

TEXT SUMMARY

Governments may be classified in three ways. The first is defined by who may participate in the government. In a democracy, supreme political authority rests with the people. All dictatorships are authoritarian, meaning that the ruler holds absolute authority over the people. A dictatorship may be totalitarian, meaning that the rulers control nearly every aspect of human affairs. It may also be an **autocracy**—in which one person holds unlimited political power—or an **oligarchy**—in which a small elite holds the power to rule.

The second classification is defined by where government power is held. In a **unitary government**, a single, central agency holds all governmental powers. In a **federal government**, a central government and several local governments

share governmental powers in a **division of powers**. Because the Constitution divides power between the National Government and the States, the United States is a federal government. A federal system is different from a **confederation**, which is an alliance of independent states.

The third type of classification describes the relationship between the legislative and the executive branches of government. A **presidential government** divides power between the branches, while a **parliamentary government** focuses power on the legislative branch. In the latter, the executive branch is chosen by and subject to the legislative branch.

THE BIG IDEA

The United States is a democracy with a federal and presidential system of government.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Classifications of Government

The government of the United States is a federal, presidential democracy.

Who may participate in government?	Democracy
	Dictatorship

Where is the power held?	Unitary
	Federal
	Confederation

What is the relationship between the legislative and executive branches?	Presidential
	Parliamentary

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How is the U.S. government an example of division of powers?

2. **Chart Skills** What are the three ways to classify governments?