Definition of Tyranny



James Madison (*Federalist No. 47*): Defined tyranny directly as the accumulation of all powers—legislative, executive, and judicial—in the same hands, "whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective". [1]



George Washington (*Farewell Address*): Warned that the "spirit of encroachment" tends to consolidate power into a single department, creating a de facto despotism regardless of the nominal form of government. [1]



Thomas Jefferson: Characterized tyranny as a gradual and slow perversion where those entrusted with power twist free institutions over time, warning against "elective despotism" or majority oppression of minority rights. [1, 2, 3]

"Mankind soon learn to make interested uses of every right and power which they possess, or may assume. The public money and public liberty, intended to have been deposited with three branches of magistracy, but found inadvertently to be in the hands of one only, will soon be discovered to be sources of wealth and dominion to those who hold them… They [the assembly] should look forward to a time, and that not a distant one, when a corruption in this, as in the country from which we derive our origin, will have seized the heads of government, and be spread by them through the body of the people; when they will purchase the voices of the people, and make them pay the price. Human nature is the same on every side of the Atlantic, and will be alike influenced by the same causes. The time to guard against corruption and tyranny, is before they shall have gotten hold of us. It is better to keep the wolf out of the fold, than to trust to drawing his teeth and talons after he shall have entered." – Thomas Jefferson

Core Safeguards Against Tyranny

The framers sought to cage potential tyranny through structural design rather than hoping for benevolent leaders:

- **Separation of Powers & Checks and Balances**: Dividing authority across distinct branches (Congress, the President, and the Judiciary) so that "ambition [might] be made to counteract ambition" (*Federalist No. 51*). [1, 2]
- **Constitutional Chains**: As Jefferson famously wrote, the government is a potential threat alongside criminals, meaning citizens must "tie the second down with the chains of the Constitution". [1]
- **Civic Virtue and Education**: Figures like **John Adams**, **Benjamin Franklin**, and **Samuel Adams** maintained that a free republic cannot survive on paper alone; it requires a wise, morally grounded, and vigilant citizenry. Franklin famously cautioned that trading essential liberty for temporary safety usually results in losing both. [1, 2, 3]
- **The Right to Bear Arms**: Jefferson and other revolutionaries viewed an armed populace as a final structural deterrent against domestic government overreach and tyranny. [1]

The final solution only for the people. Simply put, Warn them, failing that kill them:

> *"And what country can preserve it's liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? It is it's natural manure." -* ***Thomas Jefferson***