Who Holds Power?

Trace constitutional principles through a public policy debate.

SS24.USG.3a "Summarize and explain the underlying principles of the Constitution, including checks and balances, federalism, limited government, popular sovereignty, republicanism, and separation of powers."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions by voters or elected officials, circle limits on government power, and number each example of a branch checking another branch. Use your marks to explain how the principles work together.

A Question About Tap Water

1. When a community learns that its tap water contains a harmful chemical, residents may demand action. They cannot pass a federal law by themselves. Instead, they elect members of Congress to represent them, an example of republicanism. Their votes also reflect popular sovereignty: governmental authority comes from the people. Yet elected officials cannot do whatever a majority wants. The Constitution grants the federal government specific powers and protects individual rights, establishing limited government even when public pressure is intense.

2. Suppose Congress debates a national drinking water rule. Separation of powers assigns lawmaking to Congress, enforcement to the executive branch, and interpretation of law to federal courts. These jobs are distinct, but the branches can also restrain one another. Congress might pass a bill, the president could veto it, and Congress could override that veto with a two-thirds vote in each house. A court could later rule that an enacted law violates the Constitution. These actions illustrate checks and balances, not three branches acting in isolation.

3. A national rule does not erase state authority. Under federalism, the Constitution divides governing power between the national and state governments. Congress can establish a federal drinking water standard within its constitutional authority, while states can administer water programs and set stricter protections. A state cannot simply ignore a valid federal requirement because it dislikes the policy. Residents can still press state lawmakers to strengthen their rules and elect federal representatives who favor changes. The result is several routes for public influence, each bounded by law.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do residents' votes show both popular sovereignty and republicanism?

2. Why could elected officials not adopt just any water policy residents demand?

3. How do a presidential veto and a congressional override show both separation of powers and checks and balances?

4. How could a state respond to the water problem without rejecting a valid federal rule?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine voters propose a national law protecting consumer data. In 70 to 100 words, explain how the proposal could reflect at least four constitutional principles, including one branch checking another and one role for states.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.3a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions by voters or elected officials, circle limits on government power, and number each example of a branch checking another branch. Use your marks to explain how the principles work together. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do residents' votes show both popular sovereignty and republicanism?	**Authority comes from the voters, who elect members of Congress to act as their representatives.**
2	Why could elected officials not adopt just any water policy residents demand?	**Limited government requires federal officials to act within constitutional powers and respect individual rights.**
3	How do a presidential veto and a congressional override show both separation of powers and checks and balances?	**The branches have distinct roles: Congress passes bills and the president can veto them. Each can restrain the other's action when Congress has enough votes to override a veto.**
4	How could a state respond to the water problem without rejecting a valid federal rule?	**The state could administer its water program or set stricter protections while meeting the federal requirement.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Voters who want stronger data protections could elect members of Congress who support them. That shows popular sovereignty and republicanism. Congress could write a law regulating data collected across state lines, but its choices must stay within constitutional limits. Separation of powers gives the executive branch the job of enforcing the law. The president could veto the bill, and Congress could check that decision by overriding the veto with enough votes. Federalism also leaves states a role: they could pass their own protections where federal law allows.

Accept explanations that connect each named principle to a specific action or limit in the passage. For Your Turn, check that the response applies at least four principles and includes both a branch checking another and a legally possible state role.