



Wonder of the Day #1627

## What's the Difference Between a Prime Minister and a President?

Listen

28 Comments



**SOCIAL STUDIES** – Government

### Have You Ever Wondered...

- What's the difference between a prime minister and a president?
- Can a country have both a president and a prime minister?
- Which position is usually elected by the popular vote of the people?

What do you want to be when you grow up? Some kids want to be a fireman or a police officer. Others may set their sights on becoming a doctor or a lawyer. Still others may set their sights as high as they can go. No regular job will satisfy them. They want to be the leader of an entire country!

Of course, what they want to become will depend upon where they live. Kids in the United States would want to become President of the United States one day. But what about kids in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, or India? Kids in those countries would want to become Prime Minister.

So what's the difference between a president and a prime minister? Are they just different words for the same thing? Or are there real differences between these positions of power?

The title president and prime minister are rarely interchangeable terms for the same position. The differences between the two, however, can vary greatly depending upon which countries you're trying to compare.

For example, President Obama of the United States and Prime Minister May of the United Kingdom have different duties and responsibilities despite being considered the leader of their countries. Some countries, such as France, have both a president and a prime minister.

Although the differences between the positions can vary greatly from country to country, there are a few generalizations that can be made. For example, a president is usually considered a head of state, whereas a prime minister is usually a head of government.

As a head of government, a prime minister usually leads the operations of the government. As head of state, the president acts as the chief public representative of the country and often performs many ceremonial duties such as welcoming foreign dignitaries to the country when they visit. In many countries, the president is the commander-in-chief over the armed forces.

Another major difference is how a person gets to be either president or prime minister. For the most part, presidents are elected by the people. Prime ministers, on the other hand, tend to be members of a legislature that chooses them to be its leader.

The exact powers and duties of either a president or a prime minister will depend upon the particular country they serve, as well as the system of government and laws in that country. For example, a prime minister in a country that also has a president will often have fewer powers than a prime minister in a country in which a monarch is the head of state.

This Wonder of the Day<sup>®</sup>  
is proudly sponsored by



## Wonder Contributors

We'd like to thank:

Jordan for contributing questions about today's  
Wonder topic!

Keep WONDERing with us!

## Wonder Words (18)

VARY, TITLE, DUTY, HEAD, STATE,  
PEOPLE, WIELD, COUNTRY,  
POSITION, POWER, MONARCH,  
ELECTED, INTERCHANGEABLE,  
RESPONSIBILITY,  
GENERALIZATION, DIGNITARIES,  
AUTHORITY, LEGISLATURE

## Wonder What's Next?

You'll really want to sink your teeth into tomorrow's Wonder of the Day!

## Try It Out

Are you ready to lead? Give it a try! Find a friend or family member to guide through the following activities:

Think about the country in which you live. Does your country have a president or a prime minister? Or does it have both? Do some research if you need to in order to learn more about the type of government that exists in your country. Share what you learn with a friend or family member.

Based upon what you learned in today's Wonder of the Day, would you rather be a president

or a prime minister? Why? Think of at least three reasons to support your opinion. Share that opinion and your reasoning with a friend or family member. Do they agree with you? Why or why not?

What do you think about the fact that some government officials are appointed rather than elected by popular vote? Do you believe all government officials should be elected by popular vote? Why or why not? What would the benefits of such a system be? Can you think of any drawbacks to electing every single government official?

## Wonder Sources

<http://www.wisegeek.org/what-is-the-difference-between-a-president-and-a-prime-minister.htm>

<http://www.differencebtw.com/difference-between-president-and-prime-minister/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head\\_of\\_state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_state)

This Wonder of the Day<sup>®</sup>  
is proudly sponsored by



<http://wonderopolis.org/wonder/whats-the-difference-between-a-prime-minister-and-a-president>

SHARES