Who Shapes Policy?

How government powers affect environmental decisions

TOT.P.2.1.B "Evaluate the impact of the structure and powers exercised by governmental systems on public policy, using historical and contemporary examples."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each government action in the passage, then circle the part of government that has the power to take it. Number two places where the division of power changes what a policy can accomplish.

Clean Air, Shared Power

1. In 1970, Congress strengthened the Clean Air Act as smoke and smog crossed city and state borders. Congress gave the federal government power to set nationwide air-quality standards for several common pollutants. States had to write plans showing how they would meet those standards, and the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, reviewed the plans. This division mattered: a state could choose methods suited to its industries, but it could not simply ignore the federal standards. A factory's pollution could affect people beyond its home state, so national standards addressed a problem that a single state might have little incentive to solve alone.

2. In 2022, Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which included tax credits to encourage clean energy. Rather than require every town to build a solar project, Congress used its power over taxes to make some projects less costly. Federal agencies write rules for claiming the credits, while state and local governments often decide where energy facilities may be built through permits and land-use rules. A federal tax credit can therefore attract investment without guaranteeing a project in every location. The policy's reach depends both on national funding choices and on decisions made closer to the proposed site.

3. Courts can also shape what an agency is allowed to do. In West Virginia v. EPA (2022), the Supreme Court ruled that the Clean Air Act did not clearly authorize the EPA's proposed approach to shifting electricity generation away from higher-emitting power plants. The ruling limited that particular regulatory approach, not every EPA power to control air pollution. It shows a difference between an agency using authority from an older law and Congress passing a new law with specific tax credits. In both eras, policy outcomes depended not just on a goal, but on which part of government had the power to act.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might state-only action have left cross-border pollution unsolved, and how did state plans affect the national policy?

2. How could state or local land-use decisions change the effect of federal clean-energy tax credits in a community?

3. How did the Supreme Court's 2022 ruling limit the EPA's options under the Clean Air Act? What authority did the ruling leave in place?

4. Compare how Congress's actions in 1970 and 2022 shaped the kind of environmental policy each law produced.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A city wants to reduce dangerous heat in public school buildings. In five or six sentences, explain how Congress, a federal agency, and state or local officials could share responsibility for a grant program to cool schools. Evaluate one benefit and one limit of that division of power, then suggest a change that could improve the policy.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.P.2.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each government action in the passage, then circle the part of government that has the power to take it. Number two places where the division of power changes what a policy can accomplish. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might state-only action have left cross-border pollution unsolved, and how did state plans affect the national policy?	**A state might have little incentive to reduce pollution that harms people elsewhere. Federal standards addressed the shared problem, while state plans let states choose how to meet them.**
2	How could state or local land-use decisions change the effect of federal clean-energy tax credits in a community?	**Even if a tax credit makes a project less costly, state or local permit and land-use decisions can determine whether it can be built at a proposed site.**
3	How did the Supreme Court's 2022 ruling limit the EPA's options under the Clean Air Act? What authority did the ruling leave in place?	**The ruling blocked the EPA's proposed approach to shifting electricity generation because the Act did not clearly authorize it. It did not eliminate all EPA authority to control air pollution.**
4	Compare how Congress's actions in 1970 and 2022 shaped the kind of environmental policy each law produced.	**In 1970, Congress authorized national air-quality standards that states had to plan to meet. In 2022, it used tax credits to encourage clean-energy projects rather than require them everywhere.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress could offer grants to help schools install cooling systems, and a federal agency could set clear requirements for spending the money. State and local officials could choose the hottest buildings first because they know their schools. This arrangement could direct national funds toward an urgent problem while allowing plans to fit local needs. However, districts with fewer staff might struggle to apply for grants, leaving some students in overheated classrooms. Congress could fund application assistance for districts with limited staff. That change would make access to the grants more equal without removing local decisions about which buildings need work most.

Accept other accurate explanations of how each level's authority affects the policy's reach or implementation. For Part 3, look for a plausible division of responsibility, a benefit, a limit, and a change tied to that limit.