When Majorities Rule

The Founders' concerns about democracy and political power

USG.C.2.2.C "Explain concerns the Founders expressed regarding democracy."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three concerns the Founders expressed about democracy. Number each concern, then circle a phrase near it that explains why it mattered.

A Vote Is Not the Whole Story

1 Imagine a crowded meeting in 1787: a speaker urges neighbors to cancel every debt with a single vote. The proposal would help some people quickly but could leave lenders with losses they did not choose. James Madison worried that a group united by a shared interest, which he called a faction, might use political power to harm the rights of others. In *Federalist No. 10*, he warned that a majority faction was especially hard to stop in a pure democracy, where citizens vote on laws themselves. Winning a vote, he argued, did not always make a decision just.

2 Madison also feared that public decisions could follow a sudden passion rather than careful judgment. A persuasive leader might stir anger against an unpopular group, and a crowd might act before considering the consequences. He did not argue that ordinary people should have no voice. Instead, he favored a republic in which voters chose representatives to consider laws. He thought representatives might refine public views, although he knew elected officials could also pursue selfish goals. A larger republic, he reasoned, would contain more competing interests, making it harder for one faction to gain a majority everywhere and impose its wishes.

3 The Constitution's design reflected another concern: even elected leaders might abuse authority. Dividing power among Congress, the president, and the courts gave each branch ways to limit the others. The House faced elections every two years, keeping it close to voters, while senators were originally chosen by state legislatures. These arrangements could slow action when public opinion shifted rapidly. That delay was deliberate, but it also raised a lasting question: when does slowing a majority protect rights, and when does it block needed change? The Founders disagreed on details, yet many wanted popular government without unchecked power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why would Madison worry about the vote to cancel every debt, even if most people supported it?

2. What danger did Madison see in decisions driven by sudden passion? Explain how choosing representatives might address it.

3. Why did Madison think a larger republic would make it harder for one faction to impose its wishes?

4. What concern about elected leaders helps explain why the Constitution divides power among branches?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a city council proposes banning all peaceful protests for a year after one noisy rally. In 4 to 5 sentences, explain two concerns the Founders might raise, propose one way to limit the council's power, and name one possible cost of that limit.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.2.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three concerns the Founders expressed about democracy. Number each concern, then circle a phrase near it that explains why it mattered. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why would Madison worry about the vote to cancel every debt, even if most people supported it?	**A majority faction could benefit itself while unfairly harming lenders. Madison argued that majority support alone does not make a decision just.**
2	What danger did Madison see in decisions driven by sudden passion? Explain how choosing representatives might address it.	**Anger stirred by a persuasive leader could lead people to act without considering the consequences. Madison hoped representatives would weigh laws more carefully.**
3	Why did Madison think a larger republic would make it harder for one faction to impose its wishes?	**A larger republic would have more competing interests, making it harder for one faction to win a majority everywhere.**
4	What concern about elected leaders helps explain why the Constitution divides power among branches?	**Elected leaders might abuse their authority. Dividing power gives the branches ways to limit one another.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

After one noisy rally, the council might act on public anger rather than careful judgment. A majority could also take away a smaller group's right to protest peacefully. Madison warned that winning a vote does not make a decision just. A court could review the ban and stop it if it violates constitutional rights. Court review can take time, delaying a response to genuine safety problems.

Accept other passage-based explanations of majority factions, sudden passion, or abuse of authority. For the open task, the proposed limit and its cost should fit the protest scenario.