

# Chapter 2

## Government and Civics

### Chapter Preview

#### Terms

government, sovereignty, legislative branch, executive branch, judicial branch, unitary government, confederation government, federal government, autocracy, dictatorship, absolute monarchy, head of government, oligarchy, democracy, parliamentary democracy, head of state, constitutional monarchy, presidential democracy

**Top:** Sunset at the National Mall in Washington, DC, with a view of the Lincoln Memorial and the Reflecting Pool.

Imagine it is a nice warm day in Georgia, and you are on your way to school. You have just stopped talking on your new cell phone and have put it in your backpack with your lunch. Maybe your Social Studies book is there, too, along with your homework. Just as you stop to cross the street, a guy walking by quickly grabs your backpack, trips you, and in one swift motion lifts the backpack from your back. A car stops just behind you, the guy jumps in, and the car drives off. Over the roar of the car's engine, you hear several voices laughing and celebrating. Thieves! Your anger swells inside you, but there is nothing you can do at the moment. By the time you get to school, you decide to report to the office and call the police. You expect the police to come, to listen to your story, and to take some action to find the thieves. You also expect there is a possibility that your property will be returned and the thieves will be punished. You expect this because you live in a state and nation where a government exists that is designed to protect you and your property.

We do not expect to be robbed on the way to school. In fact, most people in the United States live day to day without worrying about the safety and security of themselves or their property. It is because we have good laws and good leaders that we can have this security. The Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights were written as a way to protect Americans, both from outsiders and from each other.

There are many different ways to organize government, or the system by which a nation, state, or community is governed. Nations also have citizens who have different rights and responsibilities. The study of these rights and responsibilities is called civics. This chapter focuses on some of the types of government in the world, how leaders gain power and how laws are made, and the role of the citizen in different countries around the world.

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*Government is instituted for the common good; for the protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people; and not for profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men.*

- John Adams

**Background:** The United States Constitution, signed in 1787, organized a federal government without a monarchy.

## Section 1

# What Is Government?


 Setting a Purpose

## As you read, look for

- ▶ the purpose of governments;
- ▶ examples of how governments protect their citizens;
- ▶ the three branches of government and the responsibilities of each branch;
- ▶ terms: **government, sovereignty, legislative branch, executive branch, judicial branch.**



**Above:** Emperor Napoleon of France is viewed as a dictator who took rule by force and had total power in the country. **Right:** Abraham Lincoln served as the 16th president of the United States. As president, his powers were limited by the US Constitution.

## Forms of Government

Do you believe government should be “of the people, by the people, for the people”? Abraham Lincoln believed it when he delivered these words as part of his Gettysburg Address in 1863. Most Americans probably would agree as well. However, governments around the world do not always share this idea. What would be the opposite? Here is one possible example: a government led by the emperor, under his total control, and for the purpose of keeping and expanding his power and wealth. Under such a government, rights such as a trial by jury, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion, or ideas such as “innocent until proven guilty” might not exist. Government is a part of our lives in more ways than we often realize.



So what is government? To put it simply, **government** is the system by which a country is organized. Governments are everywhere. From the earliest tribes to the most powerful nations today, governments in some form have been created to ensure safety and order. The type of government and the role a government should have is debated today. Still, every society across time has had some form of government, either as simple as the leader of a group of prehistoric people or as complex as the government of the United States in the 21st century.

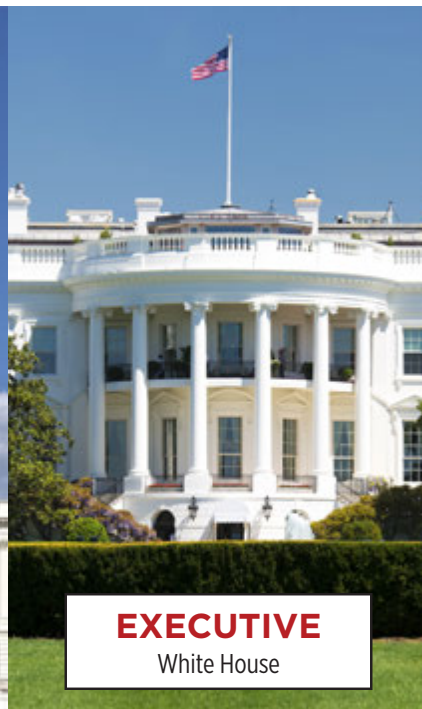
People create governments to keep civil order and protect the people. But what rules are necessary or desirable? There are many different answers to this question. In fact, countries around the world have answered it in many different ways leading to different types of government and law.

Governments first evolved as people discovered that protection was easier if they stayed together in groups and if they all agreed that one person in the group should have more power than others. This recognition is the basis of **sovereignty**, or the right of a group of people to be free of outside interference. A country needs not only to protect its citizens from one another but also to prevent an outside attack. Sometimes governments have built great walls and guarded them carefully from invaders. Other times they have led their followers to safe areas protected by high mountains, wide rivers, or vast deserts. Governments have raised armies, and the most successful ones have trained and armed special groups to defend their citizens. Governments may form alliances (agreements to defend each other) and fight wars in the name of protection and order.

**Below:** The Constitution of the United States divides power into three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.

## Branches of Government

Government functions are usually broken down into three main branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. In some forms of government, the three branches are separate. In other forms of government, the three branches' powers are combined.



The **legislative branch** is usually made up of people who are elected by the citizens of the country. Its main purpose is to create laws for the country. There are two common forms of legislatures: bicameral and unicameral. In a bicameral model, the legislature is divided into two assemblies, or houses. In a unicameral model, the legislature is just one assembly, or house. In some types of government, the legislative branch is equal to the executive and checks the power of the executive. In other forms of government, the legislative branch is weaker than the executive branch.

The main purpose of the **executive branch** is to enforce, or carry out, the laws passed by the legislative branch. The executive branch develops a foreign policy, or strategy for the best ways to deal with other countries. Members of the executive branch are also responsible for meeting with leaders of other countries as a representative of the whole country.

The final branch of government is the **judicial branch**. It is in charge of the courts in a country that settle disputes among citizens and between citizens and the government. In many countries, the highest court is called the Supreme Court. The main purpose of the judicial branch is to interpret the laws of a country and apply them to court cases.



## Reviewing the Section

1. What is government? Explain in your own words.
2. Why do countries have governments?
3. What are some of the things governments have done to protect their citizens?
4. What are the three branches of government and what is the responsibility of each branch?



**Above:** The statue of Lady Justice (Justitia) in Germany holding a balance. The balance represents the strength of arguments for each side in a case. **Bottom:** The Supreme Court of Canada meets in this building in the capital city of Ottawa.

## Section 2

# Distribution of Power in Government



### As you read, look for

- ▶ the meaning of “distribution of power”;
- ▶ the three ways governments may distribute power;
- ▶ terms: **unitary government, confederation government, federal government.**

## The Distribution of Power

People in each country must decide how to set up its government. Countries must decide how to organize and how to distribute power. Governments can have all the power held by one central government, or they can spread out the power to lower levels of government. Governments may be unitary, confederation, or federal. When trying to determine the type of distribution of power of a country, ask yourself this question: Which level or levels of government have the most power?

## Levels of Government

In a **unitary government**, the central (national) government holds almost all the power. Local governments, like states or counties, have very little power. In fact, the central government has the power to change the way states or counties operate or even remove them altogether. Some unitary governments have elected officials who, once elected, may make or enforce laws without listening to the opinions of those at lower levels of the government. Examples of countries with unitary governments include the United Kingdom and Cuba.



**Above:** The Palace of Westminster in London is the meeting place of the House of Commons and House of Lords, the two houses of Parliament in the United Kingdom. **Left:** Prior to Cuba becoming a Communist nation, the Capitolio in Havana housed the elected Cuban Congress.



In a **confederation government**, local governments hold all the power. The central government is weak, and it depends on the local governments for its existence. In other words, the central government only has as much power as the local governments are willing to give it. This is the least common type of distribution of power. Two examples of confederations are the United Nations and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The United Nations can only offer advice and assistance when the member nations agree to cooperate. OPEC can only advise countries on the amount of oil they are producing.

In a **federal government**, power is shared among different levels of government. Power is shared between the national (central) government and the local governments. The United States is an example of a country with a federal system. The national, or federal, government has elected leaders such as congresspersons and the United States president. However,

states have their own elections. A governor of a state is elected by the people of the state and works for them. The governor does not work for the president, and the president has no direct control over how a state is operated. Laws related to divorce or family matters, wills, and injuries from car wrecks are examples of laws of the state, not the national government. In the same way, states do not pass laws related to the defense of the country or make budgets for the military. These are duties of the national government. Other countries with a federal system include Australia and Canada.



**Top:** United Nations headquarters is in New York City, USA. **Bottom:** The Secretariat building of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is in Vienna, Austria.

## Reviewing the Section

1. What does the phrase “distribution of power” mean in terms of government structure?
2. Explain the difference between a unitary and a federal government.
3. Which type of government has the weakest national government? Why is it considered weak?
4. **Deeper Thinking:** Which type of distribution of power do you think is the best? Why?

## Section 3

# Citizen Participation in Government



### As you read, look for

- ▶ the meaning of “citizen participation”;
- ▶ how involved citizens can be in choosing their leaders;
- ▶ terms: **autocracy, dictatorship, absolute monarchy, head of government, oligarchy, democracy.**

## The Power of Citizens

Another way to look at the structure of a government is to look at citizen participation. In other words, how much power do the citizens in a country have in terms of rights and selecting their leaders? There are three types of citizen participation: autocracy, oligarchy, and democracy. These three forms of government have some important differences. The most important difference is based on who or how many people rule or control the government. People who live under different types of government often find that there are large differences in the rights given to individual citizens. When trying to determine which type of citizen participation a country has, ask yourself these questions: How is the head of a country chosen, and what type of freedoms do the citizens have?

**Bottom:** Unions and citizens demonstrated against the labor reform law of the Partido Popular (People’s Party) in Madrid, Spain, in 2012.



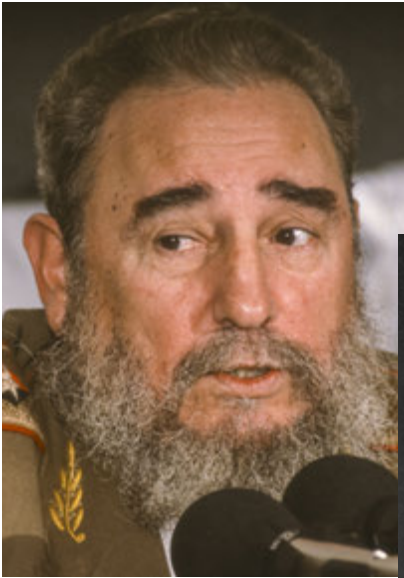
## Types of Citizen Participation

In an **autocracy**, the ruler has absolute, or total, power to do whatever the ruler wishes. The ruler can even make and enforce whatever laws he or she chooses. Citizens who live in an autocracy have very few rights. They do not get to choose their leader. They also do not get to vote on which laws are made and put into practice. In an autocratic government, people usually have little to no power to use against the government if

they disagree with decisions that the government or ruler has made. There are two main types of autocracy in the world today: dictatorship and absolute monarchy. In a **dictatorship**, one person controls the entire country. The dictator usually is supported by the military. North Korea is an example of a dictatorship. In an **absolute monarchy**, the sovereign, such as a king or queen, has all the power. The sovereign gains power by being the heir, or descendent, of the last sovereign. Citizens have no choice of sovereign. The dictator or sovereign serves as **head of government**, that is, the person in charge

of the day-to-day business of running the country. Saudi Arabia is an example of a country with an absolute monarchy.

In an **oligarchy**, a political party or other small group makes all the major decisions. The name *oligarchy* means “rule by a few.” The citizens in the country have little choice but to go along with the decisions that are made by the group in power. In this way, an oligarchy is similar to an autocracy. While the citizens have a little more power because there are more people in control of the country, citizens’ right to choose their leader is limited. Iran and China are examples of oligarchies. Iran’s government is classified as an oligarchy because a small group of religious and political leaders make many of the important decisions, but there is a president who is head of government. In China, the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party control the government, and the president is head of government.



### DID YOU KNOW?

In Australia, all eligible citizens are required by law to vote in elections. Failing to do so can result in a fine.

**Top Left:** Fidel Castro was the political leader of Cuba from 1959 to 2008. His dictatorial powers gave him control over all aspects of life in Cuba. **Top**

**Right:** Joseph Stalin had dictatorial powers in the Soviet Union for about 25 years and was responsible for the death of millions of his own people.

**Right:** The president of the People’s Republic of China, Xi Jinping, attended the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC. In 2018, China’s constitution was changed to allow Xi Jinping to remain in power for life.





In a **democracy**, citizens have the power in choosing their leaders. The word *democracy* comes from the Greek words *demos*, which means “people,” and *kratia*, which means “rule.” In this type of government, the citizens have most of the power because they have the ability to vote for the leaders who will make laws. In a direct democracy, citizens vote on all decisions. In a large, complex country such as the United States, a direct democracy would not be workable. Most citizens do not have the time or interest to study each issue and make good decisions. Instead, the United States is a republic, a system in which supreme power lies in the citizens who vote for people to represent them in government. Systems are in place to allow the elected representatives to vote on laws and other government decisions. A head of government, such as a president or prime minister, may be elected to manage the government on a day-to-day basis. Other democracies include Germany and Brazil.

## Reviewing the Section

1. What does the phrase “citizen participation” mean in government?
2. Name two countries that are autocracies.
3. Name two countries that are oligarchies.
4. What is one reason the United States is a republic instead of a direct democracy?
5. Deeper Thinking: In which type of citizen participation do the citizens have the most freedoms? Why?

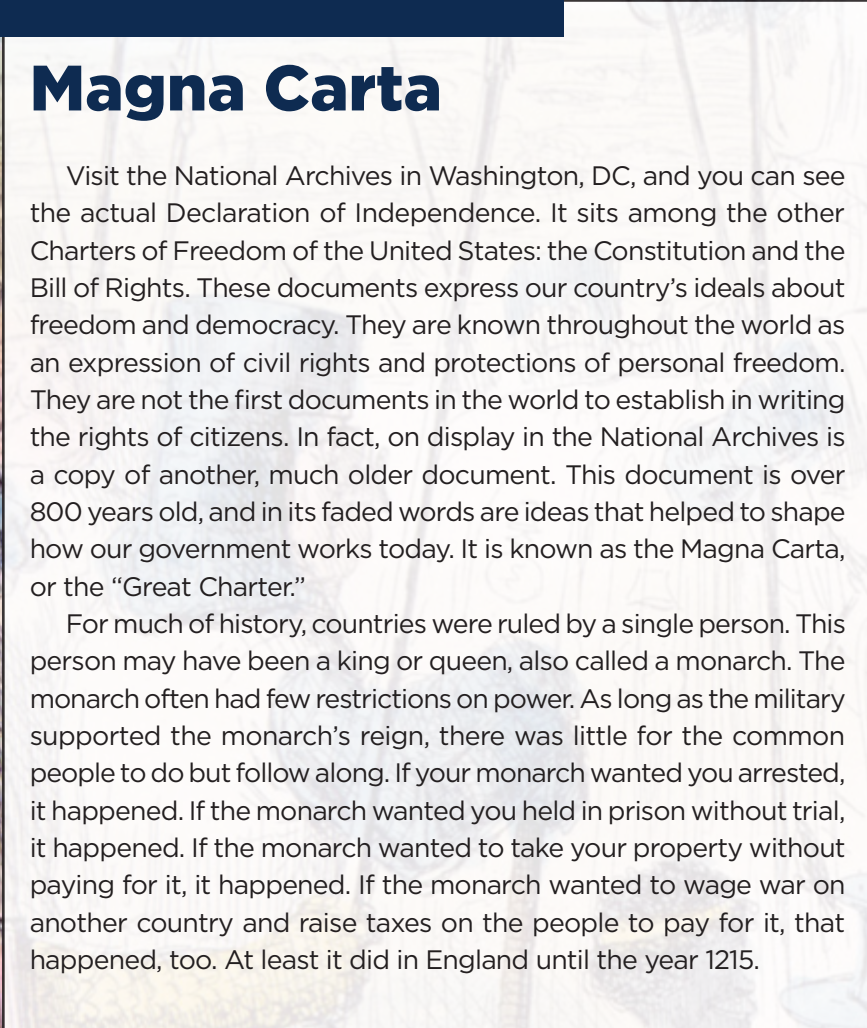
**Above:** Joe Biden (left) became president of the United States in January 2021. His vice-president was Kamala Harris (right).

# special Feature

## Magna Carta

Visit the National Archives in Washington, DC, and you can see the actual Declaration of Independence. It sits among the other Charters of Freedom of the United States: the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. These documents express our country's ideals about freedom and democracy. They are known throughout the world as an expression of civil rights and protections of personal freedom. They are not the first documents in the world to establish in writing the rights of citizens. In fact, on display in the National Archives is a copy of another, much older document. This document is over 800 years old, and in its faded words are ideas that helped to shape how our government works today. It is known as the Magna Carta, or the "Great Charter."

For much of history, countries were ruled by a single person. This person may have been a king or queen, also called a monarch. The monarch often had few restrictions on power. As long as the military supported the monarch's reign, there was little for the common people to do but follow along. If your monarch wanted you arrested, it happened. If the monarch wanted you held in prison without trial, it happened. If the monarch wanted to take your property without paying for it, it happened. If the monarch wanted to wage war on another country and raise taxes on the people to pay for it, that happened, too. At least it did in England until the year 1215.





King John was a monarch ruling England and was quite a tyrant. He was well known for having problems dealing with his barons, who were regional military leaders. He had ongoing problems with the church and had spent tax money to build a navy. He had lost most of his territory in France, and the barons began to refuse the calls for money and men to regain them. On June 15, 1215, the barons forced the king to sign this Great Charter, or Magna Carta. A portion of the document listed rights of the free people of England and helped to establish that even the monarch must govern according to law.

Among the most important rights were these: a person accused of a crime must have a fair trial with a jury of peers; a person's property could not be taken by the government without fair payment; a group of barons must assemble to advise the king on issues of money. This group led to the development of the parliament of today. Another part of the Magna Carta said that, if the king failed to follow the charter, the barons could correct the king by force. So the idea for citizens to bear arms to protect themselves was written into the charter, too. Many of these ideas about rights and freedoms were incorporated into the Charters of Freedom over 560 years later in the new United States of America. Which of the Magna Carta's ideas seem most important to you?

**Background:** This illustration by John Leech, published in 1875, depicts King John signing the Magna Carta in 1215.

## Section 4

# Two Types of Democracies



Setting a Purpose

### As you read, look for

- ▶ two types of democracy;
- ▶ how the head of government is chosen in a parliamentary versus a presidential democracy;
- ▶ the difference between absolute monarchies and constitutional monarchies;
- ▶ terms: **parliamentary democracy, head of state, constitutional monarchy, presidential democracy.**

## Forms of Democracy

A democratic government is one in which citizens vote on laws and make decisions directly or vote for representatives to do these tasks. Today, there are two major forms of democratic governments, parliamentary and presidential. Each of these is designed to represent and protect the rights of the people in their country.

## Parliamentary Democracy

In a **parliamentary democracy**, the citizens can vote for a representative from a political party that they feel best represents their views and opinions. In most countries with a parliamentary democracy, the elected representatives are known as members of parliament or MPs. Parliament's main job is to make and carry out the laws of the country. After the election, the political party that wins the most seats in parliament picks the head of government, who is called a prime minister or a premier. The prime minister is the head of the executive branch. The prime minister holds power for whatever term of office the country's constitution allows.



**Right:** The Houses of Parliament in Ottawa, Canada.

In many parliamentary governments, there is also a position called **head of state**. The head of state may be a leader who does not have very much power. For example, the country of Australia is a **constitutional monarchy** with a sovereign as head of state. This means the sovereign is only allowed whatever powers are stated in the constitution. The sovereign serves as the head of state with limited power, while the prime minister is the head of government and runs the country. Other examples of parliamentary democracies include the United Kingdom and Canada.

## Presidential Democracy

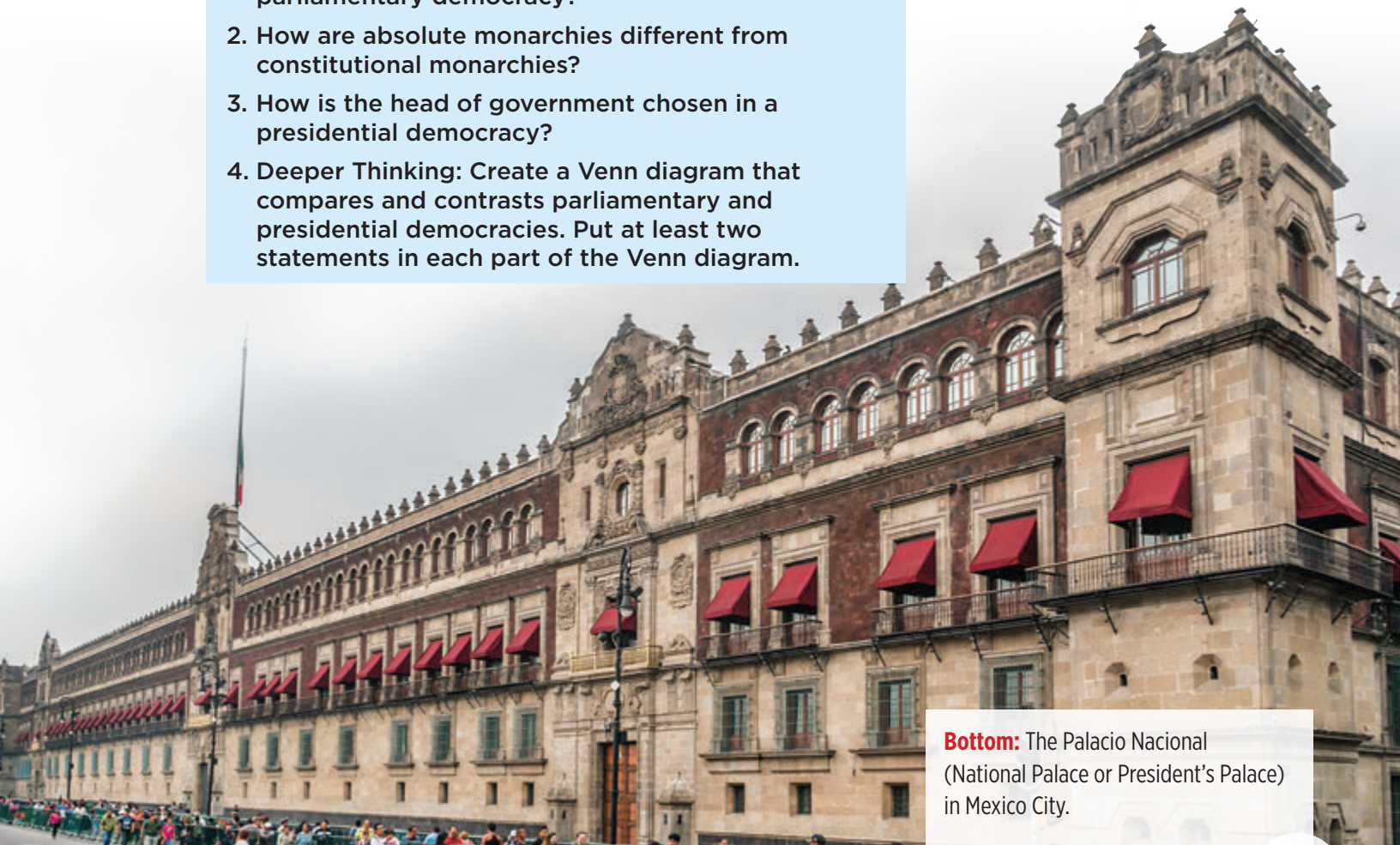
In a **presidential democracy**, citizens elect the president as head of government separately from the legislature. The legislative and executive branches are separate from each other and usually serve as checks (having the power to stop) the other branches' powers. The legislature passes laws while the president makes sure laws are enforced. The legislature cannot dismiss the president, nor can the president dismiss the legislature. The president is an official head of government, and may be head of state. Examples of countries with presidential democracies include Brazil and Mexico.

### In Other Words

A monarch may also be known as a sovereign, king, queen, emperor, or empress, among other titles.

## Reviewing the Section

1. How is the head of government chosen in a parliamentary democracy?
2. How are absolute monarchies different from constitutional monarchies?
3. How is the head of government chosen in a presidential democracy?
4. Deeper Thinking: Create a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts parliamentary and presidential democracies. Put at least two statements in each part of the Venn diagram.



**Bottom:** The Palacio Nacional (National Palace or President's Palace) in Mexico City.

# Chapter Review

## Chapter Summary

### Section 1: What Is Government?

- Government is a system by which a country is organized generally in order to protect people and ensure civil order.
- The legislative branch creates laws for the country.
- The executive branch enforces laws and represents the country when interacting with other governments.
- The judicial branch is in charge of the courts and interprets the country's laws.

### Section 2: Distribution of Power in Government

- Different types of governments organize power across the system in various ways.
- In a unitary government, the central government holds almost all the power and does not have to consult anyone when making decisions.
- In a confederation government, local governments hold almost all the power, and the central government would cease to exist without their consent.
- In a federal government, power is shared across all levels, and different levels of government have different responsibilities.

### Section 3: Citizen Participation in Government

- Citizen participation refers to how many rights citizens have and how much power they have to select their leaders.
- In an autocracy, citizens have very few rights and do not choose their ruler, who has absolute power.
- In an oligarchy, citizens have limited ability to select leaders, and the country is run by a small group of powerful people.
- In a democracy, citizens have power to elect their leaders and, in some cases, vote on every law.

### Section 4: Two Types of Democracies

- A democratic government is one in which citizens vote on the laws themselves or vote for a representative to do this for them.
- In a parliamentary democracy, citizens vote on a representative, and the political group with the most representatives selects the head of government.
- In a presidential democracy, citizens directly vote on the head of government separately from other branches of government.

## Activities for Learning

### Reviewing People, Places, and Things



Imagine you recently returned from a trip to Washington, DC. Write a short letter to a friend describing what you learned about governments using at least eight of the terms below. On your paper, underline the words used in your story.

sovereignty  
 presidential democracy  
 parliamentary democracy  
 executive branch  
 legislative branch  
 judicial branch  
 federal government  
 dictatorship  
 government  
 absolute monarchy

### Understanding the Facts



1. Why did people start forming governments?
2. What branch of government enforces laws?
3. Who has the most power in a confederation government?
4. What branch of government makes the laws?
5. To what does citizen participation refer?
6. What is the difference between an autocracy and an oligarchy system of government?
7. What is a dictatorship?
8. In which democracy do representatives, not citizens, select the head of government?

### Developing Critical Thinking



1. Review unitary, confederation, and federal governments. Which system do you think would be the easiest to operate? Which system would likely have strong alliances? Why?
2. This chapter reviews many different forms of citizen participation in government. How do you think historical events, environments, and/or values shaped participation?

### Writing across the Curriculum



Write a short report stating two reasons why humans started forming governments. Give examples of how governments continue to address these issues today.

### Applying Your Skills



Create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast parliamentary and presidential democracies.

### Exploring Technology



Look at a translation of the Magna Carta at [www.bl.uk/magna-carta/articles/magna-carta-english-translation](http://www.bl.uk/magna-carta/articles/magna-carta-english-translation). List an example from the document that limits the monarchy.