Who Shapes the Debate?

Trace how information influences an election

USG.C.5.7 "Describe the impact of the media, public opinion polls, and digital communications on the political process, including issues related to the influence of social media and the potential of artificial intelligence."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one way news coverage shapes the debate, circle one limitation of a poll, and number two ways digital communication affects voters. Use your marks to explain how information can influence the political process.

The Last Bus Debate

1 In the fictional city of Briarport, voters must decide whether to fund later bus service. A local newspaper reports that hospital workers often finish shifts after the last bus leaves, while a television station interviews residents concerned about the cost. These choices do not cast votes, but they can shape which problems people discuss and what candidates must address. After the stories spread, candidates explain their plans at a public forum. News coverage can help voters compare trade-offs, yet a report that includes only one side may leave them with an incomplete picture.

2 A campaign posts an online poll asking, "Do you support safe, affordable rides home?" Most visitors click yes, and the campaign calls the result proof that voters support its bus plan. But visitors chose to respond, so their answers may not represent all voters; the wording also favors one response. A different survey that selects voters using a sound sampling method and asks a neutral question could give a better estimate of opinion. Even that estimate has uncertainty and can change before election day. Polls may steer campaign messages or news coverage, but they cannot predict each person's vote.

3 On social media, a rider shares a video of the dark bus stop, and neighbors quickly organize a meeting. A platform's recommendations may show the video to many users, while other voters never see it. Later, an account posts audio that seems to show a candidate promising to cancel all buses. The clip was made with artificial intelligence and does not record a real statement. AI can also help a group translate meeting notices, but convincing fakes can mislead voters. Before sharing the audio, residents could check the candidate's full statements and look for confirmation from reliable sources.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the newspaper and television stories affect what candidates discuss at the public forum?

2. Why might the campaign's online poll give a misleading picture of voter opinion?

3. How could the social media video both increase participation and leave some voters out of the debate?

4. How could the AI-made audio affect the election, and what could residents do before sharing it?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A school board is considering later library hours before a local election. In five sentences, explain how news coverage, a poll, social media, and AI could each affect public debate, and include one step residents should take to check a claim.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.5.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one way news coverage shapes the debate, circle one limitation of a poll, and number two ways digital communication affects voters. Use your marks to explain how information can influence the political process. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the newspaper and television stories affect what candidates discuss at the public forum?	**The stories draw attention to workers' need for later buses and residents' concerns about cost, prompting candidates to explain how their plans address both.**
2	Why might the campaign's online poll give a misleading picture of voter opinion?	**Visitors chose whether to respond, so they may not represent all voters, and the favorable wording may influence their answers.**
3	How could the social media video both increase participation and leave some voters out of the debate?	**It helps neighbors organize a meeting quickly, but platform recommendations may show it to some users and not others.**
4	How could the AI-made audio affect the election, and what could residents do before sharing it?	**The fake audio could mislead voters about the candidate's position. Residents could check the candidate's full statements and seek confirmation from reliable sources.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A local news report could interview students who need quiet study space and staff who would work later, bringing both needs into the election debate. A poll with neutral wording and a representative sample could help candidates estimate support, though it would not predict the vote. Students could use social media to share meeting details quickly, while a platform's recommendations might leave some families out of the conversation. AI could translate notices for more residents, but a fake recording of a board candidate could also spread false claims. Before sharing that recording, residents should compare it with the candidate's full statements and reliable reporting.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of each influence. For Part 3, look for five sentences that apply all four influences to library hours and give a specific claim-checking step.