

Follow-up Activities

- Divide the class into groups and assign each group a form of government. Have each group choose a country representative of that form of government and prepare an oral presentation on the specific elements of that government, and its benefits and drawbacks. Ask students to back up their oral explanations with graphic illustrations, such as photographs or video clips. Then have each group make a presentation to the class and answer questions from other students. After the presentations have been completed, encourage the class to make a chart comparing governmental elements across groups.
- Arrange for a visit to the class of someone who has lived under a dictatorship, such as those in Cuba, Afghanistan, Iraq or Iran. To prepare for the visit, have the students do some reading on the country involved. Have them compose questions to ask the visitor after hearing the visitor's experience.
- Encourage students to select and research a contemporary dictatorship. Students should specifically try to discover what life is like for the people in that country. Students can then write a letter or journal entry as if they lived under the reign of that government, providing details about daily life and activities.
- Many governments around the world are limited by written constitutions. Encourage students to explore constitutions from various governments. (See library.tamu.edu/govdocs/workshop/const.html for an online collection of world constitutions.) Students can select one world constitution and compare it with the U.S. Constitution in a Venn diagram.
- Students can imagine that they are international journalists traveling to a foreign nation to interview the head of state. Students should develop a list of questions for this person concerning his or her country's government, including its major structures and methods of functioning. Using print and Internet resources, students should provide answers to these questions and should present the interview in the form of a newspaper story or television news segment. (See www.odci.gov/cia/publications/chiefs/index.html for an up-to-date list of chiefs of state from around the world.)
- Encourage students to imagine that they are faced with the task of constructing a government for a fledgling nation. In small groups, students can draft proposals for this new government, addressing issues such as who holds the power, where the power to govern is located, to what extent the powers of government are separated and what the limits of government are. After students have presented their proposals, hold a class discussion of which governmental structure seems the most viable and why.

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our Web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html
The United States Central Intelligence Agency presents an online version of *The World Factbook*, which provides information about countries around the world, including facts about types of government and governmental structures.
- lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html
The Library of Congress sponsors Country Studies, which provides detailed information about the systems and institutions of countries worldwide.
- www.fordemocracy.net
This World Forum for Democracy site lists all of the world's democracies, and provides students with a time line describing the development of democracy over time.

Suggested Print Resources

- Lace, William. *The Nazis*. Lucent Books, San Diego, CA; 1998
- Nardo, Don. *Democracy*. Lucent Books, San Diego, CA; 1994.
- Pietrusza, David. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*. Lucent Books, San Diego, CA; 1996
- Pious, Richard M. *Governments of the World: A Student Companion*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY; 1998.

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COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT

Grades 5–12

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting programs in the video series *United States Government*.

Before Viewing: Give students an introduction to the topic by relaying aspects of the program overview to them. Select pre-viewing discussion questions and vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

After Viewing: Review the program and vocabulary, and use the follow-up questions and activities to inspire continued discussion. Encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.



Program Overview

Different forms of government can be understood by comparing components of their organizational structures, like legislatures, leaders and courts. The study of the similarities and differences among various governments is called comparative government. There are four main questions that can help us to understand differences in various forms of government.

The first question is: who holds the power in the government? In a democracy, people have the ultimate power, but in a dictatorship, rulers hold power over the people and do not respond to their wishes.

Secondly we can ask: where is the power to govern located? In a unitary system, all governmental powers are located in a single, central agency. Federal systems split power between a central government and multiple local governments. Confederations are voluntary associations of states in which the states try to retain as much individual power as possible and usually grant only limited power to a central authority.

Governments may also be distinguished by asking a third question: to what extent are the powers of government separated? In parliamentary systems, the powers of government are placed within a single body. The chief executive, called a prime minister, is a member of the legislature and is elected by the legislature's majority political party. In shared powers systems, by contrast, the powers of government are divided among several branches. The chief executive, like a president, is a member of the executive branch, not the legislature, and is elected by the people. Thus prime ministers are directly responsible to parliaments, while presidents are directly responsible to the people who elect them.

Finally, we can also ask: what are the limits on government? Limited governments are those that have established and respected limits on their power. Unlimited governments have no effective means for restraining power.

The United States, according to the categories listed above, can be defined as a democratic, federal, limited, shared powers system and is one of the most vibrant governments in the world!

Vocabulary

comparative government — The study of the elements that make up different forms of government.

democracy — A system of government in which political control is exercised by all citizens, either directly or indirectly, through elected representatives.

constitutional monarchy — A system of government characterized by a monarch as the head of state and limits placed on the powers of government by a constitution.

republic — A system of government characterized by elected representatives.

traditional monarchy — A system of government characterized by a powerful monarch and unclear limits on governmental powers.

dictatorship — A system of government characterized by unlimited powers of one person, group or political party and an absence of political liberty.

unitary system — A system of government in which all other government bodies, such as regional, city or other local governments, are subordinated to a central government.

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federal system — A union of associated states characterized by a central government and two or more local governments that do not have the right to withdraw at will.

confederal system — A union of associated states characterized by a central government and two or more state or local governments that have the right to withdraw at will.

shared powers system — A system of government in which the powers of government are separated among several branches. Each branch has primary responsibility for some functions, but also shares responsibility for other functions with other branches.

parliamentary system — A system of government in which all of the powers of government are placed within a single body, such as a legislature.

prime minister — The head of government of a parliamentary system who is a member of the legislature, which elects him or her as prime minister.

limited government — A system of government that has established and respected limits on its power.

unlimited government — A system of government that has no effective means for restraining power.

authoritarian system — A system of government that denies political freedoms and strictly regulates the degree to which individuals and groups have autonomy from government controls. Authoritarian governments are forms of dictatorships.

totalitarian system — A type of extreme dictatorial government that attempts to control every part of the lives of its people and suppresses any and all liberties, with no limits on governmental power. Totalitarian governments are forms of dictatorships.

universal suffrage — The right to vote for all adult citizens.

rule of law — The concept that every member of a society, including the rulers, must follow the law.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Encourage students to brainstorm a definition of democracy. What does living under a democratic government mean to students? What parts of U.S. government make it democratic? What characteristics would make a government not democratic?
- Why do students think America is considered to be a free country? Ask them to make a list of opportunities and freedoms they have in the United States. What governmental structures exist to allow American citizens to maintain these freedoms?
- Ask students to name several different countries around the world. What forms of government do these countries have? Can students describe anything about these forms of government? How do students think governments of other countries are different from United States government?
- Some governments around the world are limited in how they can use their power, and some aren't. See if students can give examples of limited and unlimited forms of government. What do they see as the advantages or disadvantages of limiting a government's powers?

Focus Questions

1. How can one form of government be compared with others?
2. Provide examples of different forms of governments.
3. What is a democracy?
4. What is a republic? Can a democracy also be a republic?
5. What is a federal system?
6. Describe the role citizens play in a democracy.
7. What is the difference between constitutional monarchies and traditional monarchies?
8. What is the difference between unitary and federal systems of government?
9. What is a confederation, and how does it differ from a federation?
10. Provide some features of parliamentary systems.
11. What is the difference between limited and unlimited governments?
12. What features distinguish an authoritarian government?
13. What is totalitarianism, and how does it differ from authoritarianism?
14. What are some principal features of liberal democracy?
15. What is the rule of law, and what role does it play in a democracy?

Follow-up Discussion

- America can be defined as a democratic, federal, limited, shared powers system of government. Discuss with students what each of these terms means in the day-to-day functioning of United States government.
- Ask students what they have seen in the news during previous months that tells them about significant differences between forms of government. Discuss with students what makes these forms of government similar to and different from that in America.
- Discuss with students what they think the advantages and disadvantages are of a parliamentary system as opposed to a shared powers system of government. Would American government benefit by having a President who isn't elected by the people and who remained in office for as long as members of the legislature felt he or she was doing a good job?
- United States government consists of a complex system of powers that are separated and shared among three branches. Do students think it would be more beneficial to have a single ruler to make, enforce and interpret laws? Why or why not?
- Ask students to consider the ideal expressed by President Abraham Lincoln that government should be of, by and for the people. Are all governments based on this ideal? How does this ideal work in different governments around the world? How well does this ideal work in the United States?