

Constitutional Democracies

Constitutional democracy is a form of democratic government in which a separation of powers is used to constitutionally establish a system of checks and balances in order to reduce risk of corruption. Constitutional democracy is based on a hierarchy of laws. The supreme form of law is the Constitution, to which all other laws passed by Parliament must conform. Parliamentary democracy, on the other hand, is based on the idea that Parliament is supreme, or sovereign in the law-making process.

Unlike the first genuine democracy in Greece, decisions in a constitutional democracy are not made by the *demos* or *people* directly but by their elected representatives. In many countries, such as the United Kingdom, referenda, the only means for a truly democratic decision, are non-binding.

A constitutional democracy is best regarded as one whereby the *demos* has some say in the government (such as by elections every 4 or 5 years) but does not control the government directly. However, by its very nature such a system of government inevitably makes it difficult for rulers to oppose significant public opinion - as they face losing any subsequent election. The powers of the government are limited by the constitution, in which minority rights, political equality and freedom of choice are supposed to be respected.

Constitutional democracies are commonly organized into the unitary, federal or confederate systems. In a unitary system,

central government has most power, which it may allocate to the lower levels of government. In a federal system, law-making power is allocated between the central authority and the constituent units. In a confederation, a league of independent states, which retain full sovereignty, agrees to allow a central authority to perform certain functions, but the central government may not make laws applicable to individuals without the approval of the member states.

List of countries with a constitutional democracy

Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Finland, France, Germany (since May 24, 1949 for West Germany) (since October 3, 1990 for the unified Germany), Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Panama, Poland (since May 3, 1791), Portugal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Suriname, Turkey, United States of America (since March 4, 1789)