Who Holds Power?

Trace how Roman institutions shaped republican self-government.

AWH.C.7.3 "Examine the government of the Roman Republic and its contribution to the development of republican self-government (e.g., the concepts of separation of powers, liberty, the rule of law, representative government, civic duty)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline three ways Romans shared or limited government power, circle one example of public law, and number two limits on who could participate. Use your marks to examine both the strengths and the limits of the republic.

A Decision in the Roman Republic

1. Suppose a Roman assembly is considering a law about the use of public land. In the Roman Republic, male citizens could vote in assemblies that elected officials and made laws, but voters did not all have equal influence. Some assemblies gave wealthier citizens greater voting power. Voters chose two consuls each year to lead the government and command armies. The Senate, a council dominated by wealthy former officeholders, advised officials and shaped major decisions, although it did not itself pass laws. Power was shared among institutions rather than placed in a single ruler's hands.

2. Now suppose a consul tries to carry out a policy that harms ordinary citizens. Tribunes, officials elected by the plebeians, could veto actions by magistrates and protect plebeians from abuses of power. The consul's term lasted one year, and each consul could block the other's actions. These checks did not create modern equality, but they made it harder for one official to act without restraint. A citizen might see liberty in limits on official power and civic duty in serving as a voter, soldier, or officeholder. Those duties tied public decisions to participation by citizens.

3. Written rules provided another safeguard. In the fifth century BCE, Romans displayed the Twelve Tables, laws that made some legal rules public instead of leaving them entirely to the judgment of powerful officials. Public rules could help citizens challenge arbitrary decisions, an early step toward the rule of law. Yet the republic's self-government had sharp limits: women, enslaved people, and noncitizens could not vote, and voting systems favored some wealthy citizens. Later republics drew on Roman ideas such as elected officials, divided authority, and public law, while also debating who should count as part of the people.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did assemblies give citizens a role in government, and why did that role not give every citizen an equal voice?

2. How could a tribune and a fellow consul each limit a consul's actions? Explain what these checks meant for government power.

3. How did displaying the Twelve Tables support the rule of law, and what limit kept the republic from offering equal political participation?

4. How was the Senate's role different from the assemblies' role? Why does that difference matter when describing who held power?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Your school needs a fair rule for sharing a common space. In five or six sentences, design a way to make and enforce the rule using at least two ideas from the Roman Republic, and explain how your plan avoids one limit on participation described in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Who Holds Power?

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.7.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline three ways Romans shared or limited government power, circle one example of public law, and number two limits on who could participate. Use your marks to examine both the strengths and the limits of the republic. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did assemblies give citizens a role in government, and why did that role not give every citizen an equal voice?	**Male citizens voted in assemblies that elected officials and made laws, but some assemblies gave wealthier citizens greater voting power.**
2	How could a tribune and a fellow consul each limit a consul's actions? Explain what these checks meant for government power.	**A tribune could veto a magistrate's action, and one consul could block the other. These checks made it harder for a single official to act without restraint.**
3	How did displaying the Twelve Tables support the rule of law, and what limit kept the republic from offering equal political participation?	**Public laws helped citizens challenge arbitrary decisions. Women, enslaved people, and noncitizens could not vote, and some voting systems favored wealthy citizens.**
4	How was the Senate's role different from the assemblies' role? Why does that difference matter when describing who held power?	**The Senate advised officials and shaped decisions but did not itself pass laws. Assemblies made laws and elected officials, so authority was divided among institutions.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our school wants a rule for using the courtyard at lunch. Each homeroom would elect one representative to a student council, which would vote on a schedule after hearing students' proposals. Two council chairs would share responsibility for putting the schedule into effect, and either chair could pause a decision until the full council reviews it. The rule and the reasons for it would be posted so students could challenge unfair enforcement. Unlike the Roman Republic, our system would let every student vote, not only students from favored groups. Students would also serve by attending meetings and explaining classmates' concerns.

Accept different school rules if the response applies at least two Roman republican ideas and addresses a participation limit from the passage. For question 3, students may name either exclusion from voting or unequal voting power.