

# GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY



A **government** is made up of the people and institutions put in place to lead or manage the affairs of a country, nation, province or community. The role of government is to create and enforce laws, provide services and make decisions for the benefit of the people living within its borders.

Various types of government exist in the world and they make rules and decisions for their people in different ways. Governments can be distinguished from one another by their decision-making model, the number of people who have access to power and the rights and freedoms granted to citizens.

A **dictatorship** is a type of government where one person or a ruling group has complete political power. In this system of government, the dictator or ruling group exercises power through control of a mass movement, political party or the military. Dictatorships often come to power through a military takeover (also known as a coup d'état). Power is then maintained without the consent of the people through a one-party state where political opposition is forbidden. Dictatorships generally restrict individual civil and political rights. There is usually a heavy military presence with no independent media.

The term **authoritarianism** is sometimes used to describe dictatorships. Authoritarian governments exercise forceful control over the population, with no particular concern for their preferences or for public opinion. Similarly, an autocracy is a type of government where political power is concentrated in the hands of one person who rules without restriction. An autocracy can be a dictatorship or an absolute monarchy.

A **democracy** is a type of government where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making and citizens elect political representatives to make decisions on their behalf. Citizens are also free to run for political office. In democratic countries, citizens have protected civil and political rights such as freedom of speech and religion, freedom of association and the right to participate in free and fair elections. There are many different types of democracies around the world.

A **monarchy** is a form of government where a monarch (king or queen) or royal family holds political power that is inherited and usually lasts until death. The power of ruling monarchs can vary; in an **absolute monarchy**, a monarch (or dictator) retains full political power over a state and its people, whereas in a **constitutional monarchy**, it is more symbolic.

# LESSON 1: GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY

In a constitutional monarchy, the authority of the monarch is limited by a **constitution**, which includes the basic principles and laws of a nation or state that define the powers and duties of the government and guarantee certain rights to the people living within it. A constitutional monarchy has a democratically elected government with a government leader, while the monarch remains the head of state and performs ceremonial duties.

Canada's system of government is a **parliamentary democracy**. We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and our provincial and territorial legislatures, and the political party with the most representatives forms government. Canada is also a constitutional monarchy and the British Monarch, the Queen, is our head of state. Every act of government is done in the name of the Queen, but the authority for every act comes from the Canadian people through the Constitution. The Constitution of Canada is the highest legal ruling in the country and includes laws, decisions by judges, agreements between federal and provincial governments, traditions and our civil and political rights (the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*).

A **consensus democracy** uses a consensus decision-making model while developing legislation and aims to be more collaborative and inclusive by taking into account a broad range of opinions, as opposed to decisions made by majority rule. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut both have **consensus governments** where a group of individuals without any political party affiliation share political power.

## BIG IDEA

Governments are made up of the people and practices put in place to run or govern a country, nation, province or community and make decisions on behalf of citizens.

## LEARNING INTENTIONS

Upon completion of the lesson, students are expected to know the following:

- The purpose of government; and
- The different forms of government around the world.

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Explain why people's beliefs, values, worldviews, experiences, and roles give them different perspectives; and
- Assess different forms of government, and their role in societies.

## RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 1: Government and Democracy
  - Video: Government and Democracy
  - Activity Sheet 1.1: Survivor Island
  - Activity Sheet 1.2: Government Types
  - Activity Sheet 1.3: How Should We Decide?
- (Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at [www.studentvote.ca/bc](http://www.studentvote.ca/bc))

## ACTIVITIES

 **Hook: 20-30 min**

1. Ask students to imagine they are stranded as a group on a remote island. Divide students into groups and explain that each group will explore the need for leadership, organization and rules within a community.
2. Using Activity Sheet 1.1, have your students answer the questions to figure out how they will work together to survive. Alternatively, the process can be self-directed with each group brainstorming what decisions would need to be made in order to create a community, and how those decisions would be made.
3. Bring the class back together and discuss the decisions made by each group. How were the decisions made (unanimous support, compromise, majority rule, one person)? Did everyone agree with the decisions? Were decisions made quickly? Why or why not? What were the challenges with the process and how were they overcome?

*Teacher Note: Extensions A or B could be used as the Hook activity.*

 **Discussion: 5-10 min**

Who is responsible for making decisions and rules for our community? What would happen if there was no government responsible for creating laws and providing support to citizens?

 **Essential Concepts: 15-20 min**

Use Slide Deck 1 and the 'Government and Democracy' video to review the purpose of government, different government types and decision-making models. Key terms: dictatorship, democracy, monarchy, constitution, consensus, parliamentary democracy.

*Teacher Note: Activity Sheet 1.2 can also be completed or assigned for homework.*

# LESSON 1: GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY

## ★ Action: 15-20 min

1. Ask students to complete Activity Sheet 1.3 individually or in pairs to explore the strengths and limitations of different decision-making models in various scenarios (dictatorship, democratic, consensus).
2. Debrief as a class afterwards. Discuss which type of decision-making model would be best for each situation, and why.
3. Alternatively, students could form groups and act out one of the scenarios, keeping the decision-making model secret for the rest of the class to guess.

## ✚ Extensions:

A. Ask students to imagine they are aliens visiting planet Earth for the first time and they need to make sense of how society functions. Observe the community surroundings, the behaviour of people and their interactions with one another and general order and organization. It might seem strange that cars drive on the right side of the road (traffic laws), children go into a building each day to work without pay (school) and adults exchange coloured paper or tap a card for food (money). Explain to students that, without understanding the process by which decisions are made and rules are developed, the world would seem confusing or unfair. As a class, discuss any rules in our society that students think might seem strange to an outsider. How would you explain them to someone new? Why do you think these rules came to be? Who makes these rules and decisions? Upon reflection, are there any longstanding laws or traditions that seem outdated or inappropriate? Students can create a comic strip, journal entry or short story.

B. Play a game of running dictation using some or all of the key terms in the lesson (e.g., democracy, dictatorship, monarchy). Using the glossary or your own definitions, prepare large print definitions of each term (one per page, multiple copies if necessary). Attach a single term to a wall in the classroom or in the hallway (create numerous locations if helpful). Divide students into pairs with one student acting as the 'writer' and another acting as the 'runner'. The runner must run to the wall or board where the key term is displayed, read the text, run back to their partner and repeat what they read. The writer's job is to listen to the runner and write down what is said. It will likely take a few trips to and from the posting for the runner to dictate the entire definition to the writer. When most groups are done, the writer can check their work against what is displayed. Roles are then reversed and the next term is used.

C. Ask students to imagine what life would be like in a fictional country without a government. What would happen if there were no leaders to decide on laws or services to support citizens? There would be no traffic laws or police to enforce any rules. Imagine what would happen to schools, hospitals or community centres. Students can create a comic strip, journal entry or short story.

## 💡 Reflection: 10-15 min

Have a closing discussion about government and democracy. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection in their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What is the role of government?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of government?
- Who benefits from different forms of government and decision-making?
- Which kind of government system would you prefer to live in? Why?

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Our Country, Our Parliament," *The Library of Parliament* — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- "Government Type," *CIA World Factbook* — [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/299.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/299.html)
- "Queen and Canada," *The Official Website of the British Monarchy* — [www.royal.uk](http://www.royal.uk)