

Government Overview



What is a government?

A government is made up of the formal institutions and processes through which decisions are made for a group of people. Most governments consist of three main components: people, powers, and policies.

People

A government includes both elected officials who have the authority and control over others and public servants who carry out the day-to-day business of the government.

In real life this includes the President of the United States, Senators, the Governor of New York State, the local town judge in traffic court, a general in the United States army and your letter carrier who delivers your mail every day.

Power

This is the government's authority and its ability to get things done.

There are three basic types of power:-

1. **Legislative Power** – the power to make laws.
2. **Executive Power** – to carry out, enforce, and administer laws.
3. **Judicial Power** – interpret the laws and settle disputes that arise regarding the laws.

Policy

This is any decision made by government in pursuit of a particular goal. A policy can be a law, a government program, or even a set of government actions.

In real life you see these with everyday examples such as taxation, defense of the nation, protection of the environment, health care and transportation.

A very important word and definition to understand is **state**. It is used today in which the way governments exercise their power within a nation. In this instance it does not refer to any of the 50 states, such as New York, California or Florida. It is closer to the definition of a country or a nation-state.

In terms of government, a state is a political unit with the power to make and enforce laws over a group of people living within a clearly defined territory.

All states are characterized as having a population, a territory, a government, and sovereignty.

Population

A state must have people. But the size of the population does not determine whether or not a place is a state.

Some states are small in size and population, such as St. Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean, or Lichtenstein and Monaco in Europe. No matter what their size is, they still have all of the characteristics.

Territory

States must have clearly defined and recognized borders. Disputes and wars have often changed the shapes of states. Member countries of the United Nations pledge to respect the territorial boundaries of every other member state.

Government

All states are politically organized meaning that they have governments that make and enforce laws for the people living in that territory. These governments are recognized by both the people of that territory and by other nation-states throughout the world.

How many states are there in the world today? This question can be answered by opening the following link that gives you all of the details:

<http://www.worldometers.info/geography/how-many-countries-are-there-in-the-world/>

Sovereignty

This is the supreme power to act within its territory and control its external affairs. It includes its independence from other states as well as the freedom to establish a form of government. Most states limit the sovereignty power of their governments with sets of laws and restrictions, usually in the form of a constitution or a written plan of government. Therefore the state is not above the law!

Questions:

Who is the current Secretary of States of the United States of America?

What are some of the duties of the Secretary of State?

The Five Major Functions of Government	
Ensure National Security	Protect the nation's people and territory from external threats
Maintain Order	Maintain internal order through police and legal systems
Resolve Conflict	Provide means to resolve conflicts through politics and the legal system
Provide Services	Provide a variety of services, ranging from education to public transportation, which are paid by tax dollars
Provide for the Public Good	Make decisions and policies that attempt to balance the public good with the needs of smaller segments of the population

A key word that is associated with government is **politics**. We use it in many ways such as politician, and political but what is politics?

A good definition is that **Politics is the process by which government makes and carries out decisions.**

The political process allows people with a platform to pursue different and often competing interests. Groups and political organizations try to influence the decisions that governments make.

Politics is also about debating issues and policies. In democratic societies, groups with different interests frequently must compromise with their opponents in order for the government to make its decisions. Any conflicts can be heard in a court of law where they determine if the laws have been broken or upheld and what should happen as a result.

Question:

How many political parties do you think are there in the United States of America?

Answer:

Take a look at [https://ballotpedia.org/List of political parties in the United States](https://ballotpedia.org/List_of_political_parties_in_the_United_States)

How many of these have you heard of?



Learn and understand the following table and for each Form find one example of a state that used this type of government and add this to the table.

Classic Forms of Government	
Form	Characteristics
Monarchy Example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruled by a monarch, usually a king or queen who belongs to a royal family • Power is inherited • Absolute monarchs have unlimited power
Constitutional Monarchy Example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the ideas that there are limits to the rightful power of a government over its citizens • Power of the monarch is limited by law; the real power lies in another branch of government • May coexist with other forms of government, such as a representative democracy
Dictatorship Example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single dictator or a small group hold absolute authority and makes all decisions • Violence and force used to maintain rule
Totalitarian Regimes Example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dictator holds ultimate authority • Government tightly controls all aspects of life – political, social, and economic • No formal or informal limits on government
Oligarchy/Aristocracy Example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group of powerful people make most government decisions for their own benefit • Membership in the ruling group may be based on wealth, family, or military power
Theocracy Example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rulers claim to represent and be directed by a set of religious ideas • Laws are rooted in a particular religion or religious doctrine • Government power is unlimited
Direct Democracy Example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government by the people; citizens are the ultimate source of government authority • Citizens come together to discuss and pass laws and select leaders • Works best in small communities
Indirect Democracy (Republic or Representative Democracy) Example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government by the people; citizens are the ultimate source of government authority • Indirect form of democracy; citizens elect representatives to make government decisions on their behalf • Representatives elected for set terms

Source: *United States Government, Principles in Practice*, Holt McDougal, pp. 6-15