Who Holds Power?

Compare rulers, lawmakers, and limits across time.

USG.C.1.2.A "Compare historic and contemporary examples of unlimited systems of governments (e.g., monarchy, oligarchy, theocracy, autocracy) to examples of limited systems (e.g., direct democracy, constitutional republic, constitutional monarchy)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline who makes political decisions in each system, circle checks on that power, and label each system U for unlimited or L for limited.

A Crown Does Not Tell the Whole Story

1 In seventeenth-century France, Louis XIV ruled as an absolute monarch. He inherited the throne and ruled for life. He could issue royal orders and choose ministers, and he did not answer to a regularly meeting elected legislature. The Estates-General, an assembly of representatives from social groups, did not meet during his reign. Louis still faced pressures from nobles, courts, custom, and money shortages, so "unlimited" does not mean every wish came true. Today, Saudi Arabia is also a monarchy with power concentrated in the king. Its appointed Shura Council advises on policy, but voters do not elect a national legislature with authority to remove the king.

2 In the United States, a constitutional republic, voters choose members of Congress, and the president cannot choose Congress or remain in office for life. The Constitution divides authority among Congress, the president, and the courts. Congress passes laws, and courts can rule that laws or executive actions violate the Constitution. The president is limited to two elected terms. The United Kingdom offers another limited system, a constitutional monarchy. Its monarch is hereditary, as in Saudi Arabia, but elected members of Parliament make laws and a prime minister leads the government. The monarch does not govern alone.

3 A different limited system appeared in ancient Athens. In the fifth century BCE, eligible citizens voted directly on decisions in an assembly instead of electing representatives to make every decision for them. Courts could challenge certain public decisions. Women, enslaved people, and resident foreigners could not take part, so this was not democracy for everyone. Athens differed from Louis XIV's France because political decisions rested with a body of citizens rather than one hereditary ruler. Yet Athens also differed from the United States, where citizens usually choose lawmakers instead of voting directly on national laws. To compare systems, examine who decides and what can check that power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How was power concentrated under both Louis XIV and Saudi Arabia's king, and how did their representative bodies differ?

2. Both Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom have monarchs. What difference in lawmaking helps explain why the passage calls the United Kingdom a limited system?

3. Compare Louis XIV with a U.S. president. How do their time in office and their relationship to a legislature differ?

4. How did citizens take part in decisions in ancient Athens compared with the United States, and who was excluded in Athens?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent two fictional countries that both have hereditary monarchs. In four sentences, compare who makes laws and who can check the monarch in each country, then explain why one system is limited and the other is unlimited.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.1.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline who makes political decisions in each system, circle checks on that power, and label each system U for unlimited or L for limited. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How was power concentrated under both Louis XIV and Saudi Arabia's king, and how did their representative bodies differ?	**Both concentrated power in a monarch. The Estates-General did not meet under Louis XIV, while Saudi Arabia has a Shura Council appointed by the king to advise on policy.**
2	Both Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom have monarchs. What difference in lawmaking helps explain why the passage calls the United Kingdom a limited system?	**Elected members of the UK Parliament make laws, while Saudi voters do not elect a national legislature with authority to remove the king.**
3	Compare Louis XIV with a U.S. president. How do their time in office and their relationship to a legislature differ?	**Louis inherited the throne, ruled for life, and did not answer to a regularly meeting elected legislature. A U.S. president cannot choose Congress and is limited to two elected terms.**
4	How did citizens take part in decisions in ancient Athens compared with the United States, and who was excluded in Athens?	**Eligible Athenian citizens voted directly in an assembly, while U.S. citizens usually elect lawmakers. Athenian women, enslaved people, and resident foreigners were excluded.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In Northvale, a hereditary monarch makes laws without an elected legislature. The monarch can dismiss advisers who object, so no independent body can block royal decisions. In Southmere, a hereditary monarch has no lawmaking power because an elected assembly makes laws and courts can reject laws that violate the constitution. Northvale is unlimited because power rests with its monarch, while Southmere is limited because other institutions hold and check governing power.

Accept comparisons that identify who exercises power and whether another institution can check it. An unlimited system can face practical pressures, so students need not claim its ruler can do anything.