

Checkpoint
What is the difference between an oligarchy and an autocracy?

Many Americans use the terms *democracy*, *republic*, *representative democracy*, and *republican form of government* interchangeably, although they are not the same. Whatever the terms used, remember that in a democracy the people are sovereign. They are the only source for any and all of government's power. In other words, the people rule.

Dictatorship A dictatorship exists where those who rule cannot be held responsible to the will of the people. The government is not accountable for its policies, nor for how they are carried out. Dictatorship is probably the oldest, and it is certainly the most common, form of government known to history.⁶

Dictatorships are sometimes identified as either autocracies or oligarchies. An **autocracy** is a government in which a single person holds unlimited political power. An **oligarchy** is a government in which the power to rule is held by a small, usually self-appointed **elite**.

All dictatorships are authoritarian; those in power hold absolute and unchallengeable authority over the people. Modern dictatorships have tended to be totalitarian, as well. That is, they exercise complete power over nearly every aspect of human affairs. Their power embraces all matters of human concern.

The leading examples of dictatorship in the modern era have been those in Fascist Italy (from 1922 to 1943), in Nazi Germany (from 1933 to 1945), in the Soviet Union (from 1917 until the late 1980s), and one that still exists in the People's Republic of China (where the present regime came to power in 1949).

Although they do exist, one-person dictatorships are not at all common today. A few close approaches to such a regime can now be found in Libya, which has been dominated by Muammar al-Qaddafi since 1969, and in some other Arab and African states.

Most present-day dictatorships are not nearly so absolutely controlled by a single person or by a small group as may appear to be the case. Outward appearances may

⁶ The word *dictatorship* comes from the Latin *dictare*, meaning "to dictate, issue orders," "to give authoritative commands." *Dictator* was the ancient Roman republic's title for the leader who was given extraordinary powers in times of crisis. Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.) was the last of the Roman dictators.

hide the fact that several groups—the army, religious leaders, industrialists, and others—compete for power in the political system.

Dictatorships often present the outward appearance of control by the people. The people often vote in popular elections; but the vote is closely controlled, and ballots usually contain the candidates of but one political party. An elected legislative body often exists, but only to rubber-stamp the policies of the dictatorship.

Typically, dictatorial **regimes** are militaristic in character. They usually gain power by force. The military holds many of the major posts in the government. After crushing all effective opposition at home, these regimes may turn to foreign aggression to enhance the country's military power, political control, and **prestige**.

Geographic Distribution of Power

In every system of government, the power to govern is located in one or more places geographically. From this standpoint, three basic forms of government exist: unitary, federal, and confederate.

Unitary Government A **unitary government** is often described as a centralized government. All powers held by the government belong to a single, central agency. The central (national) government creates local units of government for its own convenience. Those local governments have only those powers that the central government chooses to give them.

Most governments in the world are unitary in form. Great Britain is a classic illustration. A single central organization, the Parliament, holds all of the government's power. Local governments do exist—but solely to relieve Parliament of burdens it could perform only with much difficulty and inconvenience. Though unlikely, Parliament could do away with all local government in Britain at any time.

Be careful not to confuse the unitary form of government with a dictatorship. In the unitary form, all of the powers held by the government are concentrated in the central government.

regimes
n. particular governments

prestige
n. a reputation based on achievement

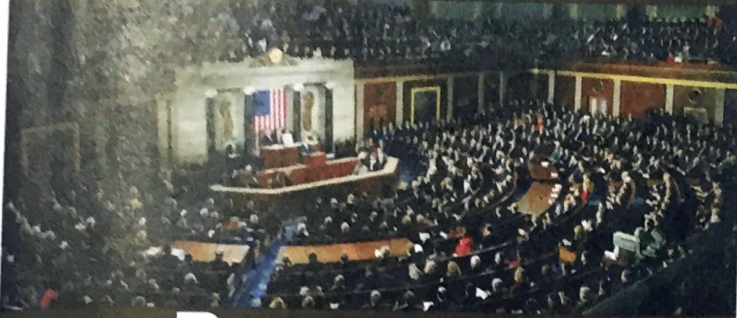
elite
n. a select group, a privileged class



For an **interactive** version of Democracies and Dictatorships, visit PearsonSchool.com/phgovt

Democracies and Dictatorships

Every country has a different approach to government. Below are four examples: two democracies and two dictatorships. In each image, the people are expressing their will. *How are the people's methods and the governments' reactions different in each image?*

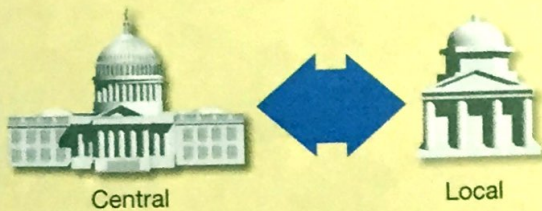
**Democracy****Dictatorship**

United States	United Kingdom	Popular Name	China	Myanmar (Burma)
United States of America  (photo above left)	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 	Official Name	People's Republic of China 	Union of Myanmar (photo above right) 
Constitution-based federal republic	Constitutional monarchy	Form of Government	Communist state	Military junta (a faction that rules after a coup)
President Barack Obama	Queen Elizabeth II	Chief of State	President Hu Jintao	Sr. General Than Shwe
President Barack Obama	Prime Minister David Cameron	Head of Government	Premier Wen Jiabao	Lt. General Thein Sein
The Constitution was ratified by the States in 1787–88, establishing the Federal Government.	Power has gradually shifted from the monarchy to the Parliament over the last 800 years.	Origins of Current Government	In 1949, Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China as a socialist autocracy.	The military has ruled since 1962, despite defeat in free elections in 1990.
The President and members of Congress are chosen by the people.	The monarchy is hereditary; the prime minister is the head of the leading party in Parliament, which is elected by the people.	Elections	The president is chosen by the National People's Congress. The president nominates the premier, who is confirmed by the Congress, which is chosen by regional congresses.	There are no elections. The junta has banned the legislature and taken over judicial power.

Distribution of Power

Power can be distributed between central (national) and local governments in three different ways. Which diagram best describes the distribution of power in the United States?

Federal Government



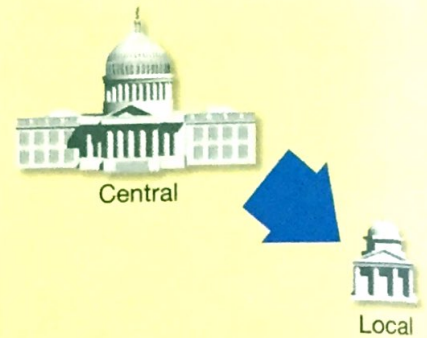
The National Government and the States are co-equal partners in a federal system.

Confederate Government



Most power belongs to the local (regional) governments. The central government has only limited power.

Unitary Government



Power resides with the central government, which creates local governments.

That government might not hold all power, however. In Great Britain, for example, the powers held by the government are limited. British government is unitary and, at the same time, democratic.

Federal Government A **federal government** is one in which the powers of government are divided between a central government and several local governments. An authority superior to both the central and local governments makes this **division of powers** on a geographic basis; that division cannot be changed by either the local or national level acting alone. Both levels of government act directly on the people through their own sets of laws, officials, and agencies.

In the United States, for example, the National Government has certain powers, and the 50 States have others. This division of powers is set out in the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution stands above both levels of government; it cannot be changed unless the people, acting through both the National Government and the States, agree to the change.

Australia, Canada, Mexico, Switzerland, Germany, India, and some 20 other states also have federal forms of government today. In the United States, the phrase "the Federal Government" is often used to identify the National Government, the government headquartered in Washington, D.C. Note, however, that each of the 50 State governments in this country is unitary, not federal, in form.

Confederate Government A **confederation** is an alliance of independent states. A central organization, the confederate government has the power to handle only those matters that the member states have assigned to it. Typically, confederate governments have had limited powers and only in such fields as defense and foreign affairs.

Most often, confederate governments have not had the power to make laws that apply directly to individuals, at least not without some further action by the member states. A confederate structure of government makes it possible for the several states to cooperate in matters of common concern and, at the same time, retain their separate identities.

Confederations have been rare in the modern world. The European Union (EU) is the closest approach to one today. The EU, formed by 12 countries in 1993, has established free trade among its now 27 member-nations, launched a common currency, and seeks to coordinate its members' foreign and defense policies.

In our own history, the United States under the Articles of Confederation (1781–1789) and the Confederate States of America (1861–1865) also provide examples of this form of government.

Legislative and Executive Branches

Political scientists also classify governments based on the relationship between their legislative and executive agencies. This grouping

yields two basic forms of government: presidential and parliamentary.

Presidential Government A **presidential government** features a separation of powers between the executive and the legislative branches of the government. The two branches are independent of one another and coequal. The chief executive (the president) is chosen by the people, independently of the legislature. He or she holds office for a fixed term, and has a number of significant powers that are not subject to the direct control of the legislative branch.

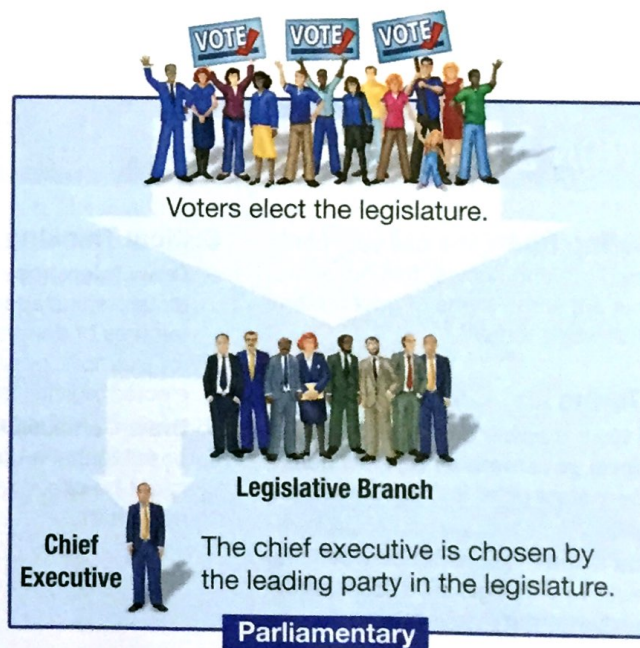
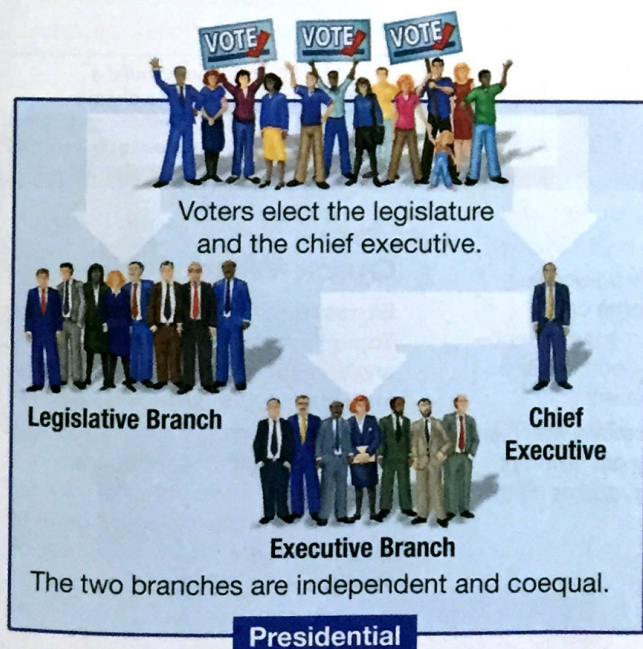
The details of this separation of the powers of these two branches are almost always spelled out in a written constitution—as they are in the United States. Each of the branches is regularly given several powers with which it can block actions of the other branch.

✓ Checkpoint
How is the executive branch related to the legislative branch in a presidential government?

coequal
adj. equal with one another, of the same rank

Choosing a Chief Executive

In a presidential democracy, the people choose their representatives as well as their President. In a parliamentary democracy, the representatives (members of parliament) choose the prime minister. *Which method seems best for choosing a chief executive? Why?*





▲ Members of the South African parliament are sworn into office.

The United States is the world's leading example of presidential government. In fact, the United States invented the form. Nearly all of the other presidential systems that exist in the world today are also found in the Western Hemisphere.

Parliamentary Government In a **parliamentary government**, the executive branch is made up of the prime minister or premier, and that official's cabinet. The prime minister and cabinet are themselves members of the legislative branch, the parliament. The prime minister is the leader of the majority party or

of a like-minded group of parties (a coalition) in parliament and is chosen by that body. With parliament's approval, the prime minister selects the members of the cabinet from among the members of parliament. The executive is thus chosen by the legislature, is a part of it, and is subject to its direct control.

The prime minister and the cabinet (often called "the government") remain in office only as long as their policies and administration have the support of a majority in parliament. If the parliament defeats the prime minister and cabinet on an important matter, the government may receive a "vote of no confidence," and the prime minister and his cabinet must resign from office. Then a new government must be formed. Either parliament chooses a new prime minister or, as often happens, all the seats in parliament go before the voters in a general election.

A majority of the governmental systems in the world today are parliamentary, not presidential, in form—and they are by a wide margin. Parliamentary government avoids one of the major problems of the presidential form: prolonged conflict and sometimes deadlock between the executive and legislative branches. However, the protections against arbitrary government found in the checks and balances of presidential government are not a part of the parliamentary system.

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Essential Questions Journal

To continue to build a response to the chapter Essential Question, go to your Essential Questions Journal.

1. **Guiding Question** Use your completed table to answer this question: What are some forms of government in the world today?

Key Terms and Comprehension

- (a) How is power distributed in a **federal government**? (b) How does a federal state differ from a confederate state?
- What is the relationship between the executive and legislative branches in a **parliamentary government**?

Critical Thinking

- Draw Inferences** Why do some dictatorships adopt some of the features of democratic government—for example, popular elections and elected legislative bodies?
- Draw Conclusions** Explain why it is possible that a unitary government might be either democratic or dictatorial in form.

Quick Write

Expository Writing: Research Your Topic Use several sources to find the answers to the questions you posed in Section 1. The answers will help you gather details you will need to fully explain either a democracy or a dictatorship. Then put all of your facts and details in chronological order to help the reader follow the growth of democracy or dictatorship.