to a state-centered route. [14]

1917 / Europe

Two Russian revolutions

The monarchy falls; later the Bolsheviks overthrow the Provisional Government. [19]

1921 / Europe

New Economic Policy

The Bolsheviks permit a partial market retreat while retaining political control. [21]

1922 / Europe

The USSR is established

A union state follows the earlier revolutionary seizure of power. [20]

1922 / Europe

Mussolini becomes Italian prime minister

A comparison milestone: fascism develops its own authoritarian project. [74]

1924 / Asia

Mongolian People’s Republic

A Soviet-aligned communist state takes formal shape. [41]

1928-1930s / Europe

Stalin’s transformation from above

Industrialization, coercive collectivization, famine, and terror remake society. [64]

1932-1933 / Europe

The Holodomor and wider Soviet famine

Mass starvation devastates Ukraine and other regions. [24]

1933 / Europe

Hitler becomes German chancellor

A comparison milestone: Nazi rule dismantles political pluralism. [57]

1948 / Europe

Tito-Stalin split

Communist governments develop a major political rupture. [29]

1949 / Asia

People’s Republic of China

Communist victory creates a new national government. [31]

1950s / Europe

Yugoslav self-management develops

Workplace councils and markets distinguish its economic model. [30]

1950-1953 / Asia

The Korean War

North Korea’s invasion leads to a devastating internationalized war and enduring division. [68]

1956 / Europe

Khrushchev denounces Stalin

De-Stalinization challenges a leader’s cult while preserving communist-party rule. [73]

1956 / Europe

Hungarian uprising

Soviet intervention limits challenges to the regional order. [28]

1957 / Asia

Kerala elects a Communist ministry

Communists govern within India’s multiparty constitutional framework. [42]

1958-1962 / Asia

Great Leap and famine

Campaigns and coercive policy contribute to catastrophic loss of life. [32]

1959 / Americas

The Cuban Revolution

Batista’s overthrow precedes the consolidation of a communist party-state. [60]

1961 / Europe

Berlin Wall built

Movement and family contact become tightly constrained. [27]

1961 / Americas

Cuban literacy campaign

Revolutionary mobilization extends basic education. [36]

1966-1976 / Asia

The Cultural Revolution

Political campaigns bring major upheaval to schools, work, culture, and family life. [59]

1968 / Europe

Prague Spring suppressed

Soviet-led intervention blocks a reform experiment. [28]

1974 / Africa

The Derg takes power

A military revolution develops into a Marxist-Leninist order. [39]

1975 / Asia

Khmer Rouge rule begins

Coercive social transformation devastates Cambodian life. [34]

1975 / Africa

Angolan independence and civil war

Liberation movements, ideology, and international intervention intersect. [37]

1975 / Asia

Lao revolutionary party-state

Political transformation precedes later market reform. [49]

1976 / Asia

Vietnam is formally unified

The proclamation of the Socialist Republic follows military victory in 1975. [69]

1978-1979 / Asia

Afghan coup and Soviet invasion

An attempted revolutionary transformation becomes entangled in prolonged war. [40]

1979 / Asia

Vietnam overthrows the Khmer Rouge government

Conflict between communist governments underscores their national and political differences. [34]

1986 / Asia

Vietnam and Laos turn toward markets

Economic coordination changes under continued ruling-party control. [47][49]

1989-1991 / Europe

European communist order breaks down

The Wall opens; the Soviet Union later dissolves. [62]

1990 / Asia

Mongolian democratic transition

The one-party system gives way to political competition. [41]

2006 / Asia

Nepal peace agreement

Maoist insurgents and the government agree a path toward political transition. [43]

2014 / Asia

UN inquiry on North Korea

The commission reports systematic violations amounting to crimes against humanity. [52]

2018-2019 / Global

Constitutional continuity

Chinese amendments and a new Cuban constitution reaffirm party leadership. [45][51]

2022 / Asia

China poverty report and Xinjiang assessment

Separate institutional records address material gains and grave rights concerns. [46][53]

2022 / Asia

Khmer Rouge appeal judgment

The ECCC upholds Khieu Samphan’s convictions. [35]

2026 / Asia

Vietnam political consolidation

A dated example of leadership concentration alongside a pro-business direction. [54]

2026 / Americas

Cuba announces further reforms

The package proposes decentralization and broader market measures. [55]

VIII · Take the understanding with you / CHAPTER 34

What the whole record adds up to

A framework for reading future claims with more precision.

First, communism has more than one history. Religious communal life, Marxist theory, anarchist communism, revolutionary parties, and communist party-states overlap in places but are not interchangeable.

Second, Marxism is central to modern communism, but not its only ancestor. Marx and Engels gave later movements a powerful account of capitalism and class. Leninist organization, Stalinist government, Maoist strategy, and market-oriented reforms were additional historical developments.

Third, people support movements for multiple reasons. Independence, land, security, dignity, education, and political conviction can all matter. The reason a person supports a revolution does not necessarily describe the regime that later governs them.

Fourth, public ownership does not settle who has power. A claim that property belongs to everyone must be tested against actual decision-making, access to information, the right to organize, and the ability to replace leaders.

Fifth, achievements and abuses require their own evidence. Literacy, public services, or poverty reduction do not cancel repression. Repression does not make a documented educational gain disappear. Historical understanding preserves the causal details of each.

Finally, communism remains a contemporary subject. The largest surviving party-states have changed their economies substantially. Understanding today’s systems requires looking at their present institutions and their historical pathways, rather than treating every communist government as the Soviet Union frozen in time.

> The question to carry forward
>
> Who owns? Who decides? Who benefits? Who bears the cost? And what can people do when the system fails them?

VIII · Take the understanding with you / CHAPTER 35

A compact glossary

A reading companion, not a test of ideological vocabulary.

Means of production

Land, workplaces, machinery, infrastructure, and other resources used to produce goods and services.

Bourgeoisie / proletariat

In Marxist analysis, the capitalist owning class and the class generally dependent on selling its labor power.

Social ownership

Ownership or effective control exercised on society’s behalf, through forms that may be public, cooperative, or worker-based.

Nationalization

Transfer of an enterprise or asset into state ownership. It does not by itself specify democratic control.

Collectivization

Reorganization of production into collective units; historically it can involve coercion, so the method matters.

Vanguard party

A revolutionary party claiming a leading role in organizing and directing the working-class struggle.

Democratic centralism

An organizational principle combining internal deliberation with binding unity after decisions; actual scope for debate has varied.

Party-state

A system in which ruling-party authority is deeply integrated with government institutions.

Command economy

An economy in which administrative direction plays a dominant role in production and allocation.

Market socialism

A family of models combining social ownership with market exchange; not a synonym for every market economy ruled by a communist party.

Stateless communism

The envisioned end of a separate coercive state after class antagonisms are overcome; different from the historical party-state.

Juche

North Korea’s distinctive doctrine associated with self-reliance and national autonomy, within its particular party and leadership system.

VIII · Take the understanding with you / CHAPTER 36

Sources and the way this record was built

Follow the evidence back to texts, archives, scholarship, institutions, and dated reporting.

This is an educational historical synthesis, researched for the 22 October 2026 edition. Source numbers link to the records below. Primary ideological texts establish what an author argued, not whether the argument was true. Constitutions establish formal claims and structures, not proof that every promised right is realized. Archives, demographic research, and court findings answer different evidentiary questions.

Source selection includes communist authors and internal critics, government and institutional records, museums, scholarly research, UN inquiries, and current reporting. Institutional and national perspectives are identified where helpful. Interpretive comparisons in the presentation are editorial synthesis. This is a broad overview, not an exhaustive country-by-country history.

Current reporting is used sparingly for recent developments. Diagrams and interactive examples are explanatory constructions, rather than quantitative measurements or historical images. Older constitutional texts are cited by version; the 2026 snapshot does not treat them as complete current legal compilations.

[01] Marx & Engels · Manifesto, chapter II (1848)

Primary text

Ownership, political power, and the authors’ distinction between capital and personal consumption.

Open original source online

[02] Marx · Critique of the Gotha Programme, part I (1875)

Primary text

Lower and higher phases of communist society; distribution and human needs.

Open original source online

[03] Marx · Critique of the Gotha Programme, part IV

Primary text

The transition and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Open original source online

[04] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy · Karl Marx

Scholarly reference

A guide to Marx’s philosophical framework, historical materialism, alienation, and economics.

Open original source online

[05] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy · Socialism

Scholarly reference

Social ownership, democratic control, planning, and market socialism.

Open original source online

[06] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy · Capitalism

Scholarly reference

Private productive property, wage labor, markets, investment, and profit.

Open original source online

[07] Acts 4:32-37 and Acts 5 · King James Version

Primary text

Shared possessions in an early Christian community; Acts 5:4 addresses the owner’s discretion.

Open original source online

[08] Thomas More · Utopia (1516)

Primary text

A fictional commonwealth, not a report of an actual communist country.

Open original source online

[09] Gerrard Winstanley · The True Levellers Standard Advanced (1649)

Primary text

Religious and agrarian arguments for the earth as a common livelihood.

Open original source online

[10] Indiana State Museum · New Harmony

Museum

The Harmonist settlement and Owen’s experiment beginning in 1825.

Open original source online

[11] National Park Service · Utopias in America

Public history

Religious and secular communal experiments, including Shakers and Oneida.

Open original source online

[12] Archives de Paris · La Commune de Paris

Archive

Chronology and documents concerning the Commune of 1871; French-language resource.

Open original source online

[13] Bakunin · The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State (1871)

Primary interpretation

An anarchist reading of the Commune; evidence of ideological disagreement within socialism.

Open original source online

[14] Kropotkin · The Conquest of Bread (1892)

Primary text

Anarchist communism and distribution organized around needs.

Open original source online

[15] Lenin · The State and Revolution (1917)

Primary text

Lenin’s theory of revolutionary state power and its eventual disappearance.

Open original source online

[16] Trotsky · The Revolution Betrayed, chapter IX (1936)

Primary critique

Trotsky’s analysis of Soviet bureaucracy; an interested participant’s account.

Open original source online

[17] Anton Pannekoek · Workers’ Councils (written 1942-1947)

Primary text

Workers’ self-organization and council democracy; text composed during and immediately after World War II.

Open original source online

[18] Mao · On New Democracy (1940)

Primary text

Class alliances and a revolutionary strategy adapted to China.

Open original source online

[19] USHMM · The Russian Revolution, 1917

Museum

War, the fall of the monarchy, and the Bolshevik seizure of power.

Open original source online

[20] Library of Congress · Internal Workings of the Soviet Union

Archive exhibition

Party dictatorship, purges, forced labor, persecution, and the decline of the Soviet system. Exhibition interpretation should be read alongside the linked original documents.

Open original source online

[21] Library of Congress · The Soviet Union and the United States

Archive exhibition

The New Economic Policy and changing relations with the outside world.

Open original source online

[22] Library of Congress · Collectivization of livestock

Primary archival document

An official’s report of seed shortages, famine, and emaciated livestock.

Open original source online

[23] Holodomor Research and Education Consortium · Was the Holodomor a Genocide?

Research institution

An argument connecting anti-Ukrainian measures to the legal definition of genocide.

Open original source online

[24] UK House of Lords Library · Ukrainian Holodomor

Parliamentary research

Historical context and the question of recognition as genocide.

Open original source online

[25] UNESCO IIEP · Soviet experience in educational development

Institutional study

Educational planning, women’s education, and access; a historical study, not a contemporary rights assessment.

Open original source online

[26] Bundesarchiv · What was the State Security?

Archive

The Stasi’s organization, penetration of society, and limits of surveillance.

Open original source online

[27] Deutsches Historisches Museum · Divided Germany and reunification

Museum

East Germany, the Berlin Wall, and reunification.

Open original source online

[28] UK National Archives · Cold War on File

Archive collection

Documents on divided Europe, Korea, Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Open original source online

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