Power Beyond Elections

How voters gained more direct control over officials and laws

USH.C.2.3.A "Describe how democratic processes (e.g., direct primary, initiative petition, referendum, recall) intended to limit political corruption by making politicians and lawmaking more immediately responsive to the people."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline what voters can do through each of the four processes. Circle the insider decision or official behavior each process could challenge.

Who Gets the Final Say?

1. In the early 1900s, reformers challenged political machines that traded favors for votes and jobs. Party leaders often chose candidates in private meetings, so a person seeking office might owe those leaders more than ordinary voters. A direct primary shifted the choice of party candidates to voters who could cast ballots in a party election. If a candidate needed support from voters to win the nomination, party insiders had less power to demand favors in return. Primaries did not end backroom deals, but they made a key decision more visible and tied candidates to a wider group of people.

2. In states that permit an initiative petition, residents collect the required signatures to put a proposed law before voters. Imagine that a legislature repeatedly refuses to consider a rule requiring public records of campaign donations. Citizens could propose that rule themselves if they meet their state's requirements. A referendum puts a proposed or enacted law before voters for approval or rejection, depending on state rules. If lawmakers pass a measure that benefits their wealthy supporters, voters may be able to reject it at the ballot box. Both routes give voters a way around decisions shaped by powerful insiders.

3. Recall addresses a different moment: after an official has taken office. In states that allow it, citizens gather enough valid signatures to trigger a vote on whether to remove that official before the term ends. An official who ignores public concerns to reward donors might face a recall election, creating pressure to listen between regular elections. Still, signatures, campaigns, and voting take time and money. Wealthy groups can also influence these processes through advertising. These reforms aimed to curb corruption by giving voters more direct control, not by guaranteeing that every voter would be heard equally.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could a direct primary make a candidate less dependent on party leaders?

2. If legislators refuse to consider a campaign-donation rule, how could an initiative petition make lawmaking more responsive to voters?

3. How could a referendum check lawmakers who pass a measure that benefits wealthy supporters?

4. Why might recall make an official listen to voters between regular elections?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A city council keeps awarding park-maintenance contracts to companies owned by council members' friends. Assume local law allows initiative petitions and recalls. In 4 to 5 sentences, explain how residents could use both processes to seek accountability, and name one limit of relying on them.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.2.3.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline what voters can do through each of the four processes. Circle the insider decision or official behavior each process could challenge. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could a direct primary make a candidate less dependent on party leaders?	**Voters, rather than party leaders meeting privately, choose the party candidate. A candidate needs voters' support for the nomination, so leaders have less power to demand favors.**
2	If legislators refuse to consider a campaign-donation rule, how could an initiative petition make lawmaking more responsive to voters?	**Residents could collect the required signatures to put their proposed rule before voters, allowing them to act despite the legislature's refusal.**
3	How could a referendum check lawmakers who pass a measure that benefits wealthy supporters?	**A referendum could let voters reject the measure at the ballot box, subject to their state's rules.**
4	Why might recall make an official listen to voters between regular elections?	**Where recall is allowed, citizens can gather valid signatures to trigger a vote on removing the official before the term ends.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Residents could collect signatures for an initiative proposing a rule that requires council members to disclose personal ties to companies seeking contracts. Voters could then decide whether to adopt that rule, even if the council refuses to propose it. Residents could also gather signatures to trigger a recall vote on a council member they believe has favored friends. Neither effort guarantees change, since collecting signatures and winning a vote take time and money.

Accept answers that connect each process to a specific opportunity for voters to challenge insider influence or official conduct. For Your Turn, students should distinguish proposing a rule through an initiative from voting on whether to remove an official through a recall.