Autocracies and Democracies

Is the nation an autocracy or a democracy?

Read the short description and sort each nation on your graphic organizer. Mark the ones you’re not sure about for more research and discussion in class.

China: The most populous nation in the world has three branches with a President who leads the executive branch, a legislative branch called the National People’s Congress, and a Supreme Court appointed by the Congress. Since the Chinese Civil War in 1949, there has been one party rule in China. The government owns the media.

Costa Rica: The Central American nation of Costa Rica has three governmental branches – Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. There are also independent offices including an Ombudsman, Comptroller General, and Procurator General. Currently, four independent political parties are active in the country.

Cuba: The Caribbean island nation has three branches of government featuring an executive branch led by the President, a legislature, and the People’s Supreme Court with appointed judges. After the 1959 revolution, the leader became the President and remained in power for almost 50 years. He picked his brother Raoul to succeed him. When Raoul retired, he picked the next President. The government controls the media.

Germany: The European nation of Germany is led by a Federal Chancellor, who is the leader of the Executive Branch. A bicameral (two-house) legislature enacts and amends laws. It consists of a directly elected house called the Bundestag and a regionally elected house called the Budesrat. The Judicial Branch follows what is called “Basic Law,” which guides all courts. There are four active independent political parties in Germany.

Great Britain: The European nation of The United Kingdom of Great Britain has no written constitution, but has a system build on legislative (parliamentary) acts. There is a prime minister who leads the executive branch, a parliament with an elected House of Commons and a House of Lords, and a judicial branch. The head of the Royal Family maintains some formal powers and opens parliament every year.

India: The South Asian nation of India maintains three branches of government. There is a broad executive branch consisting of a president and a prime minister, a legislative branch consisting of two houses, and a judiciary system led by a supreme court. The elected president holds office for five years.

Iran: This large nation in the Middle East used to be known as Persia. In the Islamic Consultive Assembly, which is the legislature, there are seats guaranteed to religious minorities. There is also a Supreme Court with appointed judges. After a revolution in 1979, Iran established a government led by a Supreme Leader who is a religious figure. There have been 2 Supreme Leaders since 1979. There are elections every 4 years where citizens elect representatives to the legislative branch. The candidates that run for office are approved by the government to get on the ballot.

Japan: The East Asian island nation of Japan has a central government and an Emperor (monarch) with limited political power. The executive branch is led by the prime minister, the National Diet comprises the legislative branch, and the judicial branch is headed by a Supreme Court and includes various lower courts. Japanese citizens elect members of the National Diet, which then is responsible for electing the president.

North Korea: In this small East Asian nation, there is a government with three branches. The President leads the executive branch, the Supreme People’s Assembly is a legislature, and a Supreme Court is a three-judge panel. The nation was created in 1953 after a failed war to take over South Korea and unify the country. All the leaders have come from one family line. North Korea is estimated to have 1 million soldiers massed on the border with South Korea.

Russia: The large Russian Federation stretches across northern Europe and Asia and is led by a President who heads the executive branch and is elected by popular vote. There is a legislature consisting of the General Assembly and State Duma. Supreme Court judges are nominated by the President and approved by the legislative branch. In 1989, the former autocracy collapsed, and free elections were held. There have only been 3 leaders since then. The current President has been in power twice for over 16 years and now has the power to stay in office for life.