

# **Citizenship Government and**





## Before You Read

Copy these statements into your notebook. Then, based on what you now know or think, write “Agree” or “Disagree” under each statement. When you have finished reading about government and citizenship, come back to your answers and change them if necessary.

1. The only reason governments exist is to make laws that tell us what we can and cannot do.
  2. All governments are democratic, which means that ordinary people are in control.
  3. Our right to say whatever we want to say is protected by the US Constitution.
  4. As citizens we do not need to know much about important issues, as they are decided by our elected representatives.
- .....



- **democracy**
- **constitution**
- **limited government**
- **separation of powers**
- **checks and balances**
- **representative democracies**
- **citizens**
- **citizenship**

## WHAT DO GOVERNMENTS DO?

Governments do many things that improve our daily lives. Yet we seldom stop to think about them. What is government? What does it look like? Here are some common scenes that show government at work:

- a police car with its lights flashing
- a school under construction
- a street repair crew at work
- a fighter jet soaring overhead
- a nurse entering a hospital
- a judge leaving a courthouse





## Focus Your Reading

- What do governments do that affects you?
  - What kind of government does the United States and Colorado have?
  - What are your rights and responsibilities as a citizen?
- .....

- a state senator voting on a new tax
- a park or a zoo

These everyday scenes describe some of the tasks governments perform. They include:

- enforcing the laws
- building schools and educating children
- providing public services
- defending the nation
- providing health services
- settling disputes
- making new laws
- providing recreation

Reflect for a moment. On a typical day, how does government affect your life? Make a list and share it with a partner.

In the United States, governments make decisions at different levels. The national government in Washington, DC, makes laws for all the people. It also protects the nation, prints money, and decides when to go to war. State governments provide services for citizens of that state. County and town governments make decisions only for the people who live at the local level. School districts are set up to govern a city's schools. Some rural areas have "service districts" that provide a single service. This may be fire protection, public safety, or water treatment. All levels are important, but here we will focus on Colorado's state government.

US Capitol





# Our Government at Work

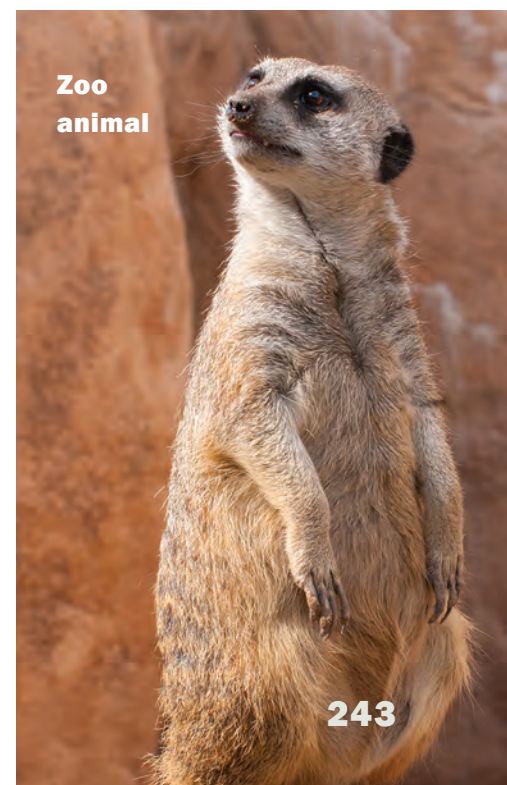
The House of Representatives chamber in the Colorado capitol building, Denver, Colorado



Policeman



Nurse



Zoo animal





**School bus**



**Street repair**



**Judge**



**Fighter jet**

# **Our Government at Work**



**Mesa Verde National Park**





**King George III of the United Kingdom**



**Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France**



**Joseph Stalin, Soviet dictator**

## WHAT KIND OF GOVERNMENT DO WE HAVE?

Not all governments are alike. The United States has a democratic form of government. So does Colorado. In a **democracy**, power comes from the people. Not all governments are democratic. In some governments, power is held by a single person. In the past, this person was usually a king, queen, or emperor. This type of government is called a monarchy. A government today that carries out the orders of a single person is called a dictatorship. When a small group of people hold power, the government is called an aristocracy. When these people are army officers, it is a military junta. Those governments do not govern with the consent or agreement of the people.

To create their democracy, Coloradans in 1876 used the US national government as their model. They have the following in common.



### While You Read

Read the section “What Kind of Government Do We Have” with a partner. Decide on a stopping point about halfway through. When you reach it, each partner must ask a question or state an opinion about either the government of the United States or the government of Colorado.

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## A Written Constitution

First, both are based on a written **constitution** or document. Some governments, such as Great Britain's, are based on many documents and court cases. A written constitution makes clear what powers people are giving to the government.

## Limited Government

Both governments are **limited governments**. That is, the powers given to the government are limited and clearly spelled out. The governments do not have powers that would violate people's rights, such as freedom of speech.

### US Constitution







White House

## Separation of Powers

A **separation of powers** also helps keep government power in check. This means that power is divided among three divisions, or branches, of government.

- **The Legislature.** At the national level, the legislature is called the US Congress. At the state level, it is known as the State Legislature. The legislative branch of government makes the laws. Congress also approves people the president appoints to important offices.
- **The Executive.** The executive branch of government carries out the laws made by the legislature. The president of the United States is the chief executive at the national level. The governor of Colorado is the head of our state executive branch.
- **The Judiciary.** The judiciary is made up of judges who work in courts to settle conflicts over laws and what they mean. They also decide whether laws





conflict with the US and the Colorado Constitutions. The highest level of the judiciary is the United States Supreme Court at the national level and the Colorado Supreme Court at the state level.

### Checks and Balances

A system of **checks and balances** further limits the government's power. While the legislature can pass a new law, the executive can veto or overturn it. The legislature helps keep the executive in check by voting to override a veto. The judiciary can balance the power of both by throwing out a law the US Constitution does not allow.

### Representative Democracy

Colorado and the national government are **representative democracies**. Voters do not go to the State House in Denver or to the nation's Capitol in Washington, DC, to vote on legislation. Instead, they elect representatives to vote for them.



**Citizens** of a democracy have both rights and responsibilities. A right is the freedom to do something the government cannot take away. The rights of citizens in all fifty of the United States are protected by the US Constitution. Among the most basic rights are:

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of religion
- Right to vote (by age eighteen)
- Right to own firearms
- Right to a trial by jury

## Rights and responsibilities of citizenship: Bill of Rights







**Rights and responsibilities of citizenship: a Colorado voter drops his election ballot at a ballot drop box**

Rights are important, but so are the responsibilities of citizenship. Responsibilities of citizenship are what we must do to use our rights wisely and to protect them. They include:

- To know your rights
- To keep informed about public issues
- To be aware of different points of view
- To discuss issues with others
- To listen to other points of view
- To volunteer time to public service
- To vote at election time
- To run for public office





Colorado capitol building  
with gold-leaf dome

## **CITIZENSHIP IN A DEMOCRACY**

Every citizen should be well informed about public issues. A public issue is a question or proposal that people disagree about. Why is it important to be well informed? Ordinary citizens do not decide most issues. They elect representatives to the US Congress and the State Legislature to do this for them. It is important because voters need to know how individuals running for office stand on public issues. Whether they share or do not share those views should help them decide for whom to vote. They also need to keep their elected representatives informed about issues that matter to them. Well-informed citizens make democratic government good government.



Here are public issues a well-informed citizen today should know about. Select one of these issues and find out as much as you can about it. Then outline your best argument for (Pro) or against it (Con).

## School Taxes

Should taxes be increased to provide more money for public schools?

**Pro:** schools need more money

**Con:** schools already have all the money they need

## Use of Fossil Fuels

Should the state discourage oil and natural gas drilling in Colorado?

**Pro:** fossil fuels contribute to global warming

**Con:** we need more oil and gas, which are Colorado's cheapest fuels

**Should oil drilling be encouraged?**







## Water Diversion

Should Denver and other cities be allowed to divert more water from the Western Slope?

**Pro:** growing cities need the water more than Western Slope farmers do

**Con:** taking water from the Western Slope is unfair and threatens fish and wildlife

**Should water be diverted from one region to another?**



## After You Read

1. Go back to the four statements you copied in your notebook before you read about government and citizenship. Based on what you knew then, you wrote “Agree” or “Disagree” under each statement.
2. Reread the statements and your responses. Do you want to change any of your responses based on what you have learned?

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