



**FLORIDA JOINT CENTER  
FOR CITIZENSHIP**

**SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT**

**SS.7.C.3.2** Compare parliamentary, federal, confederal, and unitary systems of government.

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## *Lesson Summary*

### ***Essential Question***

How is power distributed in different systems of government?

### ***NGSSS Benchmark***

SS.7.C.3.2 Compare parliamentary, federal, confederal, and unitary systems of government

### ***Florida Standards***

LAFS.68.RH.1.1

LAFS.68.RH.2.4

LAFS.68.RH.3.7

LAFS.68.WHST.3.9

LAFS.68.WHST.4.10

LAFS.7.SL.1.1

LAFS.7.SL.1.2

### ***Overview***

In this lesson, students will determine the key features of four systems of government.

### ***Learning Goals/Benchmark Clarifications***

- Students will define parliamentary, federal, confederal, and unitary systems of government.
- Students will compare the organizational structures of systems of government.
- Students will recognize examples of these systems of government.
- Students will analyze scenarios describing various systems of government.

### ***Benchmark Content Limits***

- Items will not ask students to name the system of government for countries other than the United States.
- Items will not ask students to identify the origins of these systems of government.

### ***Civics EOC Reporting Category***

Reporting Category 4 – Organization and Function of Government

### ***Suggested Time Frame***

- One 45-50 minute class period

### ***Civics Content Vocabulary***

- confederal, federal, governor, parliamentary, president, prime minister, unitary

### ***Instructional Strategies***

Close reading of complex text

Collaborative learning

### ***Materials***

Student activity sheets

- Comparing Systems of Government Graphic Organizer
- Systems of Government Scenarios

Student reading materials

- Distribution of Power

### *Suggested Student Activity Sequence*

1. To begin this lesson, put the term “government” on the board.
2. Provide students with a few minutes to brainstorm any words, terms, or concepts that come to mind when they think about the term “government” and then have students share out.
3. List any key terms that students share on the board (such as: leader, president, governor) and explain that there are different systems of government than the one we have in the United States.
4. Pass out the “Comparing Systems of Government” student activity sheet and explain to students that they will read about the different systems of government. While reading, they will mark any phrases or words that help them define each system. As a class they will review the evidence. After reading, they will use their evidence to write the definition in their own words and then create a visual for the different systems of government.
5. Pass out the “Distribution of Power” reading and instruct students to read with purpose to identify how the systems of government are defined.
6. Move around the room to monitor understanding.
7. Instruct students to fill in the top row of the graphic organizer with sentences or phrases that help define each term.
8. Discuss as a whole class the evidence that was found in the reading to define the terms. Use federal system as an example and work through the evidence to define the term as a whole class.
9. Place students into pairs and instruct students to work with their partner to compare notes and create definitions for the remaining terms.
10. Review the remaining definitions as a whole class.
11. Instruct students to work with their partner and create their own visual representations for each system.
12. Share and review as a whole class.
13. Explain to students that they will now put their knowledge of each system into practice.
14. Pass out the “Systems of Government Scenarios” student activity sheet and review the directions as a whole class. Teacher note: The intent of this activity is not to have your students memorize the country’s system of government, but rather to determine the system of government being described using real life examples.
15. Provide students time to complete the handout and review as a whole class.
16. Checking for Understanding (Formative Assessment):  
Instruct students to write a well-crafted response using the following prompt:  
Prompt  
Write a well-crafted paragraph that compares the unitary and federal systems of government. Use evidence from each reading to support your answer.

## Comparing Systems of Government

- Directions:** 1. After reading and marking the “Distribution of Power” reading, enter the sentences or phrases you found from the reading to define each term into the boxes below.
2. Using the evidence you found from each reading and create your own definition of each system of government.
3. Create a visual representation of each system of government.

	<b>Federal</b>	<b>Unitary</b>	<b>Parliamentary</b>	<b>Confederal</b>
<b>Distribution of Power Reading</b>				
<b>Your Definition</b>				
<b>Visual</b> Draw a picture or symbol that represents how power is distributed in the system of government.				

## Distribution of Power

Directions: As you read, highlight or mark sentences or phrases that help define the following terms: federal system, unitary system, parliamentary system, and confederal system.

Effective government in any form requires a method for distributing authority, or power, within the country.

**Federal Systems.** Large and diverse countries often have a federal system of government where power is “layered” or shared among different levels. The United States government is an example of a federal system. There is a central government with an executive branch, legislative branch and judicial branch. The head of the executive branch is the president. There are also state governments with executive, legislative and judicial branches. The head of the executive branch of a state government is the governor. The state legislatures pass laws having to do with state affairs; the state executive carries them out; and state judiciaries interpret them.

Federal systems also include independent local governments such as county governments and city governments. The citizens elect many of the public officials in counties and cities.

**Unitary Systems.** In countries with a similar population and with a common tradition, language, and sense of national history, the central governments may not be federal but unitary. With a unitary system, government power is held at the center and the central, or national, government performs all of the governmental functions. Local governments within this system manage issues within their area, but their powers are determined and assigned by the national government. The national government has the ability to tax and major lawmaking powers rest almost entirely with the national government.

**Parliamentary Systems.** In a parliamentary system, the government power lies with the legislative body and the leader of the country is part of the legislature. Citizens elect leaders indirectly through political parties. In these types of elections, citizens vote for the political party of their choice, and the party chooses who will represent that party in the government. In parliamentary systems, the percentage of the vote received by any party determines how much representation that party will have in the legislature. In Israel, for example, any political party that earns at least 2% of the vote will earn at least one seat in Israel’s national legislature (the Knesset). In parliamentary systems, the prime minister is the head of state (government). Some parliamentary systems elect their prime minister through an election by the legislature while other parliamentary systems hold an election by the citizens.





**Confederations.** Independent states sometimes join together to create a type of central government known as a confederation. The central government only exists to provide specific services that are determined by the independent members. The central government of a confederation is the weakest of all of the government systems. Member states in a confederation maintain their own individual power and delegate to the central government only those powers that are essential for its maintenance. The individual states or countries making up the confederations have the power to tax and make their own laws. The central government serves as a coordinator to protect the interests of all its members. It also represents the confederation in matters with outside governments, but its actions are reviewed and approved by the states.

No modern nation is organized as a confederation, yet some international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) function as confederations.

Adapted from: <http://www.scholastic.com/browse/subarticle.jsp?id=1697>

### Systems of Government Scenarios

Directions: Read each scenario and decide if a confederal, federal, parliamentary, or unitary system is being described. Write the system in the second row. In the third row, list words or phrases you used to make your decision.

Scenarios	 <p><b>Argentina's</b> government has an elected president, National Congress and Supreme Court. Argentina also has provinces, or states, that have their own constitutions and executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The central government and provinces share power in Argentina.</p>	 <p>The <b>European Union</b> is a partnership between 27 European countries. Everything that happens between partner countries is based on treaties that are voluntarily agreed upon by all members.</p>	 <p>In <b>New Zealand</b> the government is centered around the legislature and prime minister. The prime minister is the leader of the political party that has the majority of seats in the legislature. All members of the prime minister's cabinet must be members of the legislature.</p>	 <p><b>Japan's</b> government is organized with a strong, central government, comprised of a legislative branch called the Diet and an executive branch led by a prime minister and ministers of state. In Japan there are 47 prefectures, or states, however the prefectures are not independent and rely on the central government for funding.</p>
What type of system is being described?				
List the evidence you used from the text to answer the question.				

***Sources***

Distribution of Power, adapted from: <http://www.scholastic.com/browse/subarticle.jsp?id=1697>  
Systems of Government Scenarios: [http://europa.eu/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/index_en.htm) and <http://www.state.gov>

## Comparing Systems of Government


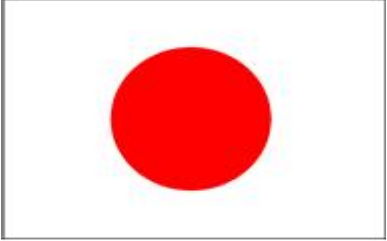
### SAMPLE ANSWERS

- Directions:** 1. After reading and marking the “Distribution of Power” reading, enter the sentences or phrases you found from the reading into the boxes below.
2. Using the evidence you found from each reading and create your own definition of each system of government.
3. Create a visual representation of each system of government.

	<b>Federal</b>	<b>Unitary</b>	<b>Parliamentary</b>	<b>Confederal</b>
<b>Distribution of Power Reading</b>	Large and diverse countries often have a federal system of government where power is “layered” or shared among different levels. There is a central government... There are also state governments	With a unitary system, government power is held at the center and the central, or national, government performs all of the governmental functions	In a parliamentary system, the government power lies with the legislative body and the leader of the country is part of the legislature.	Loosely allied independent states sometimes join together to create a type of central government known as a confederation, in which the central government exists only at the pleasure of the sovereign members.
<b>Your Definition</b>	A federal system is where power is shared between a central government and states.	A unitary system is where almost all power is located with the central government.	A parliamentary system is where the power lies with the legislative body and the leader of the country is part of the legislature.	A confederal system is where power is located with the independent states and there is little power in the central government.
<b>Visual</b> Draw a picture or symbol that represents how power is distributed in the system of government.				



**Systems of Government Scenarios**  
**SAMPLE ANSWERS**

Scenarios	 <p><b>Argentina's</b> government has an elected president, National Congress and Supreme Court. Argentina also has provinces, or states, that have their own constitutions and executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The central government and provinces share power in Argentina.</p>	 <p>The <b>European Union</b> is a partnership between 27 European countries. Everything that happens between partner countries is based on treaties that are voluntarily agreed upon by all members.</p>	 <p>In <b>New Zealand</b> the government is centered around the legislature and prime minister. The prime minister is the leader of the political party that has the majority of seats in the legislature. All members of the prime minister's cabinet must be members of the legislature.</p>	 <p><b>Japan's</b> government is organized with a strong, central government, comprised of a legislative branch called the Diet and an executive branch led by a prime minister and ministers of state. In Japan there are 47 prefectures, or states, however the prefectures are not independent and rely on the central government for funding.</p>
What type of system is being described?	Federal	Confederal	Parliamentary	Unitary
List the evidence you used from the text to answer the question.	Central government and provinces share power	Partnership, voluntarily agreed upon by all members	Prime minister, cabinet are members of legislature, centered around the legislature	Strong, central government, the prefectures are not independent and reply on the central government for funding

### *Civics Content Vocabulary*

<b>Word/Term</b>	<b>Part of Speech</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>confederal</b>	noun	a system of government where power is located with the independent states and there is little power in the central government
<b>federal</b>	noun	a system of government where power is shared between a central government and states
<b>government</b>	noun	a system or organization for exercising authority over a body of people
<b>governor</b>	noun	the head of a state government
<b>parliamentary</b>	noun	a system of government where power lies with the legislative body and the leader of the country is part of the legislature
<b>president</b>	noun	the head of the executive branch in a federal system
<b>prime minister</b>	noun	the head of state in a parliamentary system
<b>unitary</b>	noun	a system of government where almost all power is located with the central government

## *Essential Teacher Content Background Information*

**This section addresses the following issues:**

1. The three powers of government and their relation to systems of government
2. Comparing government systems (graphic)

### **1. The three powers of government and their relation to systems of government**

All governments have the same three powers. These powers are legislative (the lawmaking process), executive (the power to enforce or implement laws) and judiciary (the power to adjudicate, or judge, laws). It is in the organization of those powers where one can distinguish among forms of government. For example, some forms of government concentrate all of three powers in one place whereas other forms of government distribute power among individual states or subgovernments. Government systems, by contrast, are the rules focusing on how a government functions. Two governments may share the same form while they differ as to their type of government system. For example, two democracies (same form) may utilize different rules for electing members of the national legislature (different system).

Comparing forms and systems of government enables one to clarify the advantages and disadvantages of each as to the effectiveness of each of the powers of government within those forms and systems, and the role of citizens within those forms and systems.

### **2. Comparing Government Systems (graphic)**

#### **Comparing Government Systems**

<b>System of Government</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>The Role of the Citizen in Selecting Political Leaders</b>	<b>Helpful Hints</b>
Unitary	A system of government where almost all power is located with the central government	Unitary governments may delegate power to smaller subgovernments, such as states, and local governments. This delegation of power includes which government positions are elected and appointed.	“Uni” is the Latin root for “one”; thus, when the three powers of government (legislative, executive, judicial) are held in one place, that government is classified as a unitary system.
Federal	A system of government where power is shared between a central government and states	Citizens elect political legislators, executives and some judges through direct elections.	The U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1788, outlines the federal system that remains in place today.
Confederal	A system of government where power is located with the independent states and there is little power in the central government	Citizens elect political legislators, executives and some judges through direct elections.	The first government formed by the colonists after declaring independence in 1776 was a confederation, called the Articles of Confederation. A confederation in place today is the United Nations.
Parliamentary	A system of government where power lies with the legislative body and the leader of the country is part of the legislature	Citizens elect political leaders indirectly through political parties. In these types of elections, citizens express their party preference, and the party chooses who will represent that party in the government.	Great Britain and Canada are parliamentary systems. The executive, who is called the prime minister, is elected by the legislature and not directly by the people.