AP Free Response Questions


2008 AP Exam

1. **Congressional reapportionment and redistricting** - politicians often engage in gerrymandering
   a) Define congressional reapportionment, explain one reason why it is important to states.
   b) Define congressional redistricting.
   c) Explain two goals of politicians when they gerrymander during redistricting.
   d) Describe two limits that the United States Supreme Court has placed on congressional redistricting.

2. **Checks & Balances** – president influences Congress on domestic policy, Congress limits president on domestic policy.
   a) President has enumerated powers, describe two that enable the president to exert influence over domestic policy.
   b) For two, define and explain how each limits the president’s ability to influence domestic policymaking in Congress.
      - Mandatory spending; Party polarization; Lame-duck period

3. **Fiscal policy & Monetary policy** – Executive and Legislative branches set fiscal policy, Federal Reserve Board sets monetary policy.
   a) Define fiscal policy
   b) Describe executive branch’s influence over fiscal policy
   c) Describe legislative branch’s influence over fiscal policy
   d) Define monetary policy
   e) Two reasons why Federal Reserve Board is given independence in establishing monetary policy.

4. **QUOTE - Civil Rights**
   “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”
   *Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, 1870*
   Despite the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, voter turnout among African American citizens was very low throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Over the past 50 years, civil rights policies have changes substantially, along with a significant increase in African American voter turnout.
   a) Explain two state measures prior to 1960 that affected African American turnout
   b) Describe two alternative forms of political participation African Americans chose at this time to bring about electoral change.
   c) Choose one from (b), explain why effective in changing civil rights policies
2007 AP Exam

1) **Electoral College** – winner take all system
   a) describe the winner take all system
   b) how does this affect presidential campaigns (major parties)
   c) how does it hinder third party campaigns
   d) explain 2 reasons why electoral system has not been abolished

2) **First Amendment** – Freedom of religion (2 clauses)
   a) *Engel v. Vitale* (school prayer) or *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (state funding for private religious schools)
      What 1st Amendment clause related to one of these cases?
   b) Describe Supreme Court decision to chosen case
   c) *Reynolds v. US* (polygamy) or *Oregon v. Smith* (drug use in religious ceremonies)
      What 1st Amendment clause related to one of these cases?
   d) Describe Supreme Court decision to chosen case
   e) State two ways other institutions might limit the impact of Supreme Court decisions.

3) **1973 War Powers Resolution**
   a) describe primary constitutional conflict between Congress and the president over going to war
   b) describe 2 provisions of the Act that limited the president’s power over war making
   c) describe 2 other formal powers (can’t use what you stated in “a”) Congress has over war making

4) **Federalism**
   a) define federalism
   b) select 2 of the following and explain how each has been used federal power over the states (categorical grants, selective incorporation, and federal mandates)
   c) select 2 of the following and explain how each has been used to increase the power of the states relative to the federal government (Welfare Reform Act of 1996, Block Grants, and Tenth Amendment)
2006 AP Exam

1) **Interest Groups** and **Political Parties**
   a) fundamental goal of interest groups
   b) fundamental goal of political parties
   c) describe 2 ways interest groups support the fundamental goal of political parties
   d) for one of your answers in “c”, describe 2 different ways this helps support the fundamental goal of interest groups

2) **GRAPH** – **Social Security** and **Entitlement Programs**
   a) define entitlement programs
   b) primary source of social security funds?
   c) one threat to social security funding if trends continue
   d) describe one demographic trend and explain how it is responsible for “c”
   e) explain how would one of the trends in “c” change if the age of eligibility for social security increased?

3) **Bureaucracy** – **Federal agencies** and **Congress**
   a) explain 2 reasons why Congress gives federal agencies policy making discretion in executing federal law
   b) choose one of the following bureaucratic agencies (EPA, FCC, Federal Reserve Board)
      describe policy area it has discretion over AND provide one specific example of them exercising this authority
   c) state 2 ways Congress ensures that the agencies follow legislative intent

4) **Congress** – **Bi-cameral structure**
   a) state 2 reasons why founding fathers created a bi-cameral legislature
   b) explain one unique power of the House and describe why founding fathers gave it this power
   c) explain one unique power of the Senate and describe why founding fathers gave it this power

2005 AP Exam

1) **Judicial Branch** – Supreme Court rarely deviates too far from prevalent public opinion
   a) describe 2 things that insulate the Supreme Court from public opinion
   b) describe 2 things that keep the Supreme Court from deviating for too long

2) **Federalism** – expansion of Federal power
   a) describe two of the following Constitutional provisions, explain how each has been used to expand federal power
      (power to tax and spend; “necessary and proper”/ elastic clause; commerce clause)
b) explain how one of the following has increase the power of the federal government relative to the power of the states
(Americans with Disabilities Act, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Clean Air Act)

3) **Selective Incorporation**
   a) define selective incorporation
   b) choose two of the following. Explain how each has been incorporated. Must use the appropriately relevant Supreme Court case
   ( Rights of criminal defendants, First Amendment, Privacy rights)

4) **Campaign Finance Reform** *(This question is geared toward the proposals that ultimately became the 2002 BCRA. Must know FECA of 1971/74 to answer questions, too.)*
   Select 2 proposals (eliminating soft money, limiting independent expenditures, raising individual contribution levels)
   a) define the proposal
   b) argument in favor of proposal
   c) arguments against proposal

2004 AP Exam

1) **Foreign Policy** - Executive power versus Congressional power
   a) describe two formal presidential foreign policy powers
   b) describe two formal legislative foreign policy powers
   c) explain 2 informal executive powers in conducting foreign policy that provide president with advantage over Congressional authority
   d) explain how each answer in “c” provides president with advantage over Congress

2) **Interest Groups**
   a) Describe each technique and explain why an interest group with utilize each
   (litigation, campaign contributions, grassroots lobbying / mass mobilization)
   b) Select one of the following interest groups, describe the primary technique it uses from “a”. Explain why it use it over the other two. *(American Medical Association, Sierra Club, NRA, NAACP)*

3) CARTOON - **Third Parties**
   a) Explain meaning behind cartoon – (“A vote for a third party is a wasted vote”)
   b) explain 2 rules of the American electoral system *(this does not mean 2 rules of just the electoral college system)* that act as obstacles for minor parties to win elections
c) describe 2 contributions of third parties, despite not winning office

4) **Trust and confidence in government**
   a) define *divided government*. Explain how it has reduced trust and confidence in the American political system
   b) how has the increased cost of campaigns also reduced trust and confidence in the American political system
   c) explain two specific consequences of the decline in trust and confidence upon political behavior

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**2003 AP Exam**

1) **Presidential approval ratings**
   a) identify 2 factors that *decrease* presidential approval ratings and explain why these affects do this
   b) identify 2 factors that *increase* presidential approval ratings and explain why these affects do this

2) **Political Participation**
   a) identify 2 forms other than voting
   b) explain 2 advantages of each you identified in “a”

3) **GRAPH – Bureaucracy and Federalism**
   a) identify 2 trends found in the chart / graph (size of state & local government from 1945 to 2000 in comparison to size of the national government)
   b) explain how each of the following contributes to the differences between the two different levels within the system of federalism that are depicted in the graph *(block grants, federal mandates)*

4) **Congress – Party Leadership** and **Congressional Committees**
   a) explain two of the following elements of the congressional committee system and how each influences the legislative process *(specialization, logrolling/reciprocity, party representation on committees)*
   b) explain 2 ways the party leadership can influence the legislative process

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**2002 AP Exam**

1) **Divided Government**
   a) explain 2 problems this causes for president in making federal appointments
   b) explain 2 ways president can overcome these problems

2) **GRAPH – Entitlement Programs**
   a) describe the distribution of benefits over time comparing money going toward
programs for the elderly versus children
b) explain 2 politically relevant reasons for this change
c) explain how each of your answers in “b” actually affected the changing distribution of
benefits

3) **Federalism, Political Parties, and the US Electoral System**
a) Describe one feature of the political institution from the list above, explain how that
one feature created an obstacles for minorities to achieve their political goals
b) Describe one feature of the political institution from the list above, explain how that
one feature created an opportunity for minorities to achieve their political goals

4) **Voter Turnout**
a) describe 2 factors that have contributed to the overall decline in voter turnout in federal
elections, clearly specify how each specifically lowered voter turnout rates
b) explain two reasons why voter turnout has been higher in presidential elections than in
congressional elections

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2000 AP Exam

1) **Federalism & Constitution v. Articles of Confederation**
a) Three problems of decentralized power that existed under the Articles of
   Confederation. For each problem you listed, identify one solution that the Constitution provided
to address the problem.
b) Choose one, explain how it illustrates that the tensions between decentralized and
   centralized power continue to exist.
   · Environmental policy
   · Gun control
   · Disability access

2) **Supreme Court**
The Supreme Court is commonly thought to be “above politics.” However, one can argue that the
appointment of Supreme Court justices is political.
a) Identify three characteristics of Supreme Court nominees and discuss how each
   characteristic has been politically relevant during the appointment process.

3) **GRAPH – Voting Patterns in Presidential Elections**
a) Identify one Democratic region, explain two factors that contribute to that support
b) Identify one Republican region, explain two factors that contribute to that support

4) Campaign Finance Reform
The three obstacles listed below have made it difficult for Congress to enact significant campaign finance reform.
∙ Buckley v. Valeo (1976)
∙ Soft money
∙ Incumbency
Select two of the obstacles. For each obstacle, provide both of the following.
(a) A brief description of the obstacle
(b) An explanation of how the obstacle has made it difficult for Congress to enact significant campaign finance reform

1999 AP Exam

1) Presidential Election & Media
   a) Identify and explain two ways in which the media have contributed to candidate-centered use of the media during the 1990’s (i.e. less coverage on issues and party labels)
   b) Identify and explain two ways in which presidential candidates’ use of the media has contributed to candidates-centered campaigns.
   Your answer should NOT include a discussion of presidential primary elections.

2) Special Interest Groups
National interest groups often target national-level policymaking institutions to achieve their policy objectives.
   Select one of the following national interest groups.
   ∙ American Association of Retired Person (AARP)
   ∙ American Medical Association (AMA)
   ∙ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
   ∙ National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)
   For the group you selected do each of the following.
   a. Identify one major national-level policymaking institution that this group targets.
   b. Describe one resource or characteristic of the group you have chosen AND explain how it influences the choice of the target you have identified in (a).
   c. Describe another resource or characteristic of the group you have chosen AND explain how it influences the choice of the target you have identified in (a).

3) Congress and Federal Bureaucracy
Is Congress effective in exercising legislative oversight of the federal bureaucracy? Support your answer by doing ONE of the following.
· Explain two specific methods Congress uses to exercise effective oversight of the federal bureaucracy.

OR

· Give two specific explanations for the failure of Congress to exercise effective oversight of the federal bureaucracy.

4) CHART – **Budget** and **Mandatory Spending**

Chart about the GROWTH OF MANDATORY SPENDING IN THE FEDERAL BUDGET

a) Identify two budgetary barriers that hinder the creation of new policy initiatives and explain why each exist.

b) Identify one non-budgetary barrier AND explain how this barrier hinders the creation of new policy initiatives

**NOTICEABLE TRENDS:**

1) At least one graph, chart, quote, or cartoon has shown up on 7 of the 9 AP exams I have seen.


   No – 2005, 2007

2) Recurring topics (how many times it has appeared in some shape or form on the 9 AP exams – year or years that it appeared)

   - knowledge of **Specific Legislation** (11)
     - War Powers Resolution (1 -2007)
     - As part of First Amendment question, need to know laws that were parts of each case (1 – 2007)
     - As part of Federalism, how used to increase state power (Welfare Reform Act of 1996) (1 – 2007)
As part of Federalism, how used to expand federal power (Americans with Disabilities Act, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Clean Air Act) (1 – 2005)
As part of Selective Incorporation question, need to know state laws that were part of each case (1 – 2005)
As part of federal mandates (2 – 2007, 2003)
As part of Federalism question, helping and hindering minorities (1 – 2002)
As part of Civil Rights question, state voting restrictions (1 - 2008)
As part of Federalism question, environmental policy, gun control, disability access (1 – 2000)
(Heavy emphasis on 1/3rd of AP tests, but need to know specifics as part of questions on at least 66% of the AP tests, with many occurrences on some exams, like 2007)
(Simply, you need to know examples of key legislation to support other concepts that make connections to other aspects of this course.)

- Congress (11)
  War making powers, how limited presidential power due to War Powers Resolution (1 – 2007)
  As related to Federal Agencies and the Bureaucracy (Iron Triangles) (1 – 2006)
  As related to Federal Agencies and the Bureaucracy (Oversight) (1 – 1999)
  Bi-cameral structure (1 – 2006)
  Foreign policy powers (1 – 2004)
  Party Leadership & Congressional Committees (1 – 2003)
  As related to how influenced by Special Interest Groups (1 – 1999)
  Obstacle for Congress in relation to Campaign Finance Reform (1 – 2000)
  As part of branch’s influence over fiscal policy (budget) (1 – 2000)
  As part of Checks & Balances with Executive over domestic policy (1 -2008)
  In regard to reapportionment, redistricting, and gerrymandering (1 – 2008)
  (2002 & 2005 were the only two tests that did not have a Congressional question on them) (In other words, 78% of the time there is at least one essay related to Congress)

- Political Parties (10)
  Fundamental goal & how work with interest groups (1 – 2006)
  Third Parties, obstacles to victory, contributions (1 – 2004)
  How affected as a result of divided government, decline in trust and confidence in government (1 – 2004)
  As a method of political participation (1 – 2003)
  As part of a question on how the majority party in each chamber of Congress affects the leadership and legislative process (1 – 2003)
  As part of question on Divided government (1 -2002)
  How they helped and hindered minorities in achieving their political goals (1 – 2002)
  As part of its influence on gerrymandering (1 – 2008)
As part of Supreme Court nominees' previous experience (1 – 2000)
Regions they are dominant and why (1 – 2000)
(Apppears on 66% of the tests, but mostly as part of a free response, NOT as an entire question.) (1/3rd of tests had 2 questions related to it.)

- Executive Branch (9)
  Electoral College (1 – 2007)
  Executive Power – war making limited by War Powers Resolution (1 – 2007)
  Foreign Policy powers (formal & informal) (1 – 2004)
  Presidential approval ratings (1 – 2003)
  Presidential election turnout rates (1 – 2002)
  Presidential election and its coverage (1 – 1999)
  Presidential election voting patterns – regions dominated by one party (1 – 2000)
  Presidential control over fiscal policy (budget) (1 – 2008)
  Checks & Balances with Congress over Domestic policy (1 – 2008)

(2005 & 2006 were the only two tests that did not have an Executive question on them) (In other words, 78% of the time there is at least one essay related to the presidency)

- Federalism (6)
  Examples of how state power has increased (Welfare Reform Act, block grants, Tenth Amendments) vs. how federal power has increased (due to categorical grants, federal mandates, selective incorporation) (1 – 2007)
  Expansion of federal power (tax and spend, elastic clause, commerce clause)
    (Americans with Disabilities Act, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Clean Air Act) (1 – 2005)
  Related to the Bureaucracy (block grants, federal mandates) (1 – 2003)
  Define, Describe feature, Example of how helped & hindered minorities (1 – 2002)
  State voting restrictions (1 – 2008)
  Compare Articles and Constitution & modern tensions (1 – 2000)
( 66% of the time there is at least one essay related to Federalism)

- Checks and Balances (6)
  Congress v. President over Domestic policy (1 – 2008)
  Congress v. President over Fiscal/Budgetary policy (1 -2008)
  Congress v. President over War Powers Resolution (1 -2007)
  Inside of Congress (Bi-Cameralism) (1 -2006)
  Congress v President over Foreign Policy (1 – 2004)

(Appears on more than HALF the AP exams)
- **Interest Groups** (5)
  Fundamental goal & how work with political parties (1 – 2006)
  Techniques used to achieve goals (litigation, campaign contributions, grassroots lobbying/mass mobilization) & specific methods of groups and why
  (AMA, NRA, NAACP, Sierra Club) (1 – 2004)
  As a method of political participation (1 – 2003)
  What national policy makers they influence & how (1 – 1999)
  (Appears on more than HALF the AP exams)

- **Supreme Court cases** (4)
  First Amendment cases related to religion clauses (1 – 2007)
  Supporting **selective incorporation** (2 – 2007 & 2005)
  Buckley v Valeo (1 – 2000)

- **Entitlement Programs & Mandatory Spending** (4)
  Social Security, demographic trends, raising age of eligibility (1 – 2006)
  Distribution of benefits (elderly versus children) (1 – 2002)
  Budgetary & non-budgetary barriers to creating more (1 – 1999)
  President’s ability to influence domestic policy making in Congress (1 – 2008)

- **Divided Government** (3)
  Affect upon trust and confidence in government (1 – 2004)
  Problems for presidential appointments (1 – 2002)
  Part of question as a cause of lower voter turnout (1 – 2002)

- **Amendments** (3)
  First Amendment – religion clauses & Supreme Court cases (1 – 2007)
  As part of selective incorporation – any First Amendment rights (1 – 2005)
  As part of Federalism – how used to expand state powers (Tenth Amendment) & expand federal powers 14th due process clause (1 – 2007)

- **Bureaucracy** (3)
  Relationship between Federal agencies and Congress (1 – 2006)
  How affected by Federalism, especially block grants, federal mandates) (1 – 2003)
  Congressional oversight – effective or not (1 – 1999)

- **Judicial Branch** (3)
  Supreme Court related to public opinion – insulated from it but doesn’t deviate too far from it (1 – 2005)
  As part of question dealing with presidential appointments (1 – 2002)
  Characteristics of Supreme Court nominees (1 – 2000)
- **Selective Incorporation** (2)
  As a part of federalism, used to expand federal power (1 – 2007)
  Define, examples that expand rights of the criminal defendants, First Amendment, privacy rights)

- **Budget & Fiscal Policy** (2)
  Executive and Legislative influence over it (1 – 2008)
  Barriers to creating new spending (1 – 1999)

- **Political Participation** (2)
  Two forms other than voting, advantages of each
  Voter participation, why decline, why more during presidential election year (1 – 2002)

- **Campaign Finance Reform** (2)
  Need to know components of FECA of 1971/74 and 2002 BCRA (1 – 2005)
  Obstacles for Congress in relation to campaign finance reform (1 – 2000)

- **War Powers Resolution** (1)
  Provisions, limits on president’s power