**Types of Government Systems**

**2 Who Rules, and How?**

Governments vary not just in what they do but in how they are structured and who holds power. Some governments concentrate power in the hands of a single ruler or a small group, while others distribute power among the people. Understanding different government systems helps us compare how nations operate and allows us to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each system.

The three main ways to classify governments are by **who governs** (autocracy, oligarchy, democracy), **how power is distributed** (unitary, federal, confederate), and **how the legislative and executive branches interact** (presidential vs. parliamentary systems). Each structure shapes the political experience of citizens and affects how laws are made, how leaders are chosen, and how much voice people have in the process.

**Key Terms and Definitions**

| **Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
| **Autocracy** | A government where one person holds all power, often through inheritance or force. |
| **Oligarchy** | A government controlled by a small group of elites, such as military leaders or wealthy families. |
| **Democracy** | A system where power rests with the people, either directly or through elected representatives. |
| **Unitary System** | A government where all key powers are held by a central authority. |
| **Federal System** | A government where power is shared between a national government and state or regional governments. |
| **Confederate System** | A loose alliance of independent states with a weak central government. |
| **Presidential System** | A system where the executive and legislative branches are separate and elected independently. |
| **Parliamentary System** | A system where the executive branch is drawn from and accountable to the legislature. |

**Active Learning Exercise: Government Match-Up & Constitution Drafting**

**Orienting Question:**

*How does the structure of government affect its people?*

**Objective:**

Students will explore various types of government systems by matching them to real-world examples and designing their own system for a fictional country.

**Part 1: Government Match-Up (10–15 minutes)**

1. Provide students with a set of 6 real-world countries (e.g., United States, China, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Russia) and 6 government descriptions (e.g., "Federal republic with a presidential system," "Absolute monarchy," etc.).
2. In pairs or small groups, students will match each country to:
   * Its type of leadership (autocracy, oligarchy, democracy)
   * Its system of power distribution (unitary, federal, confederate)
   * Its relationship between legislative and executive branches (presidential or parliamentary)
3. Go over the answers as a class and discuss surprising or contested matches.

**Part 2: Create a Government (20–25 minutes)**

1. Present students with a fictional scenario:  
   *You’ve just been given the opportunity to help design the government of a brand-new country. The land is diverse, with multiple ethnic and regional groups, and has just gained independence. Your job is to decide what kind of government system would be most stable and fair.*
2. In small groups, students must decide the name of the country, and the following:
   * Will your country be an autocracy, oligarchy, or democracy?
   * Will it have a unitary, federal, or confederate system?
   * Will it use a presidential or parliamentary structure?
3. Each group must write a brief “mini-constitution” (a few sentences for each decision) explaining:
   * Who holds power and how they are chosen
   * How laws are made and enforced
   * How power is shared across the country
4. Groups share their systems with the class and explain their reasoning.
5. Discuss:
   * What challenges might their system face?
   * Which systems were most common?
   * How did geography, culture, or diversity influence decisions?

**Review Questions**

1. What is the difference between an autocracy and a democracy?
2. How does a federal system differ from a unitary system?
3. In a parliamentary system, how is the head of government chosen?
4. Which government system concentrates power the most, and which spreads it out the most?
5. Why might a diverse country choose a federal system over a unitary one?

**Graphics:**

* 1. **– Types of Government by Who Holds Power**A screenshot of a computer

     AI-generated content may be incorrect.
  2. **- Power Distribution Systems**

**A screenshot of a computer screen

AI-generated content may be incorrect.**

* 1. **- Government Structures: Presidential vs. Parliamentary**A screenshot of a computer

     AI-generated content may be incorrect.