**Government**

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*For government in linguistics, see* [*Government (linguistics)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_%28linguistics%29)*.*



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|  | It has been suggested that [*Political system*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_system) be [merged](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3AMerging) into this article or section. ([Discuss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk%3AGovernment)) *Proposed since January 2012.* |

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**Government** refers to the [legislators](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislators), [administrators](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_%28government%29), and [arbitrators](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judiciary) in the administrative [bureaucracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureaucracy) who control a [state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_%28polity%29) at a given time, and to the system of government by which they are organized. Government is the means by which state policy is enforced, as well as the mechanism for determining the [policy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Policy) of the state. A **form of government**, or **form of state governance**, refers to the set of political institutions by which a government of a state is organized. Synonyms include "**regime type**" and "**system of government**".

[States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_state) are served by a continuous succession of different governments. Each successive government is composed of a body of individuals who control and exercise control over political decision-making. Their function is to enforce [laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws), [legislate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislate) new ones, and arbitrate conflicts. In some societies, this group is often a self-perpetuating or hereditary class. In other societies, such as [democracies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracies), the political roles remain, but there is frequent turnover of the people actually filling the positions.

The word **government** is derived from the Latin infinitive [gubernare](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/guberno#Latin), meaning "to govern" or "to manage". In [parliamentary systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_system), the word "government" is used to refer to what in presidential systems would be the [executive branch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_branch). In parliamentary systems, the government is composed of the [prime minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_minister) and the [cabinet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_%28government%29). In other cases, "government" refers to executive, legislative, judicial, bureaucratic, and possibly also devolved powers.

In most Western societies, there is a clear distinction between a government and the state. Public disapproval of a particular government (expressed, for example, by not re-electing an incumbent) does not necessarily represent disapproval of the state itself (i.e. of the particular framework of government). However, in some [totalitarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Totalitarian) regimes, there is not a clear distinction between the regime and the state. In fact, leaders in such [regimes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regimes) often attempt to deliberately blur the lines between the two, in order to conflate their interests with those of the polity.

**Classifying governments**

In political science, it has long been a goal to create a typology or taxonomy of [polities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polities), as typologies of political systems are not obvious. It is especially important in the [political science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_science) fields of [comparative politics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_politics) and [international relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_relations).

On the surface, identifying a form of government appears to be easy, as all governments has an official form. United States is a [federal republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_republic) while the former Soviet Union was a [socialist republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_republic). However self-identification is not objective, and as Kopstein and Lichbach argue, defining regimes can be tricky. For example, [elections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election) are a defining characteristic of a democracy, but in practice elections in the former Soviet Union were not "free and fair" and took place in a [single party state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_party_state). Thus in many practical classifications it would not be considered democratic.

Another complication is that a huge number of [political systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_systems) originate as [socio-economic movements](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Socio-economic_movement&action=edit&redlink=1) and are then carried into governments by specific [parties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_party) naming themselves after those movements. Experience with those movements in power, and the strong ties they may have to particular forms of government, can cause them to be considered as forms of government in themselves.

**Maps**

States by their systems of government. For the complete list of systems by country, see [List of countries by system of government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_system_of_government).

presidential republics, [full presidential system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_system)

presidential republics, [parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_system) supervising an [executive presidency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_president)

presidential republics, [semi-presidential system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semi-presidential_system)

[parliamentary republics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_republic)

[parliamentary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_system) [constitutional monarchies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy) in which the monarch does not personally exercise power

[constitutional monarchies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy) in which the monarch personally exercises power, often alongside a weak parliament

[absolute monarchies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_monarchy)

states whose constitutions grant only a [single party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single-party_state) the right to govern

states where constitutional provisions for government have been suspended

Countries highlighted in **blue** are designated "[electoral democracies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representative_democracy)" in Freedom House's 2010 survey "Freedom in the World". Freedom House considers democracy in practice, not merely official claims.

A world map distinguishing countries of the world as [monarchies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy) (red) from other forms of government (blue). Many monarchies are considered electoral democracies because the monarch is largely ritual; in other cases the monarch is the only powerful political authority.

**Forms of government**

* [Adhocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adhocracy) - government based on type of organization that operates in opposite fashion to a [bureaucracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureaucracy).
* [Authoritarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authoritarianism) – Authoritarian governments are characterized by an emphasis on the authority of the state in a [republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic) or union. It is a political system controlled by unelected rulers who usually permit some degree of [individual freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual_freedom).
* [Anarchism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchism) - Sometimes said to be non-governance; it is a structure which strives for non-hierarchical voluntary associations among agents.
* [Band Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Band_society) - government based on small (usually family) unit with a semi-informal hierarchy, with strongest (either physical strength or strength of character) as leader. Very much like a pack seen in other animals, such as wolves.
* [Chiefdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiefdom) ([Tribal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribal)) - government based on small complex society of varying degrees of centralization that is led by an individual known as a chief.
* [Constitutional monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy) – A government that has a [monarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarch), but one whose powers are limited by law or by a formal [constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution), such as the [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom)
* [Constitutional republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_republic) – A government whose powers are limited by law or a formal constitution, and chosen by a vote amongst at least some sections of the populace (Ancient Sparta was in its own terms a republic, though most inhabitants were disenfranchised; The early United States was a republic, but the large numbers of African Americans and women did not have the vote). Republics which exclude sections of the populace from participation will typically claim to represent all citizens (by defining people without the vote as "non-citizens").
* [Democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy) – Rule by a government chosen by election where most of the populace are enfranchised. The key distinction between a democracy and other forms of constitutional government is usually taken to be that the right to vote is not limited by a person's wealth or race (the main qualification for enfranchisement is usually having reached a certain age). A Democratic government is, therefore, one supported (at least at the time of the election) by a [majority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Majority) of the populace (provided the election was held fairly). A "majority" may be defined in different ways. There are many "power-sharing" (usually in countries where people mainly identify themselves by race or religion) or "electoral-college" or "constituency" systems where the government is not chosen by a simple one-vote-per-person headcount.
* [Dictatorship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictatorship) – Rule by an individual who has full power over the country. The term may refer to a system where the dictator came to power, and holds it, purely by force - but it also includes systems where the dictator first came to power legitimately but then was able to amend the constitution so as to, in effect, gather all power for themselves. See also [Autocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autocracy) and [Stratocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stratocracy).
* [Emirate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emirate) - similar to a [monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy) or sultanate, but a government in which the supreme power is in the hands of an emir (the ruler of a [Muslim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim) state); the emir may be an absolute overlord or a sovereign with constitutionally limited authority.
* [Geniocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geniocracy) - government ruled by creativity, innovation, intelligence and wisdom.
* [Kratocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kratocracy) - government ruled by those strong enough to seize power through physical force or political cunning.
* [Kritocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kritocracy) - government ruled by judges.
* [Matriarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy) - Rule by which females (especially mothers) have the central roles of political leadership.
* [Meritocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meritocracy) - Rule by a group selected on the basis of their ability.
* [Monarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy) – Rule by an individual who has inherited the role and expects to bequeath it to their heir.
* [Nomocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomocracy) - [Rule according to higher law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_according_to_higher_law). That is, a government under the sovereignty of rational laws and civic right as opposed to one under theocratic systems of government [1]. In a nomocracy, ultimate and final authority (sovereignty) exists in the law.
* [Oligarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oligarchy) – Rule by a small group of people who share similar interests or family relations.
* [Patriarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchy) - Rule by which males act as the primary political authority, and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property.
* [Plutocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plutocracy) – A government composed of the wealthy class. Any of the forms of government listed here can be plutocracy. For instance, if all of the voted representatives in a republic are wealthy, then it is a republic and a plutocracy.
* [Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic) - is a form of government in which the people, or some significant portion of them, have supreme control over the government and where offices of state are elected or chosen by elected people. In modern times, a common simplified definition of a republic is a government where the head of state is not a monarch. [Montesquieu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montesquieu) included both [democracies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy), where all the people have a share in rule, and [aristocracies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristocracy) or [oligarchies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oligarchy), where only some of the people rule, as republican forms of government.
* [Stratocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stratocracy) - form of military government in which the state and the military are traditionally the same thing. (Not to be confused with *"militarism"* or *"military dictatorship"*.)
* [Technocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technocracy) - government ruled by doctors, engineers, scientists, professionals and other technical experts.
* [Theocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theocracy) – Rule by a religious elite.
* [Timocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timocracy) - government ruled by honorable citizens and property owners.
* [Totalitarian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Totalitarianism) – Totalitarian governments regulate nearly every aspect of public and private life.

**Significant attributes**

Certain major characteristics are defining of certain types; others are historically associated with certain types of government.

* [Nomocracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomocracy) - [rule of law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_law)
* [Civilian control of the military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_control_of_the_military)
* [Totalitarianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Totalitarianism)/[Authoritarianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authoritarianism) vs. [liberty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty)
	+ [Police state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_state)
* [Economic system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_system) (e.g. [capitalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism), [socialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism), [welfare state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welfare_state))
* [Patriarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchy) or [matriarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matriarchy) - dominance of a particular gender

**By approach to regional autonomy**

This list focuses on differing approaches that political systems take to the distribution of [sovereignty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereignty), and the [autonomy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_entity) of regions within the state.

* Sovereignty located exclusively at the center of political jurisdiction.
	+ [Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empire)
* Sovereignty located at the center and in peripheral areas.
	+ [Federation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federation) and [Federal republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_republic)
	+ [Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederation)
* Diverging degrees of sovereignty.
	+ [Asymmetrical federalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asymmetrical_federalism)
	+ [Federacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federacy)
	+ [Associated state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Associated_state)
	+ [Devolved state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devolution_%28politics%29) - sovereignty can be abolished without changing the constitution.

**See also**

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|  | Wikiquote has a collection of quotations related to: [***Government***](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Special%3ASearch/Government) |

* [List of countries by system of government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_system_of_government)
* [List of European Union member states by political system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_European_Union_member_states_by_political_system)
* [Political system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_system)
* [Politics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics)
* [State (polity)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_%28polity%29)
* [Central government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_government)
* [World government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_government)
* [Civics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civics)
* [Comparative government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_government)
* [Voting system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_system)