

Democratic Village Elections in China:
Comparing Governments of China and the United States
High School – Government/Civics
Middle School – Government/Civics; World History

Elaborated Lesson Focus

In this lesson, students will study the emergence of democratic elections at the village level in China and how The Carter Center is working to support them. Students will assess the meaning of village elections inside a communist state while comparing and contrasting systems of government in China and the United States. Students will demonstrate understanding of the following concepts: unitary system, federal system, communist state and democratic state.

Georgia Performance Standards

SSCG19: The student will compare and contrast governments that are unitary, confederal, and federal; autocratic, oligarchic and democratic; and presidential and parliamentary.

SSCG8: The student will demonstrate knowledge of local, state, and national elections.

- a. Describe the organization, role, and constituencies of political parties.
- b. Describe the nomination and election process.
- c. Examine campaign funding and spending.

SS7CG3 The student will demonstrate an understanding of modern governments of East Asian countries and be able to describe the structure of the national governments of India, Indonesia, China, and Japan, including the type of government, form of leadership, type of legislature, and role of the citizen.

SS7H9 The student will describe the major developments in East Asia during the 20th century.

Enduring Understanding

The People's Republic of China is one of the world's few remaining communist states. Yet, over the past few decades, China has evolved from its classical model of communist rule: economic systems have become more market-oriented and political systems slightly more participatory. Since 1988, the Chinese government has authorized direct village elections to help maintain social and political order in the context of rapid economic reforms in the countryside. These elections, which receive technical support from The Carter Center, are recognized as seeds for Chinese citizens' greater participation in their government.

The constitutions of China and the United States create fundamentally different governments. China is a unitary state in which the central government has power to create or abolish lower governments, devolving power at its discretion. The United States, by contrast, operates a federal system, with powers guaranteed to the states under the constitution. States cannot be abolished by the national government. Also by contrast, China is led by a single-party, whereas multiple parties compete for and share power in the United States.

Procedure

1. Instructor will write examples of communist and democratic states on the board (e.g. China, Korea, Vietnam – and – U.S., Canada, Germany, Brazil). Students will identify and describe features of communist states and democratic states based on previous knowledge.
2. After dialogue and discussion, instructor will point out that Chinese villages have been holding democratic elections since 1988. Students will view “One Village Votes (2006)” slideshow from the Carter Center website:
<http://cartercenter.org/news/multimedia/PeacePrograms/OneVillageVotes.html>
(Select “Peace Topics” from the left console and scroll down to “One Village Votes”)
3. Students will read two articles to better understand the relationship between China’s authoritarian national government and democratic governance in villages.

The New York Times, “China Villagers Vote, but Its Party Rules”

Eric Eckholm, 4 November 2001

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9800EFDC1739F937A35752C1A9679C8B63>

The Carter Center, Statement by Yawei Liu on China Village Elections Project

8 July 2002

<http://cartercenter.org/documents/1039.pdf>

4. After reading the articles, students will research and write an essay comparing and contrasting governments of the U.S. and China, providing specific examples of similarities and differences.
 - How is the Chinese system of government different from the American system?
 - To what extent is there a diversity of people and ideas in each government?
 - Who holds power in each government?
 - Why are the village elections significant developments in China?
 - How do Chinese village elections reflect ‘democracy’? Provide a definition of ‘democracy’ in your answer.

Suggested Resources:

- Carter Center China Program
http://cartercenter.org/peace/china_elections/index.html
- China Village Elections Site
<http://www.chinaelections.net>
- BBC News: “How China is Ruled”
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/china_politics/government/html/1.stm
- BBC News Article: “China Dabbles in Democracy”
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4305881.stm>
- Constitution of People’s Republic of China
<http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/english/constitution/constLink.jsp>
- Constitution of the United States
<http://www.law.emory.edu/index.php?id=3080>
- China Central Government, Official Website
<http://english.gov.cn/>

Key Terms and Definitions

Democratic State – government of the people, by the people and for the people; majority rules; constitution is independent of political parties (e.g. U.S., Canada, Britain, France, Japan, Australia)

Communist State – government by a single-party whose power is guaranteed by constitution; communist nations may have a constitution, but it is a largely symbolic document; institutions of state and party are intertwined (e.g. China, Cuba, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam)

Unitary System – ultimate governmental authority rests in the hands of the national or central government ; the central government gets authority from the people and then gives a limited authority back to local and regional governments; authority is devolved at discretion (e.g. China, Egypt, United Kingdom, Guatemala, Israel, Japan, Kenya)

- For example: If Parliament wants to redraw local boundaries in the UK, they have the power to. Compare this to the U.S.: Even if Congress wanted to abolish Alabama or Idaho they could not. States receive their power not from the national government but from the Constitution itself.

Federal System – governing authority is divided, usually by a written constitution, between a central government and regional governments; authority in a federal system comes directly from the people—state and federal governments are directly tied to the people (e.g. U.S., Germany, Brazil, Canada)

Compare & Contrast Essay Rubric

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Purpose & Supporting Details	The paper compares and contrasts governments clearly. The paper points to specific examples to illustrate the comparison. The paper includes only the information relevant to the comparison.	The paper compares and contrasts governments clearly, but the supporting information is general. The paper includes only the information relevant to the comparison.	The paper compares and contrasts governments clearly, but the supporting information is incomplete. The paper may include information that is not relevant to the comparison.	The paper compares or contrasts, but does not include both. There is no supporting information or support is incomplete.
Organization & Structure	The paper breaks the information into whole-to-whole, similarities -to-differences, or point-by-point structure. It follows a consistent order when discussing the comparison.	The paper breaks the information into whole-to-whole, similarities -to-differences, or point-by-point structure but does not follow a consistent order when discussing the comparison.	The paper breaks the information into whole-to-whole, similarities -to-differences, or point-by-point structure, but some information is in the wrong section. Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.	Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized.
Analysis	The paper explains significance of China village elections in context of a communist state. A definition of 'democracy' is provided and applied. Specific features of American democracy are discussed for comparison.	The paper identifies significance of China village elections but offers little explanation. A definition of 'democracy' is provided but not applied. Features of American democracy are discussed generally for comparison.	The paper discusses China village elections but does not acknowledge their significance in a communist state. No definition of democracy is provided. Little or no reference to American democracy is given.	The paper does not address the China village elections or make comparison to aspects of American democracy.
Grammar & Spelling	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.

Adapted from "Read, Write, Think: Compare and Contrast Rubric" Copyright 2004 NCTE/IRA. All rights reserved.
 ReadWriteThink materials may be reproduced for educational purposes.
http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson275/comcon_rubric.pdf