

Name _____ Date _____

Forms of Government

“Who’s Making the Rules?”

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. A revolution is the act of removing a government, often by force, and putting a new government in its place. Revolutions usually occur at breaking points. People are so fed up with the current form of government that they rebel. Revolutions can also occur when powerful individuals seize power. During the American Revolution, the form of government in the American colonies changed from a constitutional monarchy to a representative democracy. There was a revolution in Egypt in 2011. As a result, the country’s government changed from a dictatorship to an oligarchy to a representative democracy over just a few months.

Notes

2. Anarchy usually refers to the complete absence of government. This type of anarchy often occurs during revolutions and civil wars. It’s connected with lawlessness, riots and often, violence. It’s not a stable form of government; as a result, there aren’t many examples of long-term anarchy in history. In Europe, many people define anarchy very differently. They think of it as a theoretical system of government that does not use force or violence. These people believe in anarchism, a theory that it’s necessary to remove all government to achieve freedom.

Notes

3. In a monarchy, the government is led by a ruler like a king, queen, tsar, pharaoh or emperor, who is called a monarch. Almost always, only one person acts as a monarch at a time, and the title and its power are later passed down to members of the monarch’s family. There are two kinds of monarchies: constitutional and absolute. In a constitutional monarchy, the constitution limits the monarch’s power. In an absolute monarchy, the monarch’s power is limitless. He or she decides the laws and wields all the political power. Today, the United Kingdom, Spain and Japan are all constitutional monarchies. The monarch’s power is very limited, and the title “monarch” is primarily ceremonial. In contrast, Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy.

Notes

4. A dictatorship is a government headed by a single person with total power, or a dictator. There are different ways that a dictator may come into power, but most often, it is by force. Both absolute monarchy and dictatorship are forms of autocracy. This means rule by a single person. Because some dictators pass on their power to their children, dictatorships can also sometimes be absolute monarchies. This is currently the case in North Korea. In an authoritarian dictatorship, the dictator controls the government. In a totalitarian dictatorship, the dictator controls not only the government but all of society and the economy.

Notes

5. An oligarchy is a government in which a small group of people rule. This is a broad term that can describe many kinds of governments. These include plutocracy, “rule by wealthy,” and military junta, “rule by military leaders.” South Africa was an oligarchy until it became a democracy in 1994. In the South African oligarchy, white people completely controlled the government though they were only 20% of the population. George Orwell’s book 1984 features a fictional example of an oligarchy.

Notes

6. In a theocracy, all laws are based on the country’s religion. Church and state, or religion and government, are not separated. Instead, the church is the state. Vatican City is a small city inside the larger city of Rome, Italy. It is independent from Italy, and it is governed by Catholicism and headed by the Pope. The laws of Saudi Arabia are all based on Islamic law: the country even has religious police to maintain social compliance with laws.

Notes

7. In a direct democracy, the people of a country have a direct say in their government. The people vote directly on laws and other policies. In contrast, in a representative democracy, people don’t vote directly on laws. They instead elect representatives to vote on laws on their behalf. Ancient Greece was a direct democracy, and many trace the origins of democracy to the Greeks. Today, Switzerland is a direct democracy. The United States is a representative democracy but includes elements of direct democracy at regional and state levels.

Notes

8. In a representative democracy, the people do not have a direct say in government. Instead, they elect representatives. The elected officials then represent the interests of those who voted for them. The United States has representative democracy in place on multiple levels of government, from city councils to state senates to Congress. The US Founding Fathers felt that representatives were necessary for the needs of the minority to be heard. Canada, Australia and Germany are a few other examples of representative democracies.

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