

UNIT 2

Forms of Government

KEY

Correlates with SS6CG1a; SS6CG2a;
SS6CG3a; SS6CG4a

CHAPTER 4

AUTOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY

Government & Its Citizens

What is a government exactly? A **government** is a body with the power to make laws, enforce those laws, and interpret the laws when disagreements arise. A government also oversees the general welfare of its people.

Who Gets to Participate?

One way to classify a government is by its level of citizen participation.

Are citizens allowed to vote? Can citizens run for political office? Can citizens voice their ideas and opinions freely without punishment?

The answers to these questions can help you determine whether the government is more autocratic or more democratic.

Autocratic and democratic governments are complete opposites!

Autocracy

"Rule by One"

One leader holds all power, often by inheritance or by using military force.

Citizen Participation

Citizens have little to no opportunity to participate in the government process. Citizens typically do not have the right to vote. In addition, citizens' rights and freedoms are often limited or unprotected by the law.

Democracy

"Rule by the People"

The people hold the supreme power. Citizens exercise their power directly or by electing representatives to govern for them.

Citizen Participation

Citizens have many opportunities to participate in the government process. Usually citizens exercise their power by voting for officials to represent them. In addition, citizens' rights and freedoms are often protected by the law.

L6-8RH4

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Make Your Voice Heard in a Democracy!

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

Voting is one of the main ways citizens participate in the government of a democracy. **Voting allows citizens to assert their power over what the government does and the laws it makes.** Free elections, held every few years, ensure 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 newspapers, on television, and in other media sources.

Protected Rights & Freedoms

Most democratic governments guarantee certain rights and freedoms to their citizens.

Examples include:

- Freedom of Speech
- Freedom of the Press
- Freedom of Religion
- Right to Assemble
- Right to Petition
- Equal Civil Rights

These rights ensure that the government cannot stop citizens from expressing their opinions, ideas, and beliefs, even when criticizing government leaders.

Stifled Opinions, Muffled Voices in an Autocracy

Citizenship participation is a very different story in an **autocracy**.

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 they are criticizing the government. **In some cases, citizens can be fined, jailed, or even killed for speaking out against the government.**

The **press** also has their freedoms **limited by autocratic governments.** Newspapers, radio, television, Internet, and other media sources are often **censored to remove content that the government does not want citizens to hear.**



Vocabulary

censorship: the act of limiting what people can hear, see, or say in the media

Writing Prompts

L6-8RH2; L6-8WSHT4

You are an American newspaper reporter on assignment in a country with an autocratic government. You have just witnessed citizens being injured and arrested for peacefully protesting against the government. Write a blog post comparing that scene with a similar peaceful protest in the United States.