

Limiting Government

Name: _____

Limiting Government? What's the Big Deal?

Sometimes you might hear people talking as if government is an evil monster. Are they overreacting? Are there reasons to fear government? Whose side is government on, anyway? Throughout history, there have been governments that had too much power and ended up abusing that power. They limited people's freedom, mistreated people, and even committed mass murders. In some places, that still happens today. Government isn't evil—but the people who run governments do need to be kept in check so they can't abuse their power. There are several ways to limit government power.



From 1926-1943, Benito Mussolini ruled Italy as a dictator with total control of the government.

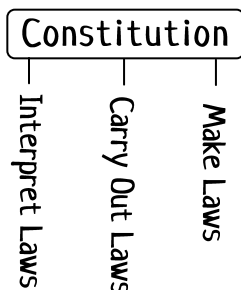


A Constitution

A **constitution** is the rulebook for a country's government. A constitution usually explains what kind of government a country has and how that government functions. It also tells how a country's laws are made, and it explains the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Most modern countries have written constitutions.

The Rule of Law

The **rule of law** means laws are fair, they're enforced, and nobody is above the law. When a country has the rule of law, even the government must follow the law. The law applies to everyone—even the president! Citizens feel secure that the government can't just do what it wants, and there are procedures in place to make sure the law is enforced.



Separation of Power

Separation of power is dividing power among several branches of government. By dividing up the power, a country can make sure that no one person or part of government gets too much control. Separation of power works because each branch of government is able to "check," or limit, what the other branches can do. Each branch is responsible for a different government function.

Consent of the Governed

When you give your consent, you are giving permission. The **consent of the governed** means that the citizens of a country give their permission to be governed by the country's government, and they do this by voting. Citizens have the right to vote, and they can use their vote to change the government. By voting, citizens can even change the constitution!



Rights of the Minority

In a system where the citizens *are* the government because leaders are elected by voting, limiting government also means limiting the power of the majority. In voting, the majority rules. It would be possible for the majority to treat a minority group unfairly. Protecting the **rights of the minority** means protecting the rights of small or unpopular groups regardless of what the majority believes. Everyone must be treated fairly.

Alberto Fujimori: Power in Peru

New President, Big Ideas

In 1990, a man came to power in Peru who would do things that would shock the world. Peru is a large country in South America. Like the United States, Peru has a constitution that creates a government with a president, a congress, and a judicial system. But in the 1990s, something happened in Peru that has never happened in America.

Alberto Fujimori was born in Peru after his parents emigrated from Japan. When Peruvians elected him to be their president in 1990, he was very popular. Peru had huge financial problems, and Fujimori had ideas for making Peru more prosperous. He also had ideas for dealing with a group of terrorists that had been causing problems in the country. But Peru's Congress was filled with lawmakers who opposed Fujimori, and they refused to pass any of his ideas into law.



Fujimori after his election in 1990

Fujimori Takes Control

On the night of April 5, 1992, Fujimori took matters into his own hands. He went on television and told Peruvians he was "temporarily dissolving" Congress and that he would "reorganize" the judicial branch. There was only one problem: Peru's constitution did not give Fujimori the power, as president, to do these things. But Fujimori had a solution for that. He used military tanks and tear gas to keep Congress from meeting. He arrested people who disagreed with him, and he also arrested popular journalists and businessmen. Just to be safe, he even arrested the man who had been president before him.

And then Fujimori set his sights on Peru's constitution. He issued a decree, or presidential order, saying the constitution could be ignored. His decree also got rid of Congress and gave the president the power to make all the laws. Fujimori then fired almost half of Peru's 23 Supreme Court justices, as well as many other judges around Peru who believed his actions were unconstitutional.



Fujimori with some of his military and government leaders

The Autocrat Falls

Having secured control of Peru's government, Fujimori now had no trouble carrying out his ideas. He solved Peru's financial crisis, and he successfully dealt with the terrorists that had taken control of several parts of the country. These and other actions made him popular.

But that wasn't all Fujimori did. With no independent judicial system, thousands of suspected terrorists were killed without ever having a trial. On top of this, scandal broke when one of Fujimori's government officials was caught smuggling drugs, stealing government money, interfering with elections, and selling weapons to terrorists in other countries.

Fujimori went to Japan to hide from the scandal. The scandal allowed Fujimori's opposition to gain control, and government in Peru was restored. Later, Fujimori was sentenced to six years in prison for abusing his power and 25 years for human rights abuses in Peru.



Peruvian newspapers announce Fujimori's 25-year prison sentence for human rights abuses