Who Gets Heard?

Voting access, majority decisions, and limits on government power

SS24.USG.12a "Explain why maintaining a balance between individual rights and majority rule and between state and national power is important for the functioning of the United States government."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline a sentence showing why majority support may not settle a decision, circle a sentence showing why state or local flexibility matters, and number the federal legal limit 1. Use your marks to trace how the three concerns shape the county's plan.

After the Flood, Where Can People Vote?

1. After a flood damages several polling places, a county proposes using fewer sites for the next election. A majority at a public meeting supports the plan because repairs cost money. Yet people who live far from the remaining sites describe long trips and missed work. Some speakers ask for temporary sites instead. Majority rule helps officials choose among competing plans, but a vote at a meeting cannot make every burden fair. Residents also have rights to speak, petition officials, and vote under applicable election laws. Listening to objections helps officials see whose access a popular plan might limit.

2. Election administration also divides power between levels of government. States set many election rules, and local officials typically select and operate polling places under state law. This lets officials respond to damaged buildings and local travel conditions. But state choices must comply with the U.S. Constitution and federal laws, including the Voting Rights Act's ban on voting practices that discriminate on the basis of race. Federal protections set limits that a state or county cannot vote away. At the same time, a national rule naming every polling site would leave little room to address a flooded school or a remote road.

3. Suppose the county gathers travel estimates, hears residents, and opens temporary sites where existing buildings are unusable. State officials can check whether the plan follows state rules, while federal safeguards remain available if a practice unlawfully discriminates. The result may cost more than closing sites, but it can preserve meaningful access while keeping elections manageable. If majority preference always prevailed, officials could ignore the people most affected by a decision. If national authorities controlled every local detail, the response to damaged sites could be slow or poorly suited to local conditions. A functioning government needs both public decision making and enforceable limits.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might majority support at the public meeting be insufficient reason to close polling places?

2. How can residents' rights to speak and petition improve the county's decision?

3. Why does the passage favor local choices about polling sites while keeping federal limits on those choices?

4. According to the passage, what could go wrong if national authorities controlled every detail of the county's response?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A state legislature votes to ban all peaceful demonstrations in public parks after a noisy rally. In one paragraph, propose a narrower response and explain why both the rights of dissenters and the state's power to address local needs matter.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.12a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a sentence showing why majority support may not settle a decision, circle a sentence showing why state or local flexibility matters, and number the federal legal limit 1. Use your marks to trace how the three concerns shape the county's plan. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might majority support at the public meeting be insufficient reason to close polling places?	**Residents far from the remaining sites could face long trips and missed work. Majority support does not make those burdens fair.**
2	How can residents' rights to speak and petition improve the county's decision?	**Residents can explain how the closures would affect them and propose temporary sites, helping officials identify access problems.**
3	Why does the passage favor local choices about polling sites while keeping federal limits on those choices?	**Local officials can respond to damaged buildings and travel conditions. Federal law and the Constitution prevent choices that violate national protections, including the ban on racial discrimination in voting practices.**
4	According to the passage, what could go wrong if national authorities controlled every detail of the county's response?	**The response could be slow or poorly suited to local conditions, such as a flooded school or a remote road.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A majority can demand quieter parks, but it cannot erase the First Amendment rights of people who disagree. The state could set content-neutral limits on amplified sound at certain hours and apply them equally to every group. Those rules would address the noise without banning peaceful demonstrations. State officials know which parks border homes and can tailor the hours accordingly. The First Amendment still limits the state's choices, so residents keep a way to challenge unfair restrictions. Balancing these powers lets officials solve a local problem while keeping public debate open.

For the marking job, accept any passage sentence that accurately shows the requested concern or limit. For Your Turn, accept a different narrowly tailored, viewpoint-neutral response if the student explains both the protection of dissent and the value of state action within constitutional limits.