# Who Holds Power?

Compare government authority and citizens' opportunities

**WG.C.4.2** "Compare the world's political systems of government, based on limited versus unlimited authority, including the rights and opportunities of citizens within each system."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline one check on government power in the United Kingdom and one sign of concentrated power in North Korea. Circle one opportunity or restriction affecting citizens in each country.

### Factory Smoke and Political Power

1. Imagine a town where factory smoke makes it hard to breathe. In the United Kingdom, residents can write to an elected member of the House of Commons, organize a public campaign, and vote in competitive elections. Voters elect members of the House of Commons, not the prime minister directly. The prime minister leads a government that must keep the confidence of the Commons. Courts can rule that ministers have acted unlawfully, and regular elections give voters a way to replace lawmakers. These checks limit officials' authority, even when many people support their policies.

2. Now consider North Korea, where the Workers' Party of Korea dominates the state and power is concentrated in its top leadership. The country holds elections, but voters do not have a meaningful choice among competing parties and candidates. Independent news outlets and public protests against leaders are not permitted. A resident concerned about factory smoke cannot freely organize an opposition campaign or use a competitive election to remove the ruling leadership. State officials and the ruling party direct much of public life, while courts do not provide an independent check on top leaders. This is an example of highly concentrated political authority.

3. The contrast is not simply whether a country has elections or written rules. The key question is whether leaders face enforceable limits and whether people can use their rights to influence public decisions. A British resident may criticize a smoke policy in an independent newspaper, join a lawful demonstration, or challenge a government decision in court. Those actions do not guarantee cleaner air, but they create opportunities to press for change. A North Korean resident has far fewer safe, independent ways to challenge leaders or change policy. Comparing both authority and citizen action reveals how each system works.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do elections limit leaders' authority in the United Kingdom but not in North Korea?

2. Compare the role of courts in checking government power in the two countries.

3. How could residents in each country respond publicly to factory smoke? Compare their opportunities.

4. Why would it be misleading to call the UK prime minister's authority unlimited? Contrast the prime minister's position with that of North Korea's top leadership.

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

In fictional Harborland, voters choose among competing parties, but the leader may cancel court rulings and ban criticism of the government. Write five or six sentences comparing Harborland's authority and citizens' opportunities with those in both countries from the passage, then explain one change that would limit Harborland's leader.

ANSWER KEY

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## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one check on government power in the United Kingdom and one sign of concentrated power in North Korea. Circle one opportunity or restriction affecting citizens in each country. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How do elections limit leaders' authority in the United Kingdom but not in North Korea? | **UK voters can choose among competing candidates and replace members of the House of Commons. North Korean voters lack a meaningful choice among competing parties and candidates.** |
| 2 | Compare the role of courts in checking government power in the two countries. | **UK courts can rule that ministers acted unlawfully. North Korean courts do not independently check top leaders.** |
| 3 | How could residents in each country respond publicly to factory smoke? Compare their opportunities. | **UK residents can campaign, criticize a policy, or join a lawful demonstration. North Korean residents cannot freely organize an opposition campaign or publicly protest against leaders.** |
| 4 | Why would it be misleading to call the UK prime minister's authority unlimited? Contrast the prime minister's position with that of North Korea's top leadership. | **The UK government must keep the Commons' confidence, and courts can rule ministers' actions unlawful. North Korea's top leadership does not face an independent court check.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Harborland offers more electoral choice than North Korea because its voters can choose among competing parties. Unlike the United Kingdom, Harborland lets its leader cancel court rulings. Its ban on criticism also gives residents fewer ways to challenge decisions than British residents have. Harborland's elections offer a way to influence government that North Korean elections do not, but its leader faces fewer checks than the UK government. Requiring the leader to obey independent court rulings would limit that power and let residents challenge unlawful decisions.

Accept comparisons that distinguish having elections from having meaningful electoral choice. For the open task, accept a different specific reform if the student explains how it would limit the leader's authority or expand citizens' opportunities.