Who Shapes Policy?

How divided government power affects public policy

WG.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 government powers or actions, circle their effects on policy, and number one linked power and effect in each case to help you evaluate the results.

One Country, Different Rules

1. In the United States, power is divided among a national government, state governments, and local governments. Congress makes federal laws and decides how federal money is spent, while states run many programs and make laws within their borders. This structure matters when a crisis crosses state lines. A national rule can reach people in many places at once, but it may not fit every community equally well. State officials can respond to local conditions, but different state choices can leave neighbors with different services. To evaluate a policy, ask who had the authority to act, what they did, and whose lives changed.

2. During the Great Depression, many people lost jobs, and state relief programs had limited funds. In 1935, Congress passed the Social Security Act. It created a national system of old-age benefits and a federal-state system of unemployment insurance. Federal law set a framework for unemployment insurance, while states wrote their own laws and administered benefits. Employers paid taxes that supported these programs. The national government could raise money and establish a system that reached across state borders. Because states controlled important details of unemployment insurance, eligibility rules and benefit amounts could vary. The new law did not give every unemployed worker the same payment.

3. In 2020, COVID-19 spread across the United States. The federal government issued public health guidance and provided money for pandemic response. Governors used state authority to order measures such as school closures and limits on gatherings. Some cities also adopted their own rules, though state laws could limit what local officials were allowed to do. As a result, rules differed across state lines even while the virus moved across them. In some places, officials adjusted rules to local conditions; in others, disagreements between levels of government made public guidance less clear. A person traveling for work might face different requirements in two nearby states.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Congress's power to pass the Social Security Act change the reach of support during the Depression?

2. What effect did giving states a role in unemployment insurance have on workers in different states? Use one policy detail.

3. How did state power shape COVID-19 rules for people who crossed state lines?

4. Considering both cases, what is one benefit and one cost of dividing policy power between national and state governments? Support each with a passage detail.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A severe heat wave hits several states, but some cities are much hotter than others. In 4 to 5 sentences, propose one action for Congress or a federal agency and one for state or local officials, then explain one benefit and one risk of dividing power this way.

Who Shapes Policy?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline government powers or actions, circle their effects on policy, and number one linked power and effect in each case to help you evaluate the results. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Congress's power to pass the Social Security Act change the reach of support during the Depression?	**It established national old-age benefits and a nationwide framework for unemployment insurance rather than leaving support only to state programs with limited funds.**
2	What effect did giving states a role in unemployment insurance have on workers in different states? Use one policy detail.	**Workers could receive different support because states controlled details such as eligibility rules and benefit amounts.**
3	How did state power shape COVID-19 rules for people who crossed state lines?	**Governors could order measures such as limits on gatherings, so a person crossing state lines could face different requirements.**
4	Considering both cases, what is one benefit and one cost of dividing policy power between national and state governments? Support each with a passage detail.	**A benefit is that states could adjust pandemic rules to local conditions. A cost is that state control of unemployment insurance details meant workers in different states could receive different benefits.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress could fund emergency cooling programs in the affected states. City officials could open cooling centers where temperatures are highest. Dividing these responsibilities would let national funding reach several states while cities choose locations based on local needs. However, people in cities that open fewer centers might have less access to a safe place to cool down.

Accept other evidence-based evaluations of national reach, local flexibility, or inconsistent support. For Part 3, the proposed actions should fit the named level of government, and the benefit and risk should follow from that division of power.