

Political Systems

Political Systems:

A **state** is a region that shares a common government. The first real states (called city-states) developed in Southwest Asia more than 5,000 years ago. A **city-state** is an independent state consisting of a city and its surrounding territory. Later, some military leaders conquered large areas and ruled them as empires. An **empire** is a state containing several countries. Geographic features such as rivers and mountains sometimes helped governments control territory by protection against invasion.



Figure 1 - Each Greek City-State was its own independent country responsible for forming their own governments and raising their own armies. They were much smaller than the countries that exist today.

Nation-States:

Today, most states are nation-states. A **nation-state** is a state that is independent of other states. The United States is an example of a nation-state. We often use the general words *nation* or *country* to refer to nation states.

All nation-states have some common features. For example, nation-states have specific territory with clearly defined borders. Nation-states have governments, laws and authority over citizens. Most are divided into smaller states or provinces that contain cities and towns.

Forms of Government:

Each state has a government, but there are many different kinds of government. Throughout history, most states were autocracies (ruled by a single person) or oligarchies (ruled by a small group of people). Today, however, many states have some form of democracy in which citizens hold political power.

Democracy is a form of government in which citizens hold political power; citizens are the ultimate source of government power and authority. The powers of a democratic government are usually limited by constitution. In a **direct democracy**, (ex: ancient Athens) citizens come together to pass laws and select citizens. In a **representative democracy**, (ex: United States) citizens elect representatives to make government decisions.



Figure 2 – Voting in a direct democracy could be crazy. In the Greek city-state of Athens, government decisions were chosen through a popular majority vote of all male citizens.

_____ A **monarchy** is a form of government in which the state is ruled by a *monarch*. A monarch is usually a king or queen and power is usually passed between members of the royal family. The powers of a monarch can be either limited or unlimited. For example, **absolute monarchs** (ex: Saudi Arabia) usually have unlimited power while **constitutional monarchs** (ex: Great Britain) are limited by law and share power with other branches of government.

An **authoritarian** government is one in which all power is held by a single person or a small group. The powers of an authoritarian government are usually unlimited with the government controlling all aspects of life for its citizens. One of the common forms of authoritarian government is

communism, (ex: North Korea) a political and economic system in which government owns all property and makes all economic decisions.

QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
What is the difference between states, city-states, and nation-states?	
How has the power of government changed in most states over the centuries?	
Which form of government relies most on its citizens? Explain your answer.	
What is the difference between direct democracy and representative democracy?	
Would it be easier to have a direct democracy in a large or small country? Explain your answer.	