Who Holds Power?

Compare where government power rests and how leaders govern.

USG.C.1.4.A "Describe the structures of unitary, federal, and confederal systems, including contemporary examples of the presidential versus parliamentary systems."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline statements about where government power rests, and circle statements about how a national executive is chosen or stays in office.

Two Ways to Describe a Government

1 When a city needs money for a new train line, who can set the rules? The answer depends partly on how power is divided across levels of government. In a unitary system, the national government holds ultimate authority and may give local governments powers that it can later change. The United Kingdom is unitary: Parliament has granted powers to Scotland's government, but Parliament remains legally sovereign. In a federal system, a constitution protects powers held by both national and regional governments.

2 The United States and Germany are federal, though their rules divide responsibilities differently. In the United States, states exercise constitutional powers that Congress cannot simply cancel. A confederal system reverses the balance: member governments keep sovereignty and delegate limited powers to a shared body. The European Union resembles a confederation in some respects because its member countries retain their own governments and treaties assign powers to EU institutions. Yet the EU has stronger shared institutions than a classic confederation, so the label is imperfect.

3 Another question is how national leaders are chosen and held accountable. In a presidential system, a president leads the executive branch and does not need the legislature's confidence to remain in office. The United States combines this arrangement with federalism. In a parliamentary system, the government is formed from the legislature and must retain its confidence to govern. The United Kingdom and Germany use parliamentary systems, even though one is unitary and the other is federal. These two classifications describe different features of government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the United Kingdom's division of power differ from that of the United States?

2. Why does the passage call the European Union confederal-like rather than a classic confederation?

3. How does a parliamentary government's hold on office differ from a president's in the passage?

4. What do the United States and Germany show about the relationship between federalism and the choice of a presidential or parliamentary system?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a country. In three sentences, choose a unitary, federal, or confederal structure and a presidential or parliamentary system, then show who controls one public service and how the national executive gains or keeps office.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.1.4.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline statements about where government power rests, and circle statements about how a national executive is chosen or stays in office. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the United Kingdom's division of power differ from that of the United States?	**The UK Parliament holds ultimate authority and can change powers granted to regional governments. In the US, the Constitution protects powers held by states.**
2	Why does the passage call the European Union confederal-like rather than a classic confederation?	**Member countries retain their governments and assign powers to EU institutions by treaty, but the EU has stronger shared institutions than a classic confederation.**
3	How does a parliamentary government's hold on office differ from a president's in the passage?	**A parliamentary government must retain the legislature's confidence to govern. A president does not.**
4	What do the United States and Germany show about the relationship between federalism and the choice of a presidential or parliamentary system?	**Both are federal, but the US is presidential and Germany is parliamentary. The two classifications describe different features.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In Alder, a federal constitution gives provinces control over schools. Provincial lawmakers set graduation rules without needing permission from the national legislature. Alder has a parliamentary system: the legislature selects the prime minister, whose government must retain its confidence.

Accept any coherent pairing of a power-sharing structure and an executive system. The public service example must fit the stated division of power.