

# GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY



**Governance** is the system of practices and processes that a community or group uses to organize themselves and make decisions. Governance models determine who has authority or a voice in making decisions, how decisions are made and who is accountable for them.

There are several different governance or leadership styles, such as autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire.

**Autocratic** governance, also known as authoritarian leadership, is characterized by one person having complete control over all decisions with minimal input from other group members. **Democratic** governance involves collective decision-making and the sharing of tasks and responsibilities, and leadership changes regularly with participation from many group members. **Laissez-faire** is the absence of an organized leadership style; there is no authority and group members are responsible for all community goals and decisions.

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.

## LESSON 1: GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

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.

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.

A **republic** is a sovereign state, country or government without a monarch where the democratically elected government holds all political power (e.g., The United States, France). Similar to a constitutional monarchy, the government exercises power according to the rule of law and often has a constitution.

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 institutions 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;
- The various forms of government and decision-making models; and
- The guiding principles of a democracy.

Students are expected to be able to do the following:

- Evaluate how factors, forces, events or people influence developments, outcomes or decisions;
- Assess different forms of government and decision-making models and their role in societies; and
- Evaluate the health of our democracy.

### RESOURCES

- Slide Deck 1: Governance and Democracy
  - Video: Government and Democracy
  - Video: Democratic Principles
  - Activity Sheet 1.1: Space Survival – Ranking Chart
  - Handout 1.2: Space Survival – Ranking of Items by Experts
  - Activity Sheet 1.3: Comparing Different Government Types (Graphic Organizer)
  - Handout 1.4: How Should We Decide?
  - Handout 1.5: The Principles of Democracy
- (Videos, slide decks and digital versions of the activity sheets can be found at [www.studentvote.ca/bc](http://www.studentvote.ca/bc))

# LESSON 1: GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

## ACTIVITIES

### Hook: 25-30 min

*Space Survival* – You are a member of a lunar exploration crew originally scheduled to rendezvous with your mother ship on the lighted surface of the moon. Due to mechanical difficulties, your ship was forced to land at a spot some 320 km from the rendezvous point. During re-entry and landing, much of the equipment aboard was damaged and, since survival depends on reaching the mother ship, the most critical items available must be chosen for the long journey. Your task is to rank these items according to their importance in aiding you to reach the mother ship, starting with “1” for the most important, to “15” for the least important. You should assume that your crew is your class, you have agreed to stick together and that all 15 items are in good condition.

1. Ask each student to take a few minutes to decide their own rankings. Using Activity Sheet 1.1, students will record their choices in the left-hand column.
2. Divide students into groups and ask them to discuss their individual choices and refine their rankings based on the collective thoughts of the group. They should record the group rankings in the second column (group rankings).

*Teacher Note: Alternatively, you could assign each group a particular governance model (autocratic, democratic or oligarchic) and evaluate the process, outcomes and feelings developed within the group.*

3. Display a list of ‘expert’ rankings compiled by a team of scientists and engineers at NASA (Handout 1.2) on a slide deck or photocopy. Have students compare their individual and group answers with the correct answers and determine a score. For each item, have students mark the number of points that their score differs from the NASA ranking and then add up all the points. Disregard plus or minus differences. The lower the total, the better the score.

4. Have a follow-up discussion: How did your group determine the rankings? Was it consensus, majority-rule or did some group members take greater control? Did you ensure all group members had a voice? How did your individual score compare to your group score? What are the strengths and limitations of working alone versus with a group?

### Discussion: 5 min

What types of rules and decisions are needed for people living in a community (e.g., education/schools, roads and traffic laws, healthcare/hospitals)? Who makes these rules and decisions? What would happen if there was no government responsible for creating laws and providing support to citizens?

### Essential Concepts: 20 min

Use Slide Deck 3 and the ‘Government and Democracy’ video to review the purpose of government, different government types and decision-making models. Key terms: autocracy, dictatorship, oligarchy, democracy, monarchy, constitutional monarchy, republic, consensus, parliamentary democracy.

### ★ Action: 30-35 min

1. Ask students to fill out a graphic organizer (Activity Sheet 1.3) to compare different types of governments.

Suggested categories include:

- Political power/authority (one, few, many);
- Leadership process (how are they determined?);
- Citizen involvement in decisions;
- Rule of law;
- Constitution; and
- Rights and freedoms.

2. Divide students into pairs or small groups and ask them to compare how they completed Activity Sheet 1.3. What are the similarities and differences in the information they included? What do they think is the most important difference between various types of government?

## LESSON 1: GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

### ✚ Extensions:

A. Assign Activity Sheet 1.4 to explore the use of an autocratic, democratic or consensus style of decision-making in a range of scenarios. Discuss the answers as a class and debate the choices where applicable. Afterwards, review the strengths and limitations of each decision-making model and where they work best.

B. Use media and news stories to discuss global struggles to participate in free and fair elections (e.g., overcoming violence or intimidation, long lines at voting stations, election fraud, voter suppression tactics). In pairs or groups, have students choose a story and share it with the class. Suggested follow-up discussion questions include: What do these struggles signify? How do they compare to voting in Canada?

C. Divide the class into groups and provide each with a different country or nation to represent (choose from different continents and regions, including First Nations within Canada). Ask students to research the system of government for each and share their findings to the class. *The Economist* has rated countries around the world using its 'Democracy Index' ([www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)), which may be a good place for students to begin their research.

D. Using the 'Democratic Principles' video, Slide Deck 1 and/or Handout 1.5, explain to students that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy. In pairs or small groups, have students co-create criteria to rank the principles in order of importance and justify their decisions. Debrief and debate as a class.

E. Ask students to select a song or image that represents the democratic principles. Ask students to write a short reflection that uses specific examples from the selected medium to articulate how it embodies democratic principle(s) and why it is significant to them.



### Reflection: 5-10 min

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

- Why do we need government?
- What does democracy mean to you?
- Do you think it is important for citizens to be involved in political decisions?

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Our Country, Our Parliament," *The Library of Parliament* — [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)
- "Government Type," *CIA World Factbook* — <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>
- "Queen and Canada," *The Official Website of the British Monarchy* — [www.royal.uk](http://www.royal.uk)
- "Democracy Index," *The Economist* — <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>