# Who Checks Power?

Compare systems by the limits on leaders, not their titles.

**USG.C.1.2** "Analyze the essential characteristics of limited versus unlimited systems of government. Compare historic and contemporary examples of unlimited systems of governments (e.g., monarchy, oligarchy, theocracy…"

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline one check on power in each limited system, and circle one sign of weak checks in each unlimited system so you can compare how their leaders are held accountable.

### A Title Is Not a Test

1 A ruler announces a new tax, and no court can overturn it. That is a clue about power, not just the ruler's title. In a limited government, enforceable laws and institutions restrict what leaders may do. In an unlimited government, rulers face few effective legal checks, even if customs or practical problems constrain them. In seventeenth-century France, Louis XIV claimed broad royal authority and ruled without a national elected legislature that could remove him. Today's United Kingdom also has a monarch, but elected lawmakers govern, and ministers must retain Parliament's confidence. The title "monarch" alone cannot reveal who holds power.

2 In North Korea today, the ruling party and its leader control major decisions. Elections do not offer a meaningful way to replace the leadership, and courts do not independently check it. This makes North Korea an example of an unlimited autocracy in practice, despite its written constitution. The United States, by contrast, is a constitutional republic: voters choose representatives, and a written constitution limits government authority. Courts can reject laws that violate that constitution. Switzerland adds a different limited-system tool: citizens can vote directly on certain laws, while constitutional rules and institutions still constrain government power.

3 Limits matter most when a decision is unpopular. Suppose a city council passes a rule barring a small religious group from meeting in public parks. In a representative democracy, elected council members may decide many policies by majority vote, but the majority cannot simply erase minority liberties. The group's freedom of religion and equal treatment under the law provide grounds to challenge the rule. Courts must apply the rule of law to officials and residents alike. Representatives might compromise by setting the same park-use hours for every group. That solution respects rights while leaving room for majority decisions on shared spaces.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why does calling both Louis XIV and today's British head of state a monarch tell you little about how limited their power is?

2. North Korea has a written constitution. Why does the passage still classify its government as unlimited in practice? Compare it with the United States.

3. How do citizens take part in decisions in Switzerland and the United States, and what keeps each system limited?

4. In the park example, why would a council majority's vote not settle the issue? Explain how the proposed compromise addresses it.

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a country where elected representatives must decide whether to ban news reports that criticize them. In one paragraph, contrast what leaders could do without effective checks with what a limited representative democracy would require, including a right, a legal check, and a possible compromise.

ANSWER KEY

# Who Checks Power?

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.1.2

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one check on power in each limited system, and circle one sign of weak checks in each unlimited system so you can compare how their leaders are held accountable. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Why does calling both Louis XIV and today's British head of state a monarch tell you little about how limited their power is? | **Louis XIV ruled without a national elected legislature that could remove him. In today's United Kingdom, elected lawmakers govern, and ministers must retain Parliament's confidence.** |
| 2 | North Korea has a written constitution. Why does the passage still classify its government as unlimited in practice? Compare it with the United States. | **North Korea's elections cannot meaningfully replace its leadership, and its courts do not independently check it. In the United States, voters choose representatives, and courts can reject unconstitutional laws.** |
| 3 | How do citizens take part in decisions in Switzerland and the United States, and what keeps each system limited? | **Swiss citizens can vote directly on certain laws, while Americans elect representatives. Constitutional rules and institutions constrain Swiss government power, and the U.S. Constitution limits government authority.** |
| 4 | In the park example, why would a council majority's vote not settle the issue? Explain how the proposed compromise addresses it. | **A majority cannot erase the religious group's liberties or right to equal treatment. Equal park-use hours for every group would allow a shared rule without excluding that group.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In the invented country of Bellhaven, unchecked leaders could ban critical reports to protect their power. In a limited representative democracy, voters could replace those leaders, and freedom of expression would protect journalists who criticize them. An independent court could reject a ban that violates that right, even if most representatives supported it. As a compromise, representatives could require news outlets to publish corrections when they make factual errors, without banning criticism of the government.

Accept comparisons that identify effective checks rather than relying on government titles or the mere existence of a constitution. For Part 3, the compromise must leave criticism possible and must not give a majority power to erase the stated right.