

Alexander

Name _____

Directions: Read, define vocabulary, ask questions, summarize, and cite evidence with your group using the following text.

Comparing governments: democracy vs. authoritarianism

No two governments, past or present, are exactly the same. However, it is possible to categorize different forms of government. This involves examining the similarities and differences among political and economic systems. One simple way to categorize governments is to divide them into democratic and authoritarian political systems.

Democracies

Many countries today claim to be democracies. However, if the citizens are not involved in government and politics, they are democratic only in name. Some governments are more democratic than others. Systems cannot be considered truly democratic unless they meet certain standards. They are freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of religion.

Democracies in general respect these basic individual liberties. No government allows absolute freedom, but democracies do not heavily censor newspapers and public expression of opinions.

A democracy has majority rule with minority rights. In democracies, people usually accept decisions made by the majority of voters in a free election. However, democracies try to avoid the "tyranny of the majority" by providing ways for minorities to have their voices heard as well.

Also, political leaders have varied personal backgrounds. Democracies usually leave room for many different types of citizens to compete for leadership positions. In other words, presidents and legislators do not all come from a few elite families, the same part of the country or the same social class.

A democracy requires free, competitive elections. The presence of elections alone is not enough to call a country a democracy. They must be fair, and there must be multiple viewpoints represented.

The elections must be fair and competitive, and the government or political leaders cannot control the results. Voters must have real choices among candidates who run for public office.

Rule by law is also crucial to a healthy democracy. Democracies are not controlled by the whims of a leader, but they are governed by laws that apply to leaders and citizens equally.

Democracies need meaningful political participation by citizens. By itself, a citizen's right to vote is not a good measure of democracy. The government must respond in some way to citizen demands. If they vote, the candidate they choose must actually take office. If they contact government in other ways — writing, protesting, phoning — officials must respond.

The degree to which a government meets these standards is the degree to which it can be considered democratic. Examples of such governments include Great Britain, France, Japan and the United States.

Authoritarian Regimes

One ruler or a small group of leaders have the real power in authoritarian political systems. Authoritarian governments might hold elections and they might have contact with their citizens, but citizens do not have any voice in how they are ruled. Their leaders do not give their subjects free choice. Instead, they decide what the people can or cannot have. Citizens, then, are subjects who must obey, and not participants in government decisions. Kings, military leaders, emperors, a small group of aristocrats, dictators and even presidents or prime ministers may rule authoritarian governments. The leader's title does not automatically indicate a particular type of government.

Authoritarian systems do not allow freedoms of speech, press and religion. They do not follow majority rule nor protect minority rights. Their leaders often come from one small group, such as top military officials, or a small group of aristocratic families. Examples of such regimes include China, Myanmar, Cuba and Iran.

No nation falls entirely into either category. It is dangerous to categorize a nation simply by the moment in time during which it was examined. The Russia of 1992 was very different from the Russia of 1990. It is important to remember that both democratic and authoritarian governments change over time, meaning that the global mosaic is uncertain and complex.

Source: www.newsela.com

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Comparing governments: democracy vs. authoritarianism

Directions: Cite evidence using the text to answer each of the following prompts.
Answers must be written in complete sentences unless otherwise stated to receive full credit.

According to the text, what three freedoms are found in true democracies and are these principles found in authoritarian governments?

Explain the following sentence in your own words: "A democracy has majority rule with minority rights."

Compare the election process in a democracy to the election process in an authoritarian system.

What is considered "meaningful political participation by citizens" in a democracy? Is there the same representation in an authoritarian system? Explain your answer.

List 4 countries that are democracies. List 4 countries that have authoritarian governments. (Does not have to be a complete sentence)