

# 1 Governance and Democracy

## OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about different types of government around the world to better understand the principles of democracy.

## KEY WORDS

government, autocracy, dictatorship, oligarchy, aristocracy, democracy, theocracy, constitutional monarchy, representative democracy, democratic principle

## QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- What is the role of government?
- What types of government exist around the world?
- How do other forms of government compare to democracy?
- What are some key principles of democracy?
- Why is democracy important?

## SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 1: Governance and Democracy
- Video 1: Government and Democracy
- Handout 1.1: Principles of Democracy
- Worksheet 1.2: What are the Principles of Democracy?
- Worksheet 1.3: Who Should Decide?

## TEACHING STRATEGIES

### Hook: 15-20 min

1. Split the class into three groups and have them sit together. Assign an actual or hypothetical decision (e.g., desk arrangements, theme for a school dance, charity fundraiser) and ask each group to brainstorm ideas for a few minutes. Provide enough time to allow all students to share their opinion.
2. Now assign each group one of the following decision-making models and ask them to make a final decision based on the rules given. These decision-making models are based on real types of government found throughout the world.

Group A – Only one person (i.e., the first person on the class list) will make the decision (autocratic)

Group B – Only a select few (i.e., only males or females) may be involved in the decision-making process (oligarchic)

Group C – All group members will have an opportunity to have a say in the decision-making process (democratic)

3. While groups are working out their decisions, observe how each group is functioning and make mental note of engagement among those with power versus those without, interactions among members and length of time to make the decision. This will help bolster lively discussion afterwards. (Alternatively, you can ask one student to be the observer in each group and take notes.)

*Teacher Note: Group A may become unruly as most members of the group will lack a voice — but this will make for a productive discussion afterwards.*

4. Bring the groups back together and ask each to describe their experience. Ask each group to mention their thoughts on the following discussion questions:
  - How quickly was a decision made?
  - Did everyone agree with the decision?
  - Was the decision-making process fair?
  - How happy were you with the decision made? Why?
  - What kind of feeling developed within the group?
  - How engaged were all members in the activity?

### Instruction: 5-15 min

Various types of government exist in the world and they make rules and decisions for their people in different ways. Governments can be compared by how they share power and the types of rights and freedoms given to citizens.

*Teacher Note: Show Video 1 or use PowerPoint 1 to summarize the different government types to students.*

a) An autocracy or dictatorship is a type of government where one person has full control through the use of a party or military, without the consent of the people. Autocratic countries have limited individual rights and freedoms, with a high level of security and restricted media. Human rights abuses are common. These countries are usually one-party states where there is little or no political opposition (e.g., Syria, North Korea).

b) An oligarchy, or aristocracy, is a type of government where power rests with a small number of people, generally individuals who are rich and powerful (often due to family lines or wealth). People living under oligarchic rule usually have some rights and freedoms (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait).

c) A democracy is a type of government where power is held by all the people and citizens are meant to participate equally in making decisions. Citizens elect people to represent them in government and make decisions on their behalf. This is called a representative democracy. Citizens also have access to power and can run for political office. In democratic countries the people have protected rights and freedoms such as the freedom of speech and religion, and free and fair elections (e.g., Canada, the United States, Japan, England).

d) A theocracy is a form of government where a god or deity is recognized as the supreme civil ruler. Government policy and leaders are determined by religious officials who are seen to be directly guided by a god or deity. Laws are interpreted by religious authorities, such as bishops or mullahs, and are enforced by religious officials (e.g., Iran, Vatican City).

#### Discussion: 5-10 min

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of government? Consider the following and relate it back to the Hook activity.

- The process for making decisions and laws (time, cost and efficiency)
- The fairness and effectiveness of the decision-making process
- The ability of citizens to live their lives freely
- The feelings developed among citizens

#### Activity: 35-45 min

1. Introduce Handout 1.1 and explain that there are several guiding principles that act as the foundation of a democracy.
2. Divide students into pairs or small groups and assign each group one or two principles of democracy. Give students 10 to 20 minutes to familiarize themselves with their principle(s) and design a brief presentation to inform the rest of the class about their principle(s). Students can design a poster, symbol or graphic, create a skit, or provide actual examples that demonstrate the principle working or not working. Make chart paper available for any visual or written material.
3. Give each group 1 to 2 minutes to present. During the presentations have students take notes on Worksheet 1.2.

*Teacher Note: Afterwards, post the presentations around the classroom for future reference.*

#### Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a brief closing discussion about governance and democracy. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection in their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- What does democracy mean to you?

- Is there a better system of government than democracy?
- Are there some countries that operate under the guise of a democracy?
- Why does a healthy democracy rely so heavily on citizen participation?

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. To further explore the advantages and disadvantages of decision-making models in a range of scenarios, assign students Worksheet 1.3. Discuss the answers as a class and debate the choices where applicable.

B. Use media and news stories to discuss global struggles to participate democratically (e.g., overcoming violence to vote, long lines at polling stations). In pairs or groups, have students choose a topic, search for a clip and present it to the class. Key discussion questions: What do these struggles signify? Does it make you appreciate our ability to vote in Canada?

C. Investigate the events of the ‘Arab Spring,’ which began in 2010 and ended in 2012. What happened? How and why did it happen? What is the current status of those affected nations, several years later?

D. As a class or in groups, have students debate the principles of democracy and evaluate the health of our democracy today. Defend your answers by providing examples of where a principle is or is not working (e.g., citizen participation in elections, multi-party systems, abuse of power, transparency). Do we, as Canadians, need a refresher in the principles of democracy?

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

##### *What is government?*

Government is made up of the people and institutions put in place to run or govern a country, state, province/territory or community. The role of government is to make decisions and laws for the people for whom it is responsible. The purpose of government is to protect its citizens and provide services.

##### *What types of government exist?*

Different systems of government exist around the world. They are distinguished by how they are formed, the allocation of power and by the types of rights and freedoms given to their citizens.

An autocracy, or dictatorship, is a type of government where one person has full control without the participation or permission of the people. The leaders or dictators often force their way to power because they were associated with or related to the previous leader. Autocratic countries generally have limited individual rights, freedoms and civil liberties. There is usually a heavy military presence and the media is limited on what it can report on. Examples include Syria and North Korea.

An oligarchy, or aristocracy, is a type of government where power rests with a small number of people, generally individuals who are rich and powerful (often due to family lines or wealth). People living under oligarchic rule usually have some rights and freedoms. Examples include Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

A democracy is a type of government where power is held by all the people and citizens are meant to participate equally in making decisions. Citizens elect people to represent them in government and make decisions on their behalf. This is called a representative democracy. Citizens also have access to power and can run for political office. In democratic countries the people have rights and freedoms such as the freedom of speech and religion, and free and fair elections. Examples include Canada, the United States, Japan and England.

A theocracy is a type of government where a god or deity is recognized as the supreme civil ruler. Government policy and leaders are determined by religious officials who are seen to be directly guided by a god or deity. Laws are interpreted by these religious authorities, such as bishops or mullahs, and are enforced by religious officials. Examples include Iran and Vatican City.

*What type of government do we have in Canada?*

Canada is a parliamentary democracy, which is a type of representative democracy. It is also a constitutional monarchy; the Queen, our head of state, holds symbolic power. A constitutional monarchy can be either a democracy or an autocracy.

*What is a principle? What are the principles of democracy?*

A principle is a fundamental belief or rule of action. There are several principles that act as the foundation of a democracy. Most democratic countries exhibit some or all of these principles, including equality and respect for human rights, economic freedom, a bill of rights, the rule of law, control of the abuse of power, free and fair elections, multi-party systems, citizen participation, accountability and transparency, an independent judiciary, political tolerance and accepting the results of elections.

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Government Type, CIA World Factbook — [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)
- Libya begins election amid violence, Al Jazeera (June 25, 2014) — [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com)
- Ukraine votes in presidential poll amid fears of violence, France24 (May 25, 2014) — [www.france24.com](http://www.france24.com)
- Iraqis vote amid looming threat of violence, Al Jazeera (April 30, 2014) — [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com)
- Zimbabwe voters stand in long lines for crucial election, The Associated Press (July 31, 2013) — [www.ap.org](http://www.ap.org)
- Florida's Long Lines On Election Day Discouraged 49,000 People From Voting: Report, Huffington Post (December 29, 2012) — [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)