

## Unit 5: Political Institutions

### **5a: Identify the primary responsibilities of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.**

5a.1. The legislative branch of government proposes and enacts the laws by which the polity will be run.

5a.2. The executive branch of government carries out the laws decided upon in a polity, developing additional rules and procedures by which the policies and programs enacted by the legislative branch may be further detailed and carried out ('executed').

5a.3. The judicial branch enforces the laws and upholds the constitution of the polity, seeking to clarify necessary interpretations of laws and constitutional provisions and to conduct investigations through legal procedures of cases in which laws have been broken and/or constitutional provisions have failed to have been upheld.

See the discussion in *A Primer on Politics* on "[Legislatures](#)" for an overview of the three branches that are typically found in democratic systems of government.

### **5b: Compare and contrast federal and unitary government systems.**

5b.1. In a federal system of government, individual sub-units of the larger country or governed area are viewed as components with distinct powers of their own but only inasmuch as they fit into the federal structure, where a national (federal) government holds ultimate authority over them.

Confederations are more loosely structured systems where the members of the confederation retain certain key rights to decide their own affairs but subjugate themselves to the larger entity and cede certain rights to the confederated body.

5b.2. A unitary system of government may have multiple sub-units (geographical areas) included under its jurisdiction, but the central government has ultimate authority and the sub-units are to some extent replicas of the central governing body's organs and stature.

The section on [legislatures](#) also provides a look at the differences between unitary and federal systems of government. Which type of government seems most like to be able to act effectively to solve social and economic problems? Which might be more effective in dealing with national crises such as natural catastrophes or terrorist attacks?

### **5c: Illustrate the key differences between legislatures and parliaments.**

5c.1. A legislature is composed of elected officials, each representing a particular jurisdiction defined geographically.

5c.2. A parliament may be composed of elected officials as well as appointed or hereditary officials or members. Consider Saylor Academy's reading, "[Parliaments](#)," to gain a fuller understanding of the ways parliamentary systems of government differ from democratic systems based on legislatures.

**5d: Compare and contrast the executive branch of presidential and parliamentary systems.**

5d.1. In a presidential system of government, the president most often is the top-level official leading the construction of policies and the decisions of state.

5d.2. In a parliamentary system of government, the source of key governing power is the parliament itself, and the head of the government most often is a prime minister.

Not all presidential systems include many powers for the president. In some countries, presidents are chiefly ceremonial, and a prime minister controls most of the executive power. In the United States, however, the president plays many roles, including some of prime importance to the execution of laws and the leadership of the state. Read Boundless.com's "[The President's Many Roles](#)" to examine more closely the ways that the US president shapes domestic public policies and conducts foreign policy as well.

**5e: Identify the main features of administrative and bureaucratic systems.**

5e.1. Administrative systems are structures defined to carry out the laws made in the legislative branch and the policies defined by the executive branch.

A. Administrative rules and procedures are developed within the organs of the administration. These rules and procedures must be in line with the policies, programs, and laws developed and enacted in other parts of the government (e.g. the legislative branch and in the office of the executive leader of the government, whether that is the president or the prime minister or a coalition of governing officials).

5e.2. A bureaucratic system is a particular type of administrative system, where a carefully structured array of hierarchically ordered offices creates a network of persons whose responsibilities are to execute the specific laws and policies of a legislature and executive administrative leader.

**5f: Discuss the structure and organization of judicial institutions.**

5f.1. The structure of judicial institutions in a government is defined in broadest terms by the constitution itself, or in the case of a lack of a formal constitution, by the traditional rules and practices of the society for monitoring and ensuring compliance with the laws.

5f.2. Judicial institutions are organized differently in each country, based on the requirements set forth in the constitution and in the basic plans for governance of that country.

- A. A system of courts at the national level and any sub-levels (states, provinces, governorates, etc.) makes up the judicial branch of government.
- B. Police forces and civil security forces (such as a national guard) also are considered part of the judicial institutions of a country. They also are involved with enforcing the laws made by the legislative branch and executed by the executive branch.

### **Unit 5 Vocabulary List**

Branches of government  
Legislative  
Executive  
Judicial  
Federal system of government  
Federation  
Confederation  
Unitary system of government  
Legislature  
Parliament  
Presidential system of government  
Parliamentary system of government  
Administrative system  
Bureaucratic system  
Judicial institutions