

# The Need for Government

Imagine what a school would be like without rules! Students would not have to attend class, complete assignments, obey teachers, or treat classmates with respect. Also, teachers would not have to assign grades fairly or treat students with respect. Obviously, without rules, schools could not function.

Just as rules are necessary for schools to function, laws are necessary for society to function. Life in a society without laws would be unsafe and unpredictable. Even though many people would probably cooperate and treat one another with respect, others would steal whatever they wanted and do as they pleased without fear of punishment. There would be no police department to provide safety and no judicial system to protect people's rights.

Governments exist to maintain law and order. They also provide services that people need. Governments build and maintain roads, hospitals, and schools. They construct libraries, parks, and playgrounds and provide police and fire protection. All of these functions, and many others, make government an important part of society.

## Questions

1) Why are governments necessary?

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2) What types of services to governments provide?

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3) Do you think governments provide enough services? Explain your answer!

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4) Think about our community. Name 3 services our government provides.

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5) Do you think it is possible for a government to provide too many services or have too much influence in a society? Explain your answer!

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# Types of Government

There are many different types of government. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, nearly all governments were absolute monarchies. In an absolute monarchy, a king, queen, or other royal ruler holds all the power, which is usually passed down through the royal family. Eventually many countries using this system began to limit the power of their monarchs. A government in which the authority of the ruler is limited by a constitution is called a limited or constitutional monarchy. Great Britain today is an example of this type of government. The powers of Queen Elizabeth II are mainly ceremonial; real control rests in the hands of Parliament.

In a dictatorship, one person or a group holds absolute power. Dictators often obtain power without the consent of the people, and their power is rarely passed from generation to generation.

A democracy is a government ruled by the people. In a direct, or pure, democracy, citizens participate directly in making laws and decisions. The ancient Greek city-state of Athens was a direct democracy. The United States is much too large to be a direct democracy. It is a representative democracy. US citizens elect representatives to make laws and decisions. The US government is also referred to as a republic. In a republic, as in a representative democracy, citizens elect representatives to run the government.

Not all Greek city-states were direct democracies. Some were oligarchies. In an oligarchy, ruling power is in the hands of a few people. Those in control of the ancient Greek city-state oligarchies were in the wealthy or noble class. This kind of oligarchy is called an aristocracy.

*Directions: Write the letter on the blank line to match each type of government with its description.*

A) Direct Democracy

E) Oligarchy

B) Limited monarchy

F) Representative democracy

C) Aristocracy

G) Absolute monarchy

D) Dictatorship

\_\_\_\_\_ 1) rule by a few people

\_\_\_\_\_ 2) rule by an all-powerful king or queen

\_\_\_\_\_ 3) citizens elect representatives to make laws and decisions

\_\_\_\_\_ 4) rule by the wealthy or noble class

\_\_\_\_\_ 5) system in which king or queen's powers are mainly ceremonial

\_\_\_\_\_ 6) all the citizens make laws and decisions together

\_\_\_\_\_ 7) rule by one person or group that has absolute power which is rarely passed down through generations