

Worldbuilding Governments

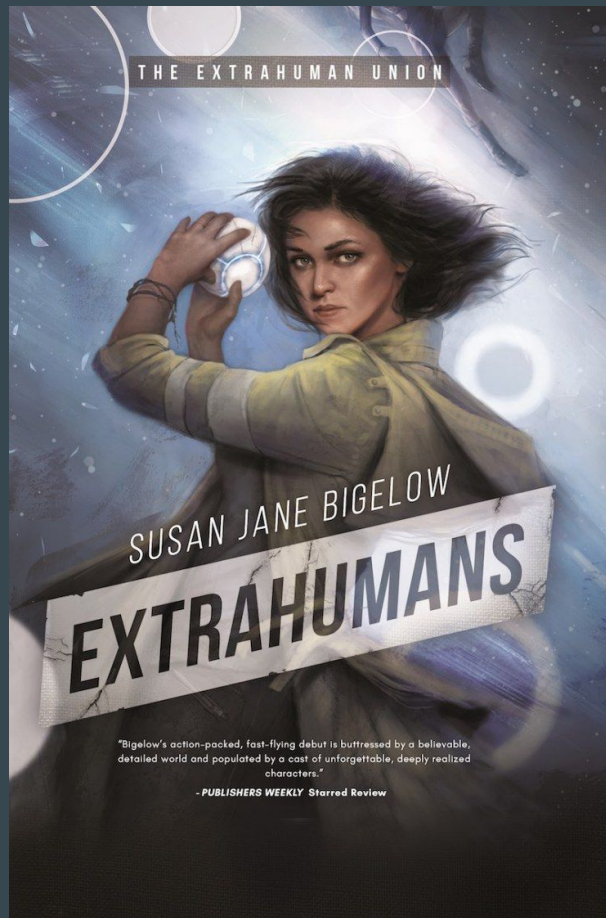
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How hard can it be?

Susan Jane Bigelow - Readercon 2018

About me

- Political columnist
- Recovering political blogger
- Author of 8 books and numerous short stories
- Librarian and general nerd



Let's get started!

Activity #1: Name a government from speculative fiction that either seems very realistic or seems very improbable!

Possible answers:

- Republic/Imperial Senate (Star Wars)
- Panem (Hunger Games)
- Whatever is going on in LOTR
- Federation Council (Star Trek)
- IngSoc in Oceania (1984)
- Ministry of Magic (Harry Potter)

So you want to create a government. why?



What do governments actually do?



The Basics:

- Security
- Infrastructure
- Justice/courts
- Foreign relations
- Regulation

What else do governments actually do?

The not-so-basics:

- Health care
- Education
- Social services
- Nationalization of industry/services
- Public transportation
- Science/research
- Commerce/trade



What forms can governments take?

- Monarchies
- Representative democracies
- Collective decision-making, like a New England town
- Cults of personality
- Autocracies
- Oligarchies, ruled by rich and powerful
- Theocracy, religious government
- Police states
- Traditional/tribal
- Anarchies





How do governments go bad?

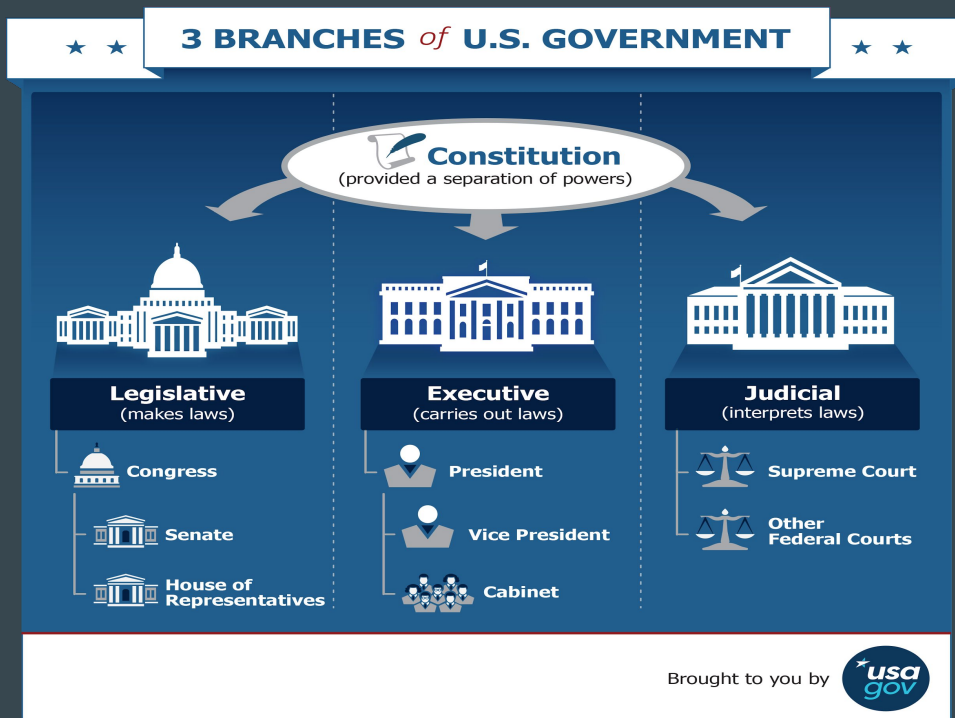


- Surveillance state
- Arbitrary exercise of power
- Corruption
- Decisions driven by fear
- Political prisoners
- Powerful police
- Cults of personality
- Suffocating control of everything
- Rule of law vanishes
- No accountability
- Body counts

Government alignment chart

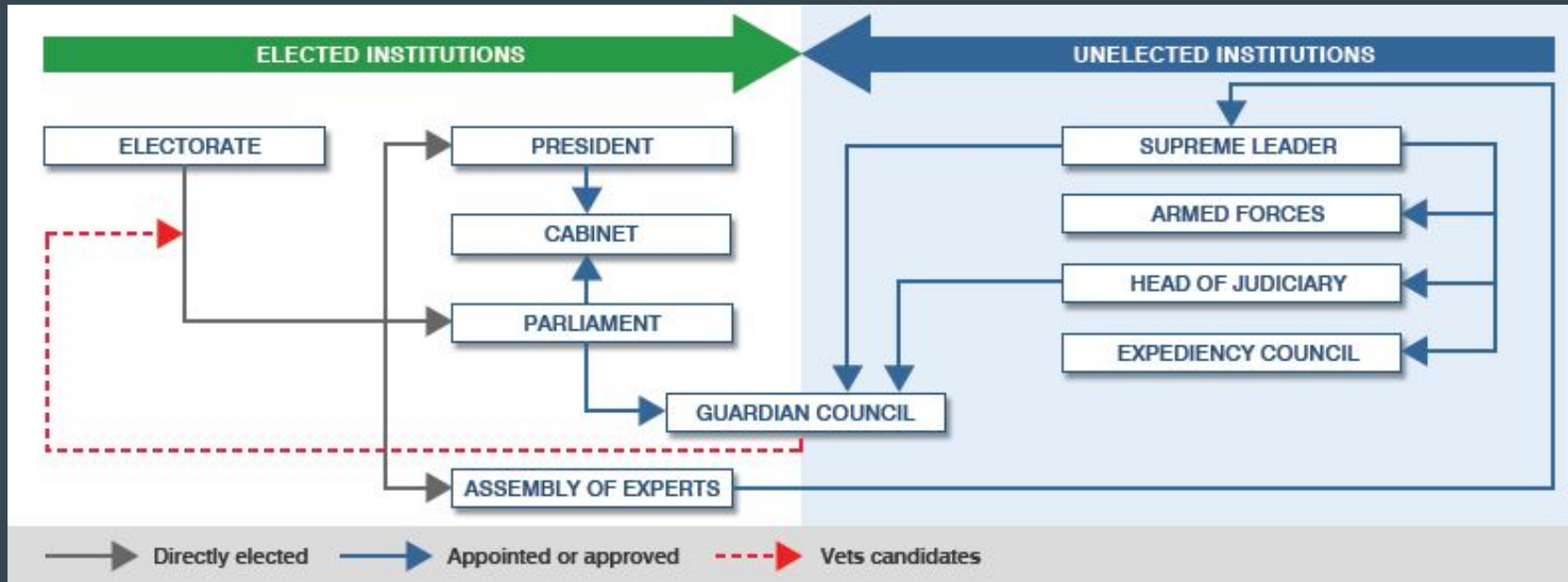
 <p>Lawful good</p>	<p><i>Representative democracy/ Republics</i></p> <p>Neutral good</p>	<p><i>True democracy</i></p> <p>Chaotic good</p>
<p><i>Constitutional monarchy</i></p> <p>Lawful neutral</p>	<p><i>Traditionalist Oligarchy</i></p> <p>True neutral</p>	 <p>Chaotic neutral</p>
<p><i>Police/military state Autocracy Theocracy</i></p> <p>Lawful evil</p>	 <p><i>Repressive authoritarianism Totalitarianism Fascism</i></p> <p>Neutral evil</p>	<p><i>Personality cults/ Stalinism Unstable tyranny</i></p> <p>Chaotic evil</p>

Government structures



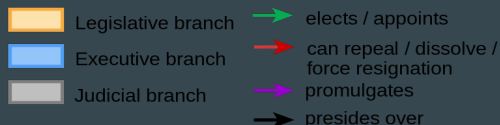
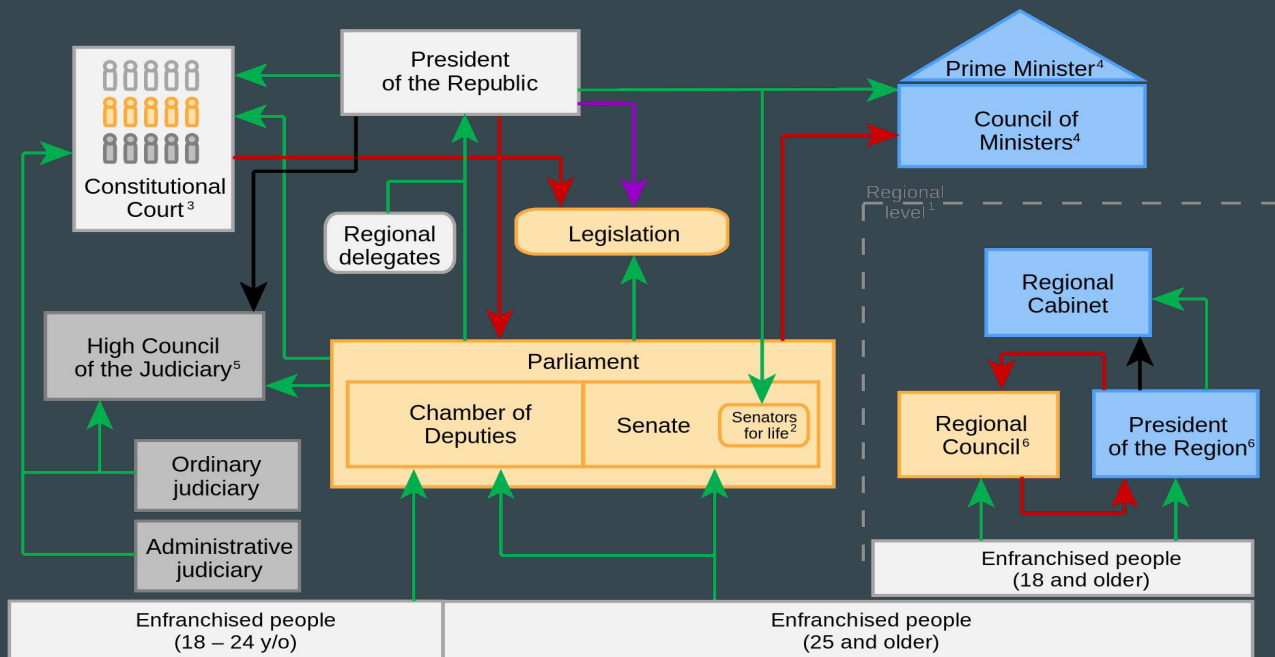
Government structures

Iran



Government structures

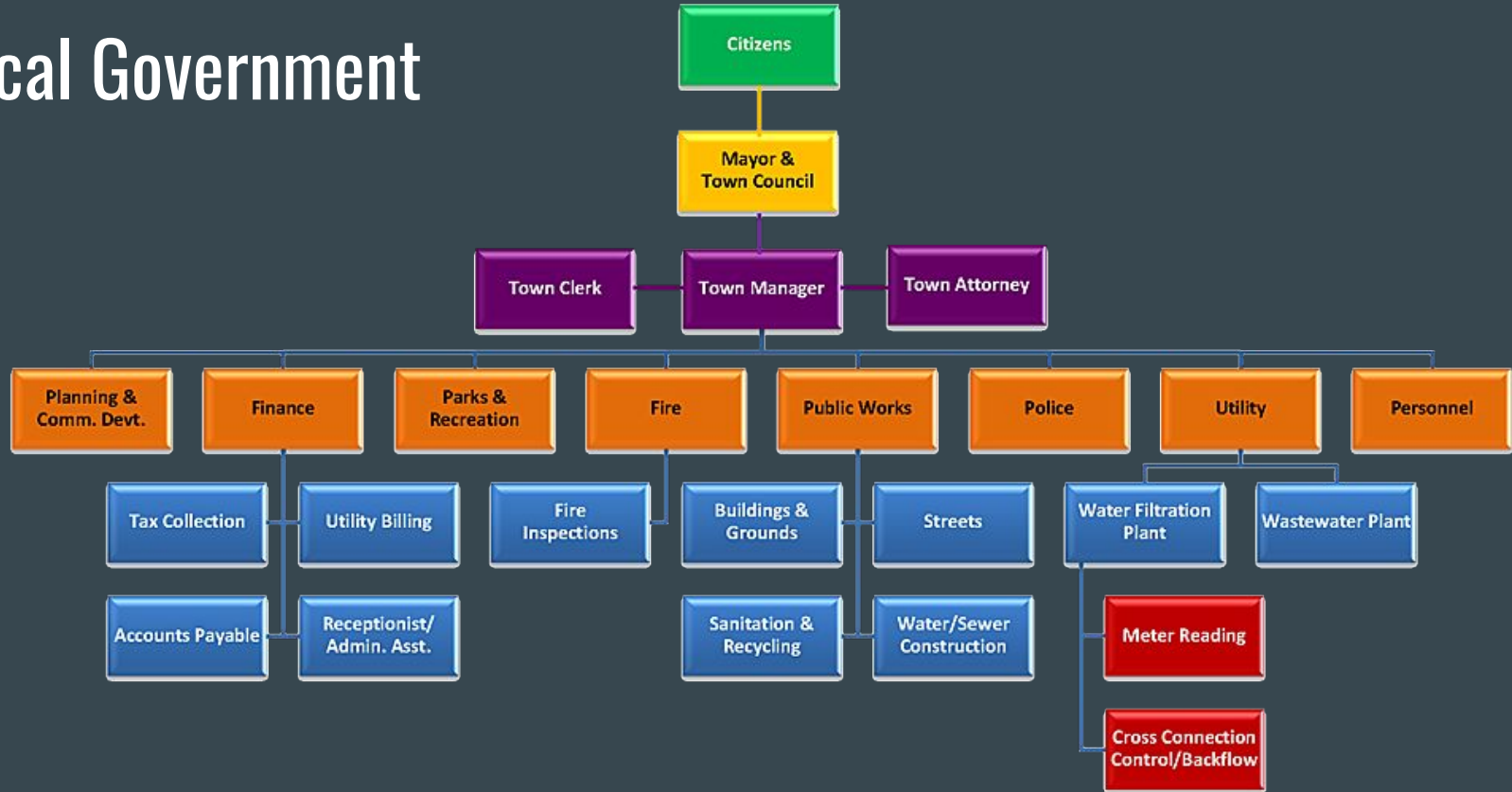
Italy



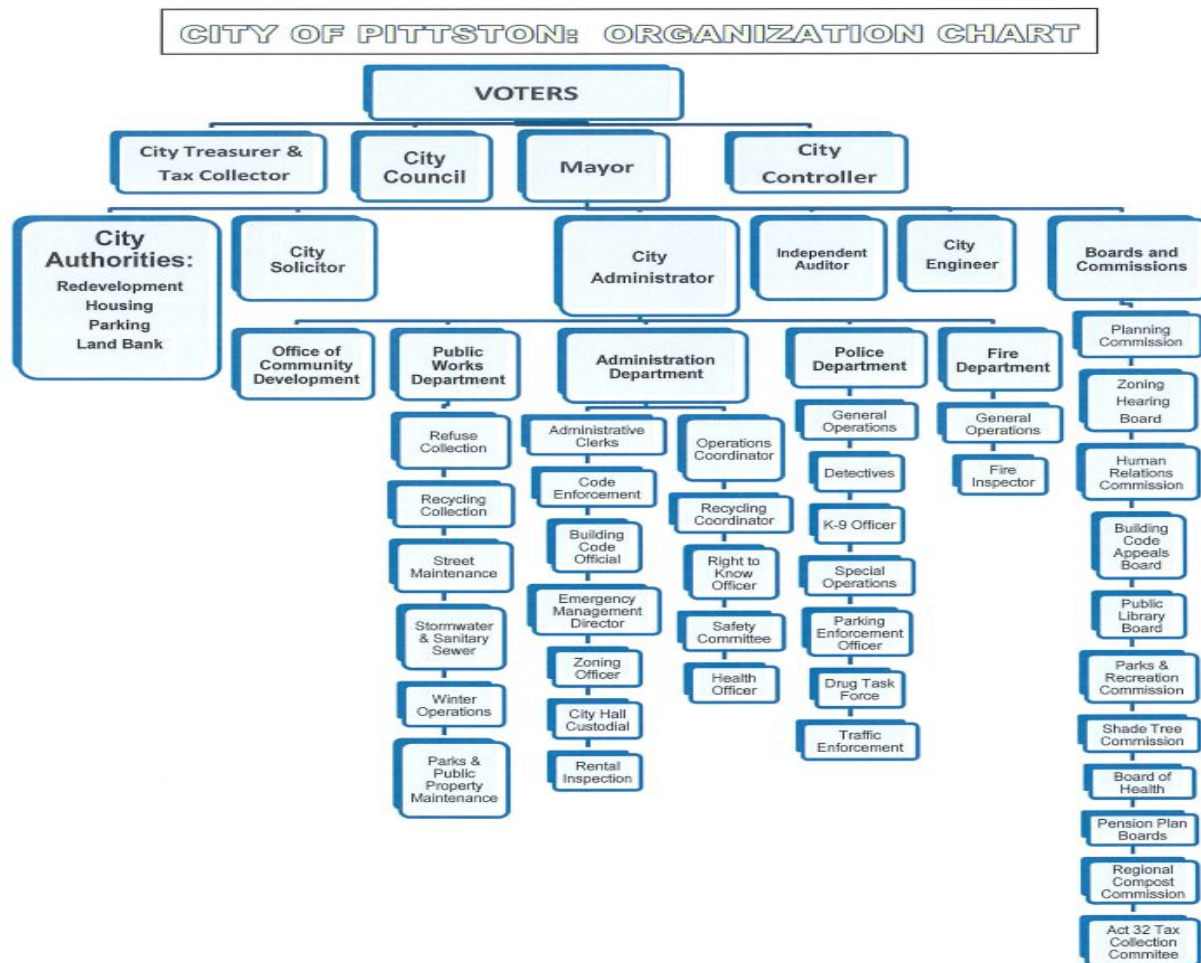
- 1: The system of Trentino-South Tyrol differs.
- 2: The President of Italy may appoint up to 5 senators for life. Former Presidents are *ex officio* senators for life.
- 3: 5 judges elected by the Parliament, 5 appointed by the President of Italy, 5 elected by the three highest Courts.
- 4: The Government must win a vote of confidence. The Parliament can force the Government or individual Ministers to resign at any time.

- 5: Self-governing body of ordinary magistrates. Elected for 2/3 by ordinary magistrates and for 1/3 by the Parliament, plus 3 *ex officio* members.
- 6: The Council can force the President to resign at any time. If the President or the majority of members of the Council resign new elections must be held for both.

Local Government

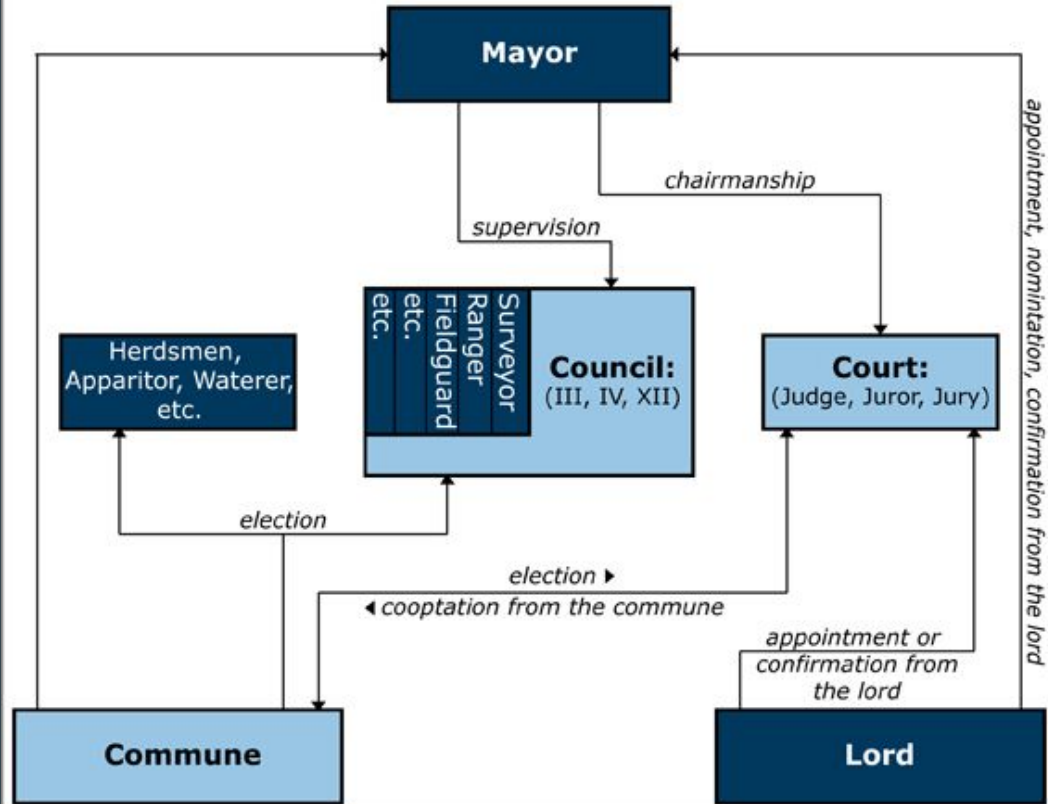


Local Government

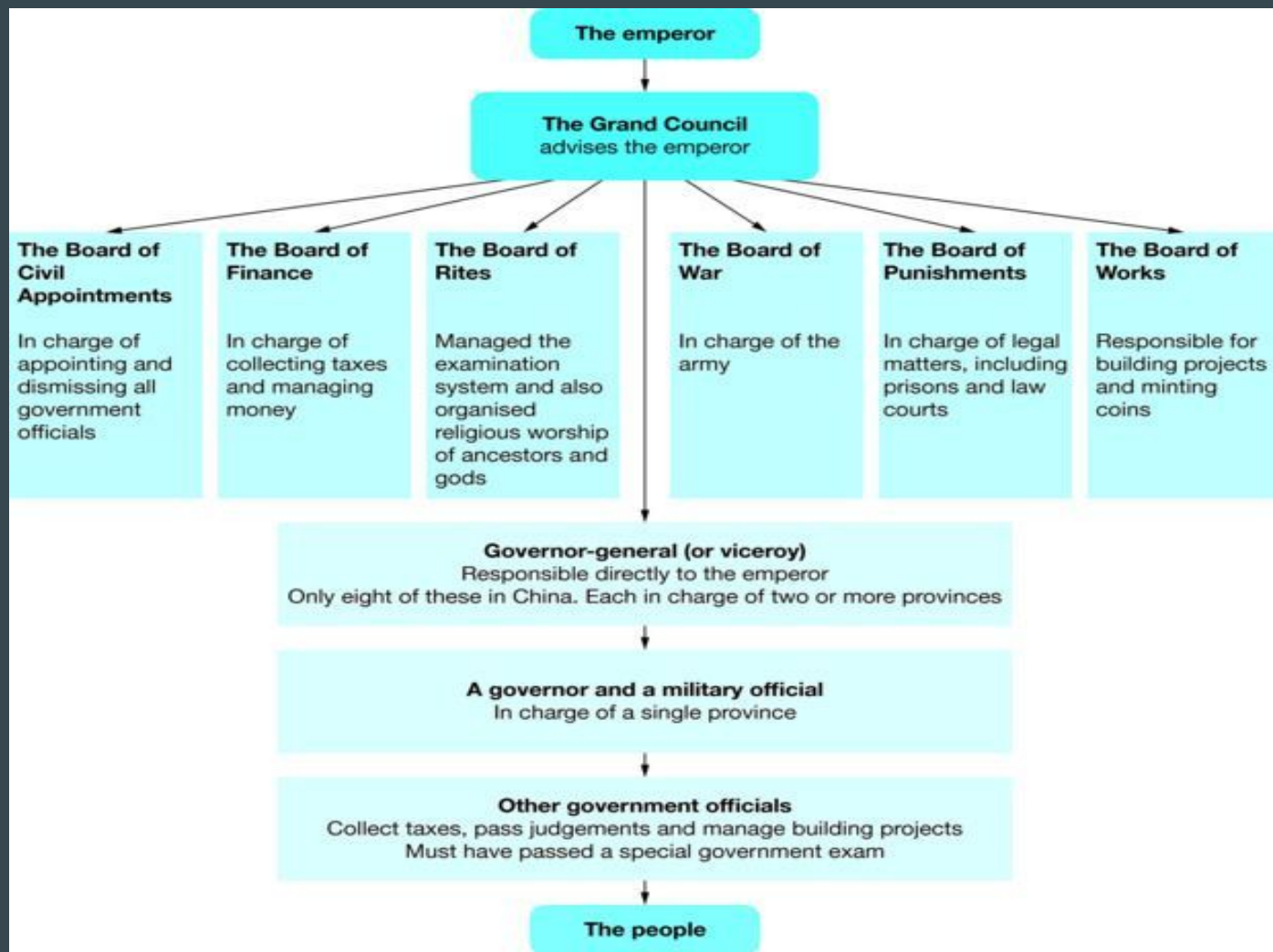


Historical Government Structures

Government of a Late Medieval Village



Historical Gov't Structures



Worldbuilding Governments

So how do we create governments for our stories?

Here are some questions to consider....

Government and story

- Is government an antagonist? Neutral-ish? Helpful? Omnipresent?
- Are there changes happening in the government that matter to the story?



- How is your government visible in the story?
- How does the government or lack thereof affect the characters and the plot?
- Are you going for verisimilitude, idealism, or dystopia? Why does it matter?
- What services are provided by government that might influence the story?

Government and setting

- Is this a historical, future, sideways, parallel dimension, fantasy, or completely off-the-wall setting?
- How does history influence the government and the story? How did things get to be the way they are?
- Are there certain conditions, like war, famine, dragons, etc., that might influence how the government works?
- What are politics like?
- How do people feel about the government?
Is there unrest? Rebellion? Peace?



Government and character

- How do your characters feel about the government?
- Do your characters participate in government in any way? Are they disenfranchised? Do/can they vote? Run for office?
- What power does the government have and/or lack over the characters?
- What is interacting with the government like at any level, from police to politicians to the DMV? (or *RMV, yes, I see you Massachusetts*)



Example: Country of Gideon and the Novan Commonwealth

Country of Gideon

- Theocratic parliamentary democracy
- “Family voting:” Only the head of household may vote (in practice always male)
- The Church of Gideon is represented in the Parliament, women are not
- “Women’s Council,” an “advisory” body, addresses women’s affairs
- Government imposes travel and communications restrictions
- Government is strong in the cities, less so in the countryside
- There is a lot of unrest simmering beneath the surface between fundamentalists and progressives
- Deeply distrusts the Commonwealth

Example: Country of Gideon and the Novan Commonwealth

Novan Commonwealth

- Parliamentary democracy, *de jure* planetary government of Nea
- Consists of delegations from all of the countries of Nea (~300)
- Has limited power to interfere in the internal affairs of any country (see: first Novan Civil War)
- Arbitrates disputes between countries
- Imposes some regulations on trade and travel
- Is the only body empowered to deal with extraplanetary affairs
- Has its own interplanetary military and trade fleet
- Can create Commonwealth citizens attached to no specific country
- Agonizes over Gideon but has no power to change them

Activity

Let's create! You may work with a partner or by yourself.

Directions:

1. Think up a setting--it could be one you've already made, a generic SFF world, or something entirely new.
2. Using the questions posed in the previous slides, create a basic government at the national, state/provincial, or local levels.
3. Be ready to share!

Questions? Comments?

Email me whenever!

susanbigelow@gmail.com

Twitter: @whateversusan

<http://www.susanjanebigelow.com>

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