

Unit 7: Civics, Government, and Global Politics (Lessons 1-3)

“The will of the people is the source and the happiness of the people the end of all legitimate government upon Earth.”

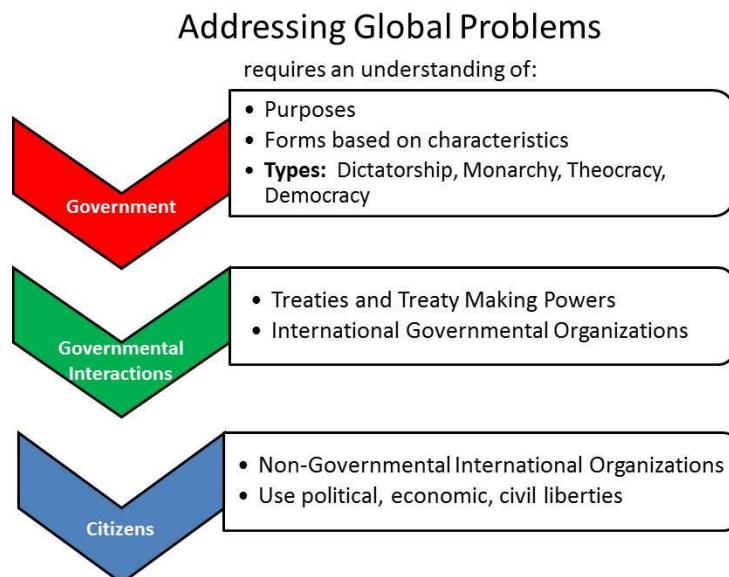
--- John Quincy Adams

Introduction

John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) was an American statesman who served as the sixth President of the United States from 1825 to 1829. He also served as a diplomat, a Senator, and member of the House of Representatives. How does he explain the job of government?

In this unit we will explore why people create governments, the different forms they can take and how they function. We will also look at how governments of different nations work together to address global concerns. In particular, we will address the following questions:

1. Why do people institute different forms of government?
2. How do nations of the world interact?
3. How can people address global problems?



There are very few places on Earth where people live without the influence of a government. Government is the system people use to exercise authority, distribute power, and regulate the conduct of people. In a nutshell, governments help answer the question “How should we live together?” with a focus on how decisions are made. A country’s government often reflects the culture and history of its people.

Addressing global problems requires an understanding of how power and authority is structured in a country. It also requires knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of citizens. You may recall that a political scientist is the kind of social scientist that specializes in the area of civics and government. Political scientists explore how and why governments vary in size, structure, and the work that they do. They also examine how governments vary in the amount of power and freedom they give their citizens.



Kiribati Parliament House

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Kiribati



Government Building in Nassau, Bahamas

Source: <https://pixabay.com/en/government-building-nassau-bahamas-963373/>

Why Do People Institute Governments?

A government is a system people use to exercise authority, distribute power, and regulate the conduct of people. Cities, states, and countries can all have governments. Countries, often referred to as a nation-states by political scientists, have several characteristics:

- a region with defined borders,
- a permanent population of people

- a system of government, and
- sovereignty.

Sovereignty is the right and power to govern the people in a defined area. Sovereignty also means that a country can govern itself without interference from other countries. For instance, because the United States is a sovereign nation-state, its government can decide that its citizens have the right to bear arms. Other sovereign governments, like that of the United Kingdom, have decided that citizens may not carry guns. The United States government has no control over this decision in the UK, and the United Kingdom has no influence of gun rights in the United States. This is because governments are independent of each other despite each having sovereignty over its own citizens.



Legally Openly Carrying a Gun in Colorado

Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_carry_in_the_United_States

The Purpose of Governments

Understanding more about the governments of different countries can be useful in understanding global problems and their potential solutions. An understanding of government begins with investigating the reasons people form governments.

Political scientists tend to identify three common purposes of most governments in the world:

- to keep order
- to provide some public services like education
- to protect the nation from outside forces



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School>



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/defenseimages/9238935939>



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firefighter>

Other purposes of government may vary depending on the predominant culture and the historical experiences of citizens.

The written document that created the system of government in the United States is the Constitution. The purposes for forming the United States government are described in the Preamble, or introduction, to this document. Read the Preamble below along with its translation into everyday language that we are more familiar with today.



What the Preamble Says:	What the Preamble Means:
<i>We the People of the United States,</i>	
<i>in order to form a more perfect union,</i> <i>establish justice,</i> <i>insure domestic tranquility,</i> <i>provide for the common defense,</i> <i>promote the general welfare,</i> <i>and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity,</i>	<i>to unite people in a country that is as perfect as is possible,</i> <i>to make sure there is fairness for all,</i> <i>to make sure there is peace within the country,</i> <i>to defend the people of the country from outside attack,</i> <i>to support the common good; to support the betterment of our society,</i> <i>to protect individual rights like freedom and make sure those rights will be enjoyed by other generations that will come after us,</i>
<i>do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.</i>	

Clearly, the purposes our founding fathers had in mind go far beyond the three common purposes of keeping order, providing public services, and providing protection. They believed it was important for the government to protect individual rights like freedom and ensuring justice, or fairness, as well. Not all countries agree with these purposes. Countries may also differ in how and to what extent they protect rights and provide services for their citizenry. Because countries hold differing viewpoints regarding the purposes of government, it is not surprising that conflicts between governments arise at times.

Government Roles in Solving Global Problems

Can people solve global problems without government? Although individuals and groups can take action, global problems tend to be so complex that government action is usually needed. Most global problems eventually need governments to work together on solutions.

One example is the problem of climate change. Some people stopped using spray cans with chlorofluorocarbons when they realized these chemicals were harming the ozone layer. Furthermore, some individual companies have even made decisions to limit emissions that may contribute to global warming. However, it is only through government bans and regulations in many countries that deterioration of the ozone layer can begin to slow.

An example of this happened in 2015 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21). Countries attending the conference negotiated the Paris Agreement, a global agreement on the reduction of climate change. Representatives from 196 nation-states attended



Delegates during a session of the COP21 climate change conference on December 11, 2015 in Paris, France.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Secretary_Kerry_Joins_Plenary_Session_of_the_COP21_Climate_Change_Conference_\(23581886671\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Secretary_Kerry_Joins_Plenary_Session_of_the_COP21_Climate_Change_Conference_(23581886671).jpg)

this conference with the goal of reaching a universal agreement from all nations of the world on the reduction of climate change. It is difficult to imagine this global problem even being addressed without the involvement of governments.

Solutions to global problems tend to come about through interaction and cooperation between governments. For example, governments often negotiate treaties that end conflicts, send assistance to nations that need help following a natural disaster, or enforce environmental laws that help solve problems.

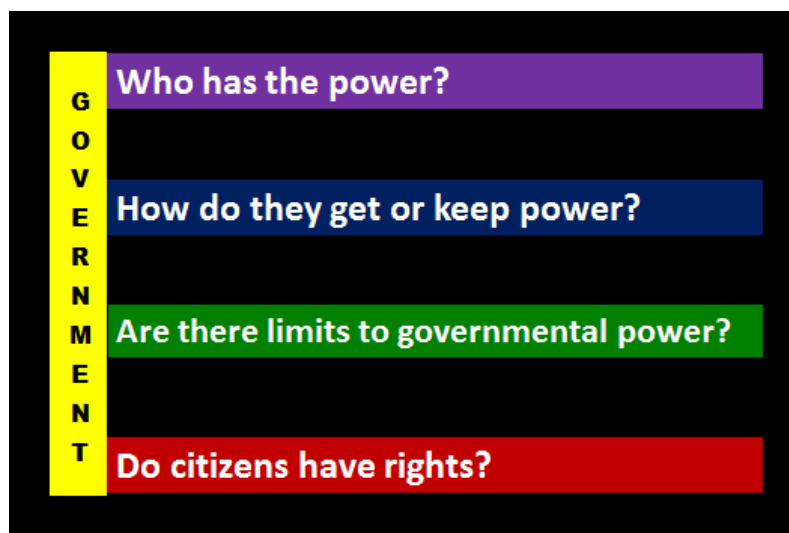
Government	Why do people form governments?
	Do people agree on the purposes of government?
	What purposes of government are described in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution?
	What role do governments play in solving global problems?

Why Are There Different Forms of Government?

Once people decide on the purposes of their government, their next challenge is to create the government structures to carry out those purposes. There are many different forms of government that people in the world have created. Countries choose different types of governments for a variety of reasons. In addition to people having different views about the purposes of government, a country's history and the cultural beliefs of its people can influence the form of government chosen. It is also important to note that sometimes a country's citizens do not have a voice regarding the government under which they live.

The Many Forms of Government

Because there are variations in the forms that governments can take, it is often difficult to precisely categorize them. However, to differentiate the different types of government, political scientists ask four questions:

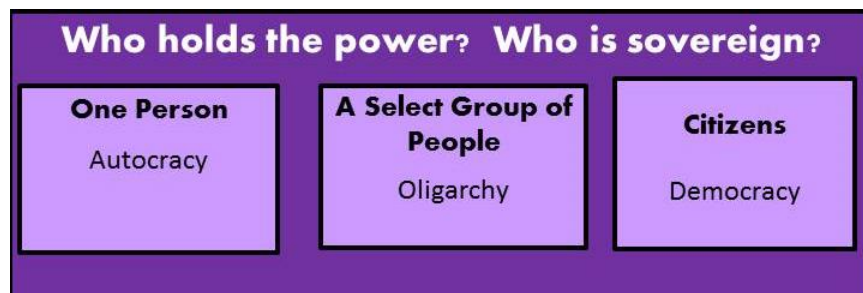


- **Who holds the power?**

One of the easiest ways to understand how a government works is to figure out who is sovereign. In other words, who has the power and authority to make decisions in the society. Power and authority can be held by one person, a group of people or many people. When one person is sovereign (holds the ultimate power in a government), it is considered an autocracy. When a small group of people are sovereign, the form of government is classed an oligarchy. A democracy is a form of government in which the people are sovereign – collectively the people have the power and authority

over decisions. A democracy can be direct rule by the people, or it can be a representative democracy where people elect representatives and give them the power to make laws and decisions. Since a democracy is a system of government where the people are in charge, “popular sovereignty” is one of its defining characteristics.

The United States and many other places today have democratic governments. However, this has not always been the case. You may recall in your studies of U.S. history that there was a king of England that had power and authority over the colonies in America.



- **How do leaders get or keep power?**

Governments also differ on how leaders get and keep their power and authority. When leaders take their power by force, the government is considered a dictatorship or a junta. A dictatorship is a form of government where a single person has unlimited power and uses force or threat of force to keep power. A junta is similar except, instead of one person, it is a small group of military leaders who take power by force.

Another way leaders gain power and authority is through hereditary succession. This is when someone in the family of the ruler takes over when he or she dies or gives up power. In most instances, this is considered a monarchy - a government led by a king or queen.

Sometimes, an individual or a group of people gets or keeps power because they are seen as religious leaders, and the law of the land is based upon religious rules or codes. This is called a theocracy. Although theocracies, dictatorships, and monarchies can all be ruled by one person,

it is the influence of religion in governmental matters that distinguishes a theocracy.

Lastly, when rulers gain their power through free and fair elections, the government is a democracy. “Free” means that voters do not have to pay money to vote and are not coerced or intimidated to vote in a certain way. A “fair” election is one in which all candidates have an equal opportunity to get their message to voters and that the counting of votes is honest and impartial. Since democracies are a form of government in which the people rule, free and fair elections are essential.



- **What limits are there on power?**

Another way to distinguish among the forms of government is to explore the extent to which there are limits to the leader(s) power and authority. Governments can either be limited or unlimited in their authority and power. Even among limited governments, the amount of power and authority varies.

Democracies limit power of government in a variety of ways:

- placing power in the hands of the people,
- describing in a document what power the people are giving government leaders,
- having free and fair elections,
- following majority rule with minority rights, and/or
- protecting specific rights such as freedom of speech and religion, as well as private property rights.

There are different forms of monarchies, aristocracies and democracies depending on whether there are limits to power. For instance, some

monarchs serve only a ceremonial function and have no political power. In a constitutional or limited monarchy, however, the head of state only has the powers given to him/her in the constitution. In an absolute monarchy, the ruler is supreme and has complete power. Dictatorships are very similar to absolute monarchies but differ in the way they come to power (force versus heredity).

Theocracies vary in terms of the limits they place on the powers of the leaders. Generally, theocracies tend to have more power and authority over people than leaders in a democracy. Yet, theocracies typically have less power (more limits) than dictatorships or absolute monarchies because theocratic leaders are limited by religious rules or tenets.



- **Do citizens have rights?**

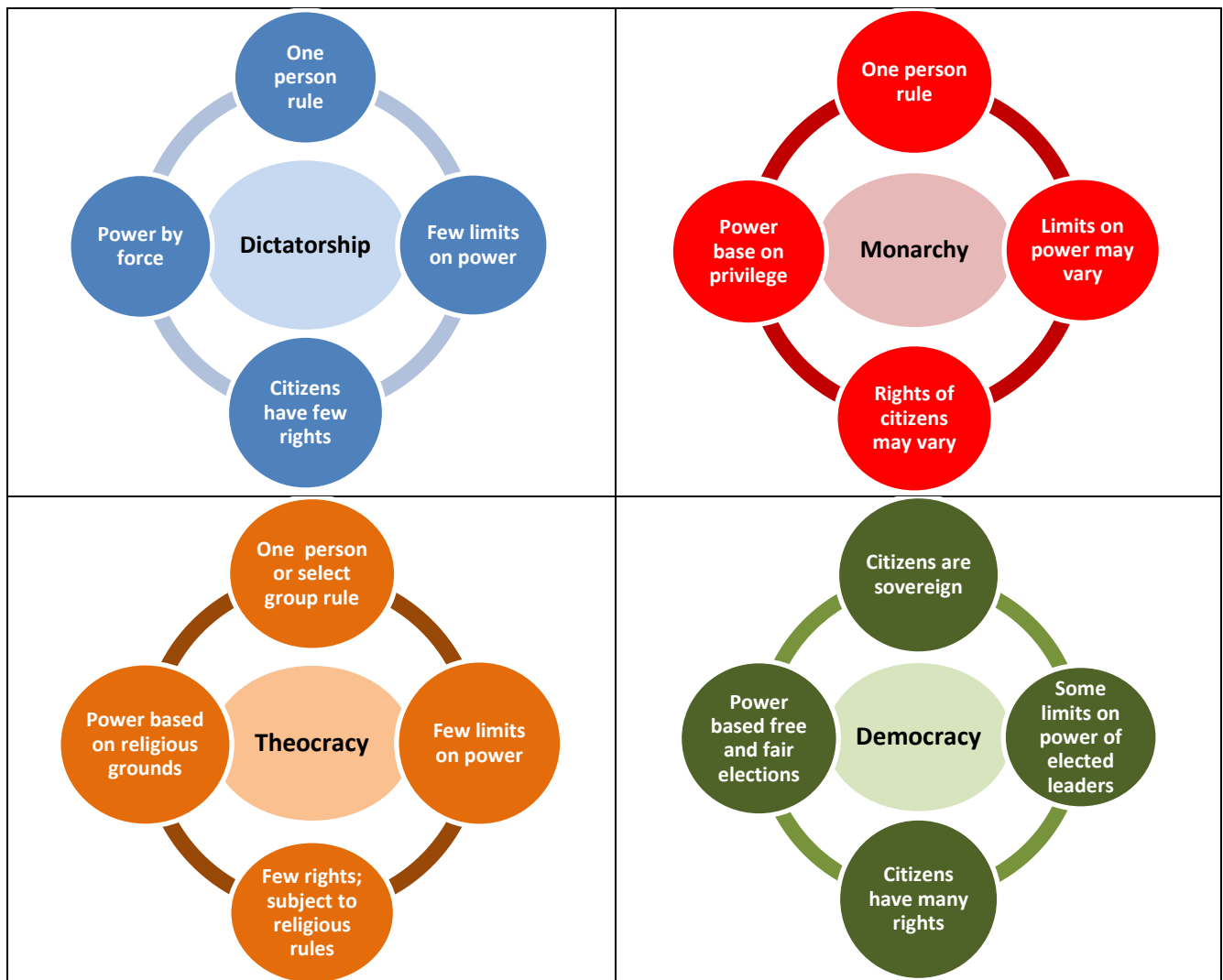
The last way that governments can differ is in the rights that citizens have. Not all governments allow citizens the same rights or the same amount of rights. While some governments stress individual and civil rights, others focus on economic rights. Typically, the amount of rights citizens have is correlated to the amount of limits on power. When a leader has more limits on his or her power, it usually corresponds with citizens having more rights. Conversely, when a leader has few limits on his or her power, the citizens tend to have fewer rights.

In a dictatorship, where the leader holds all power and has very few restrictions on that power, the citizens tend to have very few rights. Since theocracies follow religious rules, citizens' rights tend to be rather limited. However, in a democracy citizens have the power and play a very important role. Through voting, citizens choose the leaders of a democracy. They also have the responsibility to make sure their elected leaders are making good decisions and leading wisely. In addition, citizens have to be

involved in solving problems and resolving public issues by communicating to their elected representatives.



Monarchies can vary depending on the amount of rights that the citizens have, which is usually reflected by the amount of power the monarch has. In an absolute monarchy, the leader determines what rights citizens have. Oftentimes this results in few or no rights for citizens. However, a constitutional or limited monarchy does not have unlimited power and authority; a written constitution determines the extent of the monarch's power.



The chart and diagram below summarizes the four major types of governments explored: dictatorships, monarchies, theocracies, and democracies.

<i>Form of government</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
Dictatorship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One person Gets or keeps power by force or hereditary succession Few limits to power Citizens have few rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient in carrying out decisions and policy Clear line of succession for hereditary dictatorships (North Korea and Syria) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of leadership may vary Leaders in government control the military allowing the government to suppress dissent Power can be easily abused System uses force and violence to maintain order Stifles creativity and innovation
Monarchy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One person Gets or keeps power by hereditary succession Limits to power vary (absolute vs. constitutional) Citizens' rights may vary (absolute vs. constitutional) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient in carrying out decisions and policy Clear line of succession for hereditary dictatorships Citizens have a say in public affairs (constitutional monarchy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of leadership may vary Leaders in government control the military allowing the government to suppress dissent Power can be easily abused (absolute monarchy) System uses force and violence to maintain order (absolute monarchy) Stifles creativity and innovation (absolute monarchy)
Theocracy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One person or small group Gets or keeps power because of religious expertise Limits to power based on religious tenets Citizens tend to have few rights and are limited by religious tenets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient in carrying out decisions and policy Single state religion encourages political and social unity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of leadership may vary Religious minorities may be mistreated Stifles creativity and innovation
Democracy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The people Leaders get and keep power through free and fair elections Power is limited by a constitution Citizens tend to have many rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes change without violence Time consuming for citizens Citizens have a say in public affairs Decisions have wide support among citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of leadership may vary Decisions are difficult to make and gridlock may result Promotes equality

The United States Government

One important core democratic value on which our government is based is popular sovereignty. This means the power (the right to control others) and authority (the right to use power) of the government comes from the people. Having popular sovereignty is what makes our country a democracy. In addition to being a democracy, the government in the United States is a republic. A republic is a government where people hold the power and then give their power to the representatives who make laws and decisions for them. If representatives make unpopular decisions, people take away the representatives' power by voting them out of office.

Another characteristic that makes the United States a democracy is that we hold free and fair elections to elect our leaders. This means that elections should be well-managed and transparent, and citizens can vote without experiencing violence or retaliation for voting. Citizens should also be able to vote unconditionally. Throughout our nation's history, we have demonstrated progress toward this ideal. Initially, only landowners could vote. At other times in our history, the United States limited voting through the use of poll taxes (requiring people to paying money to vote) and literacy tests as preconditions to voting.

This receipt is furnished in pursuance of Section 910, Compiled General Laws of Florida, 1927:—
ERNEST AMOS, Comptroller

POLL TAX RECEIPT

STATE OF FLORIDA } 1932 N^o 6177
DUVAL COUNTY

Received of Florida Dwight the sum of ONE DOLLAR in
payment of his or her Capitation or Poll Tax for the year A. D. Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Two (1932)

Color C Sex F Age 32 No. Election District 69

Residence Address: 1226 W. 8th

Rose Ptg. Co.—Tallahassee, 733 R. H. Gansell
Tax Collector for Duval County.

This poll tax receipt shows one way the United States limited voting in the past.

Source: <https://asheville-pd09.wikispaces.com/Poll+Tax+Receipt>

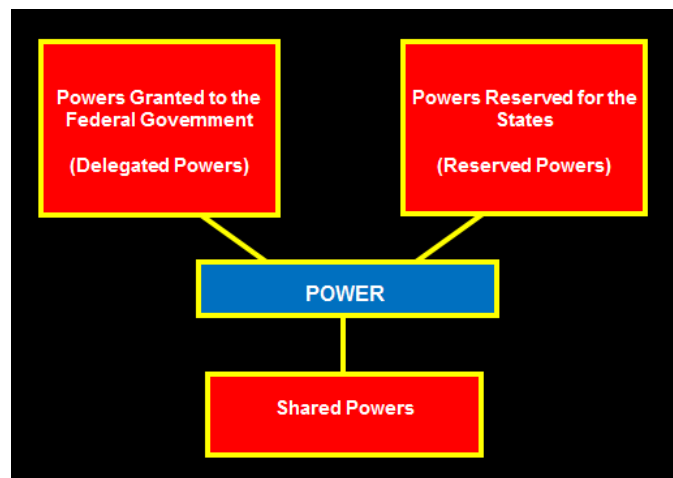
A second important core democratic value on which our republic is based is having a limited government. Having a limited government means the government's power over its citizens is restricted by laws or a constitution. The government can only do what the people have given it the power to do and must obey its own laws. In other words, the government and our elected leaders cannot do whatever they want.

Like many countries, the United States has struggled over issues of political power since its beginnings. The Constitution established rule of law as well as free and fair elections. It also guarantees specific rights through the Bill of Rights, such as freedom of speech and religion. In addition, the founding fathers long ago tried to create a system of government with limited power by structuring our government in three very special ways:

Federalism

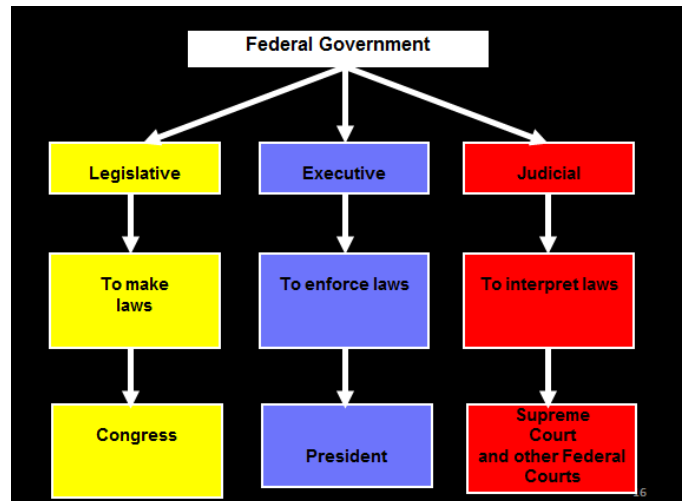
The first way the power of the U.S. government is limited is through the establishment of federalism. This means that power is divided and shared between the federal government and state governments. For instance, state governments are responsible for creating

public schools, making marriage laws, establishing local governments, issuing drivers' licenses, and handling trade within a state. The federal government is responsible for maintaining an army, establishing post offices, printing money, handling trade with other countries, declaring war, and making treaties with other countries. There are some powers that both the state and federal governments maintain including collecting taxes, borrowing money, making laws, and providing for the welfare of people. These are called concurrent powers because both levels of government share them simultaneously.



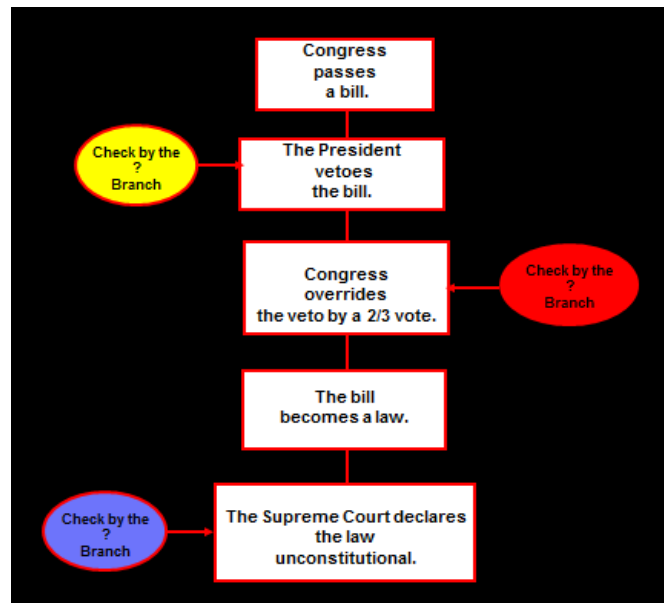
Separation of Powers

Another way power is limited in the United States is through the separation of powers. This refers to how power is divided among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government. This prevents any one branch of the government from becoming too powerful.



Checks and Balances

The third way the founding fathers limited the power of the U.S. government was by establishing a system of checks and balances. This system keeps different branches of government from having too much power. For example, although Congress has the power to pass laws, this power is limited by the executive and judicial branches. The diagram on the right illustrates the checks on legislative power by the other branches.



Two Types of Democracy

It is worth noting that just as monarchies vary, so do democracies. There are two main types of democracies: presidential and parliamentary. A major difference is in who chooses the chief executive. In a presidential system, citizens elect both a legislature and an executive (the president). This system is based on a separation of powers, and the United States is an example of a presidential democracy.

There is another way in which legislative and executive branch leaders come to power in a parliamentary democracy. In parliamentary system, citizens elect a legislature, called a Parliament, and then that body chooses the executive, who is normally called a Prime Minister. A parliamentary system is based on a 'joining of powers', not a separation of powers. Some examples of parliamentary systems are in the United Kingdom and Canada.

