Power and Liberty

Read the ratification debate through competing concerns about government.

USG.C.2.2 "Compare points of view toward the structure and powers of government as expressed during debates over ratification of the Constitution of the United States..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two arguments for the proposed Constitution, circle two concerns about national power, and number two different safeguards against abuses of power. Use your marks to compare the writers' views.

How Much Power Is Enough?

1. In 1787, Americans faced a practical question: Could a new Constitution give the national government enough power to solve shared problems without putting liberty at risk? In Federalist No. 1, Alexander Hamilton called the decision a test of whether people could establish good government through reflection and choice rather than accident or force. He argued that the proposed Constitution could preserve the Union and provide effective government, but he did not claim that disagreement meant bad faith. The ratification debate asked Americans to judge both the promise of a stronger union and the danger of giving any government too much power.

2. In Federalist No. 10, James Madison warned that a faction, a group driven by a shared interest harmful to others or the common good, could threaten liberty. A majority faction could even use elections to trample minority rights. Madison argued that a large republic would include many interests, making it harder for one faction to dominate. Elected representatives would also filter public views, although Madison knew representatives could fail. Brutus, writing against ratification, drew nearly the opposite lesson from size: a vast republic would put national leaders too far from the people to understand local needs or remain accountable.

3. Brutus also feared that broad national powers, especially when paired with federal laws taking priority over state laws, would weaken state governments. George Mason refused to sign the Constitution in part because it lacked a declaration of rights to protect people from federal power. Both sides worried about unchecked rule, but they proposed different safeguards. That tension survives in debates over a national online privacy law: supporters might say one rule protects people across state lines, while critics might worry that it could block stronger state protections. Today's disagreement echoes ratification without making the two disputes identical.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Hamilton and Madison make different arguments for the proposed Constitution?

2. Why did Madison and Brutus draw opposite conclusions about a large republic? Include the danger Madison saw in elections.

3. How did Brutus's concern about national power differ from Mason's concern?

4. In the passage's online privacy example, what would each side value, and how does that disagreement echo ratification?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A proposal would give the national government power to set one emergency response rule for every state, even when a state has a different plan. In 4 to 5 sentences, take a position, explain how a Federalist and an Anti-Federalist might each respond, and name one safeguard against abuse.

ANSWER KEY

Power and Liberty

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.2.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two arguments for the proposed Constitution, circle two concerns about national power, and number two different safeguards against abuses of power. Use your marks to compare the writers' views. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Hamilton and Madison make different arguments for the proposed Constitution?	**Hamilton emphasized choosing an effective government that would preserve the Union. Madison argued that a large republic with elected representatives could make it harder for a harmful faction to dominate.**
2	Why did Madison and Brutus draw opposite conclusions about a large republic? Include the danger Madison saw in elections.	**Madison thought many competing interests would make majority factions less likely to dominate, though a majority could use elections to violate minority rights. Brutus feared that leaders in a vast republic would be too distant to understand or answer to the people.**
3	How did Brutus's concern about national power differ from Mason's concern?	**Brutus feared broad national powers would weaken state governments. Mason objected to the lack of a declaration of rights protecting people from federal power.**
4	In the passage's online privacy example, what would each side value, and how does that disagreement echo ratification?	**Supporters value one national rule that protects people across state lines. Critics value states' ability to set stronger protections. The disagreement echoes the debate over effective national power versus state authority.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would support a national emergency rule if disasters cross state lines. A Federalist might argue that a shared rule helps states act together quickly. An Anti-Federalist might warn that distant officials could overlook local conditions. To limit that risk, the rule should leave states room to adapt their plans when local needs differ. This safeguard keeps coordination while protecting local judgment.

Accept different positions in Part 3 if the response accurately contrasts a national coordination argument with a concern about distant or excessive national power and identifies a relevant safeguard. For the marking job, students may choose different valid arguments and concerns from the passage.