

LESSON 3

GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

Governance is the system of practices and processes that a community or group uses to organize themselves and make decisions. Governance models determine who has authority or a voice in making decisions, how decisions are made and who is accountable for them. There are several different governance or leadership styles, such as autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire.

Autocratic governance, also known as authoritarian leadership, is characterized by one person having complete control over all decisions with minimal input from other group members. **Democratic** governance involves collective decision-making and the sharing of tasks and responsibilities, and leadership changes regularly with participation from many group members. **Laissez-faire** is the absence of an organized leadership style; there is no authority and group members are responsible for all community goals and decisions.

A **government** is made up of the people, institutions and practices put in place to manage the land, resources and people living within its borders. Various types of government exist in the world.

Governments can be compared by their governance model, the number of people who have access to power, and the rights and freedoms granted to citizens. There are three basic government types: autocracy, oligarchy and democracy.

An **autocracy** is a type of government where political power is concentrated in the hands of one person who rules without restriction. There is no rule of law and citizens are not consulted on the decisions and affairs of the country. An autocracy can be a dictatorship or an absolute monarchy.

In a **dictatorship**, the dictator or ruling group exercises power through control of a mass movement, a political party or the military (e.g., North Korea, Zimbabwe). Dictatorships often come to power through a military takeover (also known as a coup d'état). Power is then maintained without the consent of the people through a one-party state where political opposition is forbidden. Dictatorships generally restrict individual civil and political rights and there is no independent media.

The term **authoritarianism** is sometimes used to describe dictatorships. Authoritarian governments exercise forceful control over the population and with no particular concern for their preferences or for public opinion.

An **oligarchy** is a type of government where power rests with a small number of people, generally individuals who are rich and powerful, often due to family lines, wealth or prominent political or military connections (e.g., China, Venezuela). People living under oligarchic rule usually have some rights and freedoms. Similarly, an **aristocracy** is a form of governing where administration or power is in the hands of a special class of people. Aristocrats are connected to royal families through blood, whereas an oligarchy is not.

A **democracy** is a type of government where a majority of the people are included in political decision-making and citizens elect political representatives to make decisions on their behalf (e.g., Canada, United States of America). Citizens are also free to run for political office. In democratic countries, citizens have protected civil and political rights such as freedom of speech and religion, freedom of association, and the right to participate in free and fair elections. There are many different types of democracies around the world.

A **monarchy** is a form of government where a monarch (king or queen) or royal family holds political power that is inherited and usually lasts until death (e.g., Sweden, United Kingdom). The power of ruling monarchs can vary; in an **absolute monarchy**, a monarch (or dictator) retains full political power over a state and its people (e.g., United Arab Emirates), whereas in a **constitutional monarchy**, the role of the monarchy is more symbolic (e.g., Canada). In a constitutional monarchy, the authority of the monarch is severely limited by a constitution, which includes the principles and laws of a nation or state, defines the powers and duties of the government and guarantees certain rights to the people living within it. A constitutional monarchy has a democratically elected government with a government leader, and a monarch who remains the head of state and performs ceremonial duties.

A **republic** is a sovereign state, country or government without a monarch where all members of government are elected (including the head of state), and the democratically elected government holds all political power (e.g., United States, France). Similar to a constitutional monarchy, the government in a republic exercises power according to the rule of law and often has a constitution.

Canada's system of government is a **parliamentary democracy** and a **constitutional monarchy**. We elect members to represent us in our federal parliament and our provincial and territorial legislatures, and the political

party with the most elected representatives, forms government. The British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is our head of state, represented by the Governor General. Every act of government is done in the name of the Queen, but the authority for every act comes from the Canadian people through the Constitution. The Constitution of Canada is the highest legal ruling in the country and includes laws, decisions by judges, agreements between federal and provincial governments, traditions and our civil and political rights (the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*).

A **consensus democracy** uses a consensus decision-making model while developing legislation and aims to be more collaborative and inclusive by taking into account a broad range of opinions, as opposed to decisions made by majority rule. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut both have consensus governments where a group of individuals without any political party affiliation share political power.