Government

A government is the rule makers and rule enforcers of a group. People decided to make governments a long time ago in order to keep other people from doing whatever they wanted whenever they wanted. The word for a place with no government or rules is called *anarchy*. The thing people had to give up in order to have that security was their own right to do whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted. This idea where everyone agrees to give up some freedom in order to get some security is called the *social contract* by the philosopher John Locke.

There are a lot of different kinds of governments in the world and throughout history. When people describe governments, they usually look at who has the power to make decisions, if the people in a country have a say in how things are run, and if they have any sort of liberties (freedom) that their government respects. Governments that limit the freedoms and participation of its citizens are considered *authoritarian*. Governments that allow more freedom and participation are considered *representative.* Keep in mind that all governments are a mixture; the question to ask is “is it *more authoritarian* or *more representative?”* Also, keep in mind that sometimes governments can lie: they might claim they are one type of government but really are another.

Democracy

A democracy is a type of government where people have a say in how their government works. The United States and a lot of the rest of the world are democracies, but they can be really different from one another. Some of the ways they can be different is how much they let people decide, how many people get to decide, and how much the government follows the instructions of the people. In the United States, we have a representative democracy, where we vote for someone to go make the decisions instead of us having to make every single, little decision. This type of democracy is called a *republic*. Sometimes, we use *direct* democracy if we are voting on a law instead of a person. This happens frequently in some states in the United States. In a lot of other countries, they have a *parliamentary democracy* which is where instead of having a President and a legislature as different branches of government; they have a legislature which appoints people to do the work that the President does in our system. Usually that person will be called a Prime Minister.

Autocracy

An autocracy is a type of government where one person (*dictatorship*) or group (*oligarchy*) makes the rules without having to worry about what anyone else thinks. They can do whatever they want. Sometimes, the people of a country do not seem to mind living with these types of governments, especially when the government makes decisions that help everyone. Often times, though, there will be people who disagree with the dictator or oligarchy, but they will not have the right to say what they want or protest in any other way. If they do, they might go to jail or be executed. In a dictatorship or oligarchy, people have few if any liberties that the government actually respects. A lot of governments in the world and in history have been dictatorships and oligarchies. The dictatorship most people are very familiar with is Germany under Adolf Hitler (1933-1945). An oligarchy is a type a government that listens to only a small group of people. A really great example of an oligarchy was a country called South Africa before the 1990s. Even though black Africans were a majority of the population, only whites could vote. The government of South Africa benefitted the whites and made life difficult for the black Africans. Today, China is led by an oligarchy. Sometimes these governments try to make it look like they listen to the people of the country, like have elections, but most of the people of the country don’t really get to have a say.

Monarchy

A monarchy is a type of government where a person runs the country because they are considered special. This person will often be called a king or queen and they can usually expect that their children will also rule the country, because rule is hereditary, which means it stays in the family. Most countries used to be monarchies. People just thought that having a king was the normal and right way to run a country and they often believed that god had sent their monarch to them. Once democracy became more popular in the 1800s, people began having doubts about whether having a monarch made sense, so a lot of countries got rid of them or took away their power. In Great Britain, the royal family does not have a lot of power but they represent an important part of British history, so people don’t want to get rid of them completely. A monarchy that serves as a symbol of the country’s past is called a *symbolic monarchy.* A symbolic monarch is like a model in an ad—they are just there to sell an idea. Symbolic monarchs do not really have power and don’t get to make important decisions. There are two types of monarchies they do have power and both exist in the world. A *constitutional monarchy* has a king or queen who has agreed to rule within a set of rules and does what the people want most of the time. A good example of a constitutional monarchy in the world today is the country of Jordan. The king there has a lot of power but there are limits on what he is allowed to do. Some countries still have kings and queens that have all the power. This is called an *absolute monarchy.* There are still some absolute monarchies in the world, such as Saudi Arabia and Oman.

Theocracy

A theocracy is a type of government where a religious group has a lot of power to make and enforce rules. The government in a theocracy can be a monarchy, democracy, or a dictatorship. It is a theocracy when the government works to makes sure that everyone follows the rule of the religion as well as follows the rules of the government. A good example of a theocracy is Iran. The person who really has the power in that country is the country’s most important religious figure. The other people in the government have to do what that person wants. The laws of the country make everyone follow the rules of the religion. For example, every woman in Iran, even visitors who are not Islamic, have to cover their hair and neck with the hajib. If they don’t, they might be fined or arrested.

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|  | Authoritarian or Representative | Who holds power? | Are liberties protected? | Definition | Example |
| Republic |  |  |  |  |  |
| Parliamentary Democracy |  |  |  |  |  |
| Dictatorship |  |  |  |  |  |
| Oligarchy |  |  |  |  |  |
| Symbolic Monarchy |  |  |  |  |  |
| Constitutional Monarchy |  |  |  |  |  |
| Absolute Monarchy |  |  |  |  |  |
| Theocracy |  |  |  |  |  |