

AP US Government Top 20 Topics

These topics have made up one-third of all mult-choice questions and one-quarter of all free-response questions. Your goal is a 4-5, so you are shooting for getting 62% of the mult-choice questions right, which puts you in the bottom of the 4 range.

1. The Incumbency Advantage

- most important factor
- Who is re-elected more often, House or Senate?
- What do incumbents have to their advantage?

2. Federalism

- What is federalism?
- During conflicts of power, who wins?
- power has increased over time
 - “necessary and proper” clause
 - commerce clause
 - Civil Rights Act 1964
 - categorical grants
 - federal mandates
- decentralizes political conflict; provides multiple entry points for citizens and interest groups

3. Selection of Sup Ct justices

- How do they get to the bench?
- What does the nomination/confirmation process illustrate?
- What do presidents take into account when choosing a nominee?
- What does judicial restraint emphasize?
- And judicial activism?

4. Electoral College

- Who is not elected by direct (popular) vote?
- What kind of system do the states have for their EC votes?
- How does this affect third-party candidates?
- Where do they campaign?
- What happens if there is a tie?
- Who benefits most from the Electoral College system?

5. African American voting patterns

- Have consistently supported Democratic candidates since New Deal, and those that are more liberal within the party

6. Voter turnout

- lower than most Western democracies
- When does most voter turnout occur?
- What trends do we see in voting; who votes most?
- What affects voter turnout?

7. Divided government

- When does this happen?
- What are the effects of divided government?
- What can the president do, or threaten to do during a period of divided government?

8. Political Action Committees

- Have PACs increased or decreased over the last 30 years?
- What role do they play in elections?
- What limitations have been placed on PACs?

9. Veto Power

- What does the veto power illustrate?
- How does a pocket veto differ?
- How can the veto be used as a persuasive tool by the president?
- How common is a congressional override?
- What is a line-item veto?

10. President and the Cabinet

- President appoints, who confirms?
- Can be fired by the president without approval.
- Member loyalty is usually divided
- How can iron triangles interfere with presidential control?

11. Presidential Primaries

- Party control has been weakened
- closed primary
- Democrats use a proportional system;
what does this mean?
- Who tends to vote in primaries?
- What is frontloading? Why do it?

12. Standing committees and the Seniority System

- Standing committees > subcommittees
- What happens to most bills?
- How have committee chairs traditionally been chosen? How has the process changed?
- House Rules Committee

13. The Federalist Papers

- Federalist No. 10; what did Madison argue about factions?
- What did it argue about a republican form of government?

14. 14th Amendment and Incorporation

- What did the amendment do?
- Due Process Clause
- Equal Protection Clause
- What is incorporation?

15. Political Socialization

- What is it?
- What is the most important factor in political socialization?

16. Critical/realigning Election

- when groups of voters change traditional patterns of party loyalty; begin a new party era
 - 1800
 - 1828
 - 1860
 - 1896
 - 1932
 - 1980 could constitute as it ushered in new conservatism

17. Selection of Supreme Court Cases

- most come from appellate jurisdiction
- most reach through writ of certiorari
- Rule of Four
- receives 8000 petitions, accepts less than 100

18. Mass Media

- What effect does mass media have on the public?
- Focus on the “horse race”

19. Articles of Confederation

- What kind of government was established, centralized or decentralized?
- How many houses in the legislative branch?
- What were some of the problems?

20. Role of State Legislatures

- What role did state legislatures play in the Senate? (Hint: 17th amendment changed this)
- What do state legislatures establish within their own states?
- What role do the states play in the amendment process?