Overview

This handbook presents information about the various forms that government has taken throughout history. It discusses the main differences between federal and unitary government, presidential and parliamentary government, and democracy and dictatorship. During most of world history, governments have been ruled through some type of dictatorship. The handbook describes several of these types.

The study of government is a key element of civics. Knowing about various forms of government gives students a perspective for understanding their own political system and their rights and responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.

Test Preparation

■ Review Chart Have students draw a chart to show the similarities and differences between federal and unitary, presidential and parliamentary, and democratic and dictatorial governments.

■ Glossary Ask students to make flashcards for the Glossary of Political Terms. Then encourage students to quiz each other.

Analyzing the Visuals

■ Direct students to the photo of the Ukrainians on this page. Explain that supporters of the opposition candidate for president took part in what was called the Orange Revolution, a series of protests aiming to end government corruption and voting fraud in Ukraine. Ukraine’s Supreme Court agreed with the protesters, leading to this celebration. Ask Are public protests acceptable in a democracy? (yes) Are they acceptable in a dictatorship? (no) Remind students that the United States was founded by people who protested that their rights were being violated.

Point out the chart on this page. Which two countries in the chart are dictatorships? (Cuba and Syria) Do you think that dictatorships tend to be unitary or federal? (unitary) Why? (Dictatorships concentrate power in the hands of the few; they are not inclined to divide or share power.)

Forms of Government

Political scientists classify governments in order to help them describe, compare, and analyze different forms. These particularly helpful classifications involve determining (1) the geographic distribution of governmental power within the state, (2) the relationship between the legislature and executive branches of the government, and (3) who can participate in the government. As the chart shows, modern forms of government vary widely.

Forms of Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Where is the power?</th>
<th>What is the relationship between the legislative and executive branches?</th>
<th>Who can participate?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Central government holds all powers. Central government controls national and regional governments.</td>
<td>The executive branch is made up of the president and cabinet. The president and cabinet are members of the legislative branch, or parliament.</td>
<td>President is the head of the government. The president of the republic is a ceremonial figure. The actual executive branch is made up of the president and cabinet. In their role as the head of state, the president is responsible for the day-to-day performance of the presidency. The president can appoint the president of the republic. The president is responsible for the overall performance of the presidency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>中央政府拥有所有权力。中央政府控制国家和地方的政府。</td>
<td>总统和内阁成员是立法机构的成员。</td>
<td>总统是政府的首脑。实际的政府首脑是总统和内阁。在他们的角色中，总统是国家的象征性领袖。总统可以任命总统。总统是政府的一把手。总统负责政府的一日三餐。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Central government holds all powers.</td>
<td>Central government holds all powers.</td>
<td>President is the head of the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Central government holds all powers.</td>
<td>Central government holds all powers.</td>
<td>President is the head of the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Central government holds all powers.</td>
<td>Central government holds all powers.</td>
<td>President is the head of the government.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Bibliography

For the Teacher


For the Student


1162 Concept Connector Handbooks
Federal vs. Unitary Government

Today, about two dozen nations, including the United States, have a federal system of government. In this kind of system, two levels of government—central and state—divide power between them. In this unitary system, which is more common by far, all powers belong to the central government. One disadvantage of a federal system is its inefficiency. People must obey two sets of laws, which belong to the central government. One disadvantage of a federal system is its inefficiency. People must obey two sets of laws, which belong to the central government.

Federal System

Powers of the central government

Unitary System

Powers of the central government

Presidential and Parliamentary Governments

The Presidential Relationship

Voters elect the legislature and the chief executive, who is part of the executive branch. The legislative and executive branches are independent and concurrent.

The Parliamentary Relationship

Voters elect the legislature. The chief executive is chosen from the legislature.

Analyzing the Visuals

- Have students look at the diagram titled Federal vs. Unitary Government. Ask: In which system is the central government stronger? (the unitary system) How do the two governmental systems differ in the way they distribute power? (In a federal system the powers of the central government and of the states are fairly equal and some powers are shared. In a unitary system, the central government holds all the power; any power wielded by the states comes from the central government.) Which system probably experiences more squabbling between the central and state governments, and why? (the federal system, because the central and state governments might have trouble sharing some powers or avoiding the occasional usurping of the other’s powers)

- Now point out the Presidential and Parliamentary Governments diagrams. Ask: Who chooses the chief executive in a presidential government? (the voters) Who chooses the chief executive in a parliamentary government? (the legislative branch) Which system might the chief executive be more responsive to the citizens, and why? (the presidential, because the chief executive is directly elected by the voters)

Basic Concepts of Democracy

1. A recognition of the fundamental worth and dignity of every person. At various times, the welfare of one or a few individuals is subordinate to the interests of the many in a democracy; for example, a democratic society may force people to pay a tax or obey traffic signals.

2. A respect for the equality of all persons. The democratic concept of equality insists that all people are entitled to equality of opportunity and equality before the law— contacts necessary equal distribution of wealth.

3. A faith in the majority rule and the right to give-and-take among the various competing interests. People must compromise to find the position most acceptable to the largest number. Compromise is the process of blending and adjusting competing views and interests.

4. An insistence upon the necessity of compromise. In a democracy, public decision making must be largely a matter of give-and-take among the various competing interests. People must compromise to find the position most acceptable to the largest number.

5. An insistence upon the widest possible degree of individual freedom. In a democracy, each individual must be as free to do as he or she pleases as far as the freedom of all will allow. Oliver Wendell Holmes once had this to say about the nature of each individual rights. “The right to swing my fist ends where the other man’s nose begins.”
Analyzing the Visuals

Tell students that each of the leaders shown on these pages was a dictator. Nevertheless, each had the support of a large part, if not most, of the population. Ask Which leaders appear to reflect the typical militaristic character of an authoritarian government? How can you tell? (Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Mao Zedong; they are all wearing military uniforms.) Which leaders appear to be sensitive to the finer aspects of life? How can you tell? (Mehmed II, who is sniffing a flower; Louis XIV, who is riding a fine horse; Catherine the Great; all three are wearing fashionable clothing.) Discuss the various forms of dictatorship described in the text. Challenge students to give examples of each.

Government and Civics

Forms of Dictatorship

Typically militaristic in character, an authoritarian or dictatorship regime usually acquires political power by force and may turn to foreign aggression to enhance its military strength and prestige. Authoritarianism has taken several related forms throughout history.

Absolutism A system in which the ruler holds complete authority over the government and the lives of the people. Some absolute monarchs ruled according to the principle of divine right. Modern forms of absolutism include military dictatorships that try to control every element of people’s lives (see Totalitarianism).

Despotism Absolute rule with no constitutional restraints. The term despot was an honorable title in ancient times. Later, absolute monarchs who favored reforms became known as enlightened despots. Today, despot refers to a brutal and oppressive ruler.

Autocracy The concentration of power in one individual or group that uses force to maintain absolute control and smother any political opposition.

Glossary of Political Terms

bureaucracy a large, complex administrative structure that handles the everyday business of government

citizen a member of a state or nation who is entitled to full civil rights

civil service those civilian employees who perform the administrative work of government

compromise an adjustment of opposing principles or systems by modifying some aspect of each

constitution the body of fundamental laws setting out the principles, structures, and processes of a government

foreign policy everything a nation’s government says and does in world affairs

immigrant a person legally admitted as a permanent resident of a country

jury a legally chosen group of persons who hear evidence and decide questions of fact in a court case

nation a group of people who share the same way of life and live in the same area and under the same central government

Differentiated Instruction

Advanced Readers

Point out that the regimes of the leaders depicted here varied greatly. Ask students to research one or more of these dictators to determine which form of dictatorship best applies to their government. Have students present their conclusions, along with supporting details, to the class.

Gifted and Talented

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History Background

Mao’s Little Red Book  
By the 1960s, Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong had become a revered, godlike figure, especially to members of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Lin Biao, the head of the PLA, gathered many of Mao’s sayings and writings into a book called the Quotations of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung. He ordered all PLA soldiers to memorize the material, which presented Mao’s ideas about a variety of political and social issues. During the Cultural Revolution of the 1970s, the book was required reading for students at all grade levels, and workers studied it as well. Mao’s quotations came to be seen as infallible. Unofficially, all Chinese citizens were expected to carry a copy of the book with them at all times, and they could be punished for failing to do so. The pocket-sized Western version of this book, with its bright red cover, became known as The Little Red Book.