The Polling Place Decision

Election access, citizen participation, and limits on government power

SS24.USG.12 "Describe the rights and duties of citizens, including participation in the election process. 12a Explain why maintaining a balance between individual rights and majority rule and between state and national power is important for the..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways citizens can participate in the decision or election, and circle the decision a board majority wants to make. Write 1 beside a state responsibility and 2 beside a national safeguard to trace how both levels of government shape the election.

A Vote About Where to Vote

1. In a fictional county, election officials propose closing a polling place beside a bus stop and sending its voters to a recreation center three miles away. A majority of the county election board favors the change because the center costs less to operate. Residents can speak at the board's public meeting, and eligible citizens can vote for the officials who oversee future elections. Voting is a right, not a legal duty, but participating gives citizens a way to influence these choices. Citizens also have duties, such as serving on a jury when summoned.

2. A majority vote on the board would not settle every question. The move might save public money, yet voters without cars could have a harder time casting ballots. Officials must consider whether voters with disabilities can use the new location. Federal law requires election programs to be accessible to people with disabilities and prohibits racial discrimination in voting. These protections limit what officials can do, even when most board members support a plan. Without such limits, a majority could make decisions that leave some citizens with less meaningful access to the ballot.

3. States have primary responsibility for running elections, including setting many rules for polling places and registration. County officials carry out election tasks under state law, while national laws establish protections that states and counties must follow. Before deciding, the board could compare travel times and expected costs, then hear from people affected by the move. It might keep the bus-stop site open if the savings do not justify the added travel burden. Balancing these concerns lets elected officials make practical choices without treating a majority's preference as permission to ignore individual rights.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How can citizens influence the polling-place decision now and future election decisions? Explain why those actions matter even though voting is not required.

2. Why is support from a majority of board members not enough by itself to justify moving the polling place?

3. What roles do state authority and national law each play in this decision, and why does the government need both?

4. How could comparing travel times and costs, then hearing from residents, help the board balance majority rule with individual rights?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine your county proposes using self-service check-in kiosks at every polling place. In 80 to 110 words, explain one possible benefit, one risk to voting access, how state authority and national protections apply, and a change that would better balance the concerns.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.12

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways citizens can participate in the decision or election, and circle the decision a board majority wants to make. Write 1 beside a state responsibility and 2 beside a national safeguard to trace how both levels of government shape the election. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How can citizens influence the polling-place decision now and future election decisions? Explain why those actions matter even though voting is not required.	**Residents can speak at the board meeting, and eligible citizens can vote for officials who oversee future elections. These actions let citizens influence decisions, even though voting is a right rather than a legal duty.**
2	Why is support from a majority of board members not enough by itself to justify moving the polling place?	**The move could make voting harder for people without cars or voters with disabilities. Federal protections still apply, regardless of the board majority's preference.**
3	What roles do state authority and national law each play in this decision, and why does the government need both?	**State law governs many election procedures that county officials carry out. National law sets protections the state and county must follow, allowing local administration while protecting voters' rights.**
4	How could comparing travel times and costs, then hearing from residents, help the board balance majority rule with individual rights?	**Those steps let the board weigh the majority's goal of saving money against the burden on affected voters. The board could keep the bus-stop site open if the savings do not justify that burden.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Check-in kiosks might shorten lines and reduce the number of staff needed, so a board majority could see them as a good use of public money. But voters who cannot use a touchscreen could face a new barrier. State election rules would govern whether and how the county uses the equipment, while federal disability protections would still require an accessible voting program. I would keep trained staff at every site to offer another way to check in. The board could then test whether the kiosks save time without making voting harder for some citizens.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of how participation influences officials and how national protections limit election decisions. For the open task, accept a different workable revision if the response addresses access, both levels of authority, and the proposed benefit.