U.S. Government Name:

Mrs. Barnes

Types of Government

**Forms of Government in Today's World**

Almost all nation-states have some form of functioning government. As Aristotle observed more than 2,000 years ago, these governments fall into three broad groups: **rule by the one** (monarchies and dictatorships), **rule by the few** (theocracies and single-party states), and **rule by the many** (parliamentary and presidential democracies).

**Monarchy: Rule by the One Hereditary Ruler**

**Monarchies** are one of the oldest forms of government still found in the world today. There are many attractive things about monarchies.

One of those attractions is efficiency. Traditionally, a ruling monarch has been able to make decisions and have them carried out on his or her word alone. As a result, new policies can be carried out without a lot of political fighting. A second advantage is a clear line of succession. Citizens living in a monarchy know who is next in line for the throne. A third is the unifying power of monarchy. Loyalty to a ruling family can be a strong bond holding a nation together.

At the same time, monarchal government has its drawbacks. One is the varying quality of hereditary leaders. An exemplary monarch in one generation may be followed by an incompetent one in the next. Also, the job of running a modern nation-state has become too big for any but the most exceptional monarchs to do well. Today's monarchs go by many names, including king, queen, sultan, emperor, and emir. Most have inherited their power and expect to rule for life. But the modern monarch's power is rarely as great as in the days of Louis XIV and other absolute monarchs.

Saudi Arabia is an example of a modern day monarchy. The king of Saudi Arabia exercises broad powers. He inherits his position and has legislative, executive, and judicial powers. There are no recognized political parties or national elections in Saudi Arabia. The king may seek support from the royal family, religious leaders, and other important members of Saudi society. However, in theory, only Islamic law and Saudi traditions limit his powers.



**Dictatorships: Rule by the One Powerful Leader**

Whereas monarchs inherit their power, **dictators** take and hold power by force. Dictatorships share some of the advantages of absolute monarchies. Power is centralized in the hands of a single military or political leader who can get things done efficiently. With control of the military and police, the leader can put an end to political unrest and maintain peace and order. That same power, however, can easily be used to abuse citizens who oppose the dictator's authoritarian regime.

Dictatorships face serious legitimacy problems. Over time, pressure often builds to return the government to control by elected leaders. When this happens, ruling becomes increasingly difficult. For example, in February 2011, growing discontent led to a wave of protests in Libya, calling for an end to Gaddafi's rule. Months later, he was overthrown.

**Theocracy: Rule by the Few Religious Leaders**

A **theocracy** is a government headed by religious leaders. In ancient city-states, theocracies were common, with government officials serving as religious leaders as well. Having a government based on one set of religious beliefs had clear benefits. A single, state-supported religion encouraged political and social unity. It also ensured that political decisions were in line with the people's moral values and beliefs. As states grew larger, however, enforcing religious unity became increasingly difficult. Religious minorities were often marginalized or even persecuted. Religious warfare broke out as groups with differing beliefs fought for control of their governments.

By 2007, only two theocracies existed in the world: Vatican City and Iran. Vatican City is the governmental and spiritual center of the Catholic Church. Iran changed from a monarchy to a theocracy in 1979. That year, Iranians expelled their hereditary ruler (King) and formed an Islamic republic headed by a religious leader known as the Ayatollah Khomeini.

**Single-Party State: Rule by the Political Elite**

In a **single-party state**, (also known as **oligarchy**) the constitution allows only one political party to govern. Power is exercised by the leading members of the party, who form the nation's political **elite**, or a small group of people within a larger group who have more power, wealth, or talent than the others. The party elite nominate candidates for public office and make most policy decisions for the country.

Ideally, a single-party system avoids much of the political wrangling that is common in multiparty states, making it easier to pass laws and implement government policies. This party unity comes at a cost, however. The views of the party elite may be very different from the interests of the people as a whole, leading to social unrest. Also, people with differing political views or solutions to problems are often completely shut out of the political process. The handful of single-party states today are mainly socialist republics, in which the Communist Party rules. In China, for example, the Communist Party is the only legal political party, and it has controlled the government since 1949.

**Democracy: Rule by Citizens/Legislative Majority**

There are two main types of democracies: direct, and representative. In a direct democracy, citizens meet regularly to make decisions for their city-state. Each citizen has an equal voice in public affairs, and decisions, once made, had widespread support. Nonetheless, this form of government is time-consuming for citizens, and does not really exist in the modern world. More common is the representative style of democracy.

Representative democracies can have two types of leaders: one, a president, or two, a prime minister.

The United Kingdom, India, and Australia are examples of **parliamentary democracy** and are ruled by a Prime Minister and a parliament. In a parliamentary democracy, voters elect lawmakers to represent them in the nation's parliament. The party that wins a legislative majority forms a new administration. If no single party wins a majority, several parties join together to form a ruling coalition. On the other hand, the United States, Russia, and most countries in Latin America are **presidential democracies**. Voters in these countries choose a president to lead the government as the head of the executive branch. They also elect lawmakers to represent them in a national legislature. Both the president and the legislators serve fixed terms of office. This system has some advantages. Because presidents are directly elected by the people, they may be more responsive to the public than to their party. They may also enjoy more legitimacy and public support from the public. The presidential system also separates executive and legislative powers, which prevents abuses of power.

Source: Adapted from TCI’s *Government Alive!*

After having read and annotated the reading, fill in the chart below.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Rule By:** | **Term** | **Definition** | **Pros (advantages)** | **Cons (disadvantages)** |
| **EX: Rule by One** | **Monarchy** |  |  |  |
|  | **Dictatorship** |  |  |  |
|  | **Theocracy** |  |  |  |
|  | **Single-Party State** |  |  |  |
|  | **Democracy** |  |  |  |

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