



1 Principles of Government

Government and politics—what do they have to do with real life? After all, most people go through their days thinking about school, work, play, family, and friends. Government and politics seem remote, but every time you turn on the television, read the paper, or search the Internet, government and politics are there. The President is making a speech. Political issues are debated. Angry protesters are picketing in front of a government building. What does it all mean, and why should anyone care?

The answer is that none of our lives would be the same without government and politics. Think about what government does for you and how it affects your everyday life—your education, your health, your job, your bank account. For instance, government determines some of the graduation requirements of your school, the minimum wage for a part-time job, and the safety features in the car you drive. Government is not some vast, abstract institution that you only read about in textbooks or hear about on the news. The ties of government to our lives and relationships are deeply rooted, and our challenge is to understand something about them. The reward is a better understanding of our own lives.

In this chapter . . .

Government and Its Purposes 3

Origins of Government 6

Power and Forms of Government 7



Government and Its Purposes

"Politics and government seem so complicated that a person can't really understand what's going on." Does that sound like you or someone you know? In fact, according to a poll from The National Election Studies, 63 percent of people do feel this way.

The key to understanding **government** is to think about its various parts—what they are, why they exist, and how they work. Let's start out by looking at some basic ways to talk about countries and their governments. Take a look at a globe or a political map of the world. Think about the nearly 200 countries whose outlines you see. The **nation-state**, or country, is the world's basic political unit. Nation-states commonly share several important characteristics.

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF NATION-STATES

- ★ **TERRITORY** Of course, a nation-state must have land for people to occupy. The amount and types of land vary dramatically. For example, Russia contains more than six million square miles, but large areas are frozen tundra. In contrast, Bahrain occupies only 240 square miles of desert and coastal land.
- ★ **POPULATION** Populations, like territories, vary greatly in size and types. The population of the United States, for instance, is much larger and more culturally mixed than that of Sweden, whose people share more similar cultural backgrounds.
- ★ **SOVEREIGNTY** A strong nation-state has the power to determine its form of government and its economic and social policies. Whether one country has the right to interfere in the sovereignty of another country has become an increasingly difficult and pressing issue in the world today.
- ★ **GOVERNMENT** Each nation-state has a national government. Although they take many forms, governments are generally made up of people who have the authority and power to rule. If the government is weak, however, the result is often chaos or even war. For example, in the late 1990s, the authority of the government of the Congo was challenged by large groups of its own citizens, and a bloody civil war followed. The result was a new, but not necessarily stronger, government.

definitions

government—the institutions, people, and processes by which a nation-state or political unit is ruled and its public policy created and administered.

nation-state—a political unit with a defined territory, organized under a government and having the authority to make and enforce the law.



Keeping a government strong is not an easy task, partly because individuals must be convinced to follow the rules. In **politics**, successful leaders, or politicians, often maintain or gain control by developing good relationships with the people, and frequently they must persuade one group to see the point of view of another. Leaders must always keep in mind the reasons governments exist and then use their skills to see that those purposes are fulfilled.

PURPOSES

Think for a moment about a band of prehistoric men and women. Our images of them are shaped by scientific research and discoveries and a generous use of imagination. We do know that they generally lived in groups and that survival was not easy. Dangers lurked everywhere. Another group of humans could attack to steal food and shelter, or huge meat-eating animals could devour the band. People could die from starvation, the cold, the heat, or accidents. To ensure survival, people huddled together and began to find ways to protect themselves. Unknowingly, they were blazing a path for generations to follow. Their efforts help us understand the existence and purposes of government.

From their earliest beginnings, governments almost certainly have had three basic purposes:

1. Protection

One characteristic of all government is **sovereignty**, or the right to be free from outside interference. Throughout history, leaders have organized warriors to defend the community, from prehistoric tribes to modern armies. The United States, for example, has a military force of more than 1.5 million troops, as well as powerful nuclear weapons.

2. Maintenance of public order

Almost always, governments have taken responsibility for protecting citizens from violence against one another. Modern governments pass hundreds of laws and maintain large police forces and court systems to protect the public, ensure an orderly daily existence, and promote a sense of justice.

definitions

politics—the methods or tactics involved in managing government and gaining power.

sovereignty—the authority of a nation-state's right to rule itself.

3. Resolution of social conflicts

In human societies conflicts between groups are unavoidable. Central to many of these disagreements is the idea that some groups are unjustly treated. Left unresolved, these conflicts may lead to rioting or war. Traditionally, governments sometimes have suppressed conflicts by use of force, but if their authority is respected, people have tended to accept their decisions peaceably, whether by a king's decree or a democratic election.

In modern times governments are expected to serve several other purposes:

4. Responsibility for a stable economy

The role of government in creating and maintaining a healthy economy has varied widely throughout history. For example, in the late nineteenth-century United States, government was expected to leave the economy alone. In contrast, some modern governments actually own the major industries, and others regulate business practices of private citizens and monitor the currency or money.

5. Provision of public service

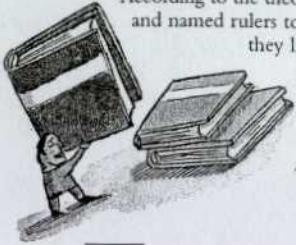
Many modern governments provide a transportation and communications network for public use, and most take some measures to protect public health and safety. More controversial is the extent of government responsibility for individual welfare, such as the needs of the poor, unemployed, aged, and disabled. Some countries have extensive welfare benefits; others do not.



Origins of Government

Governments almost certainly evolved gradually, and no one can give a definitive explanation of how they first came to exist. Four theories, however, help us consider their possible origins.

1. The *Evolution Theory* sees government as an extension of family relationships. Even in prehistoric times, families were organized under a system that gave parents authority over children. As more families banded together over time to form tribes, the system of parental rule evolved into tribal rule. Often the elder adults assumed the leadership role, forming a type of mini-government.
2. The *Force Theory* claims that governments were formed as a result of one group's conquest of another. The victorious group would then impose its rules on the conquered group, forcing it into submission. Supporters of this theory cite evidence from both prehistoric and modern times. For example, during World War II, Adolph Hitler forced other European countries to submit to Germany through his *blitzkrieg* ("lightning war") tactics.
3. The *Divine Right Theory* was widely accepted in most European nations from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. According to **divine right**, rulers inherit their power from God. Once blessed with this power, the royal family and its heirs become God's representation on Earth. Therefore, defiance of the ruler represents a sin against the church. Ancient civilizations—such as those in China, Egypt, and South America—also believed in divine right and gave godlike qualities to their leaders.
4. The *Social Contract Theory* was developed as a response to the Divine Right Theory by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers, such as John Locke, James Harrington, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean Jacques Rousseau. According to the theory of **social contract**, humans developed government and named rulers to establish order in the chaotic natural world in which they lived. By agreeing to cooperate with each other and follow a set of rules, people brought order and safety to their lives. The power to govern was a result of decisions made freely by people, not handed down by God. This theory was the inspiration for the American revolution against English rule.



divine right—the belief that rulers derive their authority directly from God and are accountable only to Him.

social contract—the concept that the governed and those governing have obligations to each other, that the people being governed will support the government, and that the government will protect the basic rights of the people.



e.g.

EARLY NATIVE-AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS

The governing systems of early Native Americans offer evidence for the Evolution Theory of the origins of government. At the time the United States was founded, more than 500 culturally different groups had occupied the land for centuries, and most of them had governments based on family life.

Peoples in areas poor in food resources, such as the Paiutes of the Nevada desert, lived in small groups of two or three couples and their children. Life consisted of hunting, fishing, gathering plant foods, and moving camp several times a year. They usually met with other small groups for only a few weeks of feasting, trading, and visiting in the summer. Under these circumstances government was simple, not much beyond the authority structure of the family.

Most Native American groups, however, lived in villages, since agriculture allowed them to stay in one place for longer periods of time. Government was more complex, but still family-based. In most cases, villages formed loose alliances with nearby villages and were governed by councils.

Power and Forms of Government

Notice that all four of these theories define government in terms of power—that is, a small group's ability to get other people to act according to its wishes. Those who govern have some degree of power over the governed. If their decisions are accepted by the people who give them the right to rule, they have the authority to exercise that power, and people recognize the right of the government to exist. Power is generally held by only a few. People who have legitimate power over others may be called **elites**.

elite—a small and privileged group who have a disproportionate share of money or political influence.

FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

Each of the elite theories (Marxism, Mills's elites, Weber's bureaucracy, and pluralism) identifies which people in a society hold real power. Even though influential people may have much in common across cultures, political power may be spread among elites in three different ways: according to geographic locations, the separation of powers between executive and legislative branches, and the number of people who hold power.

1. Geographic Distribution

All countries have capital cities, but they differ in how much political power is held there. Governments may center their power in one location, they may scatter power among several places equally, or they may do something in between.

A. UNITARY SYSTEMS

The most common way that countries distribute power is to centralize it in one place, forming a **unitary government**. Local units of government have only those powers given to them by the central government, and they usually are limited and can be changed easily. In fact, the central government can redraw the boundaries and even eliminate local units of government. One advantage of unitary systems is that laws and policies are applied in the same way to each citizen. These systems also avoid costly duplication of government efforts. However, if a country becomes very large geographically, running the government from one location may be difficult.

Unitary governments may be organized in a variety of ways. Some are run by dictators, and others are modern democracies. Examples of countries with this kind of government are France, Japan, Denmark, Great Britain, and China.

B. FEDERAL SYSTEMS

In a **federal government**, central and state governments have different spheres of authority, although their powers may overlap considerably. Countries may divide powers differently between central government and its subdivisions, but some powers are always given exclusively to each level, while others are shared. For example, the central government may hold the sole power to coin money, while both the central and local governments may have the power to tax. Federal systems allow for more flexibility and freedom for the subdivisions, but their governments are often more difficult to coordinate.

definitions

unitary government—a form of government in which all of the powers of the government are held by a single unit or agency.

federal government—a form of government in which governmental powers are divided between a central authority and a number of regional political subdivisions.

ELITES

Most Americans—who believe in equality for all, not special privileges for the few—do not like to think about the existence of political elites, at least in the United States. But as much as we might not want to admit it, elites may be identified in nearly every country, past and present, including the United States. Who are they? Political scientists have four main theories to describe and explain the actions of elites, whose political or economic power give them unusual influence in government.

1. Marxist Theory

In his famous theory, Karl Marx argued that those who hold control of the economy have the real power in a society, and government is merely a tool of the rich. In American society, the elites would be leaders of the biggest corporations and financial institutions.

2. The "Power Elite"

Other theorists believe that corporate leaders are important, but that some elites come from other areas as well. For example, C. Wright Mills, an American sociologist, argued in his book *The Power Elite* that important policies are made by three groups: corporate leaders, top military officers, and a few key political leaders.

3. The Bureaucrats

According to this theory, elites are not well-known, visible heads of state or business tycoons, but the people behind the scenes, the bureaucrats whose expertise and specialized talents are responsible for managing societies. Leaders may come and go, but the bureaucrats carry out the day-to-day workings of government and hold the real power. The scholar most often associated with this theory is Max Weber, a German historian and sociologist who believed that all institutions, not just government, have fallen under the control of large bureaucracies.

4. The Pluralists

According to the pluralists, elites are not easily identified as one specific group holding power, money, or prestige. In modern society, these resources are held by a variety of people, and no single elitist group has a monopoly on them. Pluralists do not argue that all resources are held equally. They believe that power is split among so many different types of elites (business people, political leaders, union bosses, journalists, bureaucrats, university leaders) that many people have the chance to influence decision-making.



Another common problem is the tendency to duplicate efforts, promoting the criticism of wastefulness and inefficiency.

Fewer than 30 modern countries have federal systems of government. Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Mexico, and the United States are among them.

C. CONFEDERATIONS

A confederation has a very weak central government and very strong, nearly independent state or local governments. A confederal structure is usually formed when several states or countries want to cooperate in matters of common concern, but also retain their own separate identities. By their nature, confederations tend to be very short-lived; their governments are too weak to keep the states together, and the states often see little need to stay together for a long period of time.

The United States experimented with the confederal system when the First Continental Congress drafted the Articles of Confederation shortly after the Declaration of Independence was written. During the mid-nineteenth century, the southern states seceded from the United States and declared the formation of the Confederate States of America (CSA), thus igniting the Civil War. Quite predictably, the new, weak central government of the CSA had a difficult time coordinating the South's war effort. After it collapsed at the end of the war, no U.S. states attempted to form any other confederations.

An example of a confederation in the modern world is the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which was formed by former Soviet Union Republics when the USSR broke up in 1991. Like most confederations, its central government is so weak that it may break apart. A bold attempt to confederate is currently being conducted in phases, in an experiment called the European Union.

2. Legislative and Executive Branches

Almost all modern governments have a branch that is responsible for making laws—called a legislative branch—and a branch that is responsible for executing the laws—called an executive branch. Power is not always shared equally between these branches. For example, a country ruled by a dictator usually has a legislature, although it may function as a puppet with no real power. Today the practice of dividing power among branches of government takes two basic forms: parliamentary and presidential.

defi-ni-tions

confederation—a political system in which a weak central government has limited authority, and the states have ultimate power.

Headlines



THE EUROPEAN UNION

Shortly after World War II ended, some European leaders—who sought to unite their nations to prevent another war—began talking about establishing an economic confederation that they first called the Common Market. The main idea of the European Union was to get countries to reduce trade barriers and form a common currency that would be accepted and used in every European country. After years of discussion, in January of 1999, 11 European nations began to share a single currency, the euro. The European Union (EU) was never intended to be political, so it cannot strictly be called a government, but it does represent an economic confederation. Despite the difficulty of convincing countries to give up their old currencies, the new euro market will be huge and powerful, with an economic strength that many economists believe will be equal to or exceed that of the United States. The euro will give the European Union clout.

A. PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

The English model was widely copied and is now more common than the presidential. Although the countries with parliamentary governments may vary in form, they all tend to fuse the two branches together. The chief executive is called a prime minister or premier, and he or she is a member of the legislature, as are the members of the cabinet, who are the chief executive's advisers. The prime minister is the leader of the majority party or a coalition of parties in parliament, and he or she chooses the cabinet members from among the members of the legislature. The prime minister is not popularly elected, except as a member of parliament, but is chosen by his or her political party. Because the prime minister is selected by the majority party, the chief executive does not serve a fixed term.

B. PRESIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT

The United States was an early experiment in the form of presidential government. The presidential system separates, rather than fuses, the powers of the legislative and executive branches. The two branches are relatively independent, though they each have the power to check and balance the other. The chief executive is a president who usually holds a fixed term and is chosen separately from the legislature, often by popular vote.

defi-ni-tions

parliamentary government—a form of government in which the executive leaders are chosen by and responsible to the legislature.

presidential government—a form of government in which the legislative and executive branches are separate and function independently.



e.g.

HYBRID GOVERNMENTS

Just as species of plants may be crossed to produce new variations, some countries have combined the parliamentary and presidential systems to create a hybrid form. France, for example, has both a prime minister and a president. The prime minister, or premier, generally works closely with the legislature, and the president has an independent power base. The French system, set up in 1958, has been adopted recently by the Russian Republic, although the two hybrids are not exactly alike. Since the Russian government was established only in 1993, its success or failure remains to be seen.

3. Number Who Participate

Throughout history, the number of people who participate in government has varied widely. In the fourth century B.C., the Greek philosopher Aristotle made a memorable early attempt to classify governments according to members who participate: rule by one, rule by few, and rule by many. Although he could not have anticipated it, Aristotle's simple classification organizes many types of governments that have existed since his time.

A. RULE BY ONE

Aristotle used the term *autocracy* to define rule by one. *Auto* means "self," so loosely interpreted, it describes "rule by oneself."

ABSOLUTE MONARCHY In Greek, *mono* means "single" or "alone," and in a **monarchy**, a ruler gains power through inheritance. Rule by monarchs evolved during the Middle Ages into absolutism, a form of government in which monarchs had no restraints on their power. As parliaments and advisers came to share power, absolutism gave way to democratic forms of government, but their old titles—such as king, czar, and sultan—are still recognizable today. Modern monarchs are ceremonial or constitutional, and they generally have little power.

DICTATORSHIP Modern versions of autocracy are often called **dictatorships**. Dictators or totalitarians usually seize and keep power by force. They allow no political opposition and impose many controls on the citizens.

monarchy—government in which the ruler's power is hereditary.

dictatorship—a form of government in which an absolute ruler controls the power, often through fear or force, and ignores the will of the people.

B. RULE BY A FEW

Aristotle used the term *oligarchy* to define government in which a small group holds the power to rule. *Oligos* in Greek means "few." Oligarchies have assumed many forms.

ARISTOCRACY In Greek, *aristos* means "most virtuous, noblest, or finest." Rule by the aristocracy, then, means rule by the finest. In some aristocracies the ruling group has been determined by social position or wealth. Another ancient Greek, named Plato, believed in "philosopher kings," or rule by highly educated scholars.

THEOCRACY In Greek, *theos* means "god." In a theocracy, the power to rule lies in the hands of a religious group, such as priests. Today, theocracies rarely exist in pure form, although in some countries religious groups still have a powerful influence on government.

POLITICAL PARTY A modern version of rule by a few is control by a political party. The most obvious examples are the USSR, which existed from 1917 to 1991 under control of the communists, and China, controlled by the Communist party since 1949. In both countries leaders were carefully selected and controlled from within the top ranks of the party.

C. RULE BY MANY

Aristotle used the term **democracy** to define rule by many. *Demos* in Greek means "people," so loosely translated, democracy is rule by the people. Many variations of rule by many have existed since his time.

DIRECT OR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY Democracy began in the city-states of ancient Greece. Most citizens participated directly in either holding office or making policy (excluding nonproperty owners, slaves, and women, who were not citizens). Today, a **direct democracy** may exist in communities, but not very easily on a national level. For example, in some New England towns, the citizens of a community gather once or twice a year to vote directly on major issues and expenditures of the town.

defi-ni-tions

democracy—a system of government by the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives.

direct democracy—a democratic system of government in which all citizens participate in politics and decision-making, such as New England town meetings.

Then and Now



MINORITY RIGHTS IN A DEMOCRACY

In the years following the Civil War, Congress passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to protect the rights of former slaves who had been freed as a result of the war. Over the years the former slave states passed so-called Jim Crow laws that kept African Americans from voting, owning property, or attending the same public schools as whites. The laws and regulations were passed by majority votes by town councils, school boards, and state legislatures. African-American interest groups finally turned to the only branch of government without elected officials, the judiciary, to help them get equal rights. Eventually, the democratically elected legislature and executive branch came to agree with the courts, and representatives recognized the need to protect minority rights.



Governments have many purposes, origins, powers, and forms of organization. They are inextricably linked to individual lives and relationships and are deeply rooted in history and human nature itself. The U.S. government has been shaped by governments that came before it and today influences the lives of people around the world. Its many parts and powers are intricate, fascinating, and deserving of close study. We will begin our study of American government at its heart—with the values of freedom, order, equality, and justice that were captured at its founding by the practical men who wrote the Constitution and guided the country in its earliest days.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM This form of government, which operates on the premise that a government is democratic if it serves the true interests of the people, is associated with communist regimes of the twentieth century. The leaders claim to discover the people's interest through discussions within the Communist party and then make decisions based on their beliefs about what the people want and need. This form of democracy is far from Aristotle's definition because very few, not many, actually rule.

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY A **representative democracy** is the most common democratic form in modern times, although it was developed centuries ago in ancient Rome. Instead of allowing all of the eligible citizens to participate in the government, a small number are elected to serve as representatives. Because the representatives are elected by the people, government is indirectly by the many.

One criticism of this system is that the representatives become elites who make decisions on their own and, in reality, lead a government by the few. On the other hand, supporters of representative democracies argue that people elect representatives because they respect the representatives' judgments. Those elected see the overall picture and understand the need to protect the rights of all.



representative democracy—a democratic system of government in which policies are made by officials accountable to the people who elected them.

es
sts
ry,
nin
t

e
ed
ns