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AP US GOVERNMENT

The Ultimate Student's Guide to AP US Government

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO GET STARTED



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Introduction

This eBook is meant to provide a short collection of important principles that are often assessed on the AP US Government exam. Inside, you'll find overviews of central concepts and their relevance to the test, as well as study strategies and tips.

It features information from the [Albert Blog](#). If you're looking for additional help in preparing for the APs, be sure to regularly check the blog and subscribe to hear about our new posts.

E-mail us at hello@albert.io if you have any questions, suggestions, or comments!

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Why Educators Love Us

We asked teachers how their students did after using Albert.

Here is what they had to say:



My students had an 81.2% passing rate - the previous year was 76% (the highest rate in our county)! I am thrilled. I had 64 students total, with 6 receiving 5s, 19 scoring 4s, 27 receiving 3s, 10 scored 2s and 2 received 1s.

Susan M., JP Taravella High

70% of my students scored 3 or higher. This is up from last year, and is also well above the national average. Needless to say, I am very happy with my students' success. I used Albert more intentionally this year. In the beginning of the year, I wanted students simply to answer questions and practice. Once they had 150-200 questions answered, we looked for trends, strengths, and weaknesses and worked on addressing them. Students were tasked with increasing their answer accuracy no matter how many questions it took, then they set their own goals (some wanted to focus around tone; others needed practice with meaning as a whole).



Bill S., Lapeer High School



Last year 40% passed with 3s and 4s. This year 87% passed, most had 4s and 5s. We used the stimulus-based multiple choice questions throughout the year and as review for the exam. I think it helped tremendously.

Alice P., First Baptist Christian Academy

Why Students Love Us

We asked students how they did after using Albert.

Here is what they had to say:



I scored very well this year – four 5s and one 4. Albert helped me get used to the types of questions asked on the exam and overall my scores were better this year.

Robyn G., Chambersburg Area Senior High School

Last year was my first year taking an AP test, and unfortunately I did not do as well as I had hoped. The subject had not been my best, and that was definitely displayed on my performance. However this year, I made a much higher score on my AP test. The previous year had been AP World History and I had made a 2. For this year it was AP English Language, and I scored a 4. There was a definite jump in my score, because Albert pushed me to focus on my weaknesses and form them into strengths.



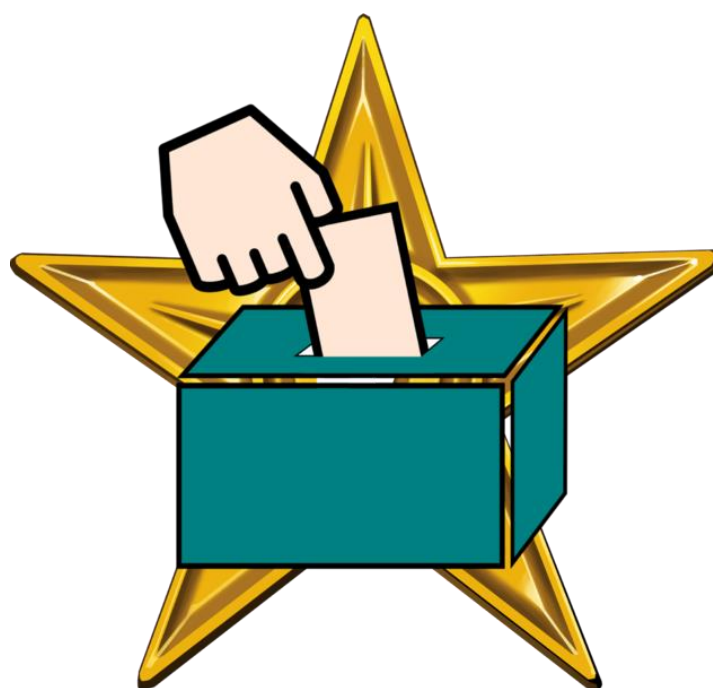
Charlotte R., Rome High



I scored a 4 on AP Biology, much higher than expected. Albert was an effective resource to guide me through AP Biology. Keeping up with it consistently all year as I learned the lesson in class was crucial to reinforcing my understanding and long-term memorization of Biology. After class each day, Albert helped to sink in the ideas that I was taught in the morning.

Lily O., Wake Forest High School

Democracy Theories: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Wikimedia Commons](#)

What Do I Need to Know About the Theories of Democracy to Prep for the AP US Gov Exam?

If you are preparing for the AP US Government exam, you need to be ready to write and answer questions about the various democracy theories that political scientists have identified. The CollegeBoard considers it such an important topic that they feature a question about the Theories of Democracy in the [AP US Gov course description](#).

Democracy Theories:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

What is Democracy?

Democracy was first practiced by the ancient Greeks, who believed that the people should have a voice in their governance. Aristotle, philosopher and author of a comparison of the different forms of government called *Politics*, warned that democracy, or the rule of the people, was a good thing that could be easily corrupted. This idea will be re-visited later in the article! In the meantime, know that from Greece, and later Rome, the United States has adopted many democratic ideas, which makes Theories of Democracy one of the key AP US Gov concepts for you to review.

One of the essential questions that is asked in any society is “Who governs?” To answer this question, you have to ask yourself who is making the laws, who has influence over public policy, who will be the next president, congressman, or senator? If you answered, “the people”, you are halfway there! But wait! Just how do “the people” make their voices heard in a democracy? Keep reading to find out.

Direct Democracy

In a direct democracy, the people’s voices are heard when citizens vote on actual decisions and bills. This was the type of democracy used in ancient Greece. In a direct democracy, a citizen would consider his or her opinion on a potential law or leader. Then, he or she would cast a vote and the votes would be counted to arrive at a majority decision.

Direct democracy is rare. It is much more likely to be seen in a small nation with few people allowed to vote. Think about how difficult it would be for a large nation like the United States to have over two million people casting votes on every decision. It would be cumbersome, expensive, and even if it could be done online, would be difficult to monitor.

Democracy Theories:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Another reason why direct democracy is hard for societies to actually implement is that few citizens have the time, energy, or interest in informing themselves on every issue. The type of issues that excite people's interest enough to cause them to form an opinion (think gun control, speed limits, abortion) are called **majoritarian issues**. Most issues, however, are not majoritarian issues and only those affected by the potential law are very informed about it.

Who really cares about the issues enough to devote their time and effort to understanding them? In an indirect democracy, the answer is elected representatives.

Indirect Democracy

In an **indirect democracy**, the citizens elect a representative who will cast votes and make decisions on their behalf. Through the citizens' representatives, they are still able to make their voice heard in the government, but they don't need to inform themselves on every issue, and may pursue other interests, entrusting their elected representatives to make the decisions that represent their desires.

Rather than vote on individual issues and bills, citizens in an indirect democracy choose from a number of candidates, voting for a representative. This is why indirect democracy is also called **representative democracy**, or **republican democracy**.

*Note: Don't get confused! When the words democratic or republican are used in the lower case and in the context of Theories of Democracy, they do not refer to political parties! Instead, **democratic government emphasizes the voice of the people** and **republican government emphasizes representation**.*

Democracy Theories:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Which of the Democracy Theories did the Founders Choose?

Which type of democracy does the United States have, a direct democracy or an indirect one? Perhaps the best way to answer the question is that the United States is a “democracy in a republic”. That means that the people DO have a voice in government, but rather than expressing that voice directly, they are represented by a legislator.

Remember Aristotle’s concern about corruption? In many ways, the framers of the American democracy felt that democracy could be dangerous. This is why, rather than implementing a direct democracy, the founding fathers took the decisions out of the people’s hands directly and created a system in which the people would vote for an elected representative. In other words, they chose indirect democracy over direct democracy.

Do any Direct Democracies Exist? How can I give an Example of One?

Very few examples of direct, or pure democracy can be found. However, for your AP US Gov review, you should be able to point to one or two examples of direct democracy. Review the bullets below and make sure you can explain how they are examples of direct, rather than indirect, democracy:

- Government in ancient Greece, perhaps the only true democracy in history. As Greece grew larger, however, and allowed more than just its most privileged citizens to vote, direct democracy could not last. There is no example of direct democracy in a modern nation state. However...
- The government of Switzerland comes closest to a modern day example of direct democracy. In Switzerland, many of the decisions at the Canton (state) level are put directly to the people.
- Another good example of direct democracy is the New England Town Meeting. When the colonies were just beginning, some colonial governments were governed by allowing the people to vote directly on the issues facing the colony. Examples of this were found in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Democracy Theories:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

What About Examples of Indirect Democracy?

The best example of an indirect democracy for you to use on your AP US Government exam is the United States! It is important that the graders know that you are aware that the United States is an indirect, representative, or republican democracy. Using these terms interchangeably throughout your essay will help the graders to know that you understand this.

Other examples of indirect democracies are Germany, India, Great Britain, and Taiwan. Remember, a democracy does not just mean a country with a President. A country with a king or queen can also have “rule by the many”, which is what democracy means!

Now, on to the last point of our review of this important AP US Government concept...

How do Representatives Function in an Indirect Democracy?

In a representative democracy (remember to use these words interchangeably!), how do the people chosen to represent the “rule of many” know what the people really think? Since the people do not directly vote on the issues as in a direct democracy, the representatives must have some basis on which to act. Political scientists cite two models that characterize the people’s representatives: the trustee model and the delegate model.

In the **trustee model**, representatives are elected by the people after the voters carefully consider their merits as leaders and thinkers. Therefore, in the trustee model, legislators should follow their own conscience and judgment when casting votes. Think of it this way: The democratic aspect is still present in the trustee model, it just takes place in the people’s voices being heard before and not during the actual voting process.

Democracy Theories:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Some disagree with the trustee model, following instead a **delegate model** of representation. In the delegate model, the representative serves more literally as a delegate or agent of the citizens. Those who believe in the delegate model place emphasis on polling their constituents and would claim that their conscience does not matter because they are bound to vote as the people in their district would.

What Should I Expect on the Actual AP US Gov Exam?

If you have not seen a sample exam, use links to AP Central to view a sample test in the course description or to see the format of past essay questions. The AP US Gov exam requires you to answer four FRE (Free Response Essays). Unlike some of the other AP social studies exams, the AP US Gov exam seeks responses that are less essay driven and more of a point by point answer to multiple and related questions.

On the AP US Government exam, you are almost sure to have a question that involves AP US Gov concepts such as Theories of Democracy. Lets look at the example provided [in the AP US Gov Course Description](#):

- a. Define direct democracy.
- b. Define republican form of government.
- c. Describe one reason the framers of the United States Constitution chose a republican form of government over a democracy.
- d. Describe each of the models of Congressional representation.
 - Trustee model (attitudinal view)
 - Delegate Model (representational view)
- e. Explain why a member of Congress might sometimes act as a trustee rather than a delegate.

Democracy Theories: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Check Yourself! Ready for Questions on the Theories of Democracy on the AP US Gov Exam?

To gauge whether or not you're ready to be tested on the following AP Gov concepts, ask yourself the following:

- What is a democracy (Who governs?)
- What is the difference between direct and indirect democracy?
- What are some synonyms for and examples of direct democracy?
- What are some synonyms for and examples of indirect democracy?

Federalism: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Flickr](#)

Federalism is a unique idea, particular to American government. So, when you take the AP US Government & Politics exam, you are going to be asked a lot of questions about what federalism is and how it works.

Federalism:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Types of Government Power

Don't be overwhelmed. The framework of the federal system is actually pretty simple. Under federalism, the national—or federal—government has certain powers and the states have other powers.

Let's look at the various types of power, and what level of government wields them.

Federal powers, consisting of

1. Delegated powers: also called express powers, are written in the Constitution.
2. Implied powers: can be reasonably inferred from the Constitution.
3. Inherent powers: don't rely on specific clauses of the Constitution but emanate from the nature of the federal government—for example, issues relating to foreign affairs.

Reserved powers: These are powers that are neither given to the federal government nor denied to the states. Although these powers are not expressed, they are guaranteed to the states via the 10th

In general these powers relate to states being able to govern their internal affairs—e.g., have police and fire departments.

Concurrent powers: These powers are held by the federal government and state governments, and include the powers of taxation and to make laws.

Prohibited powers: These powers are denied to the federal government or state governments, or both. One example of a prohibited power is the taxing of exports.

Federalism:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Supremacy Clause

Article VI of the Constitution, the Supremacy Clause, states that the Constitution is the “supreme Law of the Land.” This means that all officials of the country, including state officials, must give oaths to support the Constitution, and states cannot override national powers.

So, from the very beginning the states were viewed as somewhat secondary to the federal government. Over time, states’ powers would increase, to the benefit of the federal government.

Let’s look at how that process played out.

Early Federalism—or Dual Federalism

Up until the Civil War, the original interpretation of federalism was something known as **dual federalism**. This view held that the Constitution had given limited powers to the federal government and left most powers in the hands of the states.

The federal government was held to dominate in its areas of influence (e.g., foreign affairs) and the states in theirs (e.g., slavery or education), with the Supreme Court acting as umpire when disputes arose between the two.

After the Civil War

Dual federalism was criticized for not adequately protecting citizens from states that denied freedom (for example, slavery and Jim Crow laws) and for being ill equipped to handle the social and economic changes affecting the country.

Post-Civil War, federalism has evolved considerably. The causes of this include the Civil War, the territorial expansion of the U.S., America becoming an industrial and international power, the two World Wars and the perceived threats of communism to American interests.

Federalism:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

After the Civil War, the biggest change to federalism was the application of federal rights—those contained in the Bill of Rights—to the states. Previously, the Bill of Rights applied only to the federal government; after it applied across-the-board.

Cooperative Federalism

After the Great Depression, cooperative federalism saw the federal government expand its domestic activities. Under this idea, also known as **fiscal federalism**, the federal government sends monies to the states, and attaches stipulations, or rules and regulations, to the funds.

This allows the federal government to exercise much more power over domestic affairs than it was given in the Constitution.

Both liberal and conservative presidents have utilized cooperative federalism to implement their policies. Obamacare contains many instances of cooperative federalism; so too did President Bush's No Child Left Behind law.

The idea of cooperative federalism views federalism as a system to help provide goods and services to citizens. Again, Obamacare is a good example of this, as the federal law set up a framework for state governments to establish statewide exchanges that would provide affordable healthcare options to citizens.

Essentially—the federal government gives the states money and tells them how to spend it. The states thus become agents of federal policy.

Now let's look at some elements of federalism within the federal government.

The Separation of Powers

Inherent to the federal system is the separation of powers within the federal government. This is Government 101. Congress passes legislation and the president signs it into law.

Federalism:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

If the president vetoes legislation, Congress can override the veto and pass the legislation with the vote of two-thirds of each house.

The Supreme Court can declare acts of Congress or actions by the president unconstitutional. A constitutional amendment is required to subvert this.

Checks and Balances

The veto power is part of the federal system of checks and balances – powers given to each branch of government to prevent unfettered action by the other branches.

The Supreme Court's power to rule acts unconstitutional falls within the system also of checks and balances. This power is known as **judicial review**.

Another example of checks and balances is the requirement that the Senate approve presidential nominees and treaties with other nations.

Let's look at the basic powers that the federal government and the states have.

Basic Federal Powers

1. Taxation
2. Raise and maintain the army
3. Declare war
4. Regulate commerce
5. Supreme Court rulings
6. Rights incorporated by the 14th Amendment—in other words, the application of the Bill of Rights to the States
7. Miscellaneous (laws against kidnapping, crossing state lines to commit crimes, harming federal officials, violating civil rights)

Federalism:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Basic State Powers

1. Taxation
2. Conducting elections
3. 10th Amendment rights
4. 'Traditional' rights such as marriage licenses, business licenses, criminal laws, education

Not too complicated, right? Now let's take a look at a sample free-response question.

Federalism in the United States has shifted from a form known as "dual federalism" to a newer "cooperative federalism."

1. *Define these two kinds of federalism.*
2. *Explain why this newer concept of "cooperative federalism" favors the powers of the central government.*

Part (a) is easy to answer. Again, dual federalism was the view that the federal government and state governments operated in separate spheres, and had few powers, aside from taxation, that overlapped. Cooperative federalism sees the two levels of government working in tandem on many issues, such as healthcare and education.

Now, let's think about (b). Why does cooperative federalism favor federal power? One word: money. Since the federal government gives its money to the states with strings attached, it can exercise considerable policy control via these strings. Federal highway funds, for example, are contingent on states keeping their drinking ages at 21—otherwise, no more money from Uncle Sam to build roads!



Federalism: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Overall

This basic overview should serve you well as you prepare for the AP US Government & Politics exam. Remember, though—this is just an outline. You'll want lots of specific examples of cooperative federalism in the event you're asked to answer a federalism-based free-response question.

Constitution Review: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Public Domain Files](#)

It is arguably the most revered document in the world. Countless countries, after revolution or liberation, have looked to it to guide their own nation-building processes. The Constitution, written in the wake of the failed Articles of Confederation and ratified by the states in 1789, outlines the structure and function of our government and also, through the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments, guarantees our civil rights and liberties.

Constitution Review:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Americans are proud of their Constitution and are highly reluctant to allow any changes to it, which is why in our nation's entire history it has only been amended 27 times, and only after considerable struggle. Many worthy amendments—such as the Equal Rights Amendment—have failed to pass because of this sentiment.

The Constitution is only five pages long. It merely outlines the structure and basic functions of government; it was left up to Congress to create laws that would govern the activities of quotidian life. The meaning of the Constitution, when it is unclear, is left up to the Supreme Court to decide. Over the years, the Court has supplanted the Constitution with a wide body of constitutional law, which has clarified and at times expanded Americans' rights and liberties.

The Constitution of 1787

The Constitution contains seven articles. Most of the Constitution deals with the legislature, or Congress (Article I). The founders considered Congress to be the primary branch of the new government—as opposed to the presidency. Records of the Constitutional Convention show that most of the time was spent dealing with Article I.

The only real specifics contained in the Constitution—things like the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate—pertain to the Congress. Congress is also given 17 specific duties, such as regulating interstate commerce and creating roads.

The Executive

Most of the details about the executive—the president—in Article II deal with the Electoral College, and many of those details have been amended over the years. There is minimal job description provided for the president and most of his powers are checked by Congress or open to interpretation. The Founders did not intend to create a powerful presidency.

Constitution Review:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Judicial Branch

Article III of the Constitution deals with the judiciary and like Article II does not contain much detail. There is a minimal description of the Supreme Court, and an outline of the process by which new federal courts can be created if the need arises. Much of the article deals with how judges are appointed and how they can be removed from office.

Then, much of Article III deals with treason.

Articles IV, V and VI

These amendments describe how the states interact, how amendments can be created and establish the legal status of the federal government. Article IV contains the “Full Faith and Credit” clause, meaning that the states must respect the laws of the other states. Article VI gives the Constitution its “supremacy” status.

Article VII

This article deals with ratification—i.e., how the states can approve the new Constitution. The Constitution was officially ratified in 1788, when nine states had approved it. However, the nation waited for two key states—Virginia and New York—to also ratify the Constitution before it held elections for Congress and president.

After this, North Carolina reversed itself and ratified, and Rhode Island, the lone holdout among the 13 colonies, finally ratified in 1791.

Constitution Review:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Bill of Rights and other Amendments

There was considerable opposition to the new Constitution from the anti-Federalists, particularly in New York, Virginia and North Carolina, three of the states that ratified near the end. The anti-Federalists insisted that clearer limits be placed on federal power, so the Federalists agreed to add a series of new amendments as soon as the Congress could form, in 1789.

James Madison, who was originally elected as a member of the House of Representatives, led the drafting of what became the Bill of Rights—the first ten amendments to the Constitution. These amendments are:

1. First Amendment: deals with freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition.
2. Second Amendment: deals with the right to bear arms.
3. Third Amendment: prohibits the forced quartering of troops.
4. Fourth Amendment: prohibits unreasonable search and seizure.
5. Fifth Amendment: concerns indictments, the probation on double jeopardy (being tried twice for the same crime) and just compensation.
6. Sixth Amendment: guarantees a speedy public trial, the right to confront witnesses and to seek counsel.
7. Seventh Amendment: guarantees a jury in civil trials.
8. Eighth Amendment: concerns excessive bail and cruel and unusual punishments.
9. Ninth Amendment: specifies the rights that are retained by the people.
10. Tenth Amendment: specifies the rights that are retained by the states basically, all those not enumerated in the Constitution.

Initially the Bill of Rights was viewed as only applying to the federal government. Since the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Supreme Court has slowly applied these requirements to the states as well, in a process known as *selective incorporation*.

Constitution Review:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Subsequent Amendments

The Constitution has changed surprisingly little since the Bill of Rights passed. Since then, there have only been 17 amendments, and most of them are technical. These include:

1. Eleventh Amendment: the rules for lawsuits against states.
2. Twelfth Amendment: concerns separate votes for president and vice president.
3. Seventeenth Amendment: concerns the direct election of senators.
4. Twentieth Amendment: gives a new starting date for federal terms.
5. Twenty-Second Amendment: establishes a two-term limit for presidents.
6. Twenty-Third Amendment: gives Washington, D.C. three electoral votes.
7. Twenty-Fifth Amendment: establishes rules for succession of the president dies in office or becomes incapacitated.
8. Twenty-Seventh Amendment: establishes Congressional pay rises.

The more substantive amendments are the following:

1. Thirteenth Amendment: abolishes slavery.
2. Fourteenth Amendment: makes former slaves citizens and entitles them to due process and equal protection under the law.
3. Fifteenth Amendment: guarantees voting rights for former slaves.
4. Sixteenth Amendment: establishes a federal income tax.
5. Nineteenth Amendment: gives women the right to vote.

Two amendments cancel each other out. These are the Eighteenth and Twenty-First Amendments, the first of which began Prohibition (which forbid alcohol) and the latter, which ended Prohibition.

Constitution Review:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Judicial Interpretation

Various amendments have been proposed over the years—notably, the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have guaranteed certain civil rights and liberties for women—but have failed to pass. In recent times, some politicians have called for a constitutional amendment to regulate the flow of money in politics.

This is in response to recent decisions of the Supreme Court such as *Citizens United*. Since *Marbury v. Madison*, the Court has been the arbiter of disputes over what the Constitution means—including what rights it guarantees. While the Constitution does not explicitly guarantee a right to privacy, for instance, the Court has found that this right is implied by other parts of the Constitution.

Now let's take a look at a sample free-response question.

A Sample AP US Government & Politics Free-Response Question (FRQ)

The framers of the Constitution created a political system based on limited government. The original Constitution and the Bill of Rights were intended to restrict the powers of the national government. Later constitutional developments also limited the powers of state governments.

1. Explain how each of the following limits the powers of the national executive.
2. Federalism
3. Checks and balances
4. Explain how each of the following two provisions in the Bill of Rights limits the powers of the national government.
5. Establishment clause
6. Guarantee of a public trial
7. Choose one of the following and explain how it limits the power of state governments.
8. Citizenship clause of the Fourteenth Amendment
9. Selective incorporation

Constitution Review: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

This is an involved question, but also fairly straightforward. For (a), we know that federalism limits the power of the federal government because the national and state governments share governing powers. Checks and balances limit the powers of the national executive because Congress and sometimes, the courts must approve many of his actions.

For (b) we know that that Establishment Clause prohibits the establishment of a state religion, like in the United Kingdom. In not being able to sanction one religion over another, the national government is unable to enforce its will through the institution of the church. The guarantee of a public trial ensures that the national government cannot lock up its critics or opponents on a pretense in order to suppress dissent.

For (c), let's choose *selective incorporation*. We know that selective incorporation applies the Bill of Rights, which was originally only applied to the national government, to the states. This means that states are limited in the rights they can restrict—and many did, before the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Wrap Up

The Constitution is not a difficult document to understand because it is so short and contains so little detailed information. Remember this. Remember that the Constitution deals mostly with the Congress and that the amendments were added to please the anti-Federalists.

You should also be aware of the Court's role in interpreting the Constitution, and of the fact that it has hardly changed since it was written; mostly the laws written by Congress and the Court's body of constitutional law govern our country.

Good luck on the AP US Government & Politics exam!

Checks and Balances: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Flickr](#)

The system of checks and balances is one that the United States has been founded as a method of decreasing corruption. This standard has been employed in other countries as well, with varying degrees of success as to that implementation.

Checks and Balances: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The AP US Government exam will likely consider your understanding of what checks and balances are and how they relate to the entire system of government within the United States. This system is important to life as we know it and is extremely important to allowing the people to continue running the country in the way that we are used to.

This AP US Government review will take a look at what checks and balances are, who they apply to and just why they are so important to the overall government system. It will also take a look at what can happen if checks and balances are not maintained and the ways that different parts of the government can choose to circumvent the checks and balances. It will also look at why this process of circumventing is actually extremely important for the continuation of the government and the implementation of the will of the people as well.

What are Checks and Balances

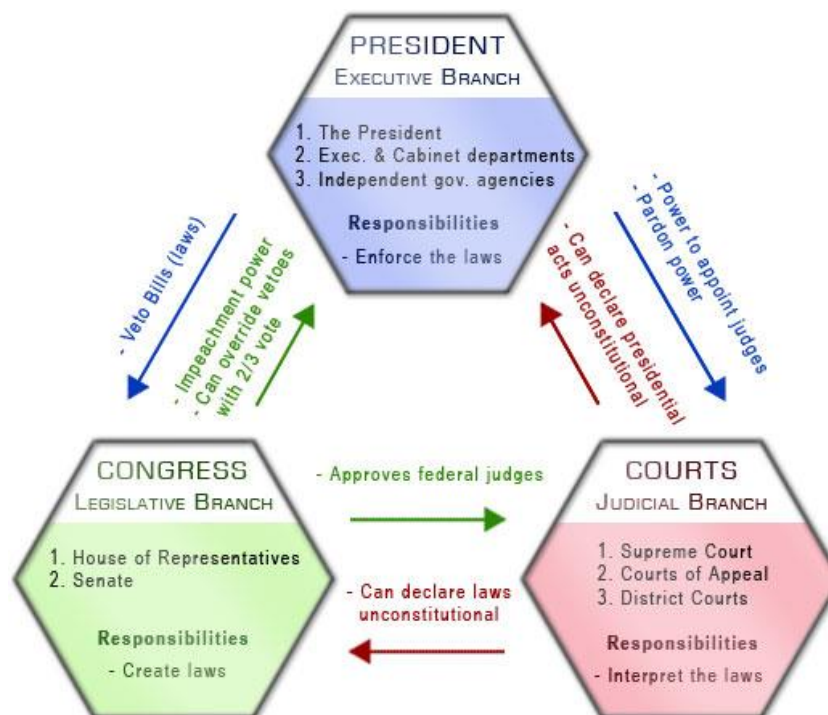


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Checks and Balances: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Checks and balances were written into the instruction manual for our government, and they are a way for each branch of government to balance out the power of the other. Our forefathers believed that it was important that no one person (or group of people) were more powerful than any other. As a result, they created a government that includes three different 'branches.' Those branches each have different responsibilities, but at the same time, they are required to work together in order to make decisions.

If the branches agree to a certain action, law or even inaction, the motion will pass, and the process goes smoothly. If they do not agree, however, that means the motion is not allowed. Without this system, one branch of the government would be able to make its own rules without regard for what the others want and even without regard for what the people want. This is the point of the system. When the government checks and balances the power of other branches, they are intended to keep them from acting in their best interests and instead lead them to act in the public's best interests.

Checks mean that each branch is able to say no to the other. Balance means that each of them has the same amount of power as each of the others. By maintaining this system where all three branches are required and their power is equal, it is possible to maintain a type of status quo. The people are represented by all powers of the government, and no one can get too much power and therefore overthrow the government or the will of the people. This was what our forefathers were most afraid of after all.

Checks and Balances in the Executive Branch

The executive branch is responsible for the 'execution' of laws. That means that once the laws are created, they are the ones who make sure that the rest of the country is following those laws and continues to do so. The President is at the head of the executive branch and is the one who is responsible primarily for this though there are others, such as the Vice President and members of the Cabinet who assist him in this process.

Checks and Balances:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The President, however, is not allowed to enact laws himself but he is allowed to call special sessions of Congress and veto bills, thus checking the power of Congress. He is also not allowed to make rulings on the violation of laws, but he is able to appoint the judges and give reprieves or pardons if he chooses, thus checking the judicial branch. At the same time, however, the other branches are not allowed to handle the execution of laws, which is the President's responsibility alone. This provides the balance between the executive branch and other branches.

Checks and Balances in the Legislative Branch

The legislative branch is responsible for making laws. New laws can be proposed to Congress and they are responsible for voting on any of those laws. Even more, they can create their own laws by presenting it to the rest of Congress, discussing it and voting. Because this is an extremely important responsibility, Congress actually has a level of checks and balances within itself, in the form of two separate houses.

The Senate and the House of Representatives make up Congress and each discusses, presents and votes on new laws entirely separately. That means if a law is proposed in the House of Representatives and passed it must then go to the Senate to be discussed and passed and vice versa. Once this has happened, the law is then able to go to the President to be signed and passed or to be rejected if he believes the law is not in the best interests of the public.

The legislative branch checks the power of the President by maintaining the right to review all appointments and bring impeachment hearings and checks the power of the judicial branch also by the power to impeach and the ability to improve appointments.

Checks and Balances: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Checks and Balances in the Judicial Branch

The judicial system is represented by the Supreme Court and federal courts established by Congress. The responsibility of the judicial branch is to review the laws passed by Congress and apply them to cases within the country. It is their responsibility to interpret the laws and the Constitution to determine if any laws passed are a violation. If a law is passed in violation of the Constitution, they are allowed to nullify it. If someone is accused of violating a law passed by Congress, they are responsible for determining if the law has truly been broken and what should be done about it.

The judicial branch's power to nullify laws passed in violation of the Constitution allows them to 'check' the power of the legislative branch, ensuring they are not able to pass just any law they want. The judicial branch also ensures that any Presidential actions are not a violation of his powers or the Constitution and can nullify those actions that are found to be a violation. In this way, the judicial branch can check the powers of the other two branches. This helps to provide the balance necessary to keep each of the branches at the same level with no one more powerful, even the President.

Avoiding Checks and Balances

In order to maintain the level of checks and balances, it is important that each branch is able to stop the power of the others. This forms a system that is able to interact with each other but also stay with a balance of power. If the system did not allow for each branch of government to control the power of the other, it could result in problems for the way the country is run. It is important to understand how this works, however, and what each branch can do to the others.

Congress has the power to make laws. Once they make the law, it must go to the President who must approve it before it's established in the country. Then the law must be reviewed by the judicial branch (when it is called for) to ensure it is Constitutional.

Checks and Balances: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

But if the President does not want to approve the law he can choose to veto it. This is a way that the President can check the power of Congress. If the judicial branch reviews the law and finds it is unconstitutional, they also can veto it.

Now the additional checks come in because if the President vetoes a law that Congress has passed they still have the ability to pass it as long as they can get a 2/3 majority in both houses of Congress. They can then override the President's veto. This is how the government ensures that the President is doing what the people want. If Congress can overwhelmingly agree that the law is in the best interests of the people, even the President is not able to stop it from becoming a law.

Checks and Balances & the AP US Government Exam

The AP US Government exam is likely to ask you to look at the way checks and balances impact each branch of the government and how this helps the country as a whole. For example, past exams have required an explanation of how each branch of government checks the executive branch. It may also require you to consider why these checks are important and why our forefathers decided that they should be included in the establishment of our government. Understanding the three different branches and how they link with each of the other branches is important, as this shows what each branch does in relation to the other branches. This is almost certain to be an important aspect of this subject in the AP US Government exam.

Bureaucracy: AP US Government Crash Course



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No matter which party controls the presidency or the Congress, the bureaucracy has continued to grow. In fact, one of the most conservative presidents in recent memory, George W. Bush, expanded the bureaucracy considerably in the wake of 9/11. An entirely new federal department, the Department of Homeland Security, was created to deal with domestic terror threats.

Bureaucracy:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Like the media, the bureaucracy is often referred to as the Fourth Branch of government. In reality it is a part of the executive branch. The heads of the various departments—the secretary of state or defense or the attorney general—are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

Early on in our democracy, the bureaucracy was often used for patronage—the supporters of whatever politician was in power were appointed cushy federal jobs in exchange for their support. This largely changed as a result of widespread corruption and incompetence during the late 1800's.

Although they don't create policy per se, federal agencies do have policy making capability. Since the Great Depression and World War II, federal agencies have implemented scores of public policies on issues ranging from business, education, general welfare and public safety.

So what Exactly are the Powers of the Bureaucracy?

The federal bureaucracy has wide-ranging powers over American citizens and businesses. Some complain about this, maintaining that since bureaucrats are unelected, they shouldn't wield such vast power over the day-to-day affairs of Americans. The bureaucracy controls how most tax dollars are spent, too.

The two primary powers of the bureaucracy are *rule making* and rule adjudication. Although the Congress writes laws, these laws don't have comprehensive instructions on how to carry them out—this task is left to bureaucrats, and gives them substantial leeway to interpret laws as they see fit (as well as how the president directs them through memoranda and executive orders).

When federal agencies create rules, they often have public hearings to allow for citizens' input. When there is a violation of bureaucratic rules, by a citizen or business, the bureaucracy has the final say.

Bureaucracy:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

What Controls are There on the Federal Bureaucracy?

The president has control over agencies' budgets, as does the Office of Management and Budget, or OMB. The president can strip an agency of its power by failing to allocate it any funds. Courts can limit bureaucratic power through their rulings, and Congress can rewrite laws affecting how agencies are run, and what their missions are.

What does the Bureaucracy Look Like?

There are two events that make the bureaucracy grow—wars and economic declines. During these times, the government allocates more funding and expands programs. Once an agency is created or given money, however, and programs are created, they are very hard to dismantle. This why bureaucracies grow even when the president is an advocate of smaller government.

Since the bureaucracy deals with so much, including maintenance of the highways and distribution of Social Security checks, it employs millions—roughly three million—people around the country. Some areas of the country have high numbers of federal employees, particularly Virginia and Maryland, which abut the federal capitol.

These days, bureaucracies aren't really depositories for big donors. (Ambassadors' posts are another story). Most bureaucrats are hired using the results of exams such as the Civil Service Exam and the Foreign Service Exam, and are highly trained and competent.

As mentioned, the bureaucracy is mostly part of the executive branch. Executive branch departments include the fifteen departments (cabinet-level posts) such as the Department of State, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). One recent major program, Obamacare, comes under the purview of HHS.

Bureaucracy: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

There are also independent agencies with very specific tasks. These include the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which regulates product safety and issues recalls; the Environmental Protection Agency, which regulates air, land and water quality; the Federal Reserve (or, “the Fed”), which sets interest rates and regulates national banking and US bond markets; and NASA, or the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which conducts space research.

Just because these agencies are not in the executive branch does not make them less important or powerful. In fact, with his ability to set interest rates, the Fed chairman has sometimes been referred to as the real most powerful man in the world.

Iron Triangles

A concept you will hear in AP US Government & Politics is *iron triangle*. Iron triangles are relationships between federal agencies, the congressional committees that oversee them, and interest groups. These three institutions interact frequently and tend to influence each other’s decisions. Since interest groups can provide money and grassroots support to politicians, committees tend to give interests groups’ opinions considerable sway in the policy making process.

Bureaucrats like to make nice with legislators, too, as the legislatures could easily cut the agency’s budget in future years. Both agencies and legislators benefit from the specialized research and other information the issue groups can provide. And—when they retire from government—interest groups provide bureaucrats and politicians with cushy, lucrative jobs in the private sector.

OK—now why don’t we take a look at a sample free-response question from a past AP US Government & Politics exam?

Bureaucracy:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

A Sample AP US Government & Politics Free-Response (FRQ) Question

The federal bureaucracy as part of the executive branch exercises substantial independence in implementing governmental policies and programs. Most workers in the federal bureaucracy are civil-service employees who are organized under a merit system. Define one key characteristic of the merit system. For each of the following, describe one factor that contributes to bureaucratic independence.

- 1. The structure of the federal bureaucracy*
- 2. The complexity of public policy problems*

For each of the following, explain one Constitutional provision that it can use to check the bureaucracy.

- 1. Congress*
- 2. The courts*
- 3. Interest groups*

This seems like a long, involved question, but the answers are actually quite straightforward and short. For (a), we can simply note that a characteristic of the merit system is that bureaucrats are hired based on their score on an exam, such as the Civil Service Exam or the Foreign Service Exam.

For (b), we'll note that the structure of the federal bureaucracy favors its independence since it is so vast—and dispersed across the country—that it is difficult for the other parts of the government to exert direct influence on every single employee. Thus, each agency typically has more control over its employees than Congress or the president does. The complexity of public policy problems gives agencies relative autonomy because they specialize in these issues, so Congress and the president are reliant on their advice and information to make decisions. Thus, the bureaucracy, in a way, can write its own ticket.

Bureaucracy:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

For (c), you have simple answers to give for each of the questions. Congress can check the bureaucracy by cutting or eliminating its budget. The courts can check the bureaucracy by invalidating their actions, if they are viewed as unconstitutional. And finally, interest groups can check the bureaucracy by clogging the pipeline of information that they deliver, or by lobbying Congress to stop the bureaucracy from doing something, or to order the bureaucracy to do something.

The Wrap Up

Remember how vast the bureaucracy is and how much influence it has on the day-to-day operation of government. Keep in mind that the bureaucracy is always growing, even under small-government presidents, and that it grows particularly during wartime and economic crises. And remember that it is very hard to shrink the size of the bureaucracy—once you give a benefit, it's hard to take it away.

You should also try to remember the names of a few executive branch agencies (State) and a few independent agencies (NASA) and be able to say what they do in a nutshell. This will help you if you encounter an FRQ about the bureaucracy on the AP US Government & Politics exam.

Good luck!



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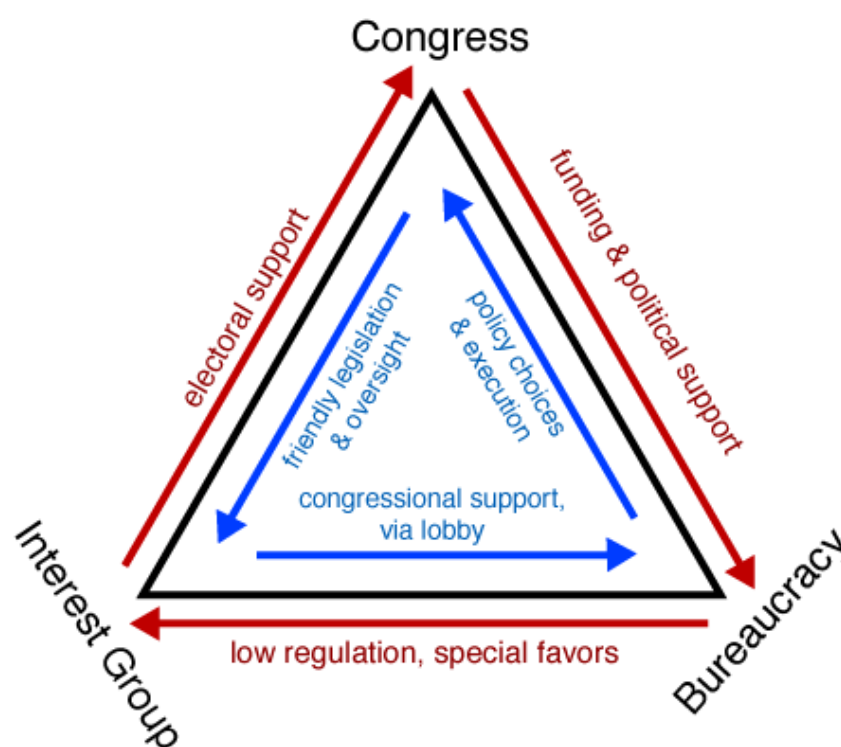
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Iron Triangle: AP US Government Crash Course



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In American politics, there are official as well as unofficial institutions that shape the development of policy and the administration of government. The AP US Government & Politics exam will test your knowledge of these institutions, as well as *how these institutions work together*.

The policymaking relationship between congressional committees, the bureaucracy and interest groups is referred to as the Iron Triangle.

Iron Triangle:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

What is an Iron Triangle?

The Iron Triangle is a *concept, not an institution*. It is the idea that committees in the House and Senate, federal departments and agencies, and think tanks and interest groups all work together to develop and conserve their own power, and expand their political influence.

There are agencies of the federal government, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs, that are tasked with providing services to consumers—the American public. This DFA, for example, provides veterans with medical and financial benefits.

In Congress, there are corresponding committees and subcommittees—such as the House Committee on Veterans Affairs—that make policy on matters relating to veterans affairs, including what types of benefits to give to veterans and how to disperse them.

Outside of government, there are various interest groups, such as the VFW—the Veterans of Foreign Wars—that advocate for veterans. This advocacy includes performing research and issuing reports about veterans' issues, as well as educating and lobbying Congress.

These three groups—congressional committees, bureaucracies and interest groups—have a symbiotic relationship. *They are the corners, or bases, of the Iron Triangle.*

It is in the best interest of the Department of Veterans Affairs to keep its corresponding congressional committee satisfied, as it votes on issues—especially, funding—that will affect bureaucrats' jobs and career prospects, as well as expand their operations, along with their influence.

Iron Triangle: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

It is in the interest of both congressional committees and the bureaucracy to keep the interest groups satisfied, as the interest groups provide them with policy expertise they might not otherwise have, and spend lavishly on campaign donations and other forms of political assistance.

Interest groups also have a big influence on public opinion, via advertising campaigns and through grassroots outreach, and can thus shape the public's perception of the congressional committees and bureaucracy.

If members of Congress and bureaucrats are perceived to be doing lousy jobs, their careers are in jeopardy. On the flip side, if the interest groups approve of a congressman's or a bureaucrat's work, they can help improve his public image and influence.

The interest groups work so closely with congress and the bureaucracy in order to see their policy goals implemented. For example, if the VFW wants more money for veterans' housing, its efforts will revolve around that goal.

And so, the links between these three bases of power form the sides of the Iron Triangle.

Easy enough, right? Now let's look at some of the implications of these relationships.

Benefits of the Iron Triangle

In order to pass quality legislation, Congress needs access to lots of research and expertise. It would be impossible for Congress, or the bureaucracy, to employ a team of experts to deal with every issue that comes before it.

In this sense, the relationship these institutions have with interest groups is very beneficial to the public. The interest groups have experts and specialized knowledge, and can help Congress craft effective legislation.

Iron Triangle:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Furthermore, these interest groups—and in particular, think tanks—can serve as farm teams for future government employees. If Democrats, for example, are out of power for four years, with Republicans controlling the presidency, House and Senate, the Democrats' allied interest groups can help them formulate new policies and ideas to present to the American public.

When Democrats are elected, some employees of these interest groups and think tanks might be hired to work in the bureaucracy, giving the government the benefit of their knowledge.

Drawbacks of the Iron Triangle

The interest groups, bureaucracy and congressional committees are each other's constituents, as opposed to consumers. The consumers are the American people. When federal agencies and members of Congress become more interested in satisfying their constituents—to get campaign donations, for example—than their consumers, the American public loses out.

The various Iron Triangles that form are often called *sub-governments*, as they are often impregnable, durable and incredibly influential. This too, while building their expertise, makes them less responsive to the demands of the public, and even to the influence of elections. Most bureaucrats remain in place even after a switch in party control of the presidency or Congress.

These sub-governments can produce sub-par legislation that benefits only the interest groups that are a part of the sub-government, or narrow, pork-barrel policies that benefit only one, small segment of the population.

For example, if interest groups representing Big Oil or the timber industry have a massive amount of influence over the Environmental Protection Agency or its environmental committees in the House and Senate, environment-friendly legislation and policies might not be passed.

Iron Triangle:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Instead, policies favoring the expansion of drilling and logging might be favored. A financial imbalance creates a big difference in the political clout of interest groups. Big Oil has hundreds of millions, environmental groups much less, for example—and so Big Oil has a louder voice in Congress and the bureaucracy.

Other Aspects of the Iron Triangle

As mentioned, sometimes the employees of interest groups go to work for the government. The reverse happens, too: sometimes, after years in Congress, a member retires and is rewarded with a high-paying job at a think tank or interest group. This is sometimes referred to as a ‘golden parachute.’

In recent years, laws have been passed to restrict employment relationships between members of Congress and interest groups—there is a two-year ban on lobbying, for example—but the problem persists. A member of Congress is likely to take the demands of an interest group very seriously if a upper-six-figure job awaits when his or her term in Congress expires.

It’s a relatively simple concept, which boils down to the old adage—you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.

Issue Networks

In some readings you will see Iron Triangles referred to as *issue networks*. They are the same thing. An Iron Triangle typically forms around a specific issue—healthcare, trade, transportation, etc.

Let’s look at part of a free-response question that asks about Iron Triangles.

Interest groups seek to influence political processes in ways that benefit their members. In doing so, however, they may not act in the overall public interest.

(a) Explain how interest groups use issue networks (also known as iron triangles) to influence government decision making.

Iron Triangle:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

First, don't forget that iron triangles and issue networks are the same thing. Multiple-choice questions might not make this clear. Now, here you can give a pretty straightforward answer. Interest groups use iron triangles to provide the government with policy knowledge, lobby the government, and provide government officials with campaign donations. All of these activities are intended to influence government policy.

Key Takeaways

There are a few simple points to remember about Iron Triangles as you prepare for the AP US Government & Politics exam:

1. The issues that come before the government are now so vast and complex that small government units (like congressional committees) now find themselves in charge of specific areas of policymaking.
2. All three of the main groups in these Iron Triangles benefit from keeping the relationships in place.
3. Lobby and interest groups keep government officials who support their pet issues in power and help the officials to maintain their contracts, jobs and benefits.
4. The American public—the consumers—sometimes benefit from Iron Triangles, but often don't.

As you prepare for the AP US Government & Politics exam, have some specific examples of Iron Triangles/issue networks so that you can illustrate your points.

Linkage Institutions: AP US Government Crash Course



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In this AP US Government review, we will look at linkage institutions and the way that they contribute to the American system of government. This review will look at not only how these systems were initially developed, but how they work in the present and also what their goals are. It will also look at why this continues to be important for the American people and what we expect from our government in order for it to properly represent us. All of this may be represented on the AP US Government exam, which seeks to review the government system as a whole.

Linkage Institutions:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Purpose of Linkage Institutions

A linkage institution is designed to do just what you would think, form a link. That link comes between the people who are being represented and the government that represents them. No matter what type of government there is in the particular area, there exists some form of linkage between the government itself and the people (except for dictatorships). These linkage forms could be anything from a legislative body to a privileged group or an arbitrator, whatever is decided by the governing body or the people.

The larger the body that represents the governed, the more positively they generally feel towards it. For example, a legislative body, such as the United States enjoys, is elected by the people and therefore is considered a good representation of what the people want, the people's 'voice.' This elected group takes the information that the people want and lets the government know those things so that they can act on them. This way, the government does not need to try and reach out to each member of the public to determine what should be done.

In governments where the power is more centralized, such as a monarchy, only one person may be selected to relay information from the people to the leader of the government. In aristocracies it may be a privileged few who are selected, possibly directly by the government head themselves, to express the will of the people. These individuals who serve as a go-between are the linkage institution themselves, and they are referred to as such whether they are only one person or a large group.

Smaller linkage institutions may not be as capable of representing the people as larger institutions, especially when the people are not responsible for their selection. As a result, this can cause some discord within the area, whether represented by a small or large government. Even governments such as city or township governments could have discord if they refused to utilize linkage institutions to join with the people.

Linkage Institutions: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Establishment of Linkage Institutions

Linkage institutions are established at the time of any government creation because they are expressly tied to that government. It does not matter what type of government is actually being established; a linkage institution is required for the success of that government. Without these types of institutions, the government cannot hope to succeed because the people do not consent to be governed when they cannot likewise be a part of the decisions.

When a monarch or dictator takes over a country, whether by succession or other means, they choose an individual or group of individuals that they trust to serve as their advisor. This person is responsible for helping them make decisions and is supposed to help them understand what others want from them, though this isn't always the case and in the past advisors have sought their own ends rather than the needs of the people.

This is why most governments have larger pools of people to serve as that advisor, especially in the case of the United States. When considering the United States and other democratic countries like it, the establishment of linkage institutions is slightly different, primarily because these countries rely on more input from the people even in choosing who is going to represent them and their best interests. This is the type of representation and thought that the United States was founded on, the ability to make decisions as a result of what the people want, rather than what one individual wants.

The Importance of Linkage Institutions

These institutions have proven important for one very important reason, the people who are being represented want to feel as though they have a voice in the politics of their own government. The people want to feel like their leader understands them and understands not only what they need, but what they want as well. By maintaining a linkage institution, the government can maintain at least a semblance of this type of input.

Linkage Institutions: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

If the government uses these types of institutions properly, it can reduce the chances of uprisings, riots, and other problems within the area. Because the people feel that there are other ways that they can get their views and thoughts across to the government, they are more likely to try those other methods, such as writing to their representatives or appealing to the governmental advisor. These methods are generally much simpler than an uprising would be.

Without linkage institutions, it's entirely possible that uprisings would occur more frequently. In fact, this is what happened in the 1700's when the United States was not yet created. Because there was no representation of the States, in the beginning, the colonists believed that they should not have to abide by the rules of their governing body. If they had received the representation that they felt was owed to them, it's likely that they would not have enacted an uprising at all, and our country may still have been a colony of Britain. After all, there may still have been a tea tax, but the colonists would have had a chance to speak out against it and might have felt better about its enactment.

How Linkage Institutions Work in Today's World

In the United States, the linkage institutions take the form of Congress. Between the House of Representatives and the Senate, the people are represented by a number of individuals who they are responsible for nominating and aiding in the election of. The president is also able to add some input and will then be able to put together a group that will reflect what the people want and feel. In this way, it's possible to maintain the level of input that the people want and also the best way to maintain a positive relationship between the people and the government.

The consent of the governed is the foundation that the United States is built on, and therefore, elections have been carried out throughout our history and our present. Our election system has been developed over an extended period of time and continues to evolve, even to this day, while we work to create parties and processes that will enable all people to contribute to choosing elected officials and even creating policies and laws that will affect all of us. The more we continue to adapt these aspects the better our linkage institutions become.

Linkage Institutions: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Problems when Linkage Institutions Fail

It takes a lot of time to develop a well-intentioned and well-functioning linkage institution, however, because the people have to feel confident in their representatives. If they do not, simply having representatives will not be able to help the situation that the government finds itself in. With representatives that they do not trust it could be difficult for the people to continue on the same avenue as they would with proper representatives. When linkage institutions begin to fall apart, it can lead to complete destruction in the frame of the government. It has been apparent for not only the United States and their battle with Britain but also through other countries around the world that have fought back against institutions and governments that oppress them. Without linkage institutions, it's impossible for the government to work with the people because there is not opportunity enough to interact with all members of the area or country.

Linkage Institutions in the AP US Government Exam

Throughout the course of the AP US Government exam, you may be asked to consider why these types of institutions are so important to the success of a country or even a smaller level of government. You may likewise be asked to consider the way that these institutions are used within the United States and why it is important that they continue to be used. Some of the questions may also consider different countries that have not used linkage institutions and why that technique has failed. Consider the way in which the United States was founded and also the way in which it continues to operate and change even now. These aspects and the way that linkage institutions play a part in them will definitely influence the way that the country functions and how long it will continue to do so. The AP US Government exam may also ask you to consider different conditions or even situations that could occur as a result of the success or failure of a linkage institution in different types of government. It may also require you to view the different types of linkage institutions that may exist and how well they accomplish their purpose compared to others.

Political Socialization: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Wikimedia Commons](#)

What do You Think of Politics?

“Political Socialization”, what is it? Almost everyone you talk to has an opinion on politics. Whether policy “wonks”, who pay close attention to current events, or the type that argue “All politicians are liars!”, they have strong opinions about politicians and their effect on culture.

Political Socialization: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Part of your AP Gov review should include a study of the AP US Government concept of political socialization. A formal definition of political socialization is

“the process by which personal and other background traits influence one’s views about politics and government.” (Wilson and Dilulio, 156).

To understand your political socialization means to figure out how you acquired (or came to have) your view of politics. In other words, why do you believe what you believe about politics?

Traditional Views of Political Socialization

In the past, most political scientists concluded that the single most influential factor in a person’s political socialization was the family. To a high degree, this is still a valid conclusion, but we will discuss some alternative sources of political socialization later in this AP US Government review.

What a person’s family thinks about politics has a significant and measurable effect on what he or she believes. Consider this:

Child A grows up in a family that regularly attends candidates’ forums, discusses political issues at the dinner table, and brings the kids to the voting booth with mom and dad on each election day.

Child B’s family never discusses current events and does not go to the voting booth or research candidates or their positions on the issues. When Child B asks a question about which candidate their parent supports, he gets an answer like:

- “It doesn’t matter who I support; my vote doesn’t count.”
- “Politics is all about money; the system is rigged.”

Political Socialization: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

How do you think the families in both these examples help to shape the political opinions of their children? The first child will not only grow up believing that politics is important and that voting and civic participation are positive things, but she will also think that her ideas about politics and public policy matter.

- Sometimes, political scientists will explain that the family dinner table is one of the biggest political socialization factors in our society.

Political Efficacy

A strong belief in political efficacy means that you believe that your participation in the process is meaningful. There are two different sides to political efficacy: internal and external.

Internal political efficacy means that you have confidence that you can understand the issues and actions that are required to participate in politics.

External political efficacy is focused not on you, but on government institutions. If you have a high level of external political efficacy, you believe that the actions you take have an effect on and can change the government.

People with a strong sense of political efficacy (both internal and external) tend to participate in specific political activities, often ones that they were socialized in as children. These may include:

- Voting
- Writing letters to your representative, governor, or the President
- Taking part in a political protest
- Campaigning for a particular political candidate or party
- Donating to a candidate, party, or political cause

A person can be politically socialized to have feelings of low political efficacy as well.

Political Socialization:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Child B, from our example above, is unlikely to participate in the activities listed, since he or she has been taught to believe, or has acquired the ideas from the family that politics is negative and that he or she can do little to effect change.

What Role does the Family Play in Political Socialization?

The family is still the primary political influence in a person's life. It is still likely, for example, that the political party that you choose to align yourself with is the same party to which your parents belong. However, this is less true than it has been in times past.

Today, young people are more likely to identify themselves as independents than as members of a political party. At one time, loyalty to a particular political party, whether Republican or Democrat could be traced back to several generations. The tendency to move away from party identification and toward independence has been observable for a little over 50 years.

What are Other Key Factors in Political Socialization?

If the family's ability to influence, or politically socialize its members is in decline, what are other factors that have been shown to have an effect on one's political views?

Religion as a Factor in Political Socialization

People's religious beliefs, values and traditions inform their political views, especially on social issues such as abortion and capital punishment. While religion is a factor in American political socialization, you should be careful to note in your AP Government responses that religious beliefs, like family, also seem to be declining in their influence on party identification. In election cycles in which economic or pressing foreign policy issues are identified, many of the social issues which religion tends to command less attention.

Political Socialization:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Gender as a Factor in Political Socialization

What about gender's effect on party identification? Political scientists speak of a gender gap. By this, they mean that many women voters have left the Republican party; at the same time, many male voters have left the Democratic party. Polls show that women tend to vote for candidates with a more activist philosophy, such as those who support increased benefits programs, universal health care, and higher federal education spending.

Race and Ethnicity as Factors in Political Socialization

At one point in history, black voters overwhelmingly identified with the Democratic party. As with other political socialization factors, this is still true, but Democratic party identification by younger blacks is declining. Note that overall, young people are moving toward an identity as independent voters. Latino voters are an emerging and diverse group that have traditionally defied simple categorization, but as Latinos have become the country's largest minority at over 50 million statistics show they tend to support Democratic candidates. For example, in the 2012 Presidential election, close to 75% of Latinos supported the Democratic candidate.

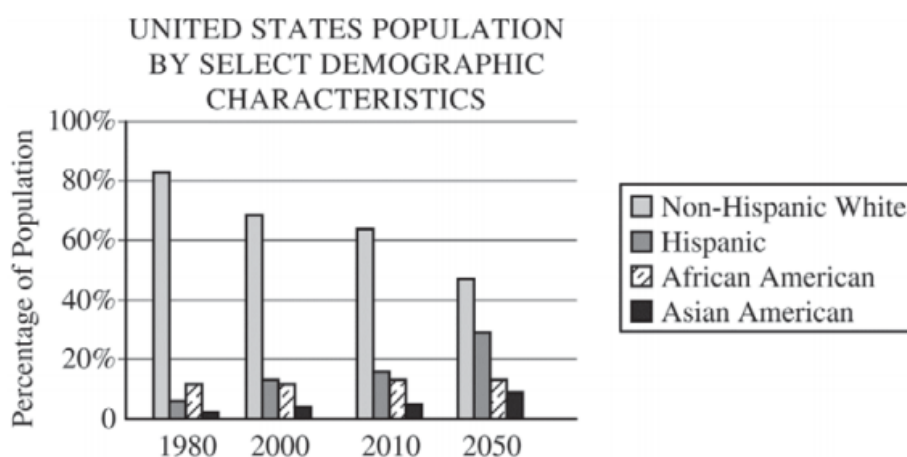
Geographical Regions as a Factor in Political Socialization

At one time, the South could be counted on in national elections to vote Democrat. This phenomenon was called "solid south." If you look at Electoral College maps after Reconstruction, you will find a "block" of democratic support for decades. However, since the 1970's there has been a shift in the alliance of the regions of the US to the political parties. The South has grown more conservative (and also grown in population) whereas the northern states have grown more reliably liberal. One reason that political scientists offer for this regional difference is the relative power and presence of unions in the North as compared to the south.

Political Socialization: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

What Am I Likely to See about Political Socialization on the AP Gov Exam?

Just last year in [2016, one of the FRE \(Free Response Questions\) on the AP Government Exam](#) asked students to look at a graph that showed changes in racial demographics in the US since 1980. The graph, and the first two parts of the question that followed appear below:



*Note: 2050 projections are based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau

[Image Source: CollegeBoard](#)

- a.) Identify a trend depicted in the chart
- b.) Assuming voting patterns continue, explain how the trend identified is likely to affect the electoral success of either the Democratic party or the Republican party.

To answer this question on this AP US Gov concept correctly, you would need to first, explain that the graph shows an increase in the Hispanic population since 1980. For the second half of the question, explain what you know of political socialization factors, in this case specifically race. It is a good idea to include some other political socialization factors in your answer, but **only** if you have clearly identified the trend in the graph first and made that connection clear in your free response.

Political Socialization: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

In 2010, the AP US Government exam [included this](#) prompt:

Over the last several decades, the composition of the Democratic and Republican parties has changed in significant ways. A major partisan shift has occurred in the South, but other demographic changes have been identified.

Again, students were asked to look at a graph and explain how changes in the electorate (in this case based on geographical socialization factors) have affected the southern vote

The Bottom Line – AP US Government Review and FREs

As you look at the links to previously released questions during your AP US Government Review, don't allow yourself to feel discouraged and overwhelmed with the multi-layered questions you will face. Remember, the whole writing portion of the exam contains only four questions! In those four FREs, the College Board will attempt to cover as many topics in the course outline as possible. The more you review AP US Government concepts, the more you will remember from your studies and reading and the more you will be able to link ideas together, which is a skill for which AP graders are looking!

As a final review, see if you can recall at least four factors in political socialization. Now, what concept will you study next?

Super PACs: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Wikispaces](#)

What do I Need to Know to Understand Super PACs?

What are Super PACs? If you're listening to any commentary about elections, you'll hear a debate about the "big money" in politics. Many people are concerned and even angered by the amount of money that today's campaigns collect and spend in the process. Political Action Committees (PACs) and Super PACs are a significant source of the funding on which many of these campaigns rely.

Super PACs:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Any **AP US Gov Review** needs to include a look at campaigns, interest groups, and campaign finance laws and mechanisms. Super PACs, less popularly known as “independent expenditure-only committees,” are an important AP US Gov concept to review and make sure you can both define and give examples.

First things first! Before you can explain a Super PAC, well, you need to know another of the important AP US Gov concepts —the definition of a PAC. A PAC, or a political action committee, is the fundraising arm of a corporation, labor union, or non-profit organization. PACs allow these bodies to contribute funds to a campaign or candidate. Political Action Committees arose in response to campaign finance laws that banned:

- individuals from contributing more than \$2000 to an individual candidate per election and
- corporations from contributing to the campaign committees of individual candidates.

A bit of history as to why we have campaign finance laws that regulate the amounts of money individuals and corporations can spend in elections: After President Richard Nixon’s resignation from office in the 1970’s, investigations into his campaign led to the discovery of illegal fundraising. There was a movement to reform and regulate campaign finance as a result.

A PAC is a way for a corporation, labor union, non-profit, etc. to legally make contributions in a way that they hope will influence the political process. There are rules that all PACs must follow:

- A PAC must have at least 50 members who choose to sign up.
- A PAC must give to at least five candidates (this prevents a PAC from existing just to benefit one candidate only).
- A PAC is limited to \$5000 contributions to any candidate and \$15,000 to any one political party.

Now that you understand what a PAC is, we can move on to Super PACs.

Super PACs:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

What is a Super PAC?

A Super PAC is a PAC that is allowed to give an unlimited amount of money to a candidate or political party. This money comes from the very same funding sources that make up political action committees — individual donors, corporations, labor unions, and nonprofits — so what is the difference? Why are Super PACs exempt from the dollar limits to which PACs are subjected?

A US Supreme Court decision in 2010 ruled that the limits on federal campaign contributions by these entities were limitations on their freedom of speech, or had the tendency of “chilling free speech.” This right, the Court emphasized, belongs to both individuals and corporations or non-profit groups (which are simply groups of individuals).

At the same time, the court did not want to strike down all campaign finance legislation. They found that while not all regulations have the effect of chilling political speech, some do. It is OK to limit the contributions that are made directly to a candidate or political party in the interest of fairness and attempting to hold back political corruption, but these concerns must be balanced with the need to allow individuals and groups to have their opinions on the issues heard.

As a result of the Supreme Court’s ruling, Super PACs developed. Though a Super PAC is allowed to make unlimited contributions to campaign or parties, there is one catch: they may not make act “in concert or in cooperation with” the candidate, his or her candidate organization, or a political party.

Then what can a Super PAC Do?

The Super PAC identifies itself with a particular set of political values and seeks to promote candidates and parties that they believe best represent those values.

For example, a Super PAC could decide that it wants to spend 4 million dollars on media that promotes greater restrictions on gun ownership.

Super PACs: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

There may be a candidate or political party they identify as having similar values to their own or one that they believe is most likely to fight for more restrictions on guns. The Super PAC may put together direct mail, television ads, internet ads, etc. which encourage voters to support that candidate or political party — here is the key — *as long as they do not consult with the candidate or party about the nature, timing, style, or content of the ads that their money goes to purchase. It is illegal for a Super PAC to ask candidates for their input on ads, how their money should be spent, or the timing of their support.*

What Effect have Super Political Action Committees had on the Election Process?

What if you are asked about the effect Super PACs have on elections? One good response is to say that Super PACs have brought a lot more money into the election process. Because Super PACs allow for unlimited contributions, some individuals or groups have given millions of dollars to see an individual candidate or party win.

It is not necessarily true that if a candidate has the support of a Super PAC, they will win the race. For example, Mitt Romney had the support of several Super PACs in 2012. These Super PACs spent over 100 million dollars in the contest, but President Obama (who had close to \$100 million in his Super PAC support) won the election. Look [here](#) for a simple explanation of how Super PACs effect elections and [here](#) for a breakdown of PAC and Super PAC money in the last Presidential election.

What will the AP US Government Exam Ask Me About Super PACs?

Though it is possible you will get a direct question **AP US Gov** concepts such as Super Political Action Committees (Super PACs), it is more likely that the FREs you encounter will ask about the election process and how interest groups seek to affect the outcomes of elections. This type of question gives you the perfect opportunity to use the knowledge of the AP US Gov concepts reviewed in this AP US Gov Review.

Super PACs: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

For example, in 2016, the AP US Government exam asked students to “describe two strategies interest groups use to influence the electoral process.” One of your answers here could be that interest groups may form Super PACs, legal fundraising arms that allow for unlimited contributions and for the interest group to spend the money in support of a candidate, party platform, or individual issue they believe will best benefit their members or the interests of the group they represent. It is important here to include that it is not the interest group directly, but the Super PAC formed by the interest group, which is allowed to raise funds for election influence.

This question also asked for an example of how critics argue that interest groups limit representative democracy. You could also include a reference to Super PACs in answering this portion. For example, [AP Central’s scoring guidelines for this part](#) suggest correct answers may include over representation of elite interests, favoring narrow interests over broad ones, and hyper pluralism leading to gridlock. All of these ideas can be the basis for critique of Super PACs. You could say:

One criticism of interest groups has been that their fundraising arms, Super PACs, allow large amounts of campaign cash into the process that unfairly skew the focus of election issues on topics that matter most to the interest group’s members. Those critical of the influence interest groups have through their Super PACs might also claim that though they spend hundreds of millions, the fact that the Super PAC money is spent by interest groups on both sides of almost every issue means that their voices cancel each other out. This hyper-pluralism can mean issues become such political hot buttons that candidates and elected officials fear to take meaningful stands or taking action, and little progress is made on the issues that matter most to the citizens.

[In 2012, an FRE](#) also asked about “two techniques interest groups use to influence elections.” Describing the role of Super PACs here would be great.

Super PACs:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

NOTE: On the [2012 scoring guidelines](#), AP Central notes that there is to be “no double dipping” on PACs and SuperPACs. In other words, you would not have gotten credit for two techniques by listing PACS and Super PACs separately. They are the same technique, but merely have different rules that apply to each.

The Bottom Line on Super PACs

Now that you have completed this **AP US Gov Review** on Super PACs, give yourself a quiz, using the questions below, and go back and review the above if there are questions you can't answer with confidence:

- What is a Super PAC?
- What is the difference between a PAC and a Super PAC?
- How did a supreme court decision end up creating Super PACs?
- What is the name of the case that led to that decision?
- What is the biggest limit on a Super PAC?
- How has the spending by Super PACs influenced elections since 2010?

If you can answer the questions above correctly, you are well on your way to preparing for the **AP US Government exam!** It is always good to provide specific examples on the AP exam. For bonus points, can you research the name of an influential Super PAC in the 2016 Presidential race?



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Electoral College: AP US Government Crash Course



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What is the Electoral College?

Because it is unique to our political system, the AP US Government & Politics exam is almost certain to test you on your knowledge of the Electoral College. What is the Electoral College, again? No—it's not somewhere you get accepted to if you get a lot of 5's on your AP exams.

Electoral College: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

You're probably too young to remember the 2000 presidential election, but you've certainly heard about it, and probably talked about it in class. George W. Bush, was elected despite losing the national popular vote (popular meaning, the most votes) because he was awarded Florida's electoral votes.

Electoral College Origins

The Founding Fathers didn't have much faith in the voters to pick the president without some help from their leaders. They felt that the public had a limited grasp of the issues. So the Electoral College was designed to balance the popular will with political leaders' wisdom. The voters' choices would be filtered through state legislatures.

In a presidential election, each state legislature sends a slate of electors—the number of electors based on a state's number of congressional districts plus two (for its senators) to go to Washington and elect a president.

Most state legislatures selected electors who would vote for the candidate the voters chose—but the Constitution (Article II, Section 1) does not require this. Then, the candidate who received the majority of the electoral vote became president. Usually—but not always—this candidate also happened to have won the popular vote.

There have been three presidential candidates who won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College vote:

1. Samuel Tilden losing to Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876
2. Grover Cleveland losing to Benjamin Harrison in 1888
3. Al Gore losing to George W. Bush in 2000

There have been a number of elections that came close to having the same mixed result. For example, in 2004, John Kerry lost to George W. Bush by over three million popular votes, but the flip of one state—Ohio—would have made Kerry president. (Surely, the irony would not have been lost on Bush.)

Electoral College: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Effects of the Electoral College

The AP US Government & Politics exam will want you to know what the effects of the Electoral College are.

One effect is that which is mentioned above—sometimes the Electoral College flouts the will of the public. Today, all of the state legislatures (with the exceptions of Maine and Nebraska, which award by congressional district) award all of their state’s electoral votes to the popular vote winner in that state. This is referred to as the “winner-take-all” system.

This means that, even if a Republican candidate get millions of votes in California, or a Democrat gets millions in Texas, they still lose all of that state’s electoral votes.

This dynamic has the additional effect of leading candidates to only spend money and campaign in swing states—states where either party’s candidate has a chance of winning the state’s popular vote.

This is why states like Ohio, Virginia and Florida, which are fairly evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, get so much attention from candidates.

How are Electoral College Votes Apportioned?

As mentioned, each state receives a number of electoral votes equivalent to its number of senators and representatives, for a total of 538 electoral votes. The votes are apportioned the same way congressional districts are—every ten years by the Census. A candidate needs 270 electoral votes to become president.

The most populous states have the most electoral votes. In 2016, for example, California will have 55 electoral votes, Texas will have 38, Florida and New York will have 29, and Illinois and Pennsylvania will have 20. It is possible for a candidate to win the presidency with the electoral votes of only the ten most populous states.

Electoral College:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

On the other hand, sparsely populated states like Montana and Vermont only have three electoral votes. Still—the electoral vote gives these states more influence than a popular vote-based system would. Three electoral votes can change the result in a close electoral vote.

Criticisms of the Electoral College

There are lots of criticisms of the Electoral College.

The most common complaint is that whoever represents the popular will—the winner of the popular vote—should be president. Half a million more voters voted for Al Gore in 2000 than voted for George W. Bush.

The other criticism is that by focusing the presidential contest on the swing states, the Electoral College deprives voters in solidly partisan states (like Republican Texas or Democratic California) from being heard.

It is also said that minority party voters in these states (e.g., Democrats in Texas or Republicans in California) have little incentive to vote, since their votes won't affect the outcome of the election at all.

There have been many efforts to amend the Constitution and do away with the Electoral College over the years, but none of them have picked up much steam.

The Electoral College in Action

The electors meet at state capitols in December to cast their ballots. The ballots are then sealed and sent to Congress, where the president of the Senate—the vice president—opens and counts the ballots in January.

The media is allowed to ask electors how they voted in December, and they typically answer. Most states require electors to cast their ballot for the candidate they were chosen to represent—but some don't.

Electoral College:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

In 2000, for example, since New Hampshire doesn't require electors to vote for the candidate the voters chose, some pundits thought the state's electors, pledged to Bush, might defect and vote for Gore. They didn't.

If no candidate wins a majority of Electoral College votes—possible in an election with three or more major candidates—the House selects from the top three presidential candidates, and each state gets one vote. D.C. does not get a vote. The winner must get 26 or more state votes, with the House re-voting until this happens.

The Senate selects from the top two vice presidential candidates, and each senator gets one vote. The majority vote winner (51 votes) is sworn in as vice president.

Now let's take a look at a free-response question about the Electoral College.

A Sample Free Response Question

- 1. Describe the winner-take-all feature of the Electoral College.*
- 2. Explain one way in which the winner-take-all feature of the Electoral College affects how presidential candidates from the two major political parties run their campaigns.*
- 3. Explain one way in which the winner-take-all feature of the Electoral College hinders third party candidates.*
- 4. Explain two reasons the Electoral College has not been abolished.*

It's easy to answer (a) – discuss how, for all states except Maine and Nebraska, the winner of the popular vote in a state gets all of its electoral votes.

For (b), you want to discuss the concept of 'swing states' – parties closely divided between the states whose electoral votes are up for grabs. Candidates spend time and money here at the expense of solidly partisan states.

Electoral College: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Part (c) will require you to discuss the dominance of the two parties, Democratic and Republican, and how third parties are unlikely to get any electoral votes at all—and thus no voice in the Electoral College—unless they outperform the two larger parties.

Part (d) will require you to discuss the amendment process—the only way the Electoral College can be abolished—and how the swing states are unlikely to support decreasing their voice in presidential elections. You will also want to discuss fears that a popular vote-based election would favor big cities and major population centers at the expense of rural and sparsely populated areas. (The argument here is that candidates would only spend time in money in places with lots of votes to be had.)

The Wrap Up

Remember, you are likely to encounter questions about the Electoral College on the AP US Government exam. The Electoral College is unique to our democracy. The most important points to remember about it are:

1. The Electoral College was created by the Founding Fathers because they believed voters weren't well-informed enough to choose the president on their own
2. The Electoral College uses a winner-take all system
3. The Electoral College encourages candidates to campaign in 'swing' states where the parties are closely matched
4. Occasionally, the winner of the Electoral College (and thus, the presidency) actually loses the popular vote.

Remember, the Electoral College is not as complex as it might seem at first blush. Americans technically vote for electors who support their favored candidate. These 538 electors then convene the month after the election to vote for the president. If you can grasp this idea and the bullet points above, you will be well prepared for Electoral College questions on the US Government & Politics exam.

1960 Election: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Wikimedia Commons](#)

The AP US Government exam can be complicated, but that doesn't mean that you can't pass it. What it means is you need to study the election and understand the importance of each of the players and what they did. In the 1960 election, the key players were Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy and this AP US Gov. review will help you better understand their position and the election.

1960 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Introduction to the 1960 Election

The 1960 election pitted Republican Richard Nixon, the incumbent Vice President for Dwight Eisenhower, against Democrat John F. Kennedy. Though Richard Nixon was well known within the country, there was a very strong following for JFK even from the start, though many believed this was related to his looks during televised debates. (This was the first election to use televised debates over radio.)

The election took hold throughout the country as they began to look for changes in the way the country was run. This led to impassioned speeches and beliefs in the way of both parties. It also led to strong feelings for the candidates. Nearly the entire west coast of the country voted red while the other half of the country was split between both parties. Though a map may make the vote appear as a runaway, the division of states was actually far closer than most would think.

What Impacted the Vote

A number of key factors impacted the way that Americans voted. First, the United States was in the middle of the Cold War, which had begun in 1947 and would not end for another 31 years. Alongside this, the Missile Gap between the USSR and the US was creating more fear and tension than ever. Second, the Civil Rights Movement had been going on for several years and was growing ever more popular. In fact, JFK fought to free Martin Luther King Jr. from prison, cementing his opinion on the issue.

Even more, with China growing in power at an alarming rate, there was no telling what the communist country was going to do next. Americans weren't certain of what was going to happen in the world and were looking for a leader who could take on these big issues. This was not going to be a race for someone who just wanted to sit back and relax, there were far too many problems in the world, even if the United States itself was in the middle of an economic boom.

1960 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Republican Candidate

Republican Richard Nixon had already served as Vice President for eight years when he decided to run for the presidency. This gave him an advantage coming into the election, but he had other areas that were definitely counted against him by the general public. For one thing, he just didn't look very good standing up at the front of the debate hall, especially compared to Kennedy. For another, he had kept a more neutral front when it came to Civil Rights, and though this was good for some voters, others thought he should have taken a bigger stand.

Nixon had developed experience in foreign policy while serving as a member of Congress from 1946. He was sent to the Select Committee on Foreign Aid with which he was able to travel to Europe. His experiences then pushed him forward to other positions within Congress and later, in 1950, into the Senate, from which he was selected to be the Vice President for Dwight Eisenhower.

Nixon on the Issues

In the midst of hostilities abroad, Nixon believed that intervening with the events in Cuba would constitute a violation of treaties as well as the UN Charter. He also appeared to under-estimate the Soviet Union stating that their economy had a long way to go before catching up to the United States. In health care, however, he also had a somewhat controversial opinion believing that everyone should have the freedom to choose to have health insurance or not for themselves. Instead, he wanted to focus more on depressed areas to improve unemployment rates and reduce the number of strikes in business without causing government seizure.

On the other side of the fence from Kennedy when it came to economic programs, Nixon believed that expanding government programs and reducing the debt would be impossible and result in increased taxes. Instead, he believed that running the government from a Republican side would cost less money overall. In order to improve the country, instead of adding more programs, he believed in building more schools and putting the education of youth ahead of anything else.

1960 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

He often pointed to the accomplishments of Eisenhower and himself over the previous eight years as evidence of his own accomplishments.

The Republican Convention

When it came time to hold the Republican Convention, there were no actual opponents left for Nixon. Held in Chicago, the convention featured a speech by one of the last candidates to leave the nomination, Barry Goldwater, U.S. Senator from Arizona. Though the event lasted four days, it was clear from the start that Nixon would be the nominee. It then fell to him to choose his running mate, for which he selected Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. from Massachusetts. Nixon promised his campaign that he would campaign in each state prior to the general election. This after he achieved an overwhelming victory over Barry Goldwater during the voting.

The Democratic Candidate

Though he started as a Harvard graduate, Kennedy joined the Navy upon his graduation and served for several years, earning a reputation as a hero. He then served as a member of Congress from Boston, where he was nearly selected to serve as Vice President for the 1956 campaign. It took only a few more years for him to run on his own.

Kennedy was not what the Democratic Party expected, but he did turn out to be what they wanted. He was young, at only 43 when he ran for president. He also had no foreign affairs experience and was a devout Catholic, but he was able to handily beat out all the other Democratic candidates, achieving the votes needed to gain the Democratic nomination. He promised to fight back against communism, and this was definitely something the American people wanted to hear at a time when communism could very well start knocking on their front doors.

1960 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Kennedy on the Issues

Interested more in improving and increasing the current federal programs than in decreasing the budget deficit, Kennedy appealed to the people who were struggling to make ends meet. He believed that these programs would assist those people who couldn't make things work on their own and that this was the point of government programs after all and that programs such as social security and medical care for the elderly would be essential for those individuals. His plan was to increase the benefits for these and the 25 million other poverty stricken individuals in the country.

Contrary to some in his party, however, he also believed in the US obligation to protect freedom at all costs, including fighting communism both economically and socially. He believed that this also included protecting other areas, such as cities in Taiwan, if the communist countries of the world, such as China, decided to attack. At the same time, he took a strong stance on free trade and making it easier for the US to export products around the world. In order to advance further than other countries around the world, Kennedy also believed in the importance of advancing space exploration, attempting to catch up with the USSR, which had pulled ahead.

The Democratic Convention

Many in the Democratic Party believed that Kennedy was not the best suited for the nomination because of his inexperience and age. Though he was extremely popular, they believed he would be better off as a running mate for someone else. Even still, he managed to win the first ballot with just under 53% of the vote. The second place fell to Lyndon Johnson, who Kennedy selected to be his running mate. On the last day of the convention, he delivered an acceptance speech as the first senator to be nominated since 1920.

1960 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Results

Kennedy was able to emerge victorious on Election Day, coming out of the vote with fewer states (23 to Nixon's 26) but a narrow margin of 200,000 votes that led to an electoral count of 303. Nixon was able to manage only 219. The electoral votes that were allocated to third party candidate Harry Byrd came close to hurting Kennedy in the general election, but he was able to pull it off even still. By splitting the Democratic Party Byrd definitely caused a stir and it was uncertain if any Democratic candidate would have been able to succeed, but Kennedy seemed able to unify the party reasonably well and drew in a large number of votes. It was at his inaugural speech that he uttered the now famous words 'Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.'

The 1960 Election & the AP US Government Exam

In order to pass the exam, it's important to understand a few basic facts related to the election. The most important is that, though Nixon was considered nearly an incumbent for the race, he lost to Kennedy. One of the main reasons many believed he lost was because of Kennedy's good looks when in front of the camera for the very first televised debate ever used in a presidential election. By a margin of 303 electoral votes to 219, he managed to secure his first election, though Nixon most definitely lived to fight another day for the White House and came back to go for the election several years later. He would eventually have his day as President of the United States.

The exam may look at your understanding of the issues related to the 1960 election. It may ask you to reflect on which candidates considered the important issues in which way and how they were able to secure their own nomination. The AP US Government exam may also consider the ways that the general election played out and how the candidates were able to overcome their negatives in order to achieve the results of the election. Make sure that you develop the AP US government concepts you would need to answer a range of multiple choice questions. Essay questions may focus more closely on the ideals behind the choices that are voiced by the candidates themselves.

1964 Election: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Wikimedia Commons](#)

The AP US Government exam is designed to test you regarding your understanding of the political system within the United States. This could relate to the study of the elections themselves, the ideals considered and upheld during this time and the presidential candidates who made it to the general election. This AP US Government concepts guide will help you understand the key players, Barry Goldwater and Lyndon Johnson, as well as their primary platforms and accomplishments throughout the primary process and through to the general election as well.

1964 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Introduction to the 1964 Election

The 1964 election pitted Republican Barry Goldwater against Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson. One of the easiest sweeps ever for the Democratic Party, Johnson had already established himself within the country, making a name for what he could accomplish when he stepped in to fill JFK's shoes after his assassination. The positive feelings and thoughts that many already had associated with Kennedy they now associated with Johnson as he began his run for the presidency in his own right during this election. His approval rating was already high and when he began to campaign it only seemed to increase.

What Impacted the Vote

Many things were happening in the world during the 1964 election and just before. In fact, this was the heart of the Civil Rights movement with Dixiecrats such as George Wallace fighting to keep Jim Crow laws in effect and most of the rest of the country fighting to abolish them. Much of the South started to switch to a Republican style of voting towards keeping these laws. However, presidential hopeful Goldwater was not one of them, voting against the new act though he had previously voted to keep it.

Though Korea had been over for some time, it still was a war that the American people couldn't easily forget, and it was something that weighed on them as they considered the current war in Vietnam. Since the Vietnam War had been unfavorable from the start, it was a sore spot of contention during the election and something that every American wanted to know about. Even more, the Cold War was still looming, and the possibility of something even worse than what was happening in Vietnam kept the entire country on the verge of disaster and definitely more than a little terrified about what could happen.

Finally, the people were concerned about what would happen in the economy. Though things had been moving along in a positive form and would likely continue to do so, the American people wanted to be sure.

1964 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

This did not translate to taking away any of the government programs or assistance that had already been granted however as it was rumored Goldwater wanted to accomplish. The American people did not want to see these social welfare programs abolished or reduced in any way.

The Republican Candidate

Barry Goldwater at the time was an ultra-conservative Senator from Arizona. At the time, it was strange to have a conservative from outside of the Midwest but since the 1950s the conservative movement moved south and west throughout the country. Mr. Goldwater was fairly ruthless on both social and economic issues and even called one of his chief opponents a “wife stealer.”

Mr. Goldwater was the first Jewish candidate nominated for a major political party in the United States, and his effects on the elections had a substantial impact on the forming of the libertarian movement. After this election, many of his former supporters rallied behind a new image of the conservative movement, Ronald Reagan.

Goldwater on the Issues

Goldwater was the poster child of the conservative movement in the 1960s, and his policies showed that. He was for the destruction of the Soviet Union instead of peaceful talks, which was viewed harshly by most moderate and liberal voters. He also backed spending much more time and resources to fully eliminate communism around the world, which with the Korean War ending recently and the Vietnam War in full strength, that was an uphill battle. He ran successfully in the south especially as an opponent to the 1964 Civil Rights Act because he called it, in June 1964 a “Dire Threat to the Liberties of African Americans and Will Create in America the Hallmarks of the Police State.”

Economically he had a view that the current economy was not sustainable and that less taxing and regulation was required to keep the economy going.

1964 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

That stance did not work well in the general election as the economy at the time was very favorable. His view of lower taxes and less general regulation was not seen as the way to go during this election cycle.

The Republican Convention

Held in Daly City California, the Republican convention was a fairly painful one for the party. As fortune would have it for Mr. Goldwater, his main opponent, Nelson Rockefeller, was in the midst of a quick divorce and remarriage to a younger woman. This was seen by many as a poor move and caused the American public to question Rockefeller's faithfulness. That opened the door for Goldwater to take the nomination away from Rockefeller and another candidate the Republicans tried to put up as the alternative to Rockefeller, William Scranton of Pennsylvania. By the time the convention hit, it was a single ballot vote with Goldwater receiving over two-thirds of the delegate votes.

William E Miller, a western New York state congressman, was unanimously nominated as the vice presidential running mate. He was relatively unknown to many outside the party, but Miller had served as the chairman of the Republican Party and was ideologically similar to Goldwater. Miller being from the east coast and being Catholic was seen as some to be a ticket balancer as Goldwater was from out west and Jewish.

The Democratic Candidate

Lyndon B. Johnson was appointed as president in 1963 following the assassination of JFK. Because of his association with the former president and the projects and accomplishments that he continued in the president's stead, he was granted a favorable opinion. Rather than seeing him as only his own person, the public saw him as an extension of JFK, and the popularity that the president had received was passed down to his successor easily. It is believed that this is one of the reasons that he did so well in the coming election.

1964 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Johnson was careful about pushing the fact that his opponent wanted to abolish the welfare programs that had already been created. He wanted the public to see Goldwater as someone who didn't believe in the things they wanted. The push for more welfare programs became Johnson's cry. This is likely one of the biggest reasons that Johnson was able to sweep a large portion of the vote and was able to easily sweep the victory in the general election.

Johnson on the Issues

Johnson, being the successor after JFK's assassination, tried to maintain Kennedy's popularity and policies throughout the campaign. He was so popular that he even got 20,000 votes in the Republican Party primaries. Johnson had enormous popularity from his signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 close to the election.

Johnson also capitalized on news clips of Goldwater speaking to cameras about how Social Security should be voluntary which was very unpopular, selling the Tennessee Valley Authority that is a government run business that controls flood control, hydroelectric power, navigating tools, and fertilizer manufacturing in the Tennessee Valley, and that the US should just casually toss a nuclear missile at the Kremlin in Russia.

The Democratic Convention

The Democratic Convention took place in Atlantic City and started what was essentially a tribute day to JFK's work and the party's success since. Johnson didn't announce his candidacy until close to the convention but once he did Robert Kennedy, JFK's brother, withdrew and Johnson was unanimously voted as he was the only candidate left on the floor.

There was no Vice President since the assassination of JFK and selection of that was endearing. Johnson had many choices including JFK's brother-in-law Sargent Shriver, but Robert Kennedy dismissed him. Two other choices that got significant interviews was Senate Majority Whip Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota who was a perennial candidate for president and Connecticut Senator Thomas Dodd.

1964 Election: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Results

When the results came in, there was a resounding lead on behalf of Lyndon Johnson. His push that Goldwater didn't believe in social programs and the fact that the public already knew him, allowing him to enter as the incumbent, was enough to make victory not just a possibility, but a reality. Johnson actually managed to achieve one of the top six most lopsided elections that had ever been carried out until that point, achieving an immense lead in the general. The election results had Johnson with over twice the popular votes that Goldwater was able to achieve but even with all of those votes on the Republican side, the results were nowhere close. Johnson achieved 486 electoral votes to the 52 that Goldwater received. Winning a total of 44 states, Goldwater was able to win only 6 of the smallest states in the country. With 42.8 million to 27.1 million, Johnson swept the highest popular vote percentage in US history with 61.1%. Even to this day that vote remains a record for any US president.

The 1964 Election and the AP US Government Exam

The government exam will most likely test the basic concepts and ideals of the 1964 election but may delve further into the specific areas that each of the top contenders were devoted to. It is important to remember the most basic information, such as the candidates, Barry Goldwater for the Republican ticket and Lyndon B Johnson (the incumbent) for the Democratic ticket. Johnson became the incumbent after the assassination of JFK in 1963 and managed to maintain the high rating and favorability that JFK himself had entertained during his presidency.

With a margin of victory of 486 electoral votes to only 52, Johnson was successful in winning the election by one of the highest margins of states ever recorded. He also achieved the highest level of the popular vote during this election that had been recorded until that time and has been recorded since. The exam may consider these feats as advanced accomplishments for the president as well as understanding the concepts that each of the presidential candidates exhibited throughout the course of the election process. You may need to answer both multiple choice and essay questions related to these candidates.

1972 Election: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Wikimedia Commons](#)

The AP US Government exam asks you to review the understanding you have developed regarding the political system of the United States. This exam could require you to repeat information related to elections in the form of the running parties and their stated points on different issues. It could also request you to review the ideals of those running parties and develop your own understanding or views on those issues. This AP US Government concepts guide will evaluate the running parties, Richard Nixon, and George McGovern, as well as the platforms which they utilized for the process of running during the primaries and general election.

1972 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Introduction to the 1972 Election

In 1972, the election was a face-off between Republican Richard Nixon and Democrat George McGovern. Also able to achieve a significant (for his party at least) level of votes was American Party candidate John Schmitz, who achieved a total of 1.1 million votes but was unable to secure any electoral votes. The country was definitely in the midst of some serious situations, but there were signs that things were going to improve soon. Even still, the election was set to be an interesting one from the moment the first candidates began putting their names into the running.

What Impacted the Vote

A number of situations were well underway during the primaries including the Vietnam War and hostile relations between the US, Communist China, and the USSR. With the Vietnam War, there was hope that the conflict would soon come to an end, and the American people were confident that their men would return soon. Still, there was much happening in the war, and there was no telling what might still occur before the troops could possibly be taken out, especially for a war that had been ill received from the start. The relations between communist countries and the United States had definitely been a questionable area for the entire country, but Nixon had an edge on the issue. As the incumbent, having already served one term of his own and part of his predecessors in the years before, he had established himself in this situation. The American public believed he had done well, and this helped him greatly coming into the election because they felt that he would continue to do well in the next term with developing additional relations.

Over the latter half of the primaries, the Watergate scandal would also become an extremely important part of the election process. Though there was information regarding the scandal and there was information leaked the public there were very few specifics and little was known about Nixon's potential involvement. As a result, the situation seemed to have very little to no influence on the actual election or Nixon's abilities there.

1972 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Republican Candidate

Richard Nixon was very well-known by the American public as a result of the 2 ½ terms that he had already served as president. As the incumbent, he had an edge going into the election and having done a good job in many areas, only improved this edge more. The biggest drawback for him was the Watergate Scandal which arose just before the general election, but it didn't seem to have as big of an impact as it would later have.

Nixon would go on to have an excellent election but during the process of the primary, he would have to fight against two others for the Republican backing. Though he was the incumbent, this did not matter to those who chose to run against him. Still, he was able to pull out the victory with his party among the people fully backing him and ignoring other candidates, likely as a result of his success in many areas during his presidency.

Nixon on the Issues

Richard Nixon was extremely anti-communist but had been doing well with communication and interaction between the United States and Communist China as well as the USSR. His diplomatic capabilities were strong, and the American people knew this. He had also done well in his handling of the Vietnam War and was hopeful that he would be able to improve the situation and potentially end the war entirely. His ability to convince the American public of his positive qualities was his saving grace in the midst of the Watergate Scandal.

Nixon was also focused on improving the country by building additional schools and by improving the economics of the country over what they already were. He believed the Soviets were far behind the states and therefore that he would not need to concern himself with these issues as much. His thoughts on registration of Communists was considered a reasonable and popular one among the public that was largely afraid of Communists taking over their country as well. He continued to express similar ideals throughout this election that he had done in the previous election, and these popular thoughts helped him improve his image further.

1972 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Republican Convention

The Republican Convention saw a landslide victory for Nixon over his two competitors. Throughout the entire primary season, he was able to win all but one delegate and so, long before the convention came, his competitors were no longer with any hope of winning and had dropped out of the race. The two competitors were John Ashbrook from Ohio and Pete McCloskey of California. Of the two, only McCloskey was able to gain a delegate, coming from New Mexico. Therefore, Nixon was more than prepared to take on the mantle of Republican nominee and work towards the final election. He retained Spiro Agnew as his vice president.

That does not mean that the Convention was not without drama of its own. In fact, the delegates were harassed on their way into the convention by anti-war protestors. Over 3,000 individuals, masked and ready for anything, continued to torment the delegates regarding Vietnam. Police finally had to employ riot control methods, and many of the individuals were arrested with an even larger number injured during the course of quelling the situation. This didn't stop the numerous protests that occurred throughout the rest of the primaries and onward to the general election, much as they had occurred prior to it.

The Democratic Candidate

George McGovern was a State Senator from South Dakota when he chose to run for the presidency. Though he had been a member of the Senate since 1963, this was his second run for the presidency. The previous time he had stepped in when Robert Kennedy was assassinated but was unable to achieve the nomination of the Democratic Convention. In this instance, he believed he could come back and improve his run, and was finally able to achieve the nomination at least.

McGovern on the Issues

Strongly against the Vietnam War from the start, McGovern advocated a complete withdrawal from the war and believed that this would improve his chances.

1972 Election: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

He also advocated for amnesty for those draft dodgers who had left the country as well as the return of American prisoners of war by the enemy. This opinion was strongly backed by many among the American people who had never wanted to enter into the Vietnam War from the start. Yet there were many questions left unanswered by this point of view, such as how he would ensure both ends of the agreement were reached.

Another important issue for McGovern was the defense spending of the United States, which he believed should be greatly reduced over his term. He also believed in establishing a demogrant program to provide a \$1,000 tax credit minimum for all American citizens in exchange for a personal income tax exemption at the time in practice. This he believed would change the public-assistance programs that were being utilized, making them far less complex. He was also a strong supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment.

The Democratic Convention

During the primaries, a total of 15 candidates put their name in the running. These included George Wallace, a segregationist from Alabama, who was shot during a rally in Maryland. Though he was able to pull through he was permanently paralyzed and, even after winning the next two primaries, he chose to pull out of the presidential race. When it came time for the convention itself, McGovern was able to win an easy victory, though his vice president was less successful.

The vice presidential nomination process extended well into the night and the winner was determined to be Senator Thomas Eagleton from Missouri. This did not last long however as he removed himself from the race when his past treatment for mental health came to light. At that time, McGovern brought forward Sargent Shriver, a member of the Kennedy family by marriage. But the convention itself was interesting and was considered to be a disaster in itself, leading to a terrible general election as well. Still, McGovern was pleased with the results of the convention and with his own acceptance speech, though it was not given until nearly 3 a.m. and was therefore not seen by most of the public.

1972 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Results

In the end, the incumbent presidential candidate, Richard Nixon, was able to easily sweep the election. Despite all of the controversy surrounding Watergate and the anti-war protests, Nixon was able to win a total of 49 states in the general election. Only Massachusetts and the District of Columbia cast their electoral votes for McGovern, resulting in an extremely disproportionate level of electoral votes. Nixon was able to retain the White House for the next two years before he resigned in the midst of the Watergate controversy.

The 1972 Election and the AP US Gov. Exam

It's likely that the AP US Government exam will consider the two presidential candidates overall including their view on some of the most important issues of the time. In this regard, it's important to remember Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew on the Republican ticket and George McGovern and Sargent Shriver on the Democratic ticket. Nixon was the incumbent, having served from 1969 on and having been responsible for much of the duties of the president even during his vice presidency with Eisenhower as a result of the illness of the former.

With a margin of victory of 49 states to 1 and the District of Columbia, Nixon was most definitely the popular choice of the American public. This was especially true given the fact that the two regions which McGovern was able to win were small states, providing him a total of only 17 electoral votes. Another important aspect of the election in this year was the changes that it brought about for the Democratic party. The entire party had to be revamped to fix the broken election system. The exam may consider these results and may also review the ideals and intentions of each of the candidates during their primary run as well as during the general election process. You may be required to answer both multiple choice and essay questions related to these issues.



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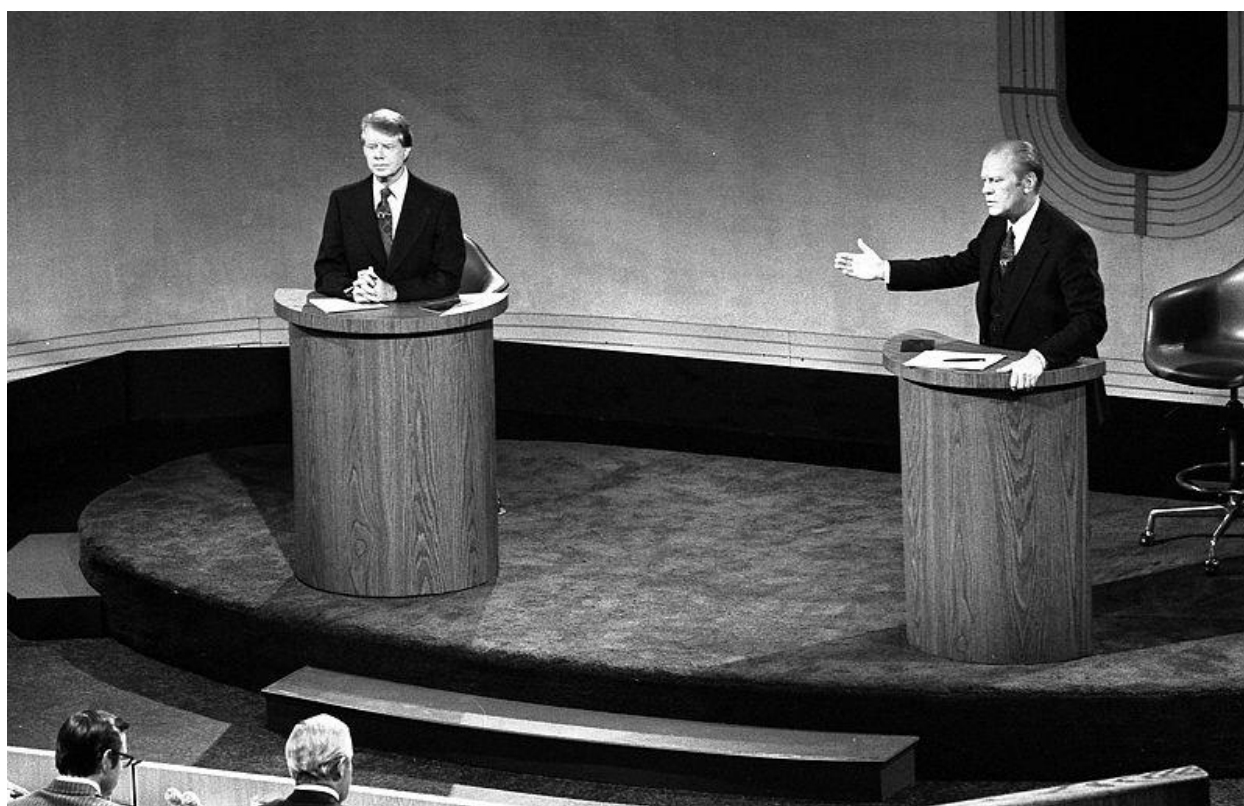
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1976 Election: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Wikimedia Commons](#)

The process of studying for an AP exam can be complex, but this AP US Government review will make the process less complex by evaluating the 1976 election. This crash course will let you learn what you need to respond correctly to questions regarding its importance and its processes.

1976 Election: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Introduction to the 1976 Election

The 1976 election pitted Democrat Jimmy Carter against Republican Gerald Ford. With Gerald Ford coming into the election as the incumbent or current president, he seemed to have an early head start on the election front. Unfortunately, there were extenuating circumstances that had occurred throughout his presidency and greatly impacted the view others took of him, even still, he was able to make for a close election.

What Impacted the Vote

There are many factors that impacted the way the country voted. One of the biggest of them all was the Watergate Scandal. Though the scandal itself was not Ford's, it was the reason that he became president in the years prior, as a direct result of the resignation of President Nixon in 1974. Ford's presidency during the following two years would not have been a danger to his potential presidency if it were not for the pardon that he granted Ex-President Nixon.

This pardon seemed to sway some of the public favor and opinions away from the incumbent president as the public did not feel that it should have been granted. His connection to Nixon before this pardon in and of itself had led many to think he might be a little too close to the events that had occurred, but the pardon brought the issue to the forefront even more. The fact that he then refused to comment on why he had chosen to grant the pardon led to an even greater fall from favor and even more distrust amongst the voters.

The Republican Candidate

At the time of the 1976 election, Republican candidate Gerald Ford from Michigan had already been president of the country for approximately three years since the resignation of President Nixon. This was after being appointed to the position of Vice President and achieving the position of 40th Vice President.

1976 Election: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

As a result, he determined to run in his own right in the next election and managed to narrowly beat out California Governor Ronald Reagan, who was also nominated by the party.

Upon winning the nomination, Ford took Bob Dole as his running mate as Vice President. This was after the previous Vice President, Nelson Rockefeller, announced that he had no interest in running for the Vice Presidential nomination yet again. Dole hailed originally from Kansas, which he had been representing as Senator since 1969. Before that he had been a member of the House of Representatives and even run for the presidency in his own right (though he would lose that election as well).

Ford on the Issues

Ford had strong views on many of the issues that were facing the country at the time. Between his view in favor of tax cuts and his strong views on cutting inflation, as well as a long-term recovery at the cost of short-term problems, many thought that he might be able to turn around the downturn. This would also begin with a moratorium on federal spending that would decrease the dramatic problems associated with the recession. Outside of the economy, he believed in mandatory sentencing with a focus on crime victims, women's rights, prayer in schools and an increase in federal spending on education.

His presidency showed his beliefs in areas of foreign policy and his statements during debates announced his feelings on Soviet domination, which he believed not to be in existence. Some of his views in foreign matters seemed to aid him, yet these views on the Soviet Union most definitely hurt his campaign. Likewise, his interest in working with the Soviet Union for trade and imports did not bode well on his side. Yet he also spoke out on matters of defense, believing it was necessary to guarantee jobs and promote the economy.

1976 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Republican Convention

Ford was not the only choice presented by his party, however, and there was serious competition in the form of Ronald Reagan. The controversy between the two candidates was so strong that there was no clear union or choice for the Republican contest until the convention. The contested convention ended with Ford achieving the backing only after a close process. Yet his win over Reagan, who would go on to achieve the nomination in later years, was not enough for him to secure the larger percentage of the popular vote and gain a win as a result of the election.

The Democratic Candidate

Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter was not very well known in the party until he began his run for the presidency, but that didn't stop him from gaining momentum. As a Washington outsider and a political reformer, Carter came from Georgia where he had been governor. He was never expected to make it. However, the Watergate scandal definitely changed the minds of many people who felt that a less establishment-affiliated candidate might be a way to change the way that Washington operated. He started to pick up steam and slowly knocked out several of the most traditional candidates.

Jimmy Carter managed to increase the ire of the Democratic party before his nomination, and they attempted to push any of their candidates to the top of the heap over Carter, without success. When he achieved the nomination, Carter took Walter Mondale, a Senator out of Minnesota, to act as his running mate and Vice President. A war veteran and attorney, he was believed to be the ideal partner for the unlikely candidate. Mondale had a long history of voting for consumer protection, fair housing, tax reform, desegregation and other causes that were important to the Democratic party and their constituents.

1976 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Carter on the Issues

Carter, on the other hand, began to make a name for himself in different ways, with a much more moderate view of the issues. Though he did not believe in federal funding for abortion, he did not believe a Constitutional amendment should be made to ban them, and he believed in shifting taxes to help with balancing the budget. Likewise, he was in favor of the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Rights Amendment and other forms of equality for those throughout the country. When it came to the GOP, however, he saw their tax policy as a type of welfare program for the rich.

His focus, when it came to crime, was mainly on white-collar crimes, believing that the poor were being unjustly prosecuted. With regards to crime he also believed in retaining the capital punishment but only in certain instances. He went on to support private schooling even when it used segregation though he felt the federal government should do more to aid public education. When it came to foreign policy his belief was to cease nuclear weapon testing and improve relations with other countries, improving free trade by lowering the barriers associated with traditional trade methods.

The Democratic Convention

The Democratic Convention was much less challenged than the Republican convention with Carter stepping into the event with enough delegates to take it. After the first ballot was complete the results were finalized. Carter won the Democratic nomination easily, beating out Udall who had managed to follow him all the way to the convention but could never quite pull off a coup of his supporters. Considered more conservative than other Democrats because he came from the south, the Democratic establishment wasn't quite sure what to make of him, or what he might do to their party, but there was no choice of who they would back.

1976 Election:

AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The Results

During this election President Gerald Ford was able to make a close race for the win, but not close enough that he could pull it off. With approximately 39,147,770 popular votes, he earned a total of 240 electoral votes. Compared to Jimmy Carter's 40,825,839 popular votes and 297 electoral votes, however, it wasn't quite enough. These votes seemed quite split through the country as well, with all of the western states voting for the president while the majority of the eastern states voted for Carter.

Nearly a full line from North and South Dakota down through Oklahoma and to the west was in agreement, voting for the incumbent president. Starting with Texas and moving toward the East the majority of states were in favor of the Democratic candidate, Jimmy Carter. Still, there were several states in the region that were overwhelmingly on the side of the Republican. Even this, with a large portion of the states, over half, there were not enough delegates in the conjunction of these states to provide the win and allow him to sweep the rest of the country. The smaller number of states with larger delegate counts were able to win it for Carter instead.

How the 1976 Election Relates to AP US Government

The exam will likely focus on some of the general aspects of the election, such as the individuals who ran both in the Presidential and Vice Presidential portions of the race. It is also likely to focus on the winner of the race itself and the margins that were represented when the votes were tallied and the winner was finally proclaimed. Because it was a close race, this is one that is at times difficult to remember, but the winner, by that 2% margin, was in fact Jimmy Carter.

The most important AP US Government concepts to remember is that this election was the first of its kind in many ways. The Southern Democrat leading the pack was definitely unheard of and the incumbent president being appointed to the position of Vice President and then achieving the rank of President was likewise unheard of in the past.

1976 Election: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Yet many things contributed to Ford being passed over by the American people and in some ways, it is believed that this was his own fault for jumping directly into the fray in regards to Nixon.

Use this AP US Government review to help you focus on some of the most important issues of the presidential election as well as the concepts that were made important as the election continued and drew to a close, leaving us with the 38th president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, from Georgia.

Key Supreme Court Cases: AP US Government Crash Course



[Image Source: Wikimedia Commons](#)

The Supreme Court has issued thousands of opinions, but some of its decisions have either had a profound impact on American history or continue to influence American government today.

Key Supreme Court Cases: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

The following is a comprehensive list of these cases. You are certain to be asked about some of them on the AP US Government & Politics exam.

Case	Year	Holding (opinion)
Marbury v. Madison	1803	Establishes judicial review.
McCulloch v. Maryland	1819	Expands federal “implied powers”
Gibbons v. Ogden	1824	Establishes Congress’s power to regulate interstate commerce.
Dred Scott v. Sanford	1857	Says that slaves are not citizens.
Munn v. Illinois	1876	Says that states can regulate privately owned business to protect the public’s interests
Plessy v. Ferguson	1896	Holds that separate but equal facilities for African-Americans are constitutional
Schenck v. US	1919	Allows limits to speech based on the “clear and present danger” principle
Gitlow v. New York	1925	Incorporates free speech to apply to the states
Near v. Minnesota	1931	Says there can be no prior restraint of publication based on freedom of the press

Key Supreme Court Cases: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Case	Year	Holding (opinion)
Korematsu v. US	1944	Says that the government can intern (imprison) citizens during wartime emergencies
Brown v. Board of Ed.	1954	Overtured <i>Plessy</i> ruling in regard to public schools.
Roth v. US	1957	Obscenity is not protected by free speech rights
Mapp v. Ohio	1961	Defines “unreasonable search and seizure” and regulates the use of warrants to obtain evidence
Baker v. Carr	1962	Holds the court may intervene in appointment cases and that every citizen’s vote carries equal weight
Engle v. Vitale	1963	Says that there can be no school-led prayer in public schools
Gideon v. Wainright	1963	Requires that states provide defendants with attorneys in state courts
Heart of Atlanta v. US	1964	Says that the Commerce Clause applies to private and interstate business
Griswold v. Connecticut	1965	Citizens have an implied right to privacy, including the right to use contraceptives

Key Supreme Court Cases: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Case	Year	Holding (opinion)
Miranda v. Arizona	1966	Says that police must explain the rights of the accused at the time of arrest
Terry v. Ohio	1968	Police can search and seize if they have probable cause
Lemon v. Kurtzman	1971	Establishes the Lemon Test, which allows for some government aid to parochial schools
N.Y. Times v US	1971	Limits prior restraint of the press
Miller v. California	1973	Holds that community standards determine what obscenity is
Roe v. Wade	1973	Establishes a woman's right to an abortion under specific circumstances
US v. Nixon	1974	Holds that executive privilege does not extend to criminal cases
Gregg v. Georgia	1976	Holds that the death penalty does not violate the Constitution
Buckley v. Valeo	1976	Establishes campaign money limits but also holds that contributions are a form of speech

Key Supreme Court Cases: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Case	Year	Holding (opinion)
Regents v. Bakke	1978	Race can be considered in admissions, but no racial quotas are allowed
New Jersey v. TLO	1985	School searches without warrants are allowed
Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier	1988	School newspapers can be censored by teachers and administrators
Texas v. Johnson	1989	Flag burning is a form of free speech
Planned Parenthood v. Casey	1992	States can put some restrictions on abortion
Santa Fe ISD v. Doe	2000	There can be no school-led prayers at extracurricular events
Bush v. Gore	2000	Ended the election recount in Florida, which led to George W. Bush winning the 2000 presidential election
Gratz v. Bollinger	2003	Affirmative action in college admissions is OK but must be limited
McDonald v. Chicago	2010	Incorporated the 2 nd Amendment right to bear arms to the states
Citizen's United v. FEC	2011	Removed campaign contribution limits for business and unions

Key Supreme Court Cases: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

It is important that you know the bare-bones facts of these cases. It's not a bad idea to make flashcards with the names and dates of the cases on the front, and the holdings on back, to help you memorize the information.

There's a decent chance you will be asked to discuss a few cases in more detail, particularly the cases pertaining to the Bill of Rights and civil liberties.

So, let's take a closer look at a select few of these cases.

Freedom of Religion Cases

In *Engle v. Vitale*, the Court struck down a New York state nondenominational prayer that began with the words "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence on thee..."

Lemon v. Kurtzman set guidelines to help determine whether government action crosses the church-state line. These guidelines are: the purpose of the legislation must be secular, not religious; its primary affect must neither enhance nor inhibit religion; and it must avoid an "excessive entanglement of government with religion."

Freedom of Speech Cases

In *Schenck v. United States*, the majority ruled that Schenck did not have the right to print, speak or distribute materials against US efforts in World War I because a "clear and present danger" existed.

New York Times v. US, famously known as the Pentagon Papers case, held that the government did not have the right to prohibit the New York Times from publishing information about the history of US involvement in the Vietnam War.

Citizens United v. FEC held that corporate funding of political advertisements that did not specifically endorse a candidate was constitutional under the First Amendment and could not be limited.

Key Supreme Court Cases: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

Right to Privacy Cases

Griswold v. Connecticut held that Americans had a right to privacy that was implied by other constitutional protections and that this meant the state could not prohibit the use of contraceptives.

Roe v. Wade used the concept of being “secure in their persons” to hold that abortions are constitutionally protected.

The federal judiciary provides some more summaries of important cases [here](#).

A Practice AP US Government Free-Response Question

Now let’s look at part of a sample free-response question and figure out how to answer it.

The First Amendment includes two clauses relating to the freedom of religion.

1. *Select one of the following cases and identify the First Amendment clause upon which the United States Supreme Court based its decision.*
2. *Engle v. Vitale (school prayer)*
3. *Lemon v. Kurtzman (state funding for private religious schools)*
4. *Describe the Supreme Court’s opinion in the decision you selected in (a).*

OK, this shouldn’t be too difficult. For (a), let’s pick *Lemon v. Kurtzman*.

We know that the First Amendment says “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Kurtzman deals with the Establishment Clause, because it aims to allow for government funding of the secular aims of parochial (religious) schools without funding religion itself.

Key Supreme Court Cases: AP US Government Crash Course Cont.

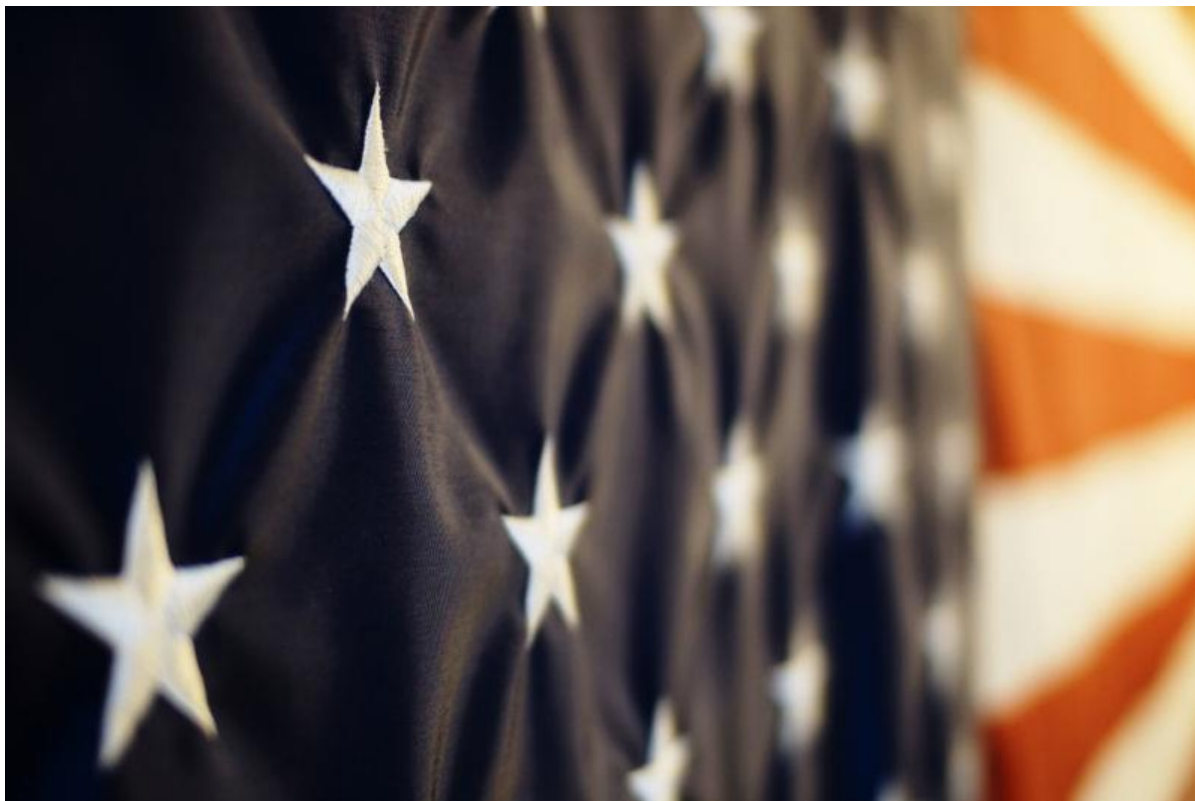
For part (b), the answer is simple. All we have to do is write down how the case was decided. The Court allowed government funding for parochial schools, as long as three guidelines were met:

1. The purpose of the legislation must be secular, not religious
2. Its primary affect must neither enhance nor inhibit religion
3. it must avoid an “excessive entanglement of government with religion.”

Remember the Most Salient Facts of Cases

The key for doing well on questions about Supreme Court cases on the AP US Government & Politics exam is to memorize the most salient facts about the important cases. Use flashcards, or do drills with a classmate to commit these cases to memory.

How to Study for AP US Government



[Image Source: Wikimedia Commons](#)

In 2015, 280,000 students took the AP US Government Exam. How did they do? While the encouraging news is that 48.1% of students passed with a 3 or higher, only 23.4% passed with a 4 or 5. The lack of success at the four and five level is somewhat remarkable since many consider the AP US Government Exam to be one of the easier exams! One of the best AP US Government tips is simple- you need to understand that the exam is broken down into two major sections (what to expect) and how to answer the questions in the Free Response Section (what to do). This AP US Government study guide help you know what to expect and what to do when it comes to AP US Government exam test time!

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

First Things First: Which Exam are You Taking?

Before starting off on your AP US Government study plan, it's important to make sure you are studying for and registering for the correct exam! There are *two* AP Government exams. One is AP US Government and Politics; the other is AP Comparative Government and Politics. AP Comparative Government and Politics is far less commonly taken, with only about 20,000 students sitting for the exam in 2015.

This study guide is for AP US Government. The [AP Course United States Government Description](#) states that its purpose is to “give students an analytical perspective on government and politics in the United States and includes both the study of general concepts used to interpret the U.S. Government and various institutions, groups, beliefs, and ideas that constitute U.S. government and politics.” Be sure that you are studying and registering for the correct course before you go any further!

Is the AP US Government Course updated, like some of the other AP Social Studies and History Courses?

The AP US Government Course and Exam are currently under review but has not changed. If the College Board decides to give a new AP US Government Exam, it will not be administered for the first time until 2019. This timing is great news for students looking for an AP US Government study plan since they will be able to use all of the released questions from past exams with confidence.

What are the Course Objectives for the AP US Government Exam?

To be prepared for the AP US Government Exam, your course of study should prepare you to:

- describe and compare important facts, concepts, and theories pertaining to U.S. government and politics
- explain typical patterns and processes and behavior and their consequences (including the components of political behavior, the principles used to explain or justify various government structures and procedures, and the political effects of these structures and procedures)

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

- interpret basic data relevant to U.S. government and politics (including data presented in charts, tables, and other formats)
- critically analyze relevant theories and concepts, apply them appropriately, and develop their connections across the curriculum

Listed above are the objectives of the AP US Government and Politics study course. This list, however, is pretty general.

But are there Specific Topics I Need to Know for the Exam?

Thankfully, the College Board provides a breakdown of the course topics, as well as how heavily weighted you can expect the exam to be in the six areas of study required:

1. Constitutional Underpinnings of United States Government (5%–15%)
2. Political Beliefs and Behaviors (10%-20%)
3. Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media (10%-20%)
4. Institutions of National Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Federal Courts (35%-45%)
5. Public Policy (5%-15%)
6. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (5%-15%)

As you can see, the topic on the exam that gets the most coverage is topic 4, the three branches of government. If your course has not emphasized Institutions, delayed it until the last minute, or you feel underprepared on this topic, start here!

Though the six periods are not given equal coverage on the AP US Government exam, it's important to study for all of them. Not only will you be tested on each topic in both the multiple choice and free response portions of the exam, but you will also be expected to synthesize your knowledge from several topics to craft answers to particular questions.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

As we continued in the AP US Government study plan, you will get AP US Government study tips for each topic covered by the exam and begin to grow comfortable with the test's expectations.

AP US Government Exam Format

If you have previously taken AP exams in the areas like World History, European History, or US History, be prepared for change! The AP US Government exam is quite a bit different from these history exams. The difference makes the exam easier to prep for in some ways, but tougher in others. There are only two sections of the AP US Government Exam.

Section 1: Multiple Choice

In this portion of the exam, you will answer 60 multiple choice questions in 45 minutes. Some of these questions might include a stimulus, such as a map, graph, or chart, but unlike the new AP history exams, many of the questions will not include a stimulus at all! You cannot rely on your ability to interpret stimuli well to get you through the multiple choice portion, but must bring to the table a significant knowledge base in all six topics to arrive at correct answers.

Section 2: Free Response Questions

In this part of the exam, you will answer 4 Free Response Questions in 100 minutes. Unlike other AP exams, the AP US Government Exam does NOT allow students any choice in which questions they will answer in free response. Each student is required to answer all four questions.

These questions will often have a prompt, worded as a declarative statement and sometimes include a map, graph, chart, or another stimulus that you need to be able to interpret to answer the question fully and accurately.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

[The College Board lets students know](#) that AP free response questions will usually use one of the following “task verbs” in stating the question:

- Identify: provide a specific answer, which does not require causal explanation
- Define: provide a specific meaning for a word or concept
- Describe: provide the essential details or characteristics of a particular concept or political phenomenon
- Explain: demonstrate understanding of how or why a relationship exists by clearly articulating the logical connection or causal pattern between or among various political phenomena
- Compare: provide an explicit statement which connects two or more concepts

The free response section on the AP US Government exam will include four questions that cover as wide of a range of material as possible. After a prompt, you will be asked to provide factual responses to the query posed, but also specific examples of the concept or phenomenon featured in the question. Below, we'll look at some samples of past AP US Government free response questions so that you can see what we mean.

How are the Two Section of the Exam Weighted?

Both sections of the exam are weighted equally, with the multiple-choice section at 50% of your exam grade and the free-response also at 50%. The good news is that while you are preparing for one section, you will learn what you need to know for the other.

Though it may sound corny, the ultimate AP US Government tip is to be a serious student of AP US Government. Knowing what you are talking about will help you not only in the area of content but in your confidence level. Take the time to prepare well and you can exit the exam room feeling like you have mastered the test, rather than it mastering you! Using this AP US Government study plan is a sign that you are already on the right path for that result, so keep reading!

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Succeeding on the AP US Government Exam with the Concept Outline

[The concept outline for AP US Government](#) is what your teacher should be following in selecting content to meet the objectives for your AP US Government course. All AP US Government instructors are required to submit a syllabus to the College Board that shows how their instruction will meet the requirements for presenting the objectives listed in the concept outline. Use the concept outline, which lists more specific content items to check up on your familiarity with the information you will need to know for the exam.

Topic Tips: Constitutional Underpinnings of United States Government

Prepare for questions on the US Constitution's history and form, as well as on the type of government that the framers created. Constitutional Underpinnings includes understanding the framer's unique ideas about democracy and the separation of powers, and one of the traditionally weak areas for students, federalism, so be sure you review it well. [Here is a good source to study the concept of federalism.](#)

Political Scientists put forth theories that are also important to know. Questions like "Who wields power in a democracy?" and "How the Constitution might be reformed?" are also possible topics that might appear as a multiple choice or free response question.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Let's look at a few questions that have appeared on past exams or in the sample exam questions regarding the topic of Constitutional Underpinnings:

1. Which of the following is an example of checks and balances, as established by the Constitution?
- (A) A requirement that states lower their legal drinking age to eighteen as a condition of receiving funds through federal highway grant programs
 - (B) Media criticism of public officials during an election campaign period
 - (C) The Supreme Court's ability to overturn a lower court decision
 - (D) The requirement that presidential appointments to the Supreme Court be approved by the Senate
 - (E) The election of the President by the electoral college rather than by direct election

Notice that all of the answers represent something legitimate and recognizable in terms of the operation of the U.S. government. Only a student who has properly understood that the concepts of checks and balances, the Framers' attempt to make sure that one branch of government would not become too powerful and overwhelm another, would realize that answer D is correct. Did you catch a reply that is a clear example of federalism?

Now, let's look at a free response question from the 2013 exam:

1. There are several different approaches to representation within a democratic political system.
- (a) Define direct democracy.
 - (b) Define republican form of government.
 - (c) Describe one reason the framers of the United States Constitution chose a republican form of government over a direct democracy.
 - (d) Describe each of the models of congressional representation.
 - Trustee model (attitudinal view)
 - Delegate model (representational view)
 - (e) Explain why a member of Congress might sometimes act as a trustee (attitudinal view) rather than a delegate (representational view).

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

You can see multiple topics from the concept outline are covered by just this one question, including [theories of democracy, which you can review here.](#)

Topic Tips: Political Beliefs and Behaviors

The College Board has stated in the past that most students score well on questions that fall under this topic. You will be asked questions about how and where people form their political beliefs (political socialization — [here is a good review](#)) as well as how they form opinions and how this is reflected in their voting behavior.

Let's compare two multiple choice questions on political beliefs and behaviors.

32. Political socialization is the process by which
- (A) the use of private property is regulated by the government
 - (B) governments communicate with each other
 - (C) public attitudes toward government are measured and reported
 - (D) political values are passed to the next generation
 - (E) children are trained for successful occupations

Obviously, this first question is an example of simple recall, as we discussed above. If you answered D, you are correct.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

The next question requires more analysis:

18. Which of the following generalizations about group voting tendencies is true?
- (A) Jewish voters tend to vote Republican.
 - (B) Protestant voters tend to be more liberal than Roman Catholics on economic issues.
 - (C) More women than men identify themselves as Republicans.
 - (D) Rural voters are more likely to support Democratic candidates than are urban voters.
 - (E) African American Democrats tend to support the more liberal candidates within their party.

As the question states, the above requires you to understand generalizations. No one is saying that these hold true at all times, and it may be that these generalizations are becoming less accurate over time. The correct answer to the question is E.

Though a free response question may include elements of political belief and behavior, there has not been a free response question that concentrates on this area for at least ten years.

Topic Tips: Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media

This topic covers parties, including their typical platforms as well as their function and organization, the role of interest groups in influencing public policy (especially regarding PACs and SuperPacs — [here is a review of interest groups](#)), and the role of the media in influencing government and elections.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

The 2016 exam featured a question that tested all of the elements of this topic and served as an example of how the College Board crafts AP US Government FRQs to be wide-ranging:

1. Linkage institutions—such as political parties, the media, and interest groups—connect citizens to the government and play significant roles in the electoral process.
- (a) Describe one important function of political parties as a linkage institution in elections.
 - (b) Describe the influence of the media on the electoral process in each of the following roles.
 - Gatekeeping/agenda setting
 - Scorekeeping/horse race journalism
 - (c) Describe two strategies interest groups use to influence the electoral process.
 - (d) Explain how, according to critics, interest groups may limit representative democracy.

To answer this question, you would need a thorough review of political parties and their role in elections, the role of the media and interest groups, and reach back to a previous topic, how interest groups might be said to limit representative democracy.

Topic Tips: Institutions of National Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Federal Courts

Get prepared for questions on all three branches of the U.S. Government, including the often overlooked bureaucracy, which is a part of the executive branch.

Remember that the executive branch is the largest of the three branches! It is important to recognize that though the President is the chief executive, he uses his advisors, his staff, executive agencies, and the rest of the federal bureaucracy to carry out the laws that the Congress legislates.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Let's look at a released Multiple-choice question on each of the institutions:

8. The role of a conference committee in Congress is to
- (A) hold hearings on proposed legislation
 - (B) oversee the actions of the executive branch of the government
 - (C) decide which bills should be considered by the full Senate
 - (D) conduct hearings that make information available to the public
 - (E) reconcile differences in bills passed by the House and Senate

This question requires you to understand the structure of Congress and understand the process of how a bill becomes law, an important part of your AP Government study plan! If you answered E, you are correct.

Next up, a recall question on presidential powers:

22. All of the following powers are granted to the President by the Constitution EXCEPT
- (A) commissioning officers in the armed forces
 - (B) addressing the Congress on the state of the union
 - (C) receiving ambassadors
 - (D) granting pardons for federal offenses
 - (E) forming new cabinet-level departments

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

E was the correct answer, but in the year this question was included on the exam only 55% of test-takers got it correct!

11. The most important source of the Supreme Court's caseload is
- (A) its original jurisdiction
 - (B) its appellate jurisdiction
 - (C) instruction from the solicitor general
 - (D) the special master's certification of cases for review
 - (E) Congress' certification of cases for review

This question requires the student to understand the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, or the types of cases it typically hears. The correct answer is B, since almost all of the cases that the U.S. Supreme Court hears are on appeal from the federal district and appellate courts.

To wrap up this topic, let's look at a question on the bureaucracy:

58. A fundamental source of power for the federal bureaucracy lies in its
- (A) role in moving legislation out of subcommittees
 - (B) role in mediating interstate conflicts
 - (C) ability to convince Congress to fund most projects it supports
 - (D) ability to mobilize public opinion in support of legislative initiatives
 - (E) ability to set specific guidelines after receiving a general mandate from Congress

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

If you properly understand the bureaucracy's role as executor of law and policy, you will have chosen E as the correct answer. Again, while only 335 of the students knew this answer, of those who scored a five on the exam the number was 73%. Preparation on this, the largest of the AP US Government topics, makes a huge difference!

Before we move on, take a quick look at this 2014 question that requires knowledge of multiple branches of government, the Congress, and the Presidency:

3. Congress and the president both have a role in making foreign policy. Despite recent expansions in presidential power, there are still limits on presidential decision making in foreign policy.
- (a) Describe two enumerated powers Congress has in making foreign policy.
 - (b) Describe two expressed powers the president has in making foreign policy.
 - (c) Explain how executive agreements expand the president's ability to implement foreign policy.
 - (d) Explain how one of the following can limit the president's ability to implement foreign policy.
 - Elections
 - Presidential approval ratings

Topic Tips: Public Policy

How should you prepare for this, the topic in the AP course outline with the least weight? First, don't assume that you won't get a question in this area. The 2016 exam featured this question on public policy as one of the four required FRQs!

3. The public policy process involves interactions between Congress and the bureaucracy.
- (a) Identify the primary role of Congress in the policy process.
 - (b) Explain how divided party control of Congress can make the policy process difficult.
 - (c) Identify the primary role of the bureaucracy in the policy process.
 - (d) Explain how one of the following increases the power of the bureaucracy in the policy process.
 - Rule making
 - Bureaucratic discretion
 - (e) Explain how each of the following enables Congress to limit the power of the bureaucracy.
 - Oversight hearings
 - Power of the purse

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

There are different theories as to how best to prepare for the public policy section. First, it's important to know what public policy is! The AP course description advises students to be familiar with “the formation of policy agendas, the enactment of public policies by Congress and the President, and the implementation and interpretation of policy by the bureaucracies and the court.”

Notice how all of the branches of government are involved. This interconnectedness is why it may be best to study public policy as you prepare for other sections of the exam. As you look at specific issues and current events in your class or AP US Government study plan, note how those issues are playing out in a public policy context.

Public policy is never found in isolation. In analyzing the question above, you'll notice that the question requires knowledge of two things we covered in institutions: Congress and the Bureaucracy. Think of public policy not so much as a stand-alone topic, but in its relations (linkages) to the other topics on the exam. If you feel unsure of your knowledge of public policy, here is [a list of public policy vocabulary terms](#) you should feel comfortable with using or encountering on the exam.

Topic Tips: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

This topic covers the rights of all citizens and emphasizes the struggle and recognition of those rights by specific groups such as women and minorities. Questions on this topic will often involve your knowledge of certain landmark Supreme Court cases. Hopefully, your course has encouraged you to learn and even memorize certain of these cases so that you can apply the principles that emerged from the decisions that were handed down by the court to an understanding of civil rights and civil liberties. [Here is a list that may help you get started.](#) It is also important for students to understand the role of the 14th amendment in expanding civil rights.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Below are some examples of questions, both multiple-choice and free-response that fall under this topic:

14. Which of the following did the most to expand civil rights in the 1950's?
- (A) State legislative decisions desegregating public accommodations
 - (B) State court decisions outlawing poll taxes
 - (C) The passage of voting-rights legislation by Congress
 - (D) Executive orders mandating affirmative action
 - (E) The Supreme Court decision declaring state-mandated school segregation to be unconstitutional

29. Discrimination in public accommodations was made illegal in the United States as a direct result of the
- (A) Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*
 - (B) Supreme Court decision in *Sweatt v. Painter*
 - (C) Civil Rights Act of 1964
 - (D) Montgomery bus boycott
 - (E) Voting Rights Act of 1965

While the first multiple choice question asks about the general topics of civil rights, the second question requires the knowledge of specific landmark cases and legislation to arrive at the correct answer. (Answers: E, C)

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Finally, this FRQ from the 2015 exam:

4. The Fourteenth Amendment protects civil rights and civil liberties.
- Describe the difference between civil rights and civil liberties.
 - Identify the primary clause of the Fourteenth Amendment that is used to extend civil rights.
 - Describe a specific legislative action that extended civil rights to each of the following.
 - Women
 - Persons with disabilities
 - Identify the primary clause of the Fourteenth Amendment that is used to extend civil liberties.
 - Explain how civil liberties were incorporated by the Supreme Court in two of the following cases.
 - Gideon v. Wainwright*
 - Mapp v. Ohio*
 - Miranda v. Arizona*

The College Board provides [sample student answers to this question](#), along with [scoring commentary that discusses how students did on this particular question in 2015](#). Take a look at the links provided to see how you would fare! Students in 2015 received an average of only 2.42 points out of the possible seven on this question. If you are willing to learn from their mistakes with the material the College Board provides, you'll have a chance of being one of the elite 10% that scores a 5!

An AP US Government Study Plan: Gathering Your Resources

As you prepare for your AP US Government Review, you will benefit from gathering resources that are specifically targeted to help you succeed. Some students attempt to re-read the entire text for the course, along with reviewing their class notes. While this can work, it is likely not the most efficient use of your time, energy, and efforts —especially as the exam draws near! Instead, consider the following resources as potential help:

- [The AP US Government Course Description](#) A 27 page guide to the AP US Government exam, referenced throughout this article provides students with a full concept outline and exam description.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

The course description offers 25 sample multiple-choice questions and answers as well as four sample free response questions.

- [The AP US Government Released Exam, 1999](#). This is an actual exam released in 1999. An [additional released exam can be found here](#). These are very helpful for practicing multiple choice questions as well as for seeing the scope material that might be covered by the four free response questions.
- [AP US Government Sample Questions](#) The College Board's course home page lists every free response question since 2003 on this page! Not only can you see past questions, but you can click on scoring guidelines to see how your answers would be scored by graders using the AP rubrics. Look at actual student sample answers and how they were scored to help you avoid pitfalls and see helpful examples.
- AP US Government Review Books Consider [Albert Blog's review of several AP US Government Review Books](#) when selecting a book that will help you get ready for the exam in the most efficient way. Most books offer multiple practice tests, but see if you can find one that offers an *explanation* of multiple choice answers, not only why an answer is a right answer, but *one that explains why wrong answers are incorrect*. You'll be surprised at how helpful this is in cementing not only the concept that the question covers, but in helping you straighten out your thinking can recall when you make an error. An AP book with a large glossary of terms can also be helpful in checking your understanding of AP Government topics.
- Topical reviews of AP US Government topics must be part of your AP US Government study plan. Whether you physically missed class time, mentally checked out for a day or two, or are just having trouble recalling the details about a particular topic, AP review books, videos, and review websites can offer a quick way to review the need-to-know details about particular period or event. [Albert Blog offers review posts](#) on its AP US Government blog on everything from the political socialization to Political Action Committees with new topics added regularly!

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Managing Your Time on the AP US Government Exam

At only 2 hours 25 minutes, the AP Government exam will go by in a flash. Making sure you are prepared about how to manage time will help you avoid time wastage, or becoming overwhelmed and flustered. Remember, the times break down like this:

- Multiple Choice: 60 questions/45 minutes
- Free response questions: 4 questions/100 minutes

Section I of the test includes the multiple choice questions, which the College Board designs to “assess your understanding of major course concepts, policies, and institutions, and to see how you apply skills of comparison and interpretation.” There are questions on the test that might be described purely as “factual recall”. Be ready!

Section II is an uninterrupted 100 minutes period. You will not be stopped during this time and told to move on to the next essay, so it is important that you pay attention to the clock. It is recommended that you spend about 25 minutes on each essay. Remember, on the AP Government exam you are being asked to complete a series of specific tasks. Once you have done that adequately, move on to the next question! If you end up with extra time, you can always return to a previous FRQ and flesh it out with more detail or refine your answers.

- Think about it: If you spend even five extra minutes on the first three questions in the free response section, you are left with only ten minutes total for the last question! Instead, look through each question quickly and begin answering as directed. Do not spend your time on the AP Government exam formulating flowery or “attention-getting” introductory paragraphs!

Another tip for time management involves how to approach multiple-choice and free response questions that include a graph or chart. These types of questions can be huge time-wasters if not approached properly. You can end up using a lot of time in additional analysis if you don’t scan the entire question first.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Let's use an example from the course description to illustrate this time management tip:

Consider the chart and the multiple-choice question that follows:

HYPOTHETICAL GOVERNMENT		
President	Republican	
Senate	49 Republicans	51 Democrats
House	220 Republicans	215 Democrats

32. The government depicted above is best described by which of the following terms?

- (A) Nonpartisan government
- (B) Unicameral government
- (C) Unitary government
- (D) Divided government
- (E) Dealigned government

You could spend several minutes digesting the available information in chart above. But with less than one minute per question on the multiple choice section, you will not have the time to do so.

Instead quickly read the title of the chart and recognize what it is all about —that in this hypothetical government, the President is a Republican, the Senate is controlled by Democrats, and the House by Republicans. Resist the temptation to analyze more right now! Instead, go immediately to the question and answer choices.

A student following this advice on the exam would find out that what he or she needed to know from the graph was simply that government is divided. Students just need to recognize that the information given indicates that different parties control various aspects of government, with close margins in the houses of Congress.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Though this will not always be true, spending significant minutes on analyzing this stimulus is a waste of time. It is better to find out what the question is asking and then go back and do the analysis to the extent necessary for these types of questions.

This advice also holds true for political cartoons, which intimidate many students. First, ask yourself what the cartoon appears to be advocating, mocking, etc. Then move to the question to see what it is the exam is asking of you.

5. The framers created the electoral college to elect the president of the United States. This system influences the campaign strategies of presidential candidates.

- Describe one reason that the framers chose to use the electoral college as the method to elect the president.
- Describe the message the cartoon above conveys about presidential elections.
- Explain why California, Texas, and New York do not appear prominently in the cartoon above.
- Describe two campaign tactics presidential candidates use to win the key states identified in the cartoon above.

Here, you need only understand the idea that four states overwhelm the others in a Presidential race. From there, simply begin to answer the four parts the question requires.

How to Study for AP US Government Cont.

Parting Advice: Keep Current!

Here is a final AP US Government tip: Keep up with current events. Though the exam will not pose questions directly about issues in the news, you will frequently be asked to cite examples of how a principle or phenomenon can be seen in your free response essay answers. One AP teacher recommends spending 15 minutes a day getting caught up on the headlines. One way to practice applying current events is looking for AP Government review questions that require you to incorporate current events into your responses.

The Ultimate List of AP US Government Tips



Doing well on the AP US Government & Politics exam is difficult. The AP US Government exam is one of the toughest AP exams out there.

For some perspective: on the 2014 exam, only 11.9% of students scored a 5, with 12.4% scoring a 4, 26.5% scoring a 3, 24.6% scoring a 2 and another 24.6% scoring a 1. That means that almost half of all students taking the AP US Government & Politics exam got a 1 or a 2.

But fear not: this comprehensive list of tips is designed to help you rock your AP US Government exam. So check 'em out—sit back, buckle in and prepare for that 5!

The Ultimate List of AP US Government Tips Cont.

Answering AP US Government & Politics Free Response Questions Tips

1. Read, read, read. Use your course books and supplementary texts. Just because you've done well in your course at school doesn't mean you'll remember important details when it comes time to take the AP exam. So review your course materials as much as you can—and don't skip readings during the year! You'll find that the specifics contained in the text will help you fill in your free response question answers.

2. Practice, practice, practice. Take as many practice tests as possible. Topics, and variations on questions, are repeated year after year. Practice exams from the College Board are available [here](#). Also, work with classmates. Grade their free response answers, and vice-versa. Familiarizing yourself with what the AP graders are looking for will help you perfect your own answers come exam time.

3. Know the value of each question. The AP US Government exam is broken into two sections—multiple-choice questions and free response questions. Each section is worth 50 percent of your exam grade. Within the free response section there are four questions; each question is worth 12.5% of your exam grade.

4. Know the scoring guidelines. The AP graders are looking for two things—a thorough understanding of the material and a good argument. As far as your score goes, though, having an understanding of the material is slightly more important than having a good argument. Keep this in mind when you are writing your answers and check out the AP grading rubric [here](#) to see exactly how your answer will be evaluated.

5. Take a couple of minutes to brainstorm about the topic. Jot down what comes to mind. Then look over your ideas to see which go well together to serve as examples in your response to the question and to determine the order in which you will present them. This, in essence, is the outline for your response. You should use any organizational approach that makes sense to you as long as you respond to the question and all of its parts. Strong organization is to your advantage.

The Ultimate List of AP US Government Tips Cont.

Using the question structure as your guide is often a very good approach; think carefully before doing something more creative, as it makes it more difficult for you (and for the grader) to see that you have answered the entire question.

6. Be careful. Free-response is a bit misleading. You are not free to write about whatever you choose in response to a topic. You need to provide specific answers in response to each part of the question to do well. (And fortunately, within the individual questions you will often be given choices. For example, “choose one of the three court cases listed.”)

7. Remember that you’re not writing a five-paragraph essay. You do not need to write full introduction and conclusion paragraphs that repeat information you cover elsewhere. Stick to clear topic sentences and paragraphs responding to each section of the prompt and you will do well.

8. Use the prompt to your advantage. When structuring your answer, match each paragraph to each section in the prompt. Use the language in the prompt to provide a clear answer to the question you are asked. For example, if part of the prompt reads, “Identify two forms of participation in the political process other than voting,” then your corresponding paragraph should begin, “One form of participation in the political process other than voting is...”

9. Pay close attention to the vocabulary mentioned in the prompt. For example, in the sample language above, you are asked to name two forms of participation in the political process other than voting. Now, if the prompt begins, “Citizens often choose to participate in the political process in ways other than voting,” make sure you talk about the participation of *citizens*—not interest groups or political parties. Recognizing this key distinction will help you earn an additional point.

10. Know your terminology. As mentioned in the previous tip, the vocabulary mentioned in the prompt is key to answering the question correctly. But you will also need to be facile with AP US Government & Politics terminology in order to provide full, knowledgeable answers to the free response questions.

The Ultimate List of AP US Government Tips Cont.

So review your flashcards or use [this](#) (AP Study Notes) or visit [Quizlet](#) to help you review key AP US Government vocab.

11. Don't do an "info dump." Don't include long, involved random facts about specific concepts or political phenomena. Even if the information is correct, this will not get you extra points. You need to stick to salient, specific information that is directly related to the question asked and the point you're trying to make.

12. Don't get in over your head. Don't use words and terminology that you don't understand. Try to stick to facts and figures that you are comfortable with and confident in. If you start discussing topics that you aren't facile with, you are prone to ramble and waste time writing stuff you won't get any points for, anyway.

13. Pay close attention to essay prompts. The prompt vocabulary will tell you exactly what to do in your essay. Some common prompts are: 1. Evaluate or judge – discuss the value or wisdom of a belief or idea. 2. Analyze – evaluate each part of the whole systematically. 3. Identify – name something, typically members of a group. 4. Define – explain what something means. 5. Discuss – provide details and examples of something. 6. Describe – create a picture of something with details and examples. 7. Compare and contrast – point out similarities and differences. 8. Categorize – sort into groups based on traits or features. 9. Explain – tell how and why with reasons and examples. 10. Determine cause and effect – decide what leads to an event/circumstance and what results from this event/circumstance.

14. Keep your opinions to yourself. Because the AP US Government & Politics exam deals with political issues—issues that you're likely to have opinions on—it might be tempting to express your opinions in your answers. Don't! The AP graders aren't interested in your position on campaign finance reform or whether or not you think the Electoral College should be abolished. The graders are only interested in concrete facts and figures about these questions—so do discuss the merits and drawbacks of the Electoral College if you are asked, but don't advocate for its retention or repeal. Stick to fact-based analysis.

The Ultimate List of AP US Government Tips Cont.

15. Pay close attention to dates and terms. If a question asks about the “modern presidency,” do not write about Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln. As you have learned, although the dynamics might be largely the same, the day-to-day realities of our political system have changed considerably since the Founding. The political realities President Obama faces are different than those President Washington faced—so, you won’t be asked to discuss campaign finance in the context of both of their presidencies, for example. Make sure you know the proper context for the issue you’re discussing.

16. Budget your time well. You should plan to budget 25 minutes for each question, for a total of 100 minutes, so that you do not have to rush on any question. For what it’s worth, AP graders say one of the biggest mistakes that students make on the AP US Government FRQs is spending too much time on one or two questions at the expense of the others, or becoming fatigued after three good answers and skipping the fourth.

17. Remember that writing too much can hurt your score. Your answer is judged based on whether or not you have accomplished your task—to define, identify, describe, or explain—as laid out in the question. You earn points for accomplishing the assigned tasks. There is no need to venture beyond the scope of the question. You will not earn extra points, and, because each question is scored independently, you will not be able to make up for a question you feel you did not answer well enough by overcompensating on another question.

18. No matter what, try to answer every question. You won’t lose points off your score for incorrect or incomplete answers, so it is in your best interest to answer as much as you can—even if you’re not sure your information is correct or don’t have enough time to provide a full answer. Particularly on the fourth, and final, free-response question, the graders are aware that you might be pressed for time and need to rush. Just write as much as you can, even if it is only a few sentences.

19. If you have extra time, check your work. This seems obvious, but there are ways to use your extra time most effectively. Most free response questions have multiple parts.

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First, make sure that you have answered each part of the question. Then, you can check for grammar, spelling and punctuation errors. (Remember, these are less of a problem the better the content of your answer is.)

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Answering AP US Government & Politics Multiple-Choice Questions Tips

- 1. Know your material.** As mentioned above, before the exam be sure to thoroughly review your course books and supplementary texts. Even though you've done well in your course at school doesn't mean you'll remember important details when it comes time to take the AP exam. So review your course materials as much as you can—and don't skip readings during the year.
- 2. Improve upon your weaknesses.** As you review for the AP US Government & Politics exam, take note of the sections or concepts that you have the most difficulty with. Drill these sections most intensely in the days before the exam. Have trouble differentiating between substantive and procedural rights? Make flashcards. Don't quite understand how the Electoral College works? Neither do most American voters—check out some of the many videos on YouTube explaining its mechanisms.
- 3. Read the questions carefully.** Circle, underline and highlight with your pencil as you read questions, with particular emphasis on the key details of the question and what, exactly, you are being asked. Look for words like *not* and *except*.
- 4. Don't panic.** If you start getting anxious, take slow deep breaths. Don't worry about other people finishing early. The students who get 5s on their AP exams know that they should use all of the available time to check and double-check their work.

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5. Pace yourself. Calculate the amount of time you have to answer each question and avoid getting bogged down on any one question. A watch with a countdown timer can be very helpful for budgeting your time. You should also take a few minutes at the start of the test to scan through the questions, so you can know what to expect.

6. Know the different types of multiple-choice questions. They are: Definition or identification questions: these questions require you to recognize something and know what it means or signifies. 1. Cause-and-effect questions: how did one action or event lead to another? What was the result of a certain occurrence? 2. “Roman Numeral” questions: these questions provide a list of items, and you must decide which of the words, phrases or statements are correct. More than one list might be correct (e.g., “I, II and IV”). 3. Except or not questions: four statements or lists are correct, and one isn’t. Identify the incorrect answer. 4. Graphic questions: answer a question based on a map, chart, table, graph or picture. Be carefully to analyze the graphic carefully.

7. Know the structure of AP exam multiple-choice questions. All AP exam multiple-choice questions have the same structure: a stem and a set of alternative responses. Each alternative provides the completion of the sentence, but you must find the *best possible* answer. Think of the stem as an incomplete sentence or question and try to answer it before looking at the answer choices.

8. Eliminate answers that are obviously wrong by crossing them off. This will make it easier for you to choose among the remaining possible answers. When you are doing this, pay special attention to any qualifiers or absolutes that might rule out possible answers—for example, words such as all, never, every, always, and best often try to trick you into drawing the wrong conclusion.

9. Knock out the answers that are *almost* right. AP graders know that some people will look at the question, have a quick think and look for the answer that’s in the ballpark. That’s why they include an answer choice that’s only half-right. Half-right answers are 100 percent wrong and it’s a trick answer included to fool you. Find the half-right answer and cross it out.

The Ultimate List of AP US Government Tips Cont.

10. Look out for “all of the above.” Since it’s best to read all of the possible answers before answering the question, anyway, test “all of the above,” if it is an option, first. Statistically the mere inclusion of the option makes it more likely that the correct answer is, indeed, all of the answers.

11. When you are stuck between two questions, look more carefully at the wording. There is usually a qualifying word—such as *not* or *except*—that makes one answer better or another incorrect.

12. Understand the progressive difficulty of the multiple-choice questions. The easier questions tend to be at the beginning of the exam. However—all questions are worth the same amount. So don’t rush through the easy questions and accidentally get something wrong.

13. However, do answer the easiest questions first. Most tests arrange the questions in order of their difficulty, but sometimes you’ll find that later questions are easier for you. If you’re stuck on a question, move on to the next question (again, be sure you skip it on the answer sheet). You can always return to the question later. Sometimes returning to a question after answering other questions can give you the fresh perspective that you need.

14. Make sure to answer every question on the exam. The guessing penalty has been eliminated, meaning that you won’t hurt your score with a few wrong choices. But don’t guess right away. Leave the questions you don’t know until the end, so if you have free time, you can spend a bit more time thinking about them. Just make sure that you skip over the corresponding bubble on the answer sheet so that your entire series of responses isn’t thrown off.

15. Trust your instincts. Only change answers that you are absolutely sure were incorrect. Most of the time, your first instinct is correct—so in those close cases, err on the side of having been right the first time.

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The Ultimate List of AP US Government Tips Cont.

Tips by AP US Government & Politics Teachers

1. Bring everything you might need to the exam—that you’re allowed. Mr. H at [usgovteducatorsblog](#) recommends bringing several pencils, pens and a wristwatch with you to the exam. He also recommends that you leave home 15-20 minutes earlier than usual on the day of the exam, so that you aren’t stressed out before you even arrive at school.

2. Use high quality erasers. If you change your mind about an answer and incorrect answer choices aren’t erased fully, you risk the computer reading both choices as bubbled in and marking your answer as incorrect. Mrs. J at Boulder High School recommends using high-polymer erasers to avoid this problem.

3. If you have the time, give more examples than you are asked to. Mr. H at [usgovteducatorsblog](#) says that, if you are asked to provide one example, give two. If you are asked to give two, give three if possible. This way, even if one of your examples is incorrect, it is still possible for you to score the maximum number of points on your free-response answer. The only exception to this advice is if you are asked something that only has one correct answer—here, giving two or more answers could cause you to lose points.

4. Don’t cram. Mr. K from Harvey Milk High recommends studying over an extended period of time, tackling one or two topics at a time, rather than studying everything in a one-or-two night rush. It might not be possible to set a leisurely study schedule right before the exam—particularly if you have other AP exams to study for, too—so it is best that you begin preparing for the exam well in advance. Prepare throughout the year, developing an outline, flashcards and charts, so that you don’t have to do everything last minute. You will retain more information this way, and you will also be less stressed.

5. Read the newspaper and watch the news. Particularly on the AP US Government & Politics exam, says Mrs. O from Taft High, your knowledge of current events and contemporary politics can come in handy. You’re allowed to use contemporary examples in your free response questions.

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So if you're asked a question about how a bill becomes a law, don't be afraid to talk about President Obama and the Affordable Care Act. Or if you're asked about foreign policy—for example, presidents acting without Congressional authority in matters of war—don't be afraid to talk about the recent airstrikes in Syria. Use knowledge—as long as you are sure of your facts—from wherever you can get it.

6. Make sure you nourish yourself. Mr. B. from Eagleton High recommends that you get *at least* eight hours of sleep the night before the exam, that you eat a healthy breakfast and that you bring a snack and bottle of water for the midpoint of the exam. Bring a sweater in case it is cold.

7. Also, Mr. B adds—don't mess with your body on the day of the exam. Don't drink more coffee than you usually do, start a new medication or take existing medications at a different time of the day. You want to have as much control over the way your body feels as possible. And it should feel good!

8. Specifically, avoid sugary foods and eat a high protein breakfast. Mrs. E from Winchester High says to stay away from sugary drinks on the morning of the exam, as these can cause fatigue later on. High-protein breakfasts like scrambled eggs are best for aiding concentration and minimizing fatigue.

9. Remember what you can't bring to the exam. Don't show up on exam day counting on being able to use things that you're not allowed to. Some items that are not allowed in exam rooms include:

1. Cell phones or other electronics
2. School supplies not already specific like liquid paper or highlighters
3. A computer
4. Watches that make noise or have alarms
5. Notes, books or scratch paper
6. Portable listening devices—this includes your smartphone.

Thanks to Sabrina D. at Barnard for this tip.

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10. Don't start writing your free response question answers right off the bat. Mr. A from BC High reminds his students of the importance of outlining your answers. Remember to put your outline in the blue book—everything should go in the blue book—and to organize your answer in response to each specific part of the prompt. When you're organized, you're less likely to leave out important information or to write too much.

11. Know about important legislation. Ms. B from Canaan High recommends using [these](#) Quizlet flashcards from the AP US History exam to drill your knowledge of important pieces of legislation. This is not because you will be questioned on the specifics of legislation, but because knowledge of key facts about major legislation will come in handy as details on free response questions. If you are asked a question about the legislative process, for example, you might want to include some details of, say, the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

12. Remember the presidents. Mr. S from Johnson High reminds students that they're going to need to know about a few presidents to answer their free response questions. It would be helpful to know more than just the famous presidents like Washington and Lincoln and recent presidents such as Obama, Bush and Clinton. If you can cite some important information about, say, Woodrow Wilson on the exam in response to a question about presidential powers over foreign affairs, you'll be closer to that perfect score. There's a handy primer on presidents [here](#).

13. Know the different Articles of the Constitution. They're relatively simple, but Ms. K at Smith High notes that many of her students get them mixed up on exam day. Article I is about the legislative branch, Article II about the executive branch and Article III about the judicial branch. Remember that most of what governs the operations of these branches on a day-to-day basis is not in the Constitution but, rather, in legislation passed since the Founding.

14. The day before the exam, make a dry run. Mr. N from Des Moines Central says that if you can make the time, practice taking a three-plus-hour exam just prior to the AP US Government & Politics exam.

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Just like a marathon runner should have already run close to a marathon in preparation for a race, you should be building the mental and physical stamina to stay fresh throughout the exam.

15. Do some memory drills. Mr. N adds that, if there are certain elements, concepts, functions, or words that you always forget, play some memory games before taking the test. You can use mnemonic devices (such as acronyms, always useful with legislation) to remember lists or to remember the main takeaways from Supreme Court cases.

16. Manage your time wisely during the course. Similar to the advice from Mr. K, Ms. Z at Viera High School says, “If studying and practice is done consistently, then the end-of-year cramming should be nonexistent. In fact, I really believe that small revisions at home every day after lectures in class is the best way to go, especially if students are balancing more than a few AP classes.” Try to arrange your schedule at the beginning of the year to block out some time specifically for AP US Government & Politics review—not just time to complete homework assignments, but to actually review the material.

17. Try different study methods. Ms. M at Wayzata High says don’t be afraid to try out new methods of studying or prepping for assignments, quizzes and exams. “I’d say successful AP students are also flexible, trying multiple strategies for note- or test-taking in order to find the one that works for them. There is no one magic formula for success, and students have to be actively advocating for themselves with teachers and trying different approaches on their own until they find the one that works for them.”

Are you a teacher or student? Do you have an awesome tip? [Let us know!](#)

The Ultimate List of AP US Government Tips Cont.

Ideally you have learned a lot from this list of AP US Government & Politics tips. Remember to relax. Although the AP US Government & Politics exam isn't easy, it is one of the easiest to study for, since the concept of federalism extends throughout almost the entire course—if you understand the concept of the states and federal government operating independently as well as cooperatively, you will be able to understand and explain most of the ideas in the course. The other key piece of knowledge to have is the system of checks and balances—and here, don't just think about the formal system of checks and balances in the Constitution, but also the ways that informal institutions—political parties, interest groups and the like—provide limits to each others' power.

American government and politics is a system of divergent actors, interests and issues competing to shape policy and the role of government.

With these fundamental concepts in mind, you should be prepared to grab your books, review this list of tips, and be well on your way to a 5.

Good luck.

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