

UNIT 2

Forms of Government

CHAPTER 4

Correlates with SS7CG1a; SS7CG3a;
SS7CG4a

AUTOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY

Citizen Participation

In a **democracy**, citizens have many ways to express themselves and participate in the government process. Why? Because a democracy is all about making the voice of the people heard!

Voting is one of the main ways citizens participate in a democratic government. Voting allows citizens to assert their power over what the government does and the laws it makes. Free elections, held every few years, ensures that power is passed peacefully from one political leader to another, when citizens vote to do so. Voting is both a right and a responsibility.

Citizens can also participate in the government of a democracy by running for political office, petitioning the government, and voicing their opinions in many different media outlets.

Autocracy

Who Has the Power?

One leader or party has unlimited power to rule.

Voting?

Voting is usually not allowed.

Rights & Freedoms?

Citizens' rights and personal freedoms are often limited or taken away.

Democracy

Who Has the Power?

The people and their elected representatives.

Voting?

The right to vote is given to all eligible citizens.

Rights & Freedoms?

Citizens' rights and personal freedoms are protected by law.

Citizenship participation is a very different story in an **autocracy**. Citizens have little to no role in choosing the government's leaders. Instead, one ruler (dictator) or single political party holds unlimited power. In general, dictators rule by force and are unwilling to give up power without war or other political violence.

Autocratic governments limit citizens' rights and freedoms, or deny them entirely. People are not allowed to express their ideas and opinions freely, especially if criticizing the government. The same is true for the press. Newspapers, radio, television, Internet, and other media sources are often censored to remove content that the government does not want citizens to hear. In some cases, citizens can be fined, jailed, or even killed for speaking out against the government.



Key Concept Check-Point

L6-8RH2; L6-8RH4

For each pair of statements, determine which describes an autocracy (A) and which describes a democracy (D).

Who holds power?

- The people (citizens) hold power.
- One ruler or leader holds power.

Citizen Rights & Freedoms

- Citizen's rights and freedoms are limited.
- Citizen's rights and freedoms are protected by law.

Participation in Government

- Citizens have little choice in who leads the government.
- Citizens typically vote to elect leaders in government.
- Citizens have many opportunities to participate in government.
- Citizens have few opportunities to participate in government.

Categories Are Not Always Clear!

The truth is that most governments are not entirely democratic or entirely autocratic. Most governments fall somewhere in-between. It all depends on how much power and freedom the people have to participate in the government!



Critical Thinking

L6-8RH2; L6-8RH6

Read about the government of Iran, a country in Southwest Asia (Middle-East). Make a list of ways in which it is democratic. Make another list of ways in which it is autocratic. Then discuss this question: "Is Iran's government more democratic or more autocratic?"

Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran's government includes many elected representatives. Both men and women in Iran have the liberty and responsibility to vote at the age of 18. Every 4 years, citizens elect the president, as well as representatives to Parliament. Citizens also elect religious leaders to the Assembly of Experts.

However, Iran's government is heavily influenced by Islam. Religious leaders in the Assembly of Experts are responsible for appointing the nation's Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader guides Iran's political decisions by the teachings of Islam. The Supreme Leader serves for life and has more political power than Iran's president. The Supreme Leader also oversees Iran's judicial system, radio and television stations, and military and police forces.

Iran's constitution guarantees certain personal freedoms and rights for citizens. However, the laws of Islam limit some rights. For example, citizens are allowed to choose their employment, as long as it is not against Islamic belief. Citizens are given freedom of the press, except when what is printed is damaging to the government. If a person disagrees with the government, he or she could be arrested for treason. Additionally, women have far fewer rights than men.

Did You Know?

Iran's government is a special type of government called a "theocracy."

In a theocracy, government laws and actions are heavily influenced by religious beliefs. Many of the government's top officials are religious leaders.