

# Who Rules?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Someone's Got to Be In Charge

If you compared all the governments in the world, you would find one thing in common: Someone is in charge. The question is, who? There are many different forms of government. Some have one leader who has all the control. Others give power to the people. Here are some forms of government that exist (or have existed) in the world:



*King Harald V of Norway with his wife, Queen Sonja. Norway is a constitutional monarchy. The king is the head of state and has a mainly ceremonial role. The actual government is a democracy.*

## Me, Myself, and I

An **autocracy** is a government in which one person has all the power. There are two main types of autocracy: a monarchy and a dictatorship.

In a **monarchy**, a king or queen rules the country. The king or queen is known as a monarch. Monarchs usually come to power through their family line: The current king or queen's oldest child becomes the next king or queen. In some monarchies, especially those in historical times, the monarch held all the power and had the final say over the government. In modern times, monarchs usually share power with other parts of government. Often they are also subject to the country's constitution.

A **dictatorship** is a form of government where one leader has absolute control over citizens' lives. If there is a constitution, the dictator has control over that, too—so it doesn't mean much. Although other parts of the government may exist, such as courts or a lawmaking body, these branches always do what the dictator wants them to do. They do not represent citizens.

## Power to the People!

In a **democracy**, citizens hold the political power. There are two fundamental types of democracies:

In a **representative democracy**, citizens elect leaders to represent their rights and interests in government. The elected leaders, or representatives, do the day-to-day work of governing the country: They consider the issues, work to find solutions, pass laws, and do all of the other things necessary to keep a country going. Citizens hold the ultimate power, though, because if they don't like what their representatives are doing, they can vote in new ones!

In a **direct democracy**, there are no representatives. Citizens are directly involved in the day-to-day work of governing the country. Citizens might be required to participate in lawmaking or act as judges, for example. The best example of this was in the ancient Greek city-state called Athens. Most modern countries are too large for a direct democracy to work.



*A man votes in Peru.*



*The Peruvian legislature*

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## We, Ourselves, and... um... Us

In an **oligarchy** (OH-lih-gar-kee), a small group of people has all the power. *Oligarchy* is a Greek word that means “rule by a few.” Sometimes this means that only a certain group has political rights, such as members of one political party, one social class, or one race. For example, in some societies, only noble families who owned land could participate in politics. An oligarchy can also mean that a few people control the country. For example, a **junta** is a small group of people—usually military officers—who rule a country after taking it over by force. A junta often operates much like a dictatorship, except that several people share power.



From 1962 to 2011, Myanmar (also known as Burma) was ruled by a military junta that was condemned by the world for its human rights violations.



Crown of the Holy Roman Empire, which was tied to the Catholic church and lasted from the 10th—19th century.

## Religious Rule

A **theocracy** is a government that recognizes God or a divine being as the ultimate authority. (“Theo” is a Greek word that means *god*.) In a theocracy, religious law is used to settle disputes and rule the people. A theocracy can also be a democracy, dictatorship, monarchy, or just about any other kind of government. For example, the Republic of Iran recognizes Islamic law, but Iran’s citizens vote to elect their leaders. Modern theocracies are usually found in countries where the population is strongly religious.

## Rule by None

In an **anarchy**, nobody is in control—or everyone is, depending on how you look at it. Sometimes the word anarchy is used to refer to an out-of-control mob. When it comes to government, anarchy would be one way to describe the human state of existence before any governments developed. It would be similar to the way animals live in the wild, with everyone looking out for themselves. Today, people who call themselves anarchists usually believe that people should be allowed to freely associate together without being subject to any nation or government. There are no countries that have anarchy as their form of government.



An A inside a circle is the traditional symbol for anarchy.

