



AP U.S. Government & Politics

99 Essential Concepts

1. How does the Declaration of Independence provide the philosophical inspiration for American democracy?

2. What features of the original Constitution attempt to protect individual liberty?

3. Identify features of the original Constitution that attempt to promote safety and order.

4. What were the primary goals of the anti-federalists?

5. What warnings in *Brutus* No. 1 regarding the power of the federal government may be relevant today?

6. How is participatory democracy visible in constitutional amendments?

7. Provide examples of participatory democracy in some state government policies.

8. Identify key powers the federal government lacked under the Articles of Confederation and gained under the Constitution.

9. Identify issues left unresolved by the original Constitution.

10. Identify advantages of establishing a stronger central government.

11. What are advantages of maintaining states' rights?

12. How do separation of powers and federalism protect the rights of the individuals?



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13. Why is federalism said to reflect a *dynamic* relationship?

14. Identify advantages of federalism in the creation of public policy.

15. Identify how the tremendous increase in federal grants to states has shifted the U.S to cooperative federalism.

16. What dilemma do state governments face when deciding whether to accept federal grants-in-aid?

17. What features of the original Constitution have led to the federal government gaining more power over time?

18. Describe the debate over the meaning of the 10th amendment.

19. Describe how changing interpretations of the commerce clause have affected federal power over the years.

20. Why has the necessary and proper (elastic) clause led to expansion of congressional power, and why is this controversial?

21. Describe the purpose of the Bill of Rights.

22. Why didn't the Constitution originally contain a bill of rights? Why was one added?

23. Describe Hamilton's argument that having a Bill of Rights could actually make it *more* likely that Congress would be able to violate people's rights.

24. What advantages did Madison believe a large republic would have over a smaller republic?



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25. Where does most of the work in Congress take place? Where do most bills die?

26. Describe ways that the House of Representatives is different than the Senate.

27. Describe non-legislative powers of the Senate.

28. Senators and Representatives have different constituencies and term lengths; how does this affect congressional behavior?

29. Describe the role of standing committees in congressional oversight.

30. Explain the impact of filibuster and cloture rules in the Senate on the law-making process.

31. Identify causes of party polarization.

32. What are the effects of party polarization?

33. Identify 4 ways Congress can affect foreign policy.

34. According to *Federalist* No. 70, why is a single executive desirable?

35. What Constitutional advantages does the president have dealing with foreign affairs?

36. Why do the president's agenda and executive orders often create tension and conflict with Congress?

37. Describe an expansive interpretation of presidential power and give justification for it.



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38. How has technology changed the president's relationship with the public, and in turn Congress?

39. What is the primary role of the bureaucracy in the policy process?

40. Describe the difference between political and non-political appointees in the bureaucracy.

41. Why is the bureaucracy sometimes said to have questionable accountability?

42. Identify factors that contribute to bureaucratic independence.

43. How can presidents ensure that bureaucratic agencies work in harmony with the administration's goals?

44. How do congressional oversight hearings enable Congress to limit the power of the bureaucracy?

45. How does the power of the purse enable Congress to limit the power of the president and bureaucracy?

46. According to *Federalist* No. 78, why is life tenure for judges necessary to maintain an independent judiciary?

47. How do advocates of judicial restraint and judicial activism differ in their belief of the proper role for the judiciary?

48. How does the exercise of judicial review along with Justice's life tenure lead to debate about the legitimacy of the Court's power?

49. How does Senate confirmation affect judicial decision making?



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50. What may happen to old precedents when the ideological balance of the Supreme Court shifts following an appointment?

51. What can Congress and the president do in response to an unpopular/controversial Supreme Court ruling?

52. What does the lack of police power mean for the Judiciary?

53. Describe how accusing judges of “legislating from the bench” is a critique of judicial activism.

54. How has selective incorporation weakened state governments?

55. How has the 14th Amendment’s due process clause been used to expand individual liberties?

56. What limits has the Supreme Court allowed states to place on freedom of expression/speech?

57. How does the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the 1st and 2nd Amendments reflect a commitment to personal liberty?

58. How has the Supreme Court attempted to balance individual freedom with maintaining public order and safety?

59. How have Supreme Court rulings affected civil liberties over time?

60. How have Supreme Court rulings expanded civil rights?

61. Have Supreme Court rulings at times limited civil rights?

62. Describe how the equal protection clause has inspired social movements.



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63. How are American political beliefs formed and how do they evolve over time?

64. How do political ideology and core American values influence government policy making?

65. How do public opinion polls influence members of Congress and election strategy?

66. Describe the reliability and veracity public opinion data.

67. Explain how U.S. political culture influences the formation, goals, and implementation of public policy over time.

68. Describe how ideologies vary on the role of government in regulating the marketplace.

69. Explain how different ideologies impact policy on social issues.

70. Describe how ideologies vary on the role of government in addressing social issues.

71. How do political parties influence elections?

72. Explain how structural barriers impact third-party success.

73. Describe some informal barriers that make it difficult for third parties to succeed.

74. Why do some people advocate for independent commissions to be used for redistricting?

75. What are limits that the Supreme Court has placed on redistricting?



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76. Describe the principle of “one person, one vote”.

77. Why do some question whether the Electoral College impedes democracy?

78. Why do some argue that the Electoral College facilitates democracy?

79. How does the Electoral College affect candidates’ strategies?

80. How does the Electoral College impact democratic participation?

81. Identify differences in campaign strategy between primary elections and general elections.

82. Describe the reasons some people believe that there need to be limits to the amount of money people can spend on political campaigns.

83. Explain why some people may support the Court’s ruling in *Citizens United v. F.E.C.* (2010).

84. Describe the differences between PACs and Super PACs.

85. Describe the difference between winner-take-all congressional districts and proportional representation.

86. Identify the benefits of interest group influence on elections and policy making.

87. Identify the potential problems of interest group influence on elections and policy making.



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88. How do interest groups exert influence through iron triangles and issue networks?

89. How does variation in resources of interest groups affect their ability to influence elections and policy making?

90. How do lobbyists influence public policy?

91. Identify two ways interest groups attempt to influence the Supreme Court.

92. When is litigation a good strategy for interest groups?

93. Identify significant differences between political parties and interest groups.

94. Describe the change in recent years of how citizens acquire political information.

95. How can the media's use of polling results impact elections?

96. How have increasingly diverse choices of media outlets influenced political institutions and behavior?

97. How has the media in recent years impacted the level of political knowledge among citizens?

98. What role does the media play in agenda setting?

99. Compare voter turnout rates in various elections: presidential, midterm congressional, and primaries.