

Democracy is more likely to succeed in countries where most people are educated, which is the motivation behind free public schools in most democratic nations. Democracy is not possible without a strong civil society. Civil society is made up of a complex network of voluntary associations—economic, political, charitable, religious, and many other kinds of civic groups.

The United States has thousands of such groups—the American Red Cross, the Humane Society, the Sierra Club, the National Rifle Association, churches and temples, labor unions, and business groups. These civic groups exist outside government, but government may support them in some way. It is through these organizations that citizens often organize and make their views known. Such groups give citizens a way to take responsibility for their communities, protect their rights, learn about democracy, and participate in it at the grassroots level.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Describing How do oligarchies differ from monarchies?

Principles of Democracy

GUIDING QUESTION *What principles are central to democracies?*

A number of countries call their governments “democratic” or “republics” when they are not. Their leaders may want to convey the idea that the people support those in power, but it is clear that their government **institutions** do not meet the definition of a democracy. The government of North Korea, for

institution establishment, practice, or social organization

MAP

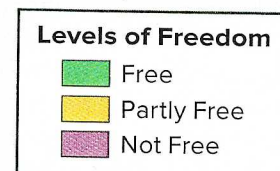
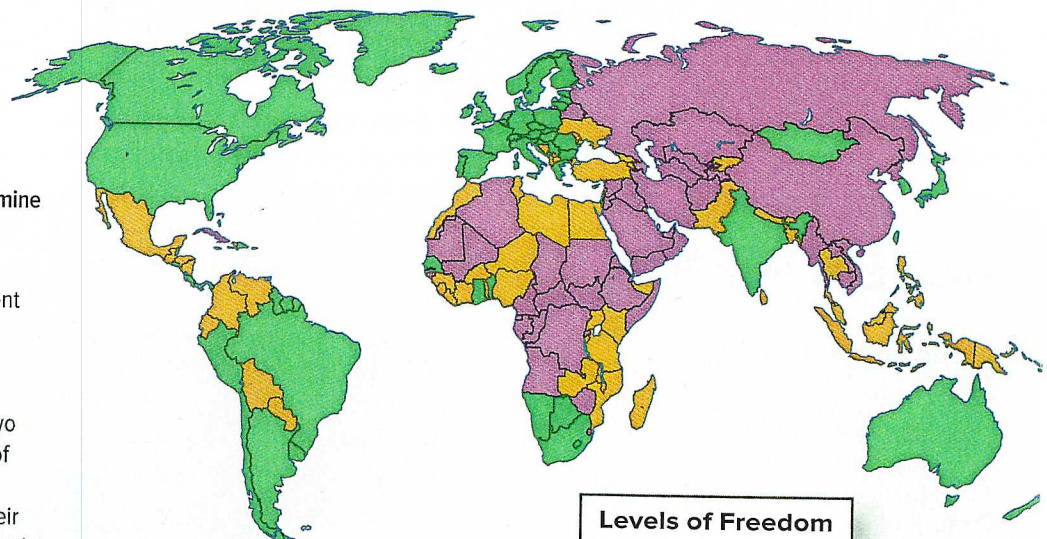
LEVELS of FREEDOM

Freedom House does an annual assessment of countries to determine which are truly democratic.

CRITICAL THINKING

1. Reading Maps Which continent is the “most free”? Which is the “least free”? What do you think accounts for the difference?

2. Interpreting Together with two other students, visit the website of Freedom House to find out what criteria they use. Then analyze their assessment of the United States and two other countries that interest your team. When you complete your research, create a continuum in your classroom with “democratic” on one end and “authoritarian” on the other. Choose one country you researched and stand along the line to show how democratic it is. Give reasons to support why you put the country where you did along the continuum.



SOURCE: Freedom House

example, is called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, but it is actually a totalitarian dictatorship. While no democracy is a perfect democracy, there are certain principles that guide them.

Citizen Participation One of the most basic principles of a democracy is citizen participation in government. Participation is more than just a right—it is a duty. Citizen participation may take many forms, including becoming informed, debating issues, voting in elections, attending community meetings, being members of private voluntary organizations, serving in the military or the national guard, paying taxes, serving on a jury, running for office, and even protesting. Effective citizen participation builds a stronger democracy.

Regular Free and Fair Elections One way citizens express their will is by electing officials to represent them in government. In a democracy, elections are held regularly, usually every few years. Elected officials must be chosen by the people in a free and fair manner. Most adult citizens should have the right to vote and to run for office—regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, and level of wealth. All votes should be counted equally. Additionally, obstacles should not exist that make it difficult for people to vote. There should be no intimidation, corruption, or threats to citizens before or during an election.

Accepting the Results of Elections In elections, there are winners and losers. Occasionally, the losers believe so strongly that their party or candidate is the best that they refuse to accept that they lost an election. Assuming an election has been judged “free and fair,” ignoring or rejecting election results violates democratic principles. Democracy depends on a peaceful transfer of power from one set of leaders to the next, so accepting the results of a free and fair election is essential.

The Rule of Law In a democracy, no one is above the law—not even a king, elected president, police officer, or member of the military. According to the rule of law, everyone must obey the law and will be held accountable if they violate it. Laws are known by the people and are equally, fairly, and consistently enforced.

Majority Rule With Minority Rights Democratic societies make most decisions according to what the majority of the people want. However, people in democracies are also concerned about the possibility of “the tyranny of the majority.” This can occur when people in racial, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups do not agree with the dominant view and lack any power to influence government. If the people in the majority try to destroy the rights of people in minority groups or those with minority viewpoints, then they also destroy democracy. Consequently, democracies are politically tolerant. In democracies, people who are not in power are allowed to organize and speak out.

Accountability In a democracy, elected and appointed officials are responsible for their actions and have to be accountable to the people. Officials must make decisions and perform their duties according to the will and wishes of the people they represent, not for themselves or their friends.

Transparency For government to be accountable, the people must be aware of the actions their government is taking. A transparent government holds public meetings and allows citizens to attend or learn what happened in meetings. In a democracy, the press and the people are able to get information about what decisions are being made, by whom, and why.

PARTICIPATING

IN Your Government

Deliberating

Deliberating is a way to understand and carefully consider both sides of a controversial issue and identify areas of agreement between opposing sides. During a deliberation, participants in groups first advocate for one side of an issue, explaining all of the best reasons to support that position. Then they switch roles and advocate for the other side of the issue by listing all of the best reasons to support that side. After both sides have received a fair hearing, participants drop their assigned roles and discuss the issue, trying to reach some consensus in their small group.



EXPLORING THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- a. **Determining Importance** Why is it important that people in a democracy are able to discuss controversial issues in a civil way?
- b. **Making Connections** Think of an issue about which you disagree with a friend or family member. Are you able to list the reasons your friend or family member disagrees with you? The next time this issue comes up, try to listen to the other side carefully and understand the reasons given, even if you do not agree with them.

Limited Government and a Bill of Rights Most democratic countries have a list of citizens' rights and freedoms. Often called a "Bill of Rights," this document limits the power of government and explains the freedoms that are guaranteed to all people in the country. It protects people from a government that might abuse its powers. When a Bill of Rights becomes part of a country's constitution, it is easier for courts to enforce and harder for a government to take those rights away.

Control of the Abuse of Power One of the most common abuses of power is corruption, which occurs when government officials use public funds for their own benefit or exercise power in an illegal way. To protect against these abuses, democratic governments are often structured to limit the powers of government officials. For example, the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government have distinct functions and can "check and balance" the powers of the other branches. In addition, independent agencies can investigate and impartial courts can punish government leaders and employees who abuse power.

Economic Freedom People in a democracy must have some form of economic freedom. This means that the government allows some private ownership of property and businesses. People are allowed to choose their own work and to join labor unions. The role the government should play in the economy is debated, but it is generally accepted that democratic government should not totally control the economy.

Equality In a democracy, all individuals should be valued equally and should be free from unreasonable discrimination. Individuals and groups maintain their rights to have different cultures, personalities, languages, and beliefs. All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law. In democracies, individuals and groups have political rights to advocate for equal rights.

Individual or Human Rights Human rights are the rights all people have simply because they are human beings. Democracies respect and protect the dignity of all people. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights spells out many human rights. Many of these rights are reflected in the individual rights that democratic governments preserve, such as the U.S. Bill of Rights. Examples include, but are not limited to, the freedom of movement, religion, speech, and assembly.

Independent Judiciary In democracies, courts and the judicial system should be fair and impartial. Judges and the judicial branch must be free to act without influence or control from the executive and legislative branches of government. Judges should also not be corrupt or obligated to influential individuals, businesses, or political groups.

Competing Political Parties A political party is a group of individuals with broad common interests who organize to nominate candidates for office, win elections, conduct government, and determine public policy. To have a democracy, more than one political party must participate in elections and play a role in government. Rival parties make elections meaningful because they give voters a choice of candidates and policies.

 **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

Analyzing Why is citizen participation an important principle of democracy?

EXPLORING THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Applying Create a poster or multimedia presentation that explains and illustrates at least three principles of democracy. For each, include an image of that principle working or an image of that principle not working. For example, you could explain the idea of control of the abuse of power and show either a public official being impeached or in handcuffs or a picture of a government official accepting a bribe. Explain your choices.

LESSON 2 REVIEW

Reviewing Vocabulary

1. **Applying** Why is the United States a republic and a democracy?

Using Your Graphic Organizer

2. **Summarizing** Use your graphic organizer to write a paragraph analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of different systems of government, including unitary, confederate, and federal systems.

Answering the Guiding Questions

3. **Explaining** How is a federal system of government different from a unitary or confederate one?

4. **Contrasting** How is a constitutional government different than a country without a constitution?

5. **Contrasting** What are the differences between authoritarian and democratic governments?

6. **Identifying Central Issues** What principles are central to democracies?

Writing About Government

7. **Argument** Choose a principle of democracy that you feel is most essential to a democratic form of government. Write a paragraph explaining what this principle is and why it is essential. Include examples that support your choice.