

# DIFFERENT TYPES OF GOVERNMENT

Because human beings are so different, there is no one form of government that everyone can agree upon. The United Nations (UN) includes almost all the countries in the world – but makes no laws and has little real power.

The European Union (EU) is similar to the UN in that it is a group of independent countries, but unlike the UN the members of the European Union elect representatives to a common parliament, which passes laws affecting all nations within the union. Over time, the EU hopes to create one unified, federal government in charge of Europe, although many people living in those countries remain sceptical.

While there are too many different forms of government to mention them all, the main ones follow. Many countries today have a blend of governments – e.g. New Zealand is a blend of democracy and monarchy.



Flag of United Nations – white on light blue background



Flag of Europe – yellow stars on dark blue background

**Democracy:** Rule by the people, or by representatives chosen by the people

**Despotism:** Rule by one person who treats all citizens/subjects as slaves

**Dictatorship:** Rule by one person who holds complete power over the country, usually with the support of a political party or armed force

**Monarchy:** Rule by one person (usually a king or queen); monarchs usually inherit their position of power and pass it on to a designated heir

**Oligarchy:** Rule by a small group of people who are united either by family connections or a common ideology or interest

**Plutocracy:** Rule by the wealthy

**Theocracy:** Rule by religious leaders



An absolute monarch – King Salman of Saudi Arabia

Governments may take different shapes – e.g. a monarchy may be **absolute**, which makes it more like a dictatorship, or **constitutional**, which makes it more of a democracy. Many democracies are also **republics**, meaning that the head of state is appointed or elected rather than born to that position. Most plutocracies and theocracies are also oligarchic, while

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Tanks of the Thai army, 2014

most dictatorships tend to be **totalitarian**, which means that everything in the country comes under the complete control of the leader (often supported by a political party). There are also **military dictatorships**, such as in Myanmar/Burma or Thailand at the moment (or in England during the 1650s), where the army is in charge and has appointed its own leaders to run the country.

### Activity: Different types of government

Answers - see RESOURCES

1. Draw lines to match the form of government on the left with its definition on the right. You might need to consult a dictionary.

Form of government
Absolute
Constitutional
Military
Republic
Totalitarian

Definition
All power is held and used by the people or their chosen representatives
All power and control over people's lives is held by one person or party
All power is held by one person
Power is held by the armed forces
The use of power is controlled by a set of rules or customs

2. Find examples of countries that have or have had the following types of government. Try to get at least two for each type.

Democracy:

Despotism:

Dictatorship:

Monarchy:

Oligarchy:

Plutocracy:

Theocracy: