**Governments in terms of their key institutions**

A **parliamentary system** or **parliamentary democracy** is a system of [democratic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy) [governance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government) of a [state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_state) where the [executive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_(government)) derives its democratic legitimacy from its ability to gain the confidence of the [legislature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislature), typically a [parliament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament), and is also held accountable to that parliament. In a parliamentary system, the [head of state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_state) is usually a person distinct from the [head of government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_government). This is in contrast to a [presidential system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_system), where the head of state often is also the head of government and, most importantly, the executive does not derive its democratic legitimacy from the legislature.

Countries with parliamentary democracies may be [constitutional monarchies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy), where a [monarch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarch) is the head of state while the head of government is almost always a [member of parliament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_of_parliament) (such as the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Sweden), or [parliamentary republics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_republic), where a mostly ceremonial president is the head of state while the head of government is regularly from the legislature (such as Ireland, Germany, and Italy). In [bicameral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bicameral_legislature) parliaments, the head of government is generally, though not always, a member of the lower house.

A **presidential system** is a [democratic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy) and [republican](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic) [government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government) in which a [head of government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_government) leads an [executive branch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_(government)) that is separate from the [legislative branch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislative_branch). This head of government is in most cases also the [head of state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_state), which is called “[president](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_(government_title))”. In presidential countries, the executive is [elected](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election) and is not [responsible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Responsible_government) to the legislature, which cannot in normal circumstances [dismiss](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissolution_of_parliament) it. Such dismissal is possible, however, in uncommon cases, often through [impeachment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impeachment).

There is also a hybrid system called [**semi-presidentialism**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semi-presidential_system). It is a [system of government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/System_of_government) in which a [president](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_(government_title)) exists alongside a [prime minister](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_minister) and a cabinet, with the latter being responsible to the legislature of the [state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_(polity)). It differs from a [parliamentary republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_republic) in that it has a popularly elected [head of state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_state), who is more than a mostly ceremonial figure, and from the [presidential system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_system) in that the [cabinet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_(government)), although named by the president, is [responsible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual_ministerial_responsibility) to the [legislature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislature), which may force the cabinet to resign through a [motion of no confidence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motion_of_no_confidence). Such system can be found, for example, in France or Russia.

The Czech Republic is a unitary parliamentary republic (despite the president being elected by the people).

**Parliament**

is a [legislative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislature) body of government. Generally, a modern parliament has three functions: [representing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representation_(politics)) the [electorate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election#Suffrage), making laws, and overseeing the government via hearings and inquiries (the term is similar to the idea of a [senate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senate), [synod](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synod) or [congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress)). Parliaments usually consist of “[chambers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chambers_of_parliament)” or “houses”, and are usually either [bicameral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bicameralism) or [unicameral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unicameralism).

In some parliamentary systems, the [prime minister](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_minister) is a member of the parliament (e.g. [in the United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_the_United_Kingdom)), whereas in others they are not (e.g. [in the Netherlands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_the_Netherlands)). They are commonly the leader of the majority party in the lower house of parliament, but only hold the office as long as the "confidence of the house" is maintained. If members of the lower house lose faith in the leader for whatever reason, they can call a [vote of no confidence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vote_of_no_confidence) and force the prime minister to resign. The parliamentary system can be contrasted with a [presidential system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_system), which operates under a stricter [separation of powers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_powers), whereby the executive does not form part of, nor is it appointed by, the parliamentary or legislative body. In such a system, congresses do not select or dismiss [heads of governments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_government), and governments cannot request an early dissolution as may be the case for parliaments.

**Separation of powers**

is a system where a state's government is divided into branches, each with separate, independent powers and responsibilities, so that [powers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_(social_and_political)) of one branch are not in conflict with those of the other branches. The typical division is into three branches: a [legislature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislature), an [executive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_(government)), and a [judiciary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judiciary). (It can be contrasted with the [fusion of powers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fusion_of_powers) in [parliamentary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_system) and [semi-presidential systems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semi-presidential_systems), where the executive and legislative branches overlap.)

Separation of powers, therefore, refers to the division of responsibilities into distinct branches of government by limiting any one branch from exercising the core functions of another. The intent of separation of powers is to prevent the concentration of power by the system of **checks and balances**.

The system of separations of powers is commonly ascribed to [French](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France) [Enlightenment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment) [political philosopher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_philosopher) [Charles-Louis de Montesquieu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_de_Secondat,_baron_de_Montesquieu), who described such system in his work [*The Spirit of the Laws*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Spirit_of_the_Laws) (1748).

**Power**

is the capacity of an individual to influence the conduct (behaviour) of others. The term "[**authority**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authority)" is often used for power that is perceived as [legitimate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legitimacy_(political)) by the [social structure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_structure). The use of power need not involve force or the threat of force ([coercion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coercion)). An example of using power without oppression is the concept "[soft power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_power)" (which comes from [diplomacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomacy), [culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture) and [history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History)), as compared to “[hard power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_power)”.

[Governments](https://www.britannica.com/topic/government) are perhaps the most familiar example of an [authoritative](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authoritative) social actor, because they generally possess a [monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force](https://www.britannica.com/topic/state-monopoly-on-violence) to compel obedience to their [mandates](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mandates) in a given geographic area. The soldier or [police](https://www.britannica.com/topic/police) officer serves as an extension of [state](https://www.britannica.com/topic/state-sovereign-political-entity) authority and shares its legitimacy. However, even these familiar forms of political authority as exercised by the state have limits set by the law.