Governments in the Middle East
A unitary government system is one in which the central government holds nearly all of the power.

In a unitary system, local governments such as state or county systems may have some power, but they are under the control of the central government.

That central government has the power to change the way state or county governments operate or abolish them altogether.
Some unitary governments have elected officials, who, once elected, may make and enforce laws without taking the opinions of those at lower levels of government into consideration.

A monarchy, where a king and his advisors make most of the decisions, would be a good example of a unitary government.

Some of the countries in Southwest Asia have unitary forms of government.

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy and is an example of a unitary system of government.
Confederation Government

- A confederation government system is one in which the local governments hold all of the power and the central government depends on the local governments for its existence.
- The central government has only as much power as the local governments are willing to give.
- Examples of confederations that can be found among the countries of Southwest Asia would include the League of Arab States or the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).
A federal government system is a political system in which power is shared among different levels of government.

Here power is divided into national governments and state governments.

In Southwest Asia, the country of Israel is an example of a federal form of government.
An autocratic government is one in which the ruler has absolute power to do whatever he wishes and makes and enforces whatever laws he chooses. Individuals who live under autocratic governments do not have any rights to choose leaders or vote on which laws are made and put into practice. Some autocratic governments may allow the people rights in certain areas like managing local affairs, but the central government keeps control of all the most important aspects of the country’s life.
In an autocratic system, people usually have little or no power to use against the government if they disagree with decisions that government or ruler has made. There are many different kinds of autocratic governments. A monarchy such as Saudi Arabia, where the king has ultimate power is one example.
An oligarchy means “government by the few.”

In this form of government, a political party or other small group takes over a government and makes all of the major decisions.

The people of the country have little choice but to go along with the decisions they make.
Oligarchy Participation

- This sort of government can be very similar to an autocratic government.
- There are several countries in Southwest Asia that might be described as oligarchies.
- Iran could also be described as an oligarchy, because a small group of religious and political leaders makes many of the important decisions.
Democratic Participation

- In a democratic government system, the people play a much greater role in deciding who the rulers are and what decisions are made.
- “Democracy” comes from the Greek word “demos,” which means “people.”
- In this form of government, a great deal of power is left in the hands of the people.
- People who live in a democracy generally recognize that there must be some rules to organize society, but the goal is to leave as much individual freedom as possible.
Democratic Participation

- Decisions are often made by majority votes, but there are also laws in place to protect individual rights.
- If a person living in a democracy feels his rights have been violated, he has the power to ask the government for help in correcting the situation.
- Among the countries of Southwest Asia, Israel is a good example of a democracy.
- Those organizing the new government of Iraq are hoping to establish a democratic system in that country as well.
In a parliamentary form of democratic government, the people vote for those who represent the political party they feel best represents their views of how the government should operate.

The legislature they elect, the Parliament, makes and carries out (enforces) the laws for the country.

The party that wins the majority of representatives in the legislature usually chooses the leader of a parliamentary form of government.

This leader is often called a Prime Minister or Premier and is recognized as the head of the government.
The Prime Minister leads the executive branch of the government and must answer directly to the legislature for the actions and policies recommended.

In many parliamentary governments there will also be a “Head of State” who is more of a ceremonial leader.

The country of Jordan in Southwest Asia is a constitutional monarchy.

The King serves as Chief of State and he has a Prime Minister who is appointed to consult with the monarchy.
In 1979, the Islamic, or Iranian, revolution overthrew the monarchy that had ruled Iran for centuries.

Today, Iran is a theocratic republic.

This means that the government is based on religious principles and the wishes of its people.

The head of state is the Supreme Leader, who is always an ayatollah, or recognized religious authority.
The Supreme Leader is chosen by the Assembly of Experts and holds the position for life.

The Assembly consists of 86 religious scholars.

The people elect the Assembly and the president by popular vote.

The president governs based on the religious guidance of the ayatollah.
The president can serve two terms of four years each.

Iran’s legislature is called the Consultative Assembly.

Citizens eighteen and older can vote for the 290 members of the Assembly.
Israel

- Israel has a parliamentary democracy.
- The head of state is the president, who actually does not have much power.
- The Israeli prime minister is the head of government.
- The legislature elects the president.
The president then chooses the head of the largest political party to be the prime minister.

The prime minister must organize a coalition to govern.

A coalition is a group of several different political parties that have to cooperate in order to make decisions.

This type of government is known as a coalition government.
Israel

- The Israeli legislature is called the Knesset.
- The Knesset holds most of the power in Israeli government.
- The Knesset consists of 120 members.
- Israelis eighteen and older elect these officials by popular vote.
Saudi Arabia

- Saudi Arabia’s government is currently changing.
- The government is a monarchy governed by Islamic Sharia Law.
- In 2004, however, the Saudi government began allowing men who are 21 and older to vote for half of their local officials.
- Men can also vote for one-third of the members of the legislature.
Saudi Arabia

- The head of state is not elected.
- Saudi kings are both heads of state and heads of government.
- The king has a cabinet called the Council of Ministers.
- The Council mostly consists of members of the royal family.
The Saudi legislature is called the Consultative Council.
There are 120 members of the Council.
There is also a Council chairman.
The king chooses two-thirds of the members of the Council.
Council members serve terms of four years.
Religion and Southwest Asian Governments

- Religion plays an important role in Southwest Asian governments.
- Countries like Iran based their systems of government on religion.
- Religion is important even in countries that don’t base their governments on religion.
Religion and Southwest Asian Governments

- Many political parties in Southwest Asia are religious in nature.
- Many parties represent different branches of Islam.
- Since the majority of the people in the region are Muslim, religion also influences the way people vote in popular elections.
Summary

- Describe each of the countries' governments that are in the notes.