Introduction to Comparative Government and Politics

Classwork Study Questions II

1. Differentiate between levels of government.

- **Supranational:** a type of multinational political union where negotiated power is delegated to an authority by governments of member states. The term is sometimes used to describe the **European Union (EU)** as a new type of political entity.

- **Unitary:** In a unitary system, the central government gets to decide what powers, if any, to give to the lower levels of government. Powers remained at central place and central government have the authority to make all the decision. **Britain, France, China, Japan** and **Iran** have a unitary system. Most of the world's states are unitary.

- **Confederal:** A confederacy is a **loose relationship** among a number of smaller political units. The vast majority of political power rests with the local governments; the **central federal government** has very little power.

The **African Union** is composed of Heads of State and Government or their African political units. **The Assembly of the Heads of State** is the **central federal government** of the Union. It represents the Union and defends its interests and provides an effective forum that enables all Member States to adopt coordinated positions on matters of common concern to the continent in international fora and defend the interests of Africa effectively. The Assembly has very little political power. Another example is the **U.S. under the Articles of Confederation.**

- **Federal:** In a **federal** system, some powers are given to the central **government** and other powers are given to the lower **levels of government** (provinces or states).

United States of America, Germany, Russia, India, Nigeria, Mexico, and Brazil are examples of federal systems.

Key differences:

	Supranational	Unitary	Confederal	Federal
	Power is delegated to an authority by governments of member states.	Central government has the power and the authority to make all the decisions.	Local governments have all political power while the central federal **government** has very little power.	Some powers are given to the central **government** and other powers are given to the lower **levels of government**
	European Union (EU)	Britain, France, China, Japan and Iran	The African Union, U.S. under the Articles of Confederation	U.S., Germany, Russia, India, Nigeria, Mexico, and Brazil .

2. Federal and unitary systems structure the relationship between national and subnational units. Describe one advantage of a federal system and one advantage of a unitary system.

	Federal System	Unitary system
	In culturally divided societies it may help protect ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities, particularly if they are geographically concentrated.	Powers remained at central place and central government have the authority to make all the decision.
	Serve as a check on overly ambitious rules and thus protect markets and citizen freedoms.	Unitary governments have just one government and are also known by the name of central government.

3. Distinguish between decentralization in federal governments and unitary governments.

A **decentralized federal government** is a form of government with its top-level decision-making processes dispersed throughout the system, rather than concentrated in one person, place or legislative body.

A **unitary or centralized government** is one in which power or legal authority is exerted or coordinated by a **de facto political executive** to which federal states, local authorities, and smaller units are considered subjects. **Devolution**, or giving more power to lower levels of government would be an example of decentralizing a unitary or centralized government.

All constituted governments are, to some degree, necessarily centralized, in the sense that a federal government exerts an authority or prerogative beyond that of its constituent parts. To the extent that the base unit of society or individual citizens vest authority in a larger unit, such as the state or the local community, authority is centralized.

4. Discuss two reasons why leaders of unitary systems might choose to decentralize power and describe one method used by leaders to decentralize power.

a. The leaders of unitary systems might choose to decentralize power to **prevent revolution** or because of **domestic pressure**.

b. Decentralization **avoids the abuse of power** from central authorities. However, this comes at the cost of every participant taking on some responsibility themselves.

One method used by leaders to decentralize power is by **devolution**.

The United States has a **decentralized federal system** that allows a measure of sovereignty to the states, which have their own constitutions and laws. The federal government oversees activity that crosses state lines or the national border, but not activities that occur within a state.

5. Identify 3 key institutions commonly found in governments and their roles.

The most important state institutions are **the executive**, the president and/or prime minister and the cabinet. Alongside the executive, **the legislature and the judiciary** comprise the institutional apex of state power, although the inter-relationships and functions of these institutions vary from country to country.

Other key state institutions include the **military, police, and bureaucracy.** Their roles are to protect the state from foreign interventions, its peoples and the government.

6. Explain the difference between the roles of head of state and head of government.

The **Head of State** represents **the state** and has more ceremonial **duties**, like attending international meetings, cultural ceremonies and other non governmental activities.

The **Head of Government** is responsible for running **the government** of a country with the approval of his or her cabinet and has power and authority within the state.

The **head of government** and country in the United States of America is the **president.** He is both head of state and head of government.

In the United Kingdom, the **prime minister** is appointed as **head** of the **government** by the **queen** who is the **head of state**.

Making trade agreements and other deals is the responsibility of the **head of government** while approving these is the duty of **head** of the **state**.

7. Distinguish between parliamentary and presidential forms of democracy.

	Presidential	Parliamentary
	Two separate agencies of government: executive and legislative.	Executive and legislative branches are interdependent.
	Separately elected and authorized by the people.	Legislative branch directly elected; prime minister and cabinet emerge from the legislature.
	Fixed terms; cannot unseat the other branch; each with specific powers.	Confidence relationship. Can change anytime.
	Coordination must be achieved to make policy	Do not experience the form of divided government that is common under presidentialism

8. Compare and contrast the two types of executive systems. Consider some characteristics that distinguish one from the other and some similarities.

	Parliamentary	Non-Parliamentary
	The members of the executive are the members of the legislature. The executive is responsible to the legislature for its acts.	In a non-parliamentary or presidential executive, the executive is constitutionally independent of the legislature.
	It remains in office so long as it commands the confidence of the legislature	It is not responsible to the legislature.
	The parliamentary executive is also known as the cabinet or responsible executive. U. K, India, Australia, Canada provide examples of parliamentary executive.	It is found in the U.S.A (America), France, Sri Lanka etc.

	Single Executive	Plural or Collective Executive
	Executive authority is vested in one person. The President of the USA provides the best example of this type.	Executive authority is vested in a group of persons who share such authority. Almost all states have single executive except a few.
	Council of Ministers or Cabinet in a parliamentary form of government falls under this category as it works like a team under the leadership of the Prime Minister.	The Federal Council of Switzerland, consisting of seven members, provides the best example of such executive.
	Single executive is prompt, vigorous and more powerful as authority is not divided. It works unitedly with singleness of purpose. It ensures complete secrecy. However, it may lead to abuse of power and corruption.	It is a check upon the abuse of power and it thwarts the possibility of dictatorship. It may bring to the state a higher degree of ability. Its demerits are: It lacks promptness of decision and singleness of purpose. It is weak due to division of responsibility.

9. What institutions help executive systems carry out their policies?

Political institutions are organizations which create, enforce and apply laws. They often mediate conflict make (governmental) policy on the economy and social systems.
Examples of such political institutions include **political parties**, **trade unions** and the **legal courts**.

The term “Political Institutions” may also refer to the recognized structure of rules and principles within which the above organizations operate, including such concepts as the right to vote, responsible government and accountability.

10. Define bureaucracy and explain the differences between bureaucracy in authoritarian regimes and democratic regimes.

A **bureaucracy** is an organization administered by lots of people. It is a system of government in which most of the important decisions are made by state officials rather than by elected representatives.

Some features of bureaucracy in an **authoritarian system** are:

- Recruitment based on party affiliations (ruling, single party), clan/tribal affiliations or personal connections.
- Patronage, patron–client systems or Nomenklatura (Soviet system) or Camarillas (Mexico) or Guan xi (China).
- Merit is not the primary basis for recruitment.
- Bureaucracy is large in size because of authoritarian goals.

Bureaucracy or civil servants are back bone of any **democratic regime administration**. While political leaders change, the civil servants ensure continuity. They help the administration implement policies of the government through constitutional means. A good bureaucracy helps in stabilization of democratic form of government, by following the rules of the administration.

Democracy is the process whereby the government is elected by the people whereas **Bureaucracy** is the system where elected government runs state matters through competent state officials selected by the government, not elected by the public, often through civil servants selected on the base of merit and intellectual capacity to implement the governments matters to translate public's interests into reality.