

WHAT FORMS CAN GOVERNMENT TAKE?

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Grade level: Grades 6-8

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Identify the different forms that governments can take
- Compare and contrast monarchies, republics and dictatorships
- Identify the advantages and disadvantages of monarchies, republics and dictatorships

What forms can government take?

Class discussion: Governments can take many forms:

- **Anarchy** is the absence of order or government. Derived from the Greek word meaning “having no ruler,” anarchy exists when no one has the authority to govern and there is usually chaos and a breakdown of civil order.
- The simplest form of government is having ONE person in charge, like a **monarchy**--a king or queen--who has absolute authority to decide what the rules and laws are.
 - Monarchies formed in the Middle East in Sumeria (current day southern Iraq) and Egypt around 3000 BC. You might want your students to consider WHY a monarch was necessary at a time when people were starting to trade.
 - In the Middle Ages in Europe, landowners acquired large amounts of territory through military force or purchase and one was crowned king to help protect their property rights
 - The idea of authority based on “divine right,” that is, given by God, was strongly supported by the French Austro-Hungarian monarchies in the 16th and 17th centuries. The religious basis allowed Kings to do whatever they pleased and made rebellion against the King a “sin”
 - Gradually, starting with the Magna (Great) Carta in 1215, the British monarchy agreed to demands from the barons for the right to a jury of one’s peers and the guarantee against loss of life, liberty or property except in accordance with law. In doing so, the power of the monarch was limited. Many monarchies existing today are “constitutional,” and limited by an elected body and/or a constitution.
- Another form of government with single absolute leadership is a **dictatorship or autocracy**. Power may be held by the military, a single party or a single individual. Dictatorships often develop when government is weak, not fully supported by the population and there is public unrest. This may also occur when civil society is weak.

- During the Roman Republic, a “dictator” was a special magistrate who held well defined powers, normally for six months at a time. Roman dictators were allocated absolute power during times of emergency but subject to law and retrospective justification (examination by the Senate of their conduct after the fact). After the beginning of the 2nd century BC Roman emperors exercised power much more personally and arbitrarily, as a king in all but name.
 - After the collapse of Spanish colonial rule, various dictators came to power in many of the liberated Latin American countries. These self-appointed political-military leaders attacked weak national governments often with private armies.
 - 20th century Fascism and Communism: Hitler in Nazi Germany, Mussolini in Italy, Franco in Spain, Tojo in Japan, Stalin’s Soviet Union, Kim Dynasty in North Korea, Mao Zedong in China. A dictatorship is called “totalitarian” when it seeks not just to control political power, but also to control aspects of citizens’ personal lives in service of a political ideology.
 - ASK: Can you identify any dictatorships today? You might to have your student consider: What is the difference between a monarchy and a dictatorship? (Not much!)
- An **oligarchy** is a form of government in which a small group of people hold most or all political power. It consolidates power to one dominant group. This structure, where a minority rules, has tended to be dictatorial and tyrannical because it relies on either oppression or public obedience so that it can exist. It encourages a great wealth divide. Russia and China may be current examples of oligarchies.
 - A **democracy** is a government run by the people. The concept developed around the sixth century BC in the Greek city-state of Athens when free male citizens gained the power to make decisions. This was a direct democracy that ran on a very small scale.
 - A **republic** is a government run by people elected to represent them. Those representatives manage the government for the people, for the sake of the **common good** or common welfare--which means doing what is best for the community as a whole rather than for their own interests. The Romans had established a Republic in 509 BC after overthrowing the Etruscans.
 - The United States is supposed to be a **democratic republic** established by our constitution in 1787. Most people think of “democracy” as voting. But democracy is more than just voting. The Founders read what historians and the Romans themselves wrote about the people and government of the Roman Republic and considered the advantages and disadvantages of republican government when they were drafting the constitution. They designed a republic to address the problems inherent in the classical republics, with the following innovations:
 - Popular Sovereignty--the authority of a state and its government are created and sustained by the consent of its people who are the source of all of its power

- The Rule of Law—the principle that all persons, institutions, and entities are accountable to the laws, which should be independently adjudicated and equally enforced
 - Separation of Powers—divides the government into separate branches, each of which has separate and independent powers, to ensure that no one branch is more powerful than another governmental authority(e.g., government is usually separated into legislative, executive and judicial powers)
 - Checks and Balances—the separate branches of government are empowered to prevent actions by the other branches to prevent one branch from becoming too powerful (e.g., the judiciary may find a law or an executive action unconstitutional)
 - Limited Government—the government is limited by law (usually in a written document, such as a Constitution) to only delegated and enumerated powers
 - Protection of Individual rights—Basic human rights, such as free expression and assembly, the right to vote, to privacy, to travel
- We will consider each of these concepts. Democracy doesn't just happen because we set up a government with our constitution. It's something that each of us has to practice: "Democracy is a social and ethical commitment, not limited to the ballot box, that must be lived and practiced in all spheres of life." (John Dewey)

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each form of government?

Classroom Activity: You might have your students create a graphic organizer comparing the types of government. Or, here's an activity to help your students appreciate both the advantages and disadvantages of a democracy, as compare to a monarch or dictatorship:

- Divide your students into groups of 4-7, give them paper, cardboard, legos (or anything else that you might have available) and ask them to build a house.
- Have some groups work under one individual in charge and able to make all the decisions, others cannot make any suggestions
- Have other groups work as a "democracy" with nobody in charge and open to suggestions from all (the group may "select" someone to be in charge if they want to)
- Give the class time to build their house, then discuss the benefits or difficulties of the process they used
- Students should appreciate that when decisions are made by one individual without the input of anybody else (a "monarchy or dictatorship") things may be built faster but the members of the group may feel frustrated because they had no input
- Students should appreciate that when decisions are made "democratically," it may take longer because deliberation and consensus take time but everybody had input.

Alternative Classroom Activity: Ask your students to consider the advantages and disadvantages of a republic. After discussion, identify advantages and disadvantages:

- Advantages, especially over monarchies and dictatorships:
 - Representatives are elected to serve the common good
 - By delegating power to their representatives, the people have a say in their government
 - It is the responsibility of the representatives to understand the issues, make good and fair laws, and protect the liberty and rights of citizens.
- Disadvantages:
 - History has shown that a republic works best in small communities where people know and care for each other and the common good. But the colonies occupied a large territory
 - The people in a republic need to agree on their common values. But the colonies had people with diverse religious beliefs and ways of life.
 - People in a large and diverse republic would divide into factions or interests groups rather than working for the common good.

On balance, democratic republics may be less efficient than dictatorships but in democratic republics the people have a say in their government and their representatives bring differing ideas for deliberations before making decisions.

Which form of government is most likely to prevent abuse of authority and protect human rights, and why?

In a democracy, an individual or group is less able to abuse authority because of the rule of law, checks and balances, and separation of powers. A representative democracy (democratic republic) is most likely to protect individual rights because representatives are elected by the people and beholden to the people.