

AP United States Government and Politics: Study Guide



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Key Exam Details

The AP U.S. Government and Politics exam will test your knowledge of material typically covered in a one-semester college introductory-level course about U.S. government and politics. The 3-hour exam is comprised of 55 multiple-choice questions (50% of the exam) and 4 free-response questions (50% of the exam).

The exam covers the following topics:

- **Foundations of American Democracy:** 15–22% of test questions
- **Civil Liberties and Civil Rights:** 13–18% of test questions
- **Interactions Between Branches of Government:** 25–36% of test questions
- **Political Participation:** 20–27% of test questions
- **American Political Beliefs and Ideologies:** 10–15% of test questions

This guide will give you a review of all major exam topics, with an emphasis on the terms covered in each exam section. Following every topic overview are sample AP multiple-choice questions so you can get a sense of how information will be presented on test day.

Foundations of American Democracy

About 15–22% of the questions on your AP exam will cover the topic Foundations of American Democracy.

Types of Democracy

Let's take a look at the various types of democracy that exist in political theory.

Direct democracy allows citizens to directly govern and make laws. It is considered a chaotic and inefficient system, especially in societies with large populations. It also has significant risks like the majority violating the rights of the minority.

Participatory democracy values broad based public participation in governing. In theory, it keeps government closest to the people and their opinions.

Representative democracy/republicanism is a theoretically more efficient system that allows citizens to elect representatives who then govern for them. It allows a smaller and more manageable group to make decisions more quickly. Republicanism retains important elements

of broad public participation in government while making governing less chaotic and more efficient.

Elite democracy/elitism favors allowing the best educated and most qualified members of society to govern in the best interests of the country. This system favors having a small group of the best-informed people to govern.

Majoritarian democracy promotes majority rule. It places power in the hands of the majority and allows them to govern based on their ideals, and values efficiency in governing and decisive elections. Critics of majoritarian democracy argue that majorities can easily violate the rights of minorities if sufficient safeguards are not in place. They also argue that majoritarian democracy's winner-take-all elections make politics a zero-sum game where candidates and groups are encouraged to do whatever it takes to win.

Consensus democracy promotes the sharing of power across diverse groups. Power is disbursed throughout the system, and therefore all groups are required to compromise with one another. Critics of consensus democracy argue that it is inefficient and creates unnecessary hurdles to decision making, especially when quick decisions are needed in times of crisis.

Founding Documents

The Declaration of Independence, created by the Second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, declares the British Colonies in North America to be a free and independent country. Authored by Thomas Jefferson and others, the Declaration of Independence relies heavily on the concepts of Natural Rights, Popular Sovereignty, and Social Contract Theory to argue that the former colonies are empowered to create their own government because of the abuses suffered under British rule.

- **Natural rights** are rights that exist in a "state of nature," or where no government exists whatsoever. English philosopher John Locke proposed these rights in his work, *Two Treatises of Government*. Locke proposed that there are three basic natural rights: life, liberty, and property. These rights are "negative" rights, which means that they are a restriction on others. It means that other people ought not to kill us (Life), ought not to interfere with us (Liberty), and ought not to take what is ours (Property).
- **Popular sovereignty** is a concept that people are the highest level of power in society. The power of government to govern comes from the people. When people consent to be governed, government gains its legitimacy.
- **Social contract theory** states that people should consent to be governed and in exchange the government will provide protections and certain public goods to the people. Proposed by English philosopher Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*, social contract theory is a fundamental theory that supports constitutional governments, because

constitutions are a form of social contract. The people agree to give government certain powers in exchange for other considerations.

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union was the United States' first constitution. Created by the Second Continental Congress on November 15, 1777, it created the first national government for the United States. Like the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation relied heavily on John Locke's theory of natural rights and very limited government roles. The Articles also gave our country its name, The United States of America.

Confederation is a form of government where smaller government units, in this case the states, are the sovereign—or the highest level of authority. States empower the national government to do very limited tasks while maintaining most of the control at the state level. This idea is borrowed from Native Americans.

Under the Articles of Confederation, the national government's size, power, and role was very limited. The national government under this document was structured as follows:

- One branch of government—Congress.
- Equal representation from each state in Congress
- All laws must be passed with a super-majority
- Congress has the power to create a national currency, borrow money in the name of the United States, declare war, raise an army, and establish relations with foreign countries

The Articles of Confederation is known more for its failures than its successes. Under the Articles, the national government did not have:

- An executive branch
- A national judiciary
- The power to tax
- The power to compel states to obey national laws or contribute funding
- Any power that was not “expressly delegated” or specifically written in the Articles

This last point prevented the national government from having any minor legal tools necessary to execute the specific powers and responsibilities that it was given.

Under the Articles, the national government lacked significant power and the states largely failed to live up to their responsibilities in the system, like adequately funding the national government for the payment of debt, etc. The nation suffered an economic depression and significant disfunction.

Shays' Rebellion was an uprising in western Massachusetts to protest economic conditions, high taxes, and abusive debt and tax collections. Led by Revolutionary War veteran Daniel Shays, it demonstrated the weakness of the national government under the Articles when the

Congress was unable to fund an army to put down the uprising. The result of this rebellion led to calls for a constitutional convention to fix the national government.

The Constitution of the United States

In the aftermath of Shays' Rebellion, a constitutional convention was called in the summer of 1787. The initial idea behind this convention was to fix the Articles of Confederation. This idea was abandoned relatively quickly in favor of creating a whole new system of government. The new government abandoned the system of Confederation in favor of a system of federalism, where the national government and state governments would share powers but the national government would have significantly more powers than under the Articles of Confederation.

The constitutional convention featured a series of proposals and compromises that allowed the new government to be formed. The initial compromise was over representation. The **Virginia Plan**, proposed by the large states, created a Congress with two houses—both based on representation. The **New Jersey Plan**, proposed by the small states, created a Congress with one house based on equal representation from each state.

Another compromise was reached between slaveholding and non-slaveholding states, known as the **Three-Fifths Compromise**, in which free persons would be counted as a whole person and slaves would be counted as three-fifths of a person. In addition to this compromise on slavery, non-slaveholding states also agreed not to regulate the slave trade prior to the year 1808.

The **Great Compromise**, also known as the Connecticut Compromise, created a **bicameral**, or two-house legislature, with the House of Representatives being based on population and the Senate being based on equal representation from each state.

Drawing on the ideas proposed by French political philosopher Charles Montesquieu, the national government was separated into three branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. Each branch of government was given specific and unique powers that could not be exercised by the other branches. This system is known as **separation of powers**. The idea behind separation of powers is to use the structure of government to control government and the officials within the government.

In addition to separation of powers, each branch of government was given certain powers over the other branches. For example, Congress can impeach and remove officers of the executive and judicial branches, the executive branch has the law enforcement power and command the military, and the judicial branch has the power to interpret law and the Constitution. This system is known as **checks and balances**.

The Constitution of the United States relies heavily on the concept of republicanism and much less on the idea of participatory or popular democracy. Only the House of Representatives in

the legislative branch is directly elected by the people in the original version of the Constitution. Senators were initially appointed by their state legislatures, and the President of the United States was elected by the Electoral College (and still is to this day).

The **Electoral College** places a buffer between the people and the powerful position of president of the United States. As originally designed, the Electoral College selects the president and may or may not vote with how the people of their state voted. This is an element of elite democracy. As it functions now, the people of the state vote on which slate of electors to send to Washington, DC, to elect the president of the United States. The electors themselves are chosen by their political parties, and in most cases vote for who won the popular vote in their state. However, there can be “faithless electors” who vote for someone other than who the people of their state chose.

The national government under the Constitution of the United States is one of **enumerated and implied powers**. Enumerated powers are those powers specifically listed in the Constitution; they are augmented by powers that are not specifically mentioned but implied in certain phrases in the constitutional text. These implied powers serve as tools with which the national government can execute the enumerated, or specifically listed, powers granted to it by the Constitution. Unlike the Articles of Confederation, the powers of the national government need not be specifically and minutely listed to exist. This system of enumerated and implied powers still provides a limited government framework but allows the government to possess all the tools it needs to function properly.

Constitutional Structure

The Constitution of the United States is separated into seven articles.

Article I

Article I created the Congress and legislative branch.

The **House of Representatives** is based on population, with the most populous state receiving the greatest number of representatives. Each state is guaranteed at least one representative. There are currently 435 seats in the House of Representatives.

A member of the House of Representatives must be at least 25 years of age, a citizen of the United States, and reside within the state they represent. Members of the House of Representatives are elected every two years by the people of their districts. This makes the House of Representatives the closest part of government to the people, and therefore the most subject to popular opinion and swings in public sentiment.

The **Speaker of the House**, a constitutionally defined position, is the most powerful person in Congress. The Speaker leads the House of Representatives and is selected by its members. The

Speaker of the House need not be a member of the House, but is almost always a member and the leader of the majority party.

The Census is also included in Article I of the Constitution. It requires the population be counted at least every 10 years; from this count, representation is apportioned to each state based on population. Since currently there are 435 members of the House, each member represents approximately 700,000 people.

The House of Representatives has the power of impeachment, which is a formal charge of wrongdoing against a member of the executive or judicial branches.

All bills raising taxes must originate in the House but can be amended by the Senate.

The United States Senate is comprised of two representatives from each state, initially selected by state legislatures but now elected by the people of the states after passage of the Seventeenth Amendment. Senators serve terms of six years. The Senate is divided into three classes, so that one-third of the Senate is up for election every two years. To serve as senator, one must be at least 30 years of age, a citizen of the United States, and a resident of the state they represent.

The Vice President of the United States presides over the Senate, but has no vote unless the Senate ties in a vote.

The Senate tries all impeachments by the house. When the impeachment is of the president of the United States, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court presides over the trial.

The powers of Congress are enumerated in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution. Among these are the powers to:

- tax
- regulate commerce
- regulate immigration
- coin money and regulate the value thereof
- create the post office
- create patents
- create all courts below the Supreme Court
- declare war
- create the army
- create the navy
- directly govern Washington, DC
- make all laws necessary and proper to execute their enumerated powers

Article II

Article II created the executive branch and the presidency.

The president and vice president are elected to terms of 4 years. These positions are elected by the Electoral College. Electoral votes are assigned to each state by adding the number of representatives apportioned to the state plus the two senators.

To be president a person must be a natural born citizen of the United States and at least 35 years of age. Before entering office, the president must take an oath that is prescribed by the Constitution. The president is commander in chief of the army and Navy and the state militias when called in the service of the United States. They have the power to create treaties, which then must be ratified by a two-thirds vote in the Senate.

The president has the power to appoint officials to the executive branch and to the judicial branch, but those appointments must be confirmed by the Senate.

Except in cases of impeachment, the president has the power to pardon convictions of federal law and commute sentences. The president, vice president, and all members of the executive and judicial branches can be impeached for treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors. If convicted by the Senate, Article II says they shall be removed from office.

The president is required to give Congress an update on the state of the union from time to time. This can be done in writing or in person.

Article III

Article III created the judicial branch and the Supreme Court.

There are 93 District Courts, 13 Circuit Court of Appeals, and one Supreme Court of the United States, which consists of eight Associate Justices and one Chief Justice.

The Supreme Court and lower courts created by Congress are empowered with “judicial power.” In the Supreme Court case *Marbury v. Madison*, this judicial power was interpreted as the power of **judicial review**, meaning only the courts have the power to interpret law and the constitution.

Persons appointed to the federal judiciary are appointed for lifetime terms.

The Supreme Court of the United States has both original and appellate jurisdiction, meaning certain cases involving states, ambassadors, and executive branch officials can be theoretically taken to the Supreme Court directly under original jurisdiction, although most cases make their way to the court under appeal or appellate jurisdiction.

Article III, Section 3 specifically defines the only crime defined by the Constitution. Treason is specifically defined.

Article IV

Article IV expanded on the idea of federalism, noting what states owe to each other and what the national government owes to the states.

It borrows language from the Articles of Confederation, and states that full faith and credit public records, acts, and judicial proceedings of each state shall be respected by the other states.

Article IV guarantees that the citizens of the United States shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in every state.

It describes the process for admitting new states to the union, but prohibits the formation of a new state by using part of a current state or combining two states, unless approved by both state legislatures in the Congress. It also states that the United States shall guarantee to each state a republican form of government.

Article V

Article V provided two methods for amending the Constitution, through bills passed by two-thirds of each house of Congress or by convention of the states.

The Constitution can be amended by a two-thirds vote of each house of Congress, and then ratification by three-fourths of state legislatures. The Constitution can also be amended by two-thirds of state legislatures petitioning to create a constitutional convention. All amendments proposed by the constitutional convention must then be ratified by three-fourths the state legislatures

Article VI

Article VI guaranteed the debt of the United States that was taken on under the articles of Confederation. Section 2 of Article VI states that the constitution, federal law, and treaties shall be the "supreme law of the land." This means that the Constitution and federal law supersede state law and state constitutions, when federal laws are being exercised appropriately.

Article VII

Article VII of the Constitution set forth the ratification process for the constitution. It initially required that 9 of 13 states ratify the Constitution for it to take effect.

Ratification Campaign

After the constitution was drafted, a campaign to ratify it began in the states. Those in favor of ratification were known as **Federalists**. Those opposed to ratification were known as **Anti-Federalists**.

Federalists Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay authored a series of articles explaining the structure and function of the government under the proposed Constitution. These articles, published in pro-ratification papers at the time, are known as ***The Federalist Papers***.

In Federalist #10, Madison described how a republican form of government combined with separation of powers can control government and the officials operating the government. The proposed government was separated in such a way that no one branch and no one person in government can obtain enough power to become despotic. Madison describes the control of factions. He stated that factions can be controlled because they're either a minority, and therefore too small to become despotic, or they are limited by the structure of government and therefore unable to obtain all the power they need to become despotic.

In Federalist #78, Alexander Hamilton described the function and structure of the judicial branch. He explains why the judicial branch is the least threatening to the rights of the people. He stated that the judicial branch has neither the power of the sword nor the purse—it only has judgment.

Anti-Federalists also published a series of articles under the name **Brutus**. These articles warned that the proposed new national government was too powerful and too far removed from the people. Brutus preferred that government power be kept in the states and closer to the people. This theory, that the lowest level of government capable of performing a task should be the one to perform a task, is called **subsidiarity**.

Practice Foundations of American Democracy Questions

Use this excerpt from James Madison's Federalist #10 to answer the questions that follow.

Complaints are everywhere heard from our most considerate and virtuous citizens, equally the friends of public and private faith, and of public and personal liberty, that our governments are too unstable, that the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority. However anxiously we may wish that these complaints had no foundation, the evidence, of known facts will not permit us to deny that they are in some degree true.

Madison's argument in Federalists No. 10 reflects

- A. the fear of abuses of power by a representative government based on regional interests.
- B. debates over the merits of inclusion of a bill of rights.
- C. the idea that the will of the public is greater than the rule of the few.
- D. supporters of the Constitution's fears that political factions would corrupt the new republic.

Explanation:

The correct answer is D. Supporters of the Constitution, including Madison, believed its checks and balances would actually protect against corruption of political parties. Choice A is incorrect because Madison's argument is focused on factions and political parties, not regional interests. Choice B is incorrect because the inclusion of a bill of rights was debated in regards to the powers associated with the Constitution, not the factions that influenced it. Choice C is incorrect because Madison's argument highlights the strain between an emphasis on wide-ranging participation in politics by the people and that of activism by factions, and he believes factions (or parties) could overrule the public will.

How would the new Constitution protect against the fears that are summarized in the excerpt, according to Madison?

- A. By creating a series of checks and balances
- B. Election of highly qualified and intellectual men
- C. Adherence to term limits for all representatives
- D. Allowing for state governments to veto any federal legislation

Explanation:

The correct answer is A. By separating powers between the branches of government, supporters of the Constitution argued it would protect against corruption. Madison makes no mention of the character or intellect of the men elected, and while he may have later supported the ideas of nullification, states do not have the ability to veto federal laws. Term limits could assist in protecting against abuses of power over time but would not be effective between branches of government or within said term.

Which of the following would the opponents of Madison's argument in the excerpt most support?

- A. The First Amendment
- B. The Fourth Amendment
- C. The Fifth Amendment
- D. The Tenth Amendment

Explanation:

The correct answer is D. Opponents would support a Bill of Rights, specifically the Tenth Amendment's delegation of powers to the State and people, would protect against abuses of power by individuals under the Constitution. The freedom of speech, protection against unreasonable searches, and application of due process, while being supported by opponents, would not be evidence to counter Madison's argument on balance of power

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Around 13–18% of the questions on your AP exam will cover Civil Liberties and Civil Rights.

The first ten amendments to the Constitution are known as the Bill of Rights.

These amendments were made to the Constitution during the First Continental Congress as a political compromise between Federalists and some Anti-Federalists. Because the original Constitution did not make any mention of specific rights held by the people, some leaders felt it important that certain rights be enumerated and protected in the document.

The **First Amendment** protects multiple rights including the free exercise of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of petition, and freedom of assembly. In addition, the First Amendment also contains the **Establishment Clause**, which created the separation of church and state.

The **Free Exercise Clause** of the First Amendment guarantees the right to follow the religion of your choice. While the freedom to believe is absolute, the Supreme Court says actions can be regulated. How far the government may go toward regulating the practice of religion is subject to debate.

In the case ***Wisconsin v. Yoder*** in 1972, the Supreme Court found that for the government to limit the free exercise of religion, it must prove that it is pursuing a *compelling government interest* in doing so by the *least restrictive means*. This standard, also known as **strict scrutiny**, places the burden of proof on government and significantly expands the right of free exercise of religion.

In the case ***Lemon v Kurtzman*** in 1972, the Supreme Court found that for the government in a religious institution to interact, they must pass the “Lemon Test.” For a law to be constitutional under this test it must have a secular legislative purpose, not inhibit or advance religion, and must not create excessive entanglement between church and state.

In the case ***Engel v. Vitale*** in 1962, the Supreme Court found that school sponsored prayer in public schools violated the Establishment Clause.

Though the First Amendment protects the freedom of speech, this is not an absolute freedom and some restrictions can be placed on speech by the government. There are two categories of restrictions on the freedom of speech.

- **Time, place, and manner restrictions** limit how the freedom of speech is exercised, but not what is said. Examples of this are noise ordinances, march or rally permits, and limits on where protests can take place in the interest of public safety.

- **Content restrictions** on free speech attempt to limit the substance of what is being said.

In *Schenk v United States* in 1919, the Supreme Court found that speech that presents a “clear and present danger” can be prohibited by the government. The example presented in this case is that you cannot shout “fire” in a crowded theater. The freedom of speech has since been expanded by the courts.

In *Tinker v. Des Moines* in 1969, the Supreme Court found that expressive acts, including wearing of arm bands in protest, were protected by the First Amendment, including when such actions are taken by public school students. While public school students do not enjoy a full set of rights as an adult would, the court says that they do not surrender their rights at the schoolhouse door.

In recent cases before the Supreme Court, the court has attempted to balance the right of free speech with the government’s responsibility to keep good order. This balancing is done on a case-by-case basis.

The freedom of the press is also protected by the First Amendment.

In the case of *Near v Minnesota*, The Supreme Court prohibited “prior restraint” of the press, or what we would commonly call censorship. The only exceptions to this are issues dealing with national security and wartime.

Even when the government claims that something is a national security matter, courts proceed with a heavy assumption against prior restraint/censorship, as noted in the case *New York Times v. United States* in 1971.

The **Second Amendment** protects citizens’ rights to keep and bear arms. The Second Amendment has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to be an individual right, unrelated to service in a state militia/National Guard.

In *District of Columbia v Heller* in 2008, the Supreme Court found that a generalized ban on handguns violated the Second Amendment and our individual right to keep and bear arms.

In *McDonald v. Chicago* in 2010, the Supreme Court applied the Second Amendment to state and local laws, therefore protecting the individual right to keep and bear arms at the state level.

The **Fourth Amendment** protects citizens against unreasonable searches and seizures and generally requires that searches by the government be done with a warrant based upon probable cause. The Supreme Court has allowed certain exceptions to the Fourth Amendment.

The **Fourteenth Amendment** is a lengthy amendment that was passed during the Civil War. It defines citizenship, protects the right of due process, and guarantees equal protection under

the law. In addition to these protections, the Fourteenth Amendment has been used to apply the Bill of Rights to the states. This means that the Bill of Rights applies to all levels of government—not just the federal government. Applying the Bill of Rights to the states through the Fourteenth Amendment is known as **Selective Incorporation Doctrine**.

The Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protects citizens from arbitrary government action. The right of due process has also been used to support the right to privacy, an unenumerated right held by the people, and to expand other rights. For example, in ***Gideon v. Wainwright*** in 1963, the Supreme Court found that defendants have a right to a lawyer under the Due Process Clause.

The right to privacy is a right that touches on many areas of law including government searches, personal relationships, abortion, healthcare, and Internet usage. It can be summarized as “the right to be left alone.”

In ***Roe v. Wade*** in 1973, the Supreme Court determined that the right to privacy extended to a woman's choice to end a pregnancy. In what's known as the trimester scheme, the Supreme Court balanced government power and the right to privacy based on when in the pregnancy a woman wanted to have an abortion. In the first trimester a woman has an absolute right to privacy. In the second trimester the government has only the power to regulate safety of medical procedures. In the third trimester government can prohibit abortion, except when the life and health of a mother are at stake.

The **Equal Protection Clause** of the Fourteenth Amendment generally protects citizens from unequal treatment under the law. Perfectly equal treatment under law is not possible in all cases, so the courts look at *why* people are being treated differently. Unequal treatment based on race is viewed as being highly suspicious, even when the government's goal is a positive one.

In ***Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*** in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional, regardless of whether or not the schools are equal in quality. The Supreme Court overruled itself in ***Plessy v. Ferguson*** (1896), determining that segregation based on race is unconstitutional in public education. The precedent in this case was used to rule racial segregation in official government policy unconstitutional in all cases.

Even when the government is pursuing a positive goal, like diversity in college admissions or government hiring, known as **affirmative action**, race cannot be a primary factor in deciding to admit or who to hire. In ***Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*** (1978), the Supreme Court found that affirmative action policies designed to diversify college admissions were permissible under the Fourteenth Amendment; however, race could not be the primary factor and deciding who to admit.

Civil rights and equal treatment were extended to the private sector through multiple civil rights legislation, the most important being the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**. This law prohibits

discrimination based on race and other factors in public accommodations, which are generally defined as businesses that are open to the general public. Businesses cannot refuse to serve or employ people based on the protected classes in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The **Voting Rights Act of 1965** prohibits discrimination in voting, banning practices such as literacy tests. Originally the law placed states, counties, and smaller jurisdictions with a history of egregious voting rights violations under “pre-clearance,” meaning they needed permission from the Department of Justice to change their voting laws. This provision is currently not in effect.

Practice Civil Liberties and Civil Rights Questions

Which of the following is an accurate comparison of the two court cases?

	<i>Brown v. Board (1954)</i>	<i>Roe v. Wade (1973)</i>
A.	Declared school segregation unconstitutional	Declared abortion unconstitutional
B.	Cited the 14th Amendment in its holding	Cited the 14th Amendment in its holding
C.	Led to an increase in power for state government	Led to an increase in power for state government
D.	Cited the Bill of Rights as protection against segregation	Cited the Bill of Rights as protection against restrictive interference

Explanation:

The correct answer is B. The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment was cited in both holdings as reason for desegregation of schools and allowing women the right to an abortion. Choice A is incorrect because the ruling in *Roe v. Wade* did not find abortion to be unconstitutional. Choice C is incorrect because state power did not increase as a result of either of these rulings; instead, federal law overruled the states. Choice D is incorrect because the Equal Protection Clause was cited, not the Bill of Rights.

Which of the following cases is most similar to *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) in its use of the First Amendment?

- A. *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972)
- B. *Schenck v. United States* (1919)
- C. *New York Times Co v. United States* (1971)
- D. *Roe v. Wade* (1973)

Explanation:

The correct answer is A. Both *Engel v. Vitale* and *Wisconsin v. Yoder* utilized the First Amendment to interpret religious practice. Choice B is incorrect because while both cases interpreted the First Amendment, *Schenck v. United States* was focused on symbolic speech and not religious practice. Choice C is incorrect because *New York Times Co v. United States* focused on strengthening freedom of the press, not on religious practice. Choice D is incorrect because *Roe v. Wade* interpreted the Fourteenth Amendment, not the First Amendment.

Which of the following would be an example of an individual liberty that is considered as part of the Second Amendment?

- A. Public safety
- B. Freedom of speech
- C. Due process
- D. Equal protection

Explanation:

The correct answer is A. The issue of public safety and individual rights is the primary area of debate when discussing the Second Amendment regarding regulation of firearms. Freedom of speech is protected by the First Amendment; due process and equal protection are debated as part of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Interactions Between Branches of Government

A large portion of your AP exam, anywhere from 25–36% of questions, will cover Interactions Between Branches of Government.

Federalism

Government power in the United States is divided between the federal government and state governments. This dividing of power is known as **federalism**. Different views exist on how this power should be specifically divided.

Dual federalism, also known as “layer cake” federalism, states that state power and federal government power and responsibility should be strictly divided and no sharing of power or responsibility should be undertaken. Dual federalism, also known as “states’ rights,” attempts to give most power and responsibility to state governments. The advantages of dual federalism are that it allows states to experiment with policy and be more specific with that policy, and that power is closest to the people. The disadvantages of dual federalism are that states do not have jurisdiction to deal with problems that cross state lines or national borders, and state governments often lack the resources to deal with policy problems, especially in times of disaster and emergency.

Cooperative federalism, also known as “marble cake” federalism, states that the federal government and state governments should share power and responsibility. Cooperative federalism often gives more power to Congress and the national government, and prefers that policy is made at the national level. The advantages of cooperative federalism are that the federal government has jurisdiction throughout the entire country; has massive resources to deal with policy problems, emergencies, and natural disasters; and can provide citizens with multiple access points to government and policy makers. The disadvantages of cooperative federalism are that Congress often makes policy that is not specific enough or tailored to unique problems occurring regionally or in states, and that experimenting with policy at the national level can lead to side effects that affect the entire nation.

The Supreme Court has taken different views on federalism throughout the history of the United States.

In the case of *McCulloch v. Maryland* in 1819, the Supreme Court ruled that states could not interfere when Congress legitimately exercised its powers. In addition, this case also confirmed that implied powers existed in the Constitution, meaning that not every power held by Congress needed to be specifically listed in the Constitution.

In the latter twentieth century, The Supreme Court defined limits on congressional and national government power. In the case of *Lopez v. United States*, the court ruled that the commerce power was not an unlimited power and that activities regulated under this power must have some relation to interstate commerce. This recognized that state sovereignty and local control did exist and has a place in law.

Policy Making

Policy making in Congress is done mostly through the committee process. Committees are groups of policy makers within Congress who specialize in certain areas of policy. Committees are further divided into subcommittees that deal with very specific areas of policy.

Congress has both standing and select committees. **Standing committees** are permanent committees to concentrate on certain areas of policy. **Select committees** are temporary committees that are provided with specific tasks and then disbanded when those tasks are complete. However, in the last several years select committees have taken on a more permanent presence in both houses of Congress.

When new legislation is proposed it is assigned to the appropriate committee and subcommittee by congressional leaders, and the committees begin investigating and gathering evidence about the proposed policy.

Legislation can be altered, or amended, multiple times in the committee. When the committee is done creating new legislation, it then votes on the legislation. If the legislation receives sufficient support in the committee, then the legislation is moved on to the larger legislative body—either the House or the Senate. While under consideration in the larger body, the legislation can be further amended before being voted on for final passage. Once a bill is approved by the House, it is then sent on to the Senate, to go through the Senate's legislative process. The Senate can alter the bill or pass the House's version. All bills must contain the exact same language before they can be forwarded to the president for his signature. The final version of the bill is then sent to the president for his signature or veto.

If the House and Senate version of a bill is different, those differences are worked out in **Conference Committee**, a temporary committee comprised of both House and Senate members who work out language differences in a bill. Once the common language is agreed to, the conference committee disbands.

Two theories exist about how a representative should come to voting decisions. A representative can follow the **delegate model**, which says that representatives should vote with the will of the people of the district. Under the delegate model, representatives should not exercise independent judgment when voting on a policy and should strictly follow the majority opinion of the districts they represent. A representative may also follow the **trustee model** of representation. The trustee model of representation says that a representative is in the best

position to have an informed opinion on a policy issue and therefore should use their best judgment when voting for the districts they represent. Individuals elected under this understanding of representation are trusted by the public to use their best judgment to do what is right for the citizens they represent.

Congress may choose to allow the executive branch to hire policy area experts to create rules and regulations and specific areas of policy. Congress delegates its authority on occasion because multiple scientifically based and technical rules may be needed to regulate an industry or address a complex policy issue, and Congress members do not have the time nor expertise to properly create the needed policy.

When Congress delegates its authority to the executive branch it must do so using “an intelligible principle,” or framework, that the executive branch agency must operate within. Congress can withdraw this delegated authority at any time, or it may remove funding from the executive agency at any time. Congress may not create a veto process to approve executive rules created under the delegation of authority prior to them going into effect. This is known as a **legislative veto**, and it has been found to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

Administrative Law

The rules created by the executive branch under the delegation of authority by Congress are known as **administrative law**. Congress can create new independent agencies within the executive branch to provide administrative rulemaking, policing, and regulation in certain areas of policy. Independent agencies are led by presidential appointees who are confirmed by the Senate, but after the confirmation are not subject to direct control by the president or the rest of the executive branch. These independent agencies can be empowered with both quasi-legislative and quasi-judicial functions.

- **Quasi-legislative functions** mimic the legislative branch, meaning that the independent agency can create new rules and regulations within its policy areas.
- **Quasi-judicial functions** mimic the judiciary. This means that the independent agency can decide if an individual or organization operating under its authority has acted inappropriately and provide a punishment or corrective action.

In recent years, there has been a troubling trend of industry leaders being appointed to government independent oversight agencies and then providing favorable oversight, rulemaking, and regulatory decisions for the industry. This trend of industry controlling the agencies that oversee them is called **bureaucratic capture**.

The Presidency

The president is the leader of the executive branch and is involved in both domestic and foreign policy creation. The presidency is the most powerful position in the United States government. There are two theories on how the president can choose to exercise his power.

The **literalist doctrine** states that a president has only those powers specifically mentioned in the Constitution's Article II. Therefore, the president should not exercise any power that he is not specifically granted. This view of the presidency gives only limited power to the president and the executive branch and has generally not been followed by any president since the 1920s.

The **stewardship doctrine** allows the president to exercise power in multiple areas and in multiple ways. This theory says that unless the constitution specifically prohibits a president from a certain action, then the president is free to exercise that power. The stewardship doctrine significantly increases the power of the presidency and allows the president to exert influence in nearly every area of public policy.

The **unitary executive theory** is a controversial view that provides the presidency and the executive branch with nearly unlimited power. This theory states that the president has total authority within the executive branch to create rules and policies as he or she sees fit.

The president has the most power in the area of foreign policy. As commander in chief of the military, the president can deploy the armed forces and oversee their function as he or she sees fit. The president also has the power to create relationships with foreign countries and their leaders, and negotiate treaties and executive agreements.

Executive agreements are agreements between a president's administration and other countries or international organizations. Unlike treaties, executive agreements do not have to be ratified by the Senate, but they may also end when the president's term in office ends.

The president has the power to prioritize certain issues and policies within existing law. The president can also prioritize federal law enforcement policy to pursue the political agenda he or she prefers.

The president also has the power of the bully pulpit, which is the ability of the president to command media coverage and focus the public's attention on issues he or she wishes to prioritize. By focusing the public's attention and advocating for certain solutions, the president can influence the legislative branch into producing policy that he or she favors.

The **Executive Office of the President (EOP)**, also known as the "West Wing" of the White House, contains all those employees who work directly for the president and help operate the administration. This office contains the Vice President, White House Chief of Staff,

Communications Office, National Security Council, Office of Management and Budget, and eight other offices that assist in policy making and execution from the White House. In total, approximately 2,400 people work for the EOP.

The President of the United States also oversees the rest of the Executive Branch, including all the cabinets and agencies of the federal bureaucracy.

Tension Between Branches of the Federal Government

The constitutional design of the United States government guarantees tension between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Because no one branch has all the powers it needs to operate, the three branches of government are codependent on each other to make the government function effectively and efficiently.

For example, Congress is given the power to create legislation and the budget of the United States government, also known as the “power of the purse.” The executive branch and the presidency manage the day-to-day operations of the government agencies and budgets created by Congress. The president traditionally creates a budget proposal, which he presents to Congress, but Congress is not bound to honor that budget.

Congress creates the final budget for the federal government, including mandatory and discretionary spending, and the executive branch manages its many departments within the budget created by Congress.

Laws are created by Congress, but the president has the power to veto proposed legislation. Congress can override the president's veto by a two-thirds vote of each house. While the constitution declares that the president shall take care to faithfully execute the laws, the president and the executive branch can prioritize the laws and policies they favor.

Only Congress has the power to declare war, but the president is commander in chief of the armed forces. The president may deploy the armed forces as he or she sees fit, but the funding of the armed forces is under the power of Congress. Congress also creates laws governing the discipline and organization of the military.

Both the legislative and executive branches are subject to review through lawsuits by the judicial branch. The judicial branch may declare laws passed by Congress, administrative laws, executive branch actions, and state actions or laws as unconstitutional and therefore void. The judicial branch also has the power to interpret statutes and the Constitution and settle what the law is when statutes are in conflict.

The judicial branch cannot fund itself, enforce its own rulings, or create new courts. It is dependent on the legislative and executive branches for these actions.

Bureaucracy

A **government bureaucracy** is an agency devoted to carrying out the policies of the government consistent with the laws passed by Congress.

Cabinet departments are large organizations within the executive branch that bring together agencies with similar missions to coordinate their activities and provide executive oversight. These departments are created via legislation from Congress. Examples include the Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Justice, and Department of the Treasury.

Each cabinet department is led by a secretary who is nominated by the president and then confirmed by the Senate. In addition to the secretary, the upper leadership of all the cabinet departments are subject to Senate confirmation.

Below these political appointees are the everyday workers employed by the federal government to perform the government's duties. This is known as the civil service. **Civil service** employees are not political appointees and do not change when a new president enters office. Civil service employees obtain their positions through merit hiring procedures. Civil service hiring in the federal government began with the **Pendleton Act** in the 1880s and was adopted to end the corruption plaguing the political hiring process that preceded it. The practice of hiring all government employees based upon political loyalties and favors is known as the **spoils system**.

Practice Interactions Between Branches of Government Questions

Which of the following pairs of statements is accurate with regards to the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate?

	House of Representatives	Senate
A.	Members elected every two years	Members elected every six years
B.	Can try impeachment of a president	Is empowered to call for impeachment of a president
C.	Can pass legislation	Must pass legislation in order for it to become law
D.	Can approve treaty ratification	Can discharge petitions

Explanation:

The correct answer is C. The Senate must vote and approve legislation passed by the House before it can become law. The president must also agree, but he or she can be overturned. Choice A is incorrect because while senators are elected for six-year terms, elections are held

every two years in an attempt to stagger terms. Choice B is incorrect because the House can call for impeachment proceedings, while the Senate will try impeachment. Choice D is incorrect because the Senate can ratify treaties, while the House can discharge petitions.

Which of the following best describes why a caucus in the Senate could change every two years even though senators are elected every six years?

- A. Senators rotate between committees every two years.
- B. Senators' terms are staggered.
- C. Alliances are fragile due to special interest groups.
- D. Members of the House of Representatives are elected every two years.

Explanation:

The correct answer is B. Terms are staggered so that about one third of Congress is up for election every two years. There is no rotation system in place. Choice C is incorrect because while this could be considered true, it does not directly address why coalitions could change every two years; this reason could account for changes in less or more time. Choice D is incorrect because it is not related to the question about the Senate specifically.

Which of the following was generally true of the balance of political power in the United States throughout the twentieth century?

- A. State governments grew stronger while the federal government lost influence.
- B. The executive branch grew in strength and influence relative to the other branches of government.
- C. The Supreme Court's powers of judicial review were used less and less as the century progressed.
- D. Congress's ability to amend the Constitution rendered the Supreme Court mostly irrelevant.

Explanation:

The correct answer is B. In the twentieth century, the dominant feature of the federal government of the United States was the increasing power of the executive branch. For example, in response to the Depression, F.D.R. wielded immense power over the other branches. During the 1960s, presidents were granted broad emergency powers that circumvented traditional checks on their powers. This trend of granting the executive greater and greater freedom of action has continued into this new century.

Choice A is incorrect because though the power of state governments was still relatively strong after the Civil War, the dominant trend has been toward a stronger central federal government. This was especially true after the civil rights movement. Choice C is incorrect because as the century progressed, the Supreme Court heard more cases, not fewer. The power of judicial review is still an essential part of the balance of power in the U.S. government. Choice D is

incorrect because Congress can amend the Constitution, but the process is so difficult and involved that amendments to the Constitution are fairly rare. Consequently, while the Congress does have this check on the Supreme Court, it rarely uses it to override a decision.

Political Participation

Anywhere from 20–27% of the questions on your exam will cover the topic of Political Participation.

Voting

Voting is the fundamental way that citizens can participate in government. Voting was not clearly defined in the original Constitution but voting protections have been added through amendments over the course of American history.

- **The Fifteenth Amendment** prohibits discrimination in voting based on race, color, or previous condition of slavery.
- **The Seventeenth Amendment** changes the selection of senators from appointment by state legislatures to election by citizens of each state.
- **The Nineteenth Amendment** guarantees women the right to vote in all states.
- **The Twenty-Third Amendment** provides Washington, DC, residents with 3 electoral votes for president.
- **The Twenty-Fourth Amendment** bans the use of poll taxes in all states.
- **The Twenty-Sixth Amendment** lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 years old.

The Supreme Court has also taken steps through their cases to protect voting rights and equality in voting.

In the case of *Baker v. Carr* in 1962, The Supreme Court declared that **redistricting**, or the drawing of legislative districts, be done based on equal population in each district. This means that each representative represents roughly the same number of constituents. This case creates the famous “**one person, one vote**” rule.

Voters select their candidates based on different reasons. Some states and smaller jurisdictions allow **party-line voting**. This means a voter may mark their ballot in one place and vote for all candidates of one party. Many voters use this as a shortcut to determine their voting preferences when they are unfamiliar with candidates in certain races. Voters using a **rational choice selection** vote based on which candidate will be best for their individual interests. They may also make their choices based on a candidate's history in office, or how a candidate has performed in the past. This is known as **retrospective voting**. **Prospective voting** is making a candidate selection based on how a voter thinks the candidate will perform in the future.

Certain groups in the United States are more likely to vote than other groups. Education, income, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and age are all factors used in determining who is likely to vote. Individuals who earn a higher income, college educated individuals, senior

citizens, and those who are religiously affiliated tend to be more likely to vote. Racial and ethnic minorities, lower income individuals, and 18 to 29-year-old voters tend to vote less often.

Voter turnout also depends on individual issues in an election such as condition of the economy, international crisis, and social issues. These issues may drive different demographic groups to vote in higher numbers from election to election. Generally, the United States has lower voter turnout than some other countries based on several factors, including voting being mandatory in some countries.

Elections

The power to administer elections is divided between the federal government and state governments. Election dates for federal offices are either constitutionally defined or set by statute from Congress. State election dates are set by the legislature in each state.

Voter registration is also divided between the federal and state governments. Voter registration is done state by state, with state governments having significant input on registration activities, but the federal government also provides voter registration forms that must be accepted by the states.

State and local governments establish and operate polling sites and early voting, but these operations must be done in compliance with federal and constitutional civil rights laws.

- Congressional and presidential elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. For the sake of efficiency and cost, most states also elect their legislatures and state offices on these days; however, there are exceptions to this. These are also known as **general elections**.
- **Primary elections**, or elections where members of a political party select their candidates, are set on a state-by-state basis and operate according to state laws in concert with the respective political party rules.
- **Closed primaries** are elections only open to registered members of the political party.
- **Open primaries** are elections open to any voter who wants to vote on the ballot of that party.
- **Caucuses** are used in some states to select presidential candidates. They require voters to attend a meeting on election night at their local voting location and pledge their support for a candidate. It is a longer process than a primary election, and multiple rounds of pledging may be required.
- **Mid-term elections** are held when the president is not on the ballot—in other words when the president is in the middle of his or her four-year term. These elections tend to have lower voter participation than presidential elections, sometimes with significantly less participation.

Determining who wins an election is done on a state-by-state basis. For example, in some states candidates may win with a plurality of votes, meaning they only need one more vote than other candidates to win. In other states, candidates are required to receive a majority of the votes. If no candidate receives a majority, runoff elections are held between the top two finishers.

Ballot design and technology is done on a state-by-state or even a county-by-county basis. Multiple ballot designs may be present in any given state—some jurisdictions may use paper ballots, while other jurisdictions will use voting computers or punch cards.

Political Parties

Political parties are official organizations designed to bring like-minded people together in order to elect members of the party. Political parties play a role in organizing government, operating elections, educating voters, and increasing voter turnout. These political party contributions to our system are called **party in the electorate**, **party in government**, and **party as organization**.

Party in the Electorate

Political parties in the electorate help to educate voters on issues, update voters on upcoming elections and their rules, register voters, and turn out voters on election day.

Political parties formed early in American history but have changed over time. The United States has a two-party system largely because of the single member district nature of our legislative branches at the federal and state levels combined with the plurality winner elections used by multiple states. When these conditions are present in most countries around the world, we find a two-party system. Since the 1850s our two major political parties have been the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

Although they have remained the same in name, the voters and groups who make up the parties has changed over time. The different people, interests, and groups affiliated with a political party is called the **party coalition**. Political party coalitions can be based on economic interests, social issues, religious affiliation, geographic location, political ideology, racial makeup, and ethnicity among other factors.

Voters may choose to affiliate or identify with a political party based on a number of reasons. Historically, **political party affiliation** was strongly correlated with family preference and social group, meaning that if your family and social circle are Democrats or Republicans you would also likely be a Democrat or Republican. Family and social party identification leads people to identify with the party first, and then with how they feel on individual issues as a secondary consideration. More recently, however, evidence indicates that a person's views on individual issues drives them to vote for one party or the other. So, a person's view on economic matters,

social issues, and international relations will lead them to vote for one party or the other, but perhaps not identify as a Democrat or Republican.

Parties hold **conventions**, or gatherings of selected delegates, at both the state and national levels. National conventions occur every four years during the presidential election cycle. These conventions formalize the selection of the presidential and vice-presidential candidate for each party. Prior to the 1970s, presidential candidates were actually selected at the conventions with little primary election or caucus input.

Third parties, or minor parties, exist in the United States in abundance. While their electoral success is limited, they can play a significant role in the success of the two major parties and the issues the two major parties emphasize. Minor parties are usually organized around a singular issue or a small set of related issues that motivates the targeted constituency. Historically, when a minor party gains a significant enough following, one of the two major parties will adopt the issues motivating the minor party as part of the major party's platform. This allows the major parties to broaden their coalition and add more voters during elections.

Party in Government

Political parties help to organize government. In the legislative branch political parties form caucuses, which in theory help the legislature run more effectively. These caucuses prioritize legislation and issues and appoint legislative leadership. Membership on committees, committee leadership, and overall legislative leadership are determined by parties, often through seniority.

Party as Organization

Political parties have a formal organizational structure and leadership. Parties gather information, collect resources, promote issues, and recruit candidates for office at all levels. Political parties help candidates with financial and informational resources and provide support during campaigns and while governing. Party organizations exist at the local, state, and federal level.

Collecting data and technology for political campaigns has become a highly important function for political parties, especially at the national level. Both major parties have developed sophisticated voter and election data that can be used by candidates at all levels to efficiently and effectively communicate with voters and increase voter participation in elections.

Campaign Finance Regulation

Political parties at the national and state levels raise significant funds to support candidates in their parties. Candidates are also responsible for fundraising within their individual campaigns.

Both political party fundraising and candidate fundraising are regulated by the state and federal government, depending on what office the candidate and political party are running for.

At the federal level, the **Federal Election Commission (FEC)** regulates campaign finance and disclosure. The **Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA)** created the FEC and campaign finance rules for federal candidates. Political fundraising at the federal level has **contribution limits** and **public disclosure requirements** that are enforced by the FEC. Candidates and political parties must abide by these rules or face civil and even criminal punishments for violations.

Other organizations may also participate in federal and state elections—organizations wishing to contribute directly to candidate campaigns are known as political action committees (PACs), which are also regulated by the FEC. Organizations wishing to advertise through television, radio, mail, and via the Internet who do not wish to contribute directly to candidates may also spend money on elections. These organizations, known as independent expenditure organizations, or more commonly referred to as **Super PACs**, face only disclosure requirements from the FEC. They are allowed to accept unlimited funding.

In *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976, the Supreme Court determined that how we spend money in elections is a form of expression and therefore protected by the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment. The court allowed contribution limits to stay in place but struck down spending limits.

In *Citizens United v. FEC* in 2010, the Supreme Court extended this free speech protection to corporate entities wishing to run independent advertisements during elections. The result of this case has increased election spending in the United States significantly.

Interest Groups

An interest group is an organization or group of individuals or entities who seek to influence politics, government, and policy but are not a political party. Interest groups are formed around specific areas of policy and seek to influence government in ways that are of benefit to their group. Businesses usually organize into interest groups centered around the type of businesses they're in (banking, pharmaceuticals, energy, etc.). Citizens can also form interest groups to promote the issues they care about.

Pluralism theory suggests that interest groups overall have a positive effect on government, and states that there are interest groups representing all areas of society and all sides of any given issue. This universal representation of all sides helps create balanced policy by giving every group input on the formation of policy.

Elitism theory suggests that interest groups may not provide universal representation on all issues. Even if groups exist on both sides, some groups have much more power and influence

than others. These “elite” groups will rise to the top and dominate the policy process, producing policy that is unbalanced and strongly favoring the strongest interest groups.

Interest groups attempt to influence policy and government officials using three primary tools: lobbying, campaign finance, and grassroots.

Lobbying is the act of talking directly to policy makers and building relationships with them in order to influence policy. Thousands of interest groups and their lobbyists work in Washington, DC, every day. Lobbyists can also provide draft legislation to lawmakers.

Interest groups can also influence government by helping to elect or re-elect lawmakers who are favorable to their issues via financial donations to political campaigns. One legal way for interest groups to donate directly to candidates is a PAC, which as mentioned, is a legal organization regulated by the FEC that is allowed to donate limited amounts directly to candidates and political parties but is subject to both disclosure and donation limits.

Interest groups can also influence government through **grassroots** efforts, which refers to actions taken to affect public opinion on an issue. Rather than speak to the elected official directly, grassroots efforts attempt to influence an elected official by changing the opinion of those who vote for them. By manipulating public opinion around an issue, interest groups can encourage an elected official to side with them or risk angering the voters who elect them. The rise of social media has made grassroots organizing much easier, especially for small organizations who do not have the money or influence of larger organizations.

Practice Political Participation Questions

Change in reported time of voting decision (%)	2000	2004
Knew all along how they would vote	12	33
Decided before or during the conventions	42	37
Decided after the conventions, during the campaign	24	15
Decided within two weeks of the election	18	13
Decided on Election Day	5	2
Not ascertained	<1	<1
<i>Total #</i>	<i>1,092</i>	<i>800</i>

According to this table, most voters select their preferred presidential candidate

- A. in the middle of the campaign.
- B. on Election Day.
- C. in the last two weeks of the campaign.
- D. by the end of their party's convention.

Explanation:

The correct answer is D. Most voters have selected their preferred presidential candidate by the end of their party's convention. In 2000, more than half of the voting population selected their candidate by the end of the convention. In 2004, 70 percent of the voting population had made up their minds before the presidential campaigns had officially begun. A majority of Americans selected their preferred candidate earlier than the midpoint of the campaign. Very few Americans decided which candidate to vote for on Election Day; in 2000, only five percent selected a candidate on Election Day, and in 2004, only one percent were still undecided before Election Day.

Which of the following factors is commonly linked with lower rates of political participation?

- A. Owning a home instead of an apartment
- B. Previously being involved in political activity
- C. Being 30 or older
- D. Having a high school degree only

Explanation:

The correct answer is D. There is a strong correlation between political noninvolvement and low levels of education. Recent surveys have shown that less than 40 percent of citizens with a high school education or lower voted in national or political elections. In contrast, more than 80 percent of people with advanced degrees voted. Home ownership often correlates with political participation. Previous political involvement is also a strong indicator of future political involvement; as political scientist Michael S. Lewis-Beck described it, "Voting... is an acquired taste and the appetite grows with eating." Finally, older citizens tend to be more politically active than their younger counterparts.

Which of the following strategies used by special interest groups for influencing policy would be considered illegal?

- A. Providing government officials with information
- B. Making contributions to political campaigns
- C. Directly contacting political leaders
- D. Providing a commission for successful lobbying

Explanation:

The correct answer is D. Special interest groups are prohibited from providing gifts to lawmakers and from providing a commission for successful lobbying. Choice A is incorrect because one of the major ways special interest groups influence lawmakers is by providing them with research and information that supports the views of the group. Choice B is incorrect because special interest groups frequently make contributions to political campaigns. By helping elect officials friendly to their causes, special interest groups hope to influence policy making. Choice C is incorrect because through lobbyists and other means, special interest groups frequently establish direct contact with politicians.

American Political Beliefs and Ideologies

Finally, 10–15% of your exam will cover the topic of American Political Beliefs and Ideologies.

Public Opinion

Public opinion, which can be defined as a collection of attitudes and preferences held by the general public, is measured through public opinion polling. **Polling** is the scientific measure of public opinion and is performed by collecting opinions from a randomly collected sample of individuals who are representative of the larger group. While not perfect, public opinion polling can provide a sense of where public opinion is at a given moment in time. Public opinion polls take into consideration a number of factors when attempting to obtain a representative sample of the population. Age, gender, race, education, income group, and other factors can all affect the outcome of a poll.

- **Benchmark polls** take a snapshot of the public opinion at any given time. These polls are often used to determine public feelings on certain issues and about certain candidates. They are usually performed over a 3–4-day period.
- **Tracking polls** are done continuously over a given period of time to measure how public opinion is changing from day to day, week to week, month to month, or even year to year.
- Polls are often done on Election Day at polling places in highly important precincts to let political campaigns and the media know how election is going in real time.
- **Entrance polls** ask voters how they intend to vote prior to their entering their polling places.
- **Exit polls** ask voters how they voted once the voter has left the voting place.

Polls have a **margin of error** that varies from poll to poll depending on the size of the sample taken. If a poll has a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$, then each number in the poll could be 3% more or 3% less than the number. For example, if Candidate A polls at 46% and Candidate B polls at 40%, then Candidate A should be in the range of 43–49% and Candidate B should be in the range of 37–43%. Polling can be done by Internet, phone, or in person.

Focus groups gather people together who are representative of their communities to ask them questions about certain subjects. From these group interviews, we can reasonably extrapolate how the general public might feel about an issue.

Public opinion can be formed and manipulated in various ways. Media organizations and political leaders, through the decisions they make in prioritizing issues, can prime public opinion. **Priming** is the process through which certain issues are prioritized in the public's mind over other issues. Media organizations and political leaders can also create a context for how

the public views a certain issue. **Framing** is the process of establishing context in which a certain issue is understood by the public.

Public opinion is also affected by an individual's predisposition towards any given issue. **Bias** refers to the preconceived ideas and feelings that the individual brings to an issue before being presented with new information on the issue. **Confirmation bias** is a common bias where an individual seeks out or interprets new information to confirm what they already believe to be true. Individuals attempt to reconcile conflicting information in their own minds. When presented with new information that conflicts with a previously held bias, individuals will often attempt to rationalize their previously held positions and dismiss the new information. **Availability bias** is a form of confirmation bias where readily available examples of something are mistaken for being more representative than they are (anecdotal evidence versus empirical evidence).

The discomfort felt by individuals in being presented with information that conflicts with their previously held beliefs is known as **cognitive dissonance**. This phenomenon has presented special challenges to the political world with the rise of social media, partisan news channels, and the multiple online news outlets available to the public. It is now possible for people to choose the news they want to hear, rather than being confronted with information that conflicts with their previously held beliefs. Since 24-hour news channels combine news reporting with opinion-based programming, it is sometimes difficult for the public to determine which is factually-based news and which is opinion-based editorializing.

Public opinion can shape public policy, but public opinion can also be shaped by public policy. **Issue orientation** is how the public feels about a given issue (support/oppose/no opinion). **Issue intensity** is how strongly the public feels about a given issue (highly important/not important/no opinion). **Prioritization** is the order of importance the public gives to political policies. If the public feels strongly about a policy, elected leaders can react to that strong public sentiment by creating policies that will please the public. If the public does not feel strongly one way or the other about a policy or lacks sufficient information to have an opinion on a policy, elected leaders can create a policy and then rally public support behind it.

Correlation is the relationship between two items—items that are closely related or occur frequently together can be said to have strong correlation. However, correlation is not **causation**. Because two phenomena occur frequently together does not necessarily mean that one causes the other to occur.

Ideology

Ideology refers to a set of ideas or values the voters and individuals may identify with based on how they feel about a wide variety of issues and their general attitude toward the role of government. In the United States, ideology is broadly divided into liberal and conservative.

Liberals tend to favor government action, especially at the federal level, in regulating the economy and providing necessities for those who need it. Examples of liberal programs include Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, SNAP, and unemployment benefits. Liberals tend to favor individual freedom on social issues, preferring less government involvement in private lives and a broader freedom of speech, association, etc.

Conservatives tend to favor less government involvement in the economy, preferring free market forces to dictate prices, wages, recession, and expansion. Conservatives tend to favor more government involvement in social issues. Regulating abortion, upholding moral standards based on majority religious views, and regulating speech to keep good order are issue stances generally preferred by conservatives.

In American politics, the Democratic Party tends to be the more liberal party while the Republican Party (often referred to as the Grand Old Party, or GOP) tends to be the more conservative party. Note: the definitions of liberal and conservative have different meanings outside of the United States, so be careful not to confuse the American and international definitions of these terms.

American voters can use party labels as a heuristic, or mental shortcut, to determine how they will vote when they are not familiar with certain candidates in certain races. Because they know the Democratic Party tends to be more liberal and the Republican Party tends to be more conservative, they can reasonably assume the candidates running under these party labels at least somewhat agree with the party's ideology, although moderates in both parties are neither purely liberal or purely conservative.

Practice American Political Beliefs and Ideologies Questions

Use the excerpt below to answer the two questions that follow.

When Keynes wrote his great work *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* during the Great Depression of the 1930s, he pointed out that during the Depression, the capacity of the economy to supply goods and services had not changed much. U.S. unemployment rates soared higher than 20% from 1933 to 1935, but the number of possible workers had not increased or decreased much. Factories were closed and shuttered, but machinery and equipment had not disappeared. Technologies that had been invented in the 1920s were not un-invented and forgotten in the 1930s. Thus, Keynes argued that the Great Depression—and many ordinary recessions as well—were not caused by a drop in the ability of the economy to supply goods as measured by labor, physical capital, or technology. He argued the economy often produced less than its full potential, not because it was technically impossible to produce more with the existing workers and machines, but because a lack of demand in the economy as a whole led to inadequate incentives for firms to produce. In such cases, he argued, the level of GDP in the economy was not primarily determined by the potential of what the economy could supply, but rather by the amount of total demand.

Which of the following would be most likely to support the economic policy of Keynesian economics?

- A. Liberals
- B. Conservatives
- C. Libertarians
- D. GOP members

Explanation:

The correct answer is A. Liberals believe in more government regulation of the market and attempts to increase personal spending. Choice B is incorrect because conservatives believe in fewer government regulations of economic markets. Choice C is incorrect because libertarians believe in little to no regulation of the market. Choice D is incorrect because most members of the GOP would be labeled as conservative and believe in fewer government regulations of the market.

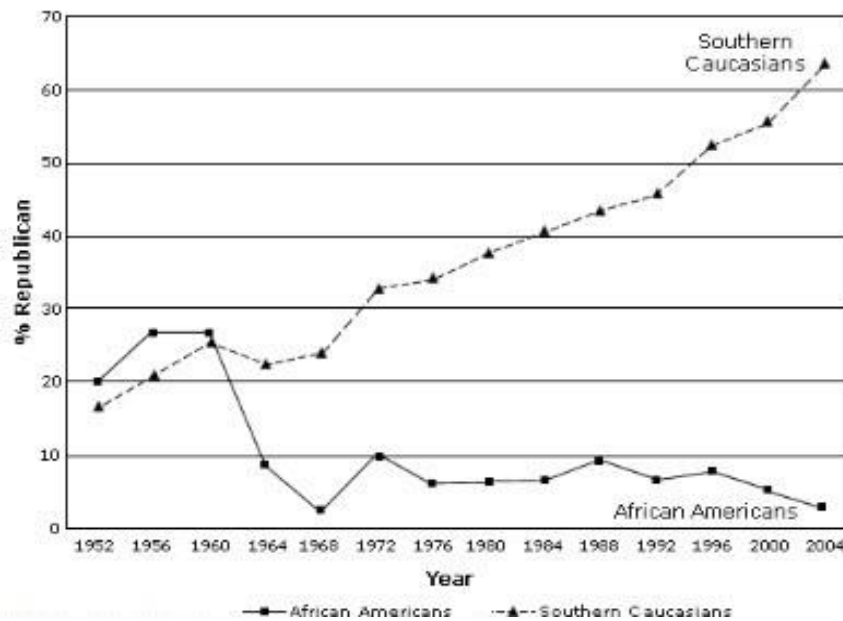
Which of the following statements is most consistent with the passage?

- A. Increasing the money supply by lowering interest rates would improve the economy.
- B. Decreasing the number of workers available for labor positions would create more demand in the economy.
- C. Government creation of a new market for produced goods would increase both the output and demand.
- D. Cutting taxes and lowering interest rates would create more opportunities for firms.

Explanation:

The correct answer is C. Government intervention by creating a new market, or demand, for goods would increase both production and the economy while reducing the supply. Choice A is incorrect because creating more inflation would not improve the economy but only shift the problem while giving no guarantee of increased demand for products. Choice B is incorrect because there is no viable way to decrease the number of available workers, and having less labor does not create more demand for products. Choice D is incorrect because this would be an opposing economic theory (supply side) that advocates for less government intervention into the economy instead of more like Keynes supported.

Use the graph below to answer the two questions that follow.



Which of the following conclusions does the above graph support?

- A. After 1998, fewer African Americans cast votes in presidential elections.
- B. There has been an increase in the number of Southern Caucasian voters since 2000.
- C. The Civil Rights Era effectively ended African American support of the Republican Party.
- D. Southern Caucasians have always been strong supporters of the Republican Party.

Explanation:

The correct answer is C. After the 1960s, the level of the African American population that identified as Republicans never rose past ten percent. The graph does not support the other choices.

Which of the following is most likely to have the greatest impact on the results expressed by the graph?

- A. Understanding the party's platform so that a voter can make his or her decision based on the issues.
- B. Raising large amounts of campaign funds that would go toward more advertising in hopes of swaying the voter.
- C. Identifying religious beliefs of the candidate to allow a voter to better understand the candidate's position.

D. Providing interest groups access to the candidate in hopes of persuading him or her toward certain types of voters.

Explanation:

The correct answer is A. Voter choice is impacted by perceived and real platform goals and management regarding issues important to said voter. Campaign funds would not be as important to a voter as the platform and what a party stands for; religious beliefs would be considered part of a party platform; and interest groups can influence a party's agenda, but the platform itself is what impacts the voter.