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### A Level Playing Field: How the Rule of Law Shapes the American Dream

In every sport I play or watch, rules are what make the game worth playing. In basketball, the clock, the foul line, and the out-of-bounds rules keep the game fair. In football, penalties stop teams from cheating just to win. If there were no rules, the biggest or toughest players would dominate every game, and skill would not matter. The rule of law works the same way in government. It sets boundaries, protects fairness, and makes sure power does not get abused. Some people argue that fewer laws mean more freedom, but just like in sports, a game without rules is unfair and dangerous. By comparing a democratic government like the United States to an authoritarian government, it becomes clear that the rule of law is what creates a fair system and makes the American Dream possible.

In a democracy, the rule of law acts like an unbiased referee. In the United States, laws are created by elected officials who are chosen by citizens through voting. These laws are based on the U.S. Constitution, which is the highest law in the country. One of the most important parts of the rule of law is that no one is above the law, including government leaders. According to the United States Courts, “The rule of law is the principle that the law applies to everyone equally” (“Rule of Law”). This means that even powerful leaders must follow the same rules as regular citizens. Just like a ref can call a foul on a star player, the law can hold leaders accountable.

Because the rule of law is enforced fairly, people in a democracy have freedoms that support opportunity. Citizens can speak their opinions, practice their religion, and peacefully protest when they believe something is wrong. These freedoms allow people to improve their lives through education, hard work, and determination. The American Dream—the idea that anyone can succeed if they work hard—depends on these protections. When the rules are clear and consistent, people know what is expected of them. This is similar to sports practice: if you know the drills and the rules, you can focus on improving your skills instead of worrying about unfair penalties.

Some people believe that fewer laws create more freedom. At first, this idea sounds reasonable. In sports, players like freedom to be creative and make plays. However, too much freedom without rules leads to chaos. Imagine a basketball game where traveling is allowed for some players but not others. That would not be freedom—it would be unfair. In government, laws exist to protect people, not restrict them unfairly. The rule of law balances freedom with fairness, making sure everyone has an equal chance to succeed.

Authoritarian governments operate very differently. In these systems, power is controlled by one leader or a small group, and citizens have little influence. Laws are made without public input and are often used to protect the government instead of the people. Courts are usually not independent, and law enforcement may punish citizens who speak out. Encyclopaedia Britannica explains that authoritarian systems are ruled by leaders “not constitutionally responsible to the public” (“Authoritarianism”). This means citizens have no real way to challenge unfair laws.

Living under authoritarian rule is like playing a game where the coach keeps changing the rules and always favors one team. Even if a player works hard, they might never get playing time. In the same way, citizens in authoritarian governments may work hard but still struggle

because success depends on loyalty, not talent. Freedom House states that authoritarian governments often “restrict political rights and civil liberties” (“What Is Freedom?”). Without freedom, opportunity disappears, and the American Dream becomes unreachable for most people.

The comparison between these two systems shows how important the rule of law truly is. In a democracy, laws protect rights and create fairness, even though they sometimes place limits on behavior. In authoritarian governments, laws are tools of control that limit freedom and silence ambition. Just like in sports, the best outcomes happen when rules are fair and consistently enforced.

In conclusion, the rule of law is the foundation of a fair society, just like rules are the foundation of a fair game. Democratic governments use laws to protect freedom, limit power, and give citizens a voice. Authoritarian governments use laws to control people and protect leaders. When laws are fair and apply to everyone equally, people have a fair chance to succeed. Just like a level playing field allows the best athletes to rise, the rule of law allows the American Dream to remain possible.

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