

Unit 1 Text 2; Forms of Government (CG 19)

Read and Mark the Following. Then use to complete Activity, put in Notebook when finished.

Constitutions and Government

In their earliest forms, governments were created to protect a societies arrangement among its members. Within the people agreed to give the government **sovereignty**, which is power and authority, the right to make rules that all must obey. In exchange they agreed to give up some or all of their rights.

Most large countries/nations/states have several *Levels of Government*, which relates to power of the governments based in its territory or national boundaries and what powers they have over the people who live there. The top level of government is the central or national government which has the power over all the people that live within the largest boundaries. Below this is the state governments that are a subdivision of the national territory. Below this is the local governments which includes counties, cities, towns, and villages. Power is first separated by the Constitution between the national and state governments, some of which is only given to the national, some to the state, some is shared and final some are denied to both. State governments decide the powers that local governments have.

A constitutional government is a government based on a written **constitution** a written plan that makes the rules for that government and gives it its powers. A constitution also places limits on the powers of those who govern. Constitutions are incomplete guides because no written constitution can spell out all the laws, customs, and ideas of a government. However, a constitution does serve the following purposes: It sets forth goals and ideals that the people of a nation believe in and share. These are usually stated in the *preamble*. It establishes the basic structure of government and defines the government's powers and duties. For example, in a federal state, a constitution describes the relationship between the national and state governments. It provides the supreme law for the country. Constitutional law involves the interpretation and application of the constitution. It defines the extent and limits of government power and the rights of citizens.

Sometime powers are separated within the government itself. When this is done it is called the division of power. Within our governments powers are divided between Legislative, Executive, and judicial Branches. The Legislative branch has the powers to write, the Executive to carryout, and the Judicial to Judge the laws.

Power and Forms of Government

Most all governments fall under three primary forms of government. Each system defines the how much power the governments have.

A **unitary** system gives all powers of government to a central or national government. The central government has the power to create state, provincial, or other local governments. These central governments decide which powers the local government may have. Countries with a unitary system of government are Great Britain, France, and Italy.

A **federal system** divides the powers of government between the national government and state governments. Federalism is the process by which these separated and divided powers between the nation and state governments actually operate.

A **confederacy** is a system that keeps most of the key powers of government to the lower level of state government. It was the first type of government chosen by the United States. A confederacy is a loose union of independent states. Since in a confederacy, most important powers are kept in the states, no one member of the confederacy has to obey the other members. When the first United States government under the confederacy failed, American leaders wrote the Constitution that made the national government supreme while preserving some of powers for the state governments.

Normally, but not always the powers of government are then separated into three specialized branches of government called the legislative, executive and judicial powers. The legislative power is the power to make laws. The executive power is the power to carry out and enforce the laws. The judicial power is the power to judge whether the laws were broken and what punishments should be given.

Participation in Government

The United States is a federal democratic republic that serves as a model of government for many people around the world. Today, democracies outnumber all other forms of government. What differentiates government today is who is allowed to participate in Government. There are three ways in which people can participate in government.

An autocracy is probably the oldest type of government. In an **autocracy** all power and authority to rule are in the hands of a single individual. Autocracy is rule by the one. Totalitarian dictatorship is one form of autocracy in which the government tries to control all of social and economic life. Nazi Germany was an example of a totalitarian dictatorship. Monarchy is another form of autocracy. In most ancient monarchies, a king, queen, or emperor exercises the absolute powers and is an absolute monarch. An example of an absolute monarch today is the king of Saudi Arabia. In a constitutional monarchy, a monarch shares governmental powers with an elected legislature based on a constitution. Great Britain, Sweden, Japan, and the Netherlands have constitutional monarchies.

An **oligarchy** is a system of government in which a small group holds power. Oligarchy is rule by the few. The government of China is an oligarchy since the Communist Party and the leaders of the armed forces control the government's decision-making.

Types of Democracies

A **democracy** is a system of government where citizens hold some degree of power. Democracy is rule by the many, or it's also known by the phrase popular sovereignty which means the people rule. There are two types of democracies direct and representative. In a **direct democracy**, all the citizens govern themselves by voting on all issues and laws that each must obey. In a **representative democracy**, one where representatives are chosen, and are given the power to make laws that all must obey. A government that has representation elected by the citizens is called a **republic**. In a republic, elected representatives are responsible to the people. Representative democracy, republics, and constitutional republics generally mean the same thing to most Americans however, not every democracy is a republic. For example, Great Britain is a democracy but not a republic because the people vote for a party and not an individual representative. Because we allow most citizens to choose representative who rule, we are officially a Democratic Republic.

Leadership in Democracies

All governments require leadership. There are primarily two ways in which democracies chose a government and a leader. One is the Parliamentary System and the other is the Presidential System.

One of the most widespread forms of democracy is **parliamentary system**. In this form of government, executive and legislative powers are combined in the parliament, which is an elected assembly. The majority party of the parliament selects the leaders or ministers of the executive branch. The executive branch is required to carry out the laws passed by the legislature. The ministers of the executive branch are known as the cabinet. The head minister of the executive branch is usually called the prime minister. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet are all part of the majority party.

Another form of democracy is the **presidential system**. Under this form of government, countries like the United States, separates the executive branch from the legislative branch. The president, is the head of the executive branch and is separately elected to office. The president is responsible to carry out the laws passed by a separately elected Legislature. Departments are created by the legislature, but run by the executive, to help carry out the laws. The heads of these departments are known as the cabinet. The president chooses the heads of the departments who are approved by the legislature. The president, cabinet members, and the majority party in the legislature do not have to be members of the same party.