

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.

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 **state** 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. Explain five forms of executive systems:

(1) Nominal and Real Executive:

In many countries the **Head of the State** has **nominal powers**, as in Great Britain, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Belgium and Holland. In these countries, the powers of the Monarch are exercised by his ministers. Thus there is **nominal executive** in these countries.

Contrary to this, under the Constitution of the U.S.A., the President has been given many powers and he himself exercises these powers. Therefore, there is **real executive** in America. Though the President of India has been given many powers in the Constitution, yet in actual practice these powers are exercised by his ministers. Thus there is **nominal executive** in India.

(2) Single and Plural types of Executives:

Single executive means that **all executive powers** are vested in one **Head of the State**, for example, the President of the United States exercises all executive powers.

In Switzerland, the executive power is not in the hands of only one individual, but in the hands of a **Council of seven members**. The Chairman of this Council has no additional powers. Thus all the seven members are equally responsible for the administration in that country. This type of Swiss executive is called **Plural Executive**.

(3) Parliamentary and Presidential Types of Executive:

In **Parliamentary executive** the **Cabinet** is responsible to the **legislature**. This system is functioning in England, France, Japan, Sri Lanka, India, West Germany, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Belgium and Holland.

Where the **President is the Head of the State** and he has real **executive powers** and is not responsible to the Parliament, the system will be known as the Presidential type of executive. This system is functioning in the United States of America, Brazil and some countries of South America. The President is elected for a fixed term in these countries and he can be removed only through an impeachment.

(4) Hereditary and Elective Executive:

When a **king** is the **Head of the State** and when after his death his son or, in case of his being issueless, some of his near relative occupies the throne, the system is called **hereditary executive**. This type of executive is functioning in England, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Japan and Nepal.

In countries where the **Head of State** is **elected** either by the people or by their representatives, the system is called **Elective Executive**. We find this system in India, France, West Germany, Italy, the United States of America, Austria, Pakistan, Egypt, etc.

(5) Dictatorship:

When the entire powers of the nation are in the hands of **one person**, it is called **Dictatorship**. The dictator wields power with the help of a particular party or army and later on he becomes all in all in that country.

After World War 1(1914-18), Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany became dictators. In the Second World War (1939-45) Germany and Italy were defeated and the dictatorship came to an end. Today democratic governments are functioning there. In Spain, General Franco established his Dictatorship.

In a dictatorship a **single party government** is established and no opposition party can be formed there.

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

| Executive System | Similarities | Differences |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |

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 can also be defined as 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 the political masters are subject to change, the **civil servants ensure continuity**.

They help the administration to implement policies of the government through constitutional means. As they are thorough about rules of the administration, a good bureaucracy helps in stabilization of democratic form of government.

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.

<http://www.politicalsciencenotes.com>

Kesselman, Introduction to Comparative Government and Politics