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American Government

Part 10: Comparative Governments

There are 118 lessons.
There are 472 questions on the test.

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1. Forms of government



Types of government

Our thanks to: <http://www.wikipedia.org>

- * adhocracy: government in an unstructured fashion; an unstructured organization
- * anarchy: order without government
- * andrarchy/androcracy: government by men
- * aristocracy: government by the nobility
- * autarchy: government by an absolute ruler
- * autocracy: government by one individual
- * bureaucracy: government by civil servants
- * confederacy: a union of sovereign states; federation
- * demarchy: government by the people; popular government
- * **democracy: government by the people**
- * ethnocracy: government by a particular ethnic group
- * gerontocracy: government by the aged
- * gynarchy: government by women
- * gynocracy: government by women; gynarchy
- * heptarchy: government by seven people
- * hierarchy: government by a ranked body; government by priests
- * hierocracy: government by priests or religious ministers
- * kakistocracy: government by the worst
- * kleptocracy: government by thieves
- * matriarchy: government by women or mothers
- * meritocracy: government by those with merit
- * monarchy: government by one individual
- * ochlocracy: government by mobs
- * **oligarchy: government by the few**
- * panarchy: universal rule or dominion
- * patriarchy: government by men or fathers
- * plantocracy: government by plantation owners
- * plutocracy: government by the wealthy
- * polyarchy: government by many people
- * pornocracy: government by harlots
- * synarchy: joint sovereignty
- * technocracy: government by technical experts
- * tetrarchy: government by four people
- * thalassocracy: sovereignty of the seas
- * theocracy: government by priests or by religious law
- * timocracy: government by the propertied class

U.S., Western Europe

Communism, Fascism

* rule by majority	democracy	The U.S. and Western Europe
* rule by minority	oligarchy	Communism, Fascism, Any military dictatorship
* rule by one	autocracy	Absolute monarchy



Forms of government

Democracy (people elect representatives) Constitutional republic Constitutional monarchy Presidential system Parliamentary system	Majority rule U.S. England U.S. Europe	Most of the world is moving this way (also Latin America) (also Asia and Africa)
Totalitarianism (police state) Communism Fascism	Rule by a few former Soviet Union former Nazi Germany	(China, N. Korea, Cuba, Vietnam)
Military dictatorship This is dying out.	Rule by a few Once very common in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This has been dying out since the end of the Cold War.	
Theocracy Religious leaders govern.	Rule by a few Iran and other Islamic states of the Middle East.	
Absolute monarchy Hereditary king has all the power.	Rule by one Saudi Arabia and other monarchies in the Middle East.	



	Definition	Political freedom	Economic Freedom	Social Welfare	Human Rights
Feudalism The Middle Ages Bad King John	Only local gov't The lord ruled peasants on the manor	no	no	no	no (trial by ordeal)
Mercantilism Establish colonies 1492-1776 Mother England/ Colonial America	no and industry = Favorable balance of trade for mother.	no (not for colonies)	no	no	
Absolute monarchy England <i>before</i> Glorious Rev, 1688	One-man rule by a hereditary king.	no	no	no	no
Constitutional monarchy England <i>after</i> Glorious Rev, 1688	King is figurehead. Parliament rules, but its powers are limited by the constitution.	yes	yes	maybe	yes
Fascism Nazi Germany Hitler, 1933-45	One-party rule. Dictatorship. Totalitarianism.	no	yes	yes	no (Holocaust)
Communism One-party rule. Soviet Union Stalin, 1929-53	no Dictatorship. Totalitarianism.	no	yes	no	(purges)
Socialism Sweden today	Multi-party Mixed economy The Welfare State	yes	limited	yes	yes
Parliamentary system Kenya today	Multi-party Parliament rules, but its powers are limited by constitution	yes	yes	yes	yes
Constitutional democracy USA today	Multi-party Three branches Powers limited by the Constitution.	yes	yes	yes	yes



The Democracies

Government is limited by the constitution.

Constitutional republic

The U.S. is a constitutional republic.

The President, Congress, and Supreme Court share political power.

What government can do is limited by the Constitution.

Constitutional monarchy

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy.

The Prime Minister is the head of the government. Parliament rules. The King is a figurehead.

What government can do is limited by the Constitution.

Parliamentary system

Kenya has a parliamentary system.

It is just like England, but there is no king.

Totalitarian governments

Government has unlimited power over the people.

Communism

The former Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, Cuba.

The Communist Party had complete control over the government and the economy.

All private property is confiscated. All farms and factories are owned and controlled by the government.

Fascism

Nazi Germany

The Nazi Party took over (and distorted) the government.

People kept their private property, but the Nazi government distorted the economy to suit its war needs.

Authoritarian governments

Absolute monarchy

Today in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.

The King is the absolute ruler. He shares power with no one.

Military dictatorship

Since the end of the Cold War, this is dying out.

A single general or a group of generals (military junta) holds political power.

2. The Parliamentary System

Democracy can take two forms

In the U.S., our democracy is based on the presidential system.

In Western Europe, the democracies have the parliamentary system.

As you will see, both Communism and Fascism (totalitarian regimes) hate democracy and the parliamentary system.



The Parliamentary System

Constitutional democracy

A democracy can be a presidential system - that's what we have in the U.S.

A democracy can be a parliamentary system - that's what they have in Western Europe.

The Parliamentary system began in England

Parliament and the parliamentary system began in England.

In 1215 the English barons forced Bad King John to sign the Magna Carta.

It stated that the King's power was limited.

It also created a group of barons to advise the King.

By 1295, that group became known as Parliament.

In French, "*parler*" means "to talk."

Today, Parliament is a building in London with the clock tower known as Big Ben.

Unlike the U.S., the British have no written Constitution.

A majority vote in Parliament could change any policy - even one that has existed for centuries.

Parliament is bicameral. It has two houses: House of Lords and House of Commons.

The House of Commons is where the action is.

The Prime Minister is the head of government; the queen is the head of state - the symbol of the nation.

(In the U.S., the President is both.)

The British monarch is a figurehead; Queen Elizabeth II reigns, but she does not rule.

The British have a constitutional monarchy - the queen is extremely limited (nearly zero) in power.

By contrast, Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy - the king is all-powerful and not limited by a constitution.

No separation of powers, no checks and balances

The Legislature

Parliament makes law.

Parliament is a congress.

Members of Parliament are elected by the people.

The Executive

The leader of the leading party in Parliament is appointed as Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister and the ministers of the cabinet remain members of Parliament.

The Prime Minister often stands on the floor of Parliament and makes speeches.

His term is usually four or five years.

There is no separation between the executive and legislature

The Prime Minister and his cabinet (the executive) arise from and remain in Parliament (the legislature).

Consequently, there is no clear-cut separation between the executive and legislative branches.

The Prime Minister and his cabinet (the executive) arises from Parliament (the legislature).

Parliament gets rid of the Prime Minister

The Prime Minister and the cabinet can be removed by Parliament through a vote of *no confidence*.

In addition, the Prime Minister can dissolve Parliament and call for an election.

The party in power

The British

In England, there are two major parties.

The party in power and the party out of power.

The party out of power is the "loyal opposition": they argue, wrangling and tangling with the party in power.

The opposition keeps the Prime Minister and his party in line.

They don't mind; someday they will be back in power.

The Multi-party System

The French, the Germans, the Italians, etc. have many political parties, not just two.

In a multi-party system, there is proportional representation and coalition governments.

That is, a minor party elects representatives to Parliament.

A major party forms a coalition with minor parties in order to reach a majority and form a government.

Its leader then becomes Prime Minister.

Federal or Unitary

In the U.S., we have a federal system:

There is a central government in Washington, D.C., but the fifty states also have their own governments.

France has a *unitary* system:

The central government in Paris calls the shots.

If it's eleven o'clock in the morning, every single 8th grade class throughout France will be studying the exact same thing.

The dangers of the parliamentary system

In the 20th century extremist parties (communists and fascists) have wreaked havoc on parliamentary systems in Europe.

Germany

The parliamentary system can lead to unstable governments.

Multiparty coalitions can be fragile and collapse at the first sign of political crisis.

The government may find itself at the mercy of small extremist parties.

If the minor parties withdraw from the ruling coalition, the government is forced to resign.

Using this leverage, minor parties make special policy demands upon the government.

The head of state (king or president) is normally a ceremonial position.

In a crisis, however, he may have special constitutional powers. (This is how Hitler came to power in Germany.)

A political party with a large enough majority in parliament could enact far-reaching, anti-democratic laws.

(This is what the Nazi Party did.)

Totalitarian regimes

Totalitarian regimes hate the parliamentary system. They want to be the party in power - with NO opposition.

The Communists

In 1917, Lenin and the Bolsheviks absolutely refused to participate in the parliamentary system.

Instead, they overthrew the Russian parliament and seized power.

The Fascists (Nazis)

Hitler hated the parliamentary system - yet he used it to come to power in Germany!



The advantages and disadvantages of a parliamentary system

The Presidential System (The U.S. and Latin America)

The Parliamentary System (Western Europe, Asia & Africa)

The Constitution

Yes

The U.S. Constitution is written.
The Supreme Court upholds it.

Maybe

Constitutions may not be written.
Constitutions may have “zingers”:
The head of state (figurehead)
can take extraordinary action during
a “crisis.”

Separation of powers

Yes

We have separate branches:
Executive, Legislature, Judiciary

No

The Executive and Legislature are
united (Prime Minister and Parliament)

The executive and legislature
are independent of each other.

Members of the executive branch
(Prime Minister and cabinet ministers)
are also members of the legislative
branch.

Independent election

Yes

The President is chosen
independently of the legislature.

No

The Prime Minister is chosen by
the legislature (Parliament).

Fixed term

Yes

The President holds office
for a fixed term.

No

The executive remains in office only as
long as his policies have the confidence
of the majority in Parliament.
A vote of “no confidence” means that
the Prime Minister must resign.

Independence

Yes

The President has powers
not subject to direct control
of the legislature.

No

The executive is subject to Parliament's
direct control.

Checks & Balances

Yes

Congress checks the power of
the President.

No

As long as the Prime Minister has the
majority party in Parliament, he rules.
*If his majority party ever wanted to
pass undemocratic laws, it could.*

Deadlock

Yes

*The President and Congress
can become deadlocked.*

No

The executive and legislature are
never deadlocked.