

## Two Types of Democracy

Most democracies fall into one of two types, parliamentary or presidential. The primary difference between them is how each type organizes the three main branches of government: the legislative branch that makes the laws, the executive branch that carries out the laws, and the judicial branch (courts) which interprets the laws.

### Parliamentary Democracy

The most common form of democracy in the world is **parliamentary democracy**. In a parliamentary democracy, all three branches of government answer to the same body: the parliament. In fact, the executive branch and legislative branch are both part of the parliament. The leader of the government holds the title of **prime minister**.

Citizens do not vote directly for the prime minister. Instead they vote to elect their local representative or "member of parliament." Once parliament is in session, the members then elect a prime minister to lead the government. The prime minister chooses other parliament members to become part of the cabinet or executive branch of the government. The prime minister also appoints judges to the judicial branch, or court system.

The prime minister and cabinet are part of the parliament, so they answer directly to the legislature. This means that they stay in power as long as the legislature supports them. As such, the prime minister does not have a set "term of office." The prime minister and cabinet can be removed from power at any time through a "no confidence vote" of the parliament. When this happens, elections are held right away to choose new members of parliament who will elect a new prime minister and cabinet.

Since the entire government is controlled by one body (the parliament), one political party usually has all of the power in a parliamentary democracy.

In addition to having a **prime minister**, most parliamentary democracies also have a ceremonial "head of state" who may hold the title "president" or may be a powerless monarch. This person presides over formal functions but has no authority.

Many of the world's parliamentary democracies are modeled after the government of England. Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his Labour Party control the parliament there, while Queen Elizabeth II serves as head of state.

### Presidential Democracy

In a **presidential democracy**, the three branches of government are independent of one another and have separate powers. The leader of the government holds the title of **president** and is in charge of the executive branch. The legislative branch is usually called the **congress**.

Citizens vote directly to elect the president and also vote to elect local representatives to the congress. Judges of the judicial branch are appointed by the president and confirmed by the congress.

Each branch of government in a presidential democracy has limited powers to affect the other two branches. This is often called checks and balances.

Each member of the government serves for a certain number of years or "term of office" at which time the citizens vote to re-elect the official, or choose someone else. It is possible for an elected official to be removed from office before their term is up, but only possible if they commit a serious crime.

Since the congress and the president are elected separately, more than one political party may hold power in a presidential democracy.

In this system the president is both the head of the government and the head of state.

Many of the world's presidential democracies are modeled after the United States. President George W. Bush from the Republican Party currently controls the executive branch, while the Democratic Party controls both houses of Congress.

# Comparing & Contrasting Two Types of Democracy

Complete this Venn diagram using the information you learned in your reading.

