

American Government (Key Questions & Terms)

Unit 1

- Making Comparisons; Contrast the social contract theory of government with the divine right theory. What type of government would result from each theory?
- Explain how some features of capitalism tend to promote freedom and democracy.
- What are the potential positive and negative effects of politics?
- Contrast the social contract theory of government with the force theory. What type of government would result from each theory?
- Explain why a free market economy would more likely be found in a democracy than in a totalitarian dictatorship.
- Are the rights of minorities better protected in a representative democracy, and autocracy, or an oligarchy?
- Identify three constitutional amendments adopted since the Bill of Rights that have made American government more democratic, and explain how each has done so.
- What might have happened to the ability of Congress to govern if the Framers had not included the elastic clause among its enumerated powers?
- Explain the power of judicial review and how it checks the power of the executive and legislative branches.
- Compare the philosophies of judicial activism and judicial restraint, and explain how each affects the separation of powers.
- The federal government guarantees the states a republican form of government, protection, and territorial integrity. Give examples of how each of these guarantees are carried out.
- Explain why laws differ from state to state and how those differences are related to federalism.
- Name one power that the Constitution denies to the states, and explain how the nation benefits from that restriction.
- What are the three things the Constitution obliges the national government to do for the states, and how are these obligations met?

Nation

State

Federal System

Government

Unicameral

Revenue

Representative Government

Limited Government

Ratify

Popular Sovereignty

Search Warrant

Treaty

Impeach

Concurrent Powers

Implied Powers

Supremacy Clause
Expressed Powers
Elastic clause
Reserved Powers

Unit 2

- How does the existence of committees in the House and Senate enable Congress to work more efficiently?
- Explain how redistricting makes Congress equally representative of all the people.
- How does the use of a filibuster threaten the principles of unlimited debate and majority rule in the Senate?
- Explain why conflict between the president and Congress often continues when the same political party controls each branch.
- Would a line-item veto increase the president's power in disagreements with Congress over proposed legislation?
- Explain how the system of checks and balances slows down the process of government.
- Explain why pork-barrel legislation and logrolling exist and how they affect government spending.
- Explain the difference between a tax bill, and appropriations bill, and an authorization bill.
- For what reasons do so few bills introduced into Congress ever become law?
- What influences might cause a member of the House to vote against the wishes of the people in his or her district?
- Explain how and why entitlements affect government spending.
- How do state legislatures abuse their redistricting power?
- What are the appropriations committees, why are they important, and how do they contribute to the checks and balances system of our government?

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Majority Leader
Caucus
Gerrymander
Census
Bill
Incumbent
Whip
Filibuster
Bicameral Legislature
President Pro Tempore
Legislative Veto
Perjury
Subpoena
Immunity
National Budget
Impeachment
Appropriation
Taxes

Lobbyist
Pocket Veto
Resolution

Unit 3

- Explain how changes in the nation have affected the importance of the Executive Office of the President.
- Explain why some people say that the winner-take-all system of the Electoral College is undemocratic.
- What factors that a president must consider in choosing a cabinet diminish its value as a source of advice for the president?
- Contrast the approach that Thomas Jefferson took to expand the power of the presidency with the approach taken by Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- Explain how the Vietnam War first allowed an expansion of presidential power and later caused power to be limited.
- What checks does the Constitution give Congress on the president's powers as chief diplomat and commander in chief? How effective are these checks?
- Why is it better that the president rather than Congress control the nation's military and foreign policy?
- Some people say there is an informal "fourth branch" of government, consisting of agencies that carry out functions of all three constitutional branches. Should the regulatory commissions be considered part of this "fourth branch"? Explain why or why not.
- Explain whether the civil service system or the spoils system better provides the average person with access to government jobs.
- Describe two ways the federal bureaucracy helps to shape laws passed by Congress.
- What is the OMB and why is it so important?
- How has national growth and technology added to the federal bureaucracy's assuming a greater role in creating public policy?

Electoral Vote
Succession
Cabinet
Elector
Amnesty
Covert
Impoundment
Mandate
Treaty
Reprieve
Executive Agreement
Pardon
Line-item Veto
Procurement
Embassy
Injunction

Spoils System
Bureaucrat
Civil Service System

Unit 4

- Why might a person who is being sued by someone who lives in another state demand that the case be tried in a federal court?
- Explain why the senatorial courtesy system applies to federal district courts but not to courts of appeals or to the Supreme Court?
- Explain how and why the Supreme Court's ruling in the case of Marbury v. Madison increased the Court's power
- Should a person's opinions on the controversial issues of the day be a factor in his or her selection as a Supreme Court justice? Explain why or why not.
- What two actions could Congress take to undo a Supreme Court ruling that a federal law is unconstitutional? Explain the advantage and disadvantages of each action.
- What characteristics of the Supreme Court allow the law to be both predictable and flexible? Why is it important that the Court have these qualities?
- What is the difference between constitutional federal courts, legislative federal courts, and the Supreme Court?
- What are the powers of the chief justice?

Original Jurisdiction
Indictment
Appellate Jurisdiction
Judicial Circuit
Concurrent Jurisdiction
Grand Jury
Swing Vote
Precedent

Unit 5

- Why does the law allow publication of defamatory information about government officials that it would not allow to be published about private citizens?
- Describe the limits that exist on a person's freedom to express and practice his or her religious beliefs.
- How might the exercise of freedom of assembly conflict with individual right and freedoms?
- How might being unable to speak or understand English affect someone's ability to exercise his or her rights and responsibilities as a citizen?
- How does a national origins quota system for immigration affect the ethnic and cultural diversity of a nation?
- Explain why a city council meeting to discuss hiring more city employees must be open to the public, while a meeting to discuss firing an employee can be closed.

- Substantive due process has to do with what a law says, while procedural due process has to do with how a law is enforced. Give an example of a law that might violate substantive due process, and explain why it does so.
- Describe the alternatives to a jury trial that exist for deciding a lawsuit.
- Why do citizens in a democracy need to know about the legal system?
- Explain whether a preliminary hearing or a grand jury proceeding better balances the right of society and the rights of the accused person.
- What are the cases *Bethel School District v. Fraser* and *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* about? How do they affect you and your school today? Do you agree or disagree with the rulings? Explain.
- What is affirmative action, and why do you think it is important to the people of this country?

Prior Restraint

Fundamental Freedoms

Sequester

Human Rights

Picketing

Seditious Speech

Defamatory Speech

Free Exercise Clause

Holocaust

Gag Order

Jim Crow Law

Naturalization

Affidavit

Defendant

Indictment

Injunction

Plaintiff

Law

Tort

Verdict

Felony

Hung Jury

Grand Jury

Petty Offense

Sentence

Unit 6

- In what ways could third parties have a positive effect on the major political parties?
- Identify and explain three criticisms that are made of presidential primaries.
- Why do ideological third parties tend to be more successful than single-issue third parties?
- What advantages does an open primary have over a closed primary? What are some drawbacks of open primaries?

- Explain why expanding voting rights to include more citizens may result in a lower percentage of turnout at the polls.
- Uninformed voters tend to be more influenced by the candidates' images. Describe three propaganda techniques that candidates use to gain the support of such voters.
- Explain why reform of the laws governing campaign financing is so difficult to achieve.
- How and why do education, income, and attitudes about government influence who will vote and who will not?
- Why have broadcast media largely surpassed the print media as the public's main source of information?
- What is "soft money", and why is it so controversial?

Platform

Patronage

Theocracy

Nominating Convention

National Committee

Caucus

Precinct

Single-Member District

Ward

Primary

Absentee Ballot

Campaign Manager

Suffrage

Poll Tax

Grandfather Clause

Straight-Party Ticket

Soft Money

Interest Group

Shield Law

Front-Runner

Spot Advertising