

AP

INCLUDES

- ✓ Course framework
- ✓ Instructional section
- ✓ Sample exam questions

AP[®] U.S. Government and Politics

COURSE AND EXAM DESCRIPTION

**Effective
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NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER



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National Constitution Center**

Introduction

The AP U.S. Government and Politics course detailed in this framework reflects what political science teachers, professors, and researchers agree that a college-level government and politics course should teach students to do: analyze and interpret the Constitution, important political documents, and data to better understand the American national government and the political actors who interact with it.

The AP U.S. Government and Politics Course and Exam Description defines what representative colleges and universities typically expect students to know and be able to do in order to earn college credit or placement. Students practice the skills used by political scientists by studying data, political writings from the founding era to the present, the structure of the government as established by the Constitution, and constitutional interpretations handed down by the Supreme Court. Students will show mastery of these skills on the exam through a variety of means, including concept application, data analysis, Supreme Court case comparisons, and writing political science arguments.

Although the course framework is designed to provide a clear and detailed description of the course content and skills, it is not a curriculum. Teachers create their own curricula to meet the needs of their students and any state or local requirements.

The National Constitution Center and College Board

In partnership with the National Constitution Center, College Board has developed a series of classroom lessons and materials related to the U.S. Constitution. This series includes resources to support instruction in AP U.S. Government and Politics, AP Comparative Government and Politics, AP U.S. History, and AP English Language and Composition. These lessons and resources are available to AP teachers via the course homepages at AP Central and to all teachers through the National Constitution Center's [website](#).

Maintaining Political Balance

AP U.S. Government and Politics is a nonpartisan course and has been endorsed by the National Constitution Center as well as a range of conservative and liberal scholars for its political balance. The required readings are the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Articles of Confederation, representative Federalist Papers, Brutus No. 1, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." In addition, there are 14 required Supreme Court cases. Additional readings and assignments that teachers select to supplement the course must, as a whole, maintain a political balance. It is expected and required that all AP-authorized courses maintain political balance through a nonpartisan curriculum.

Course Framework Components

Overview

This course framework provides a description of the what students should know and be able to do to qualify for college credit or placement.

The course framework includes two essential components:

1 DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES AND REASONING PROCESSES

The disciplinary practices and reasoning processes for this course are central to the study and practice of government and politics. Students should develop and apply the described practices on a regular basis over the span of the course.

2 COURSE CONTENT

The course content is organized into commonly taught units of study that provide a suggested sequence for the course. These units comprise the content and conceptual understandings that colleges and universities typically expect students to master to qualify for college credit and/or placement. This content is grounded in big ideas, which are cross-cutting concepts that build conceptual understanding and spiral throughout the course.



AP U.S. GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Disciplinary Practices and Reasoning Processes

This section presents the disciplinary practices and reasoning processes that students should develop during the AP U.S. Government and Politics and that form the basis of the tasks on the AP Exam.

AP U.S. Government and Politics I Disciplinary Practices

The AP U.S. Government and Politics course provides disciplinary practices that describe what a student should be able to do while exploring course concepts. The table on the next page presents these disciplinary practices, along with their associated skills, which students should develop throughout the course.

The unit guides that follow embed and spiral these skills throughout the course, providing teachers with one way to integrate the skills into the course content with sufficient repetition to prepare students to transfer those skills when taking the AP Exam.

More detailed information about teaching the disciplinary practices can be found in the Instructional Approaches section of this publication.

Practice 1

Concept Application 1

Apply political concepts and processes to scenarios in context.

Practice 2

SCOTUS Application 2

Apply Supreme Court decisions.

Practice 3

Data Analysis 3

Analyze and interpret quantitative data represented in tables, charts, graphs, maps, and infographics.

Practice 4

Source Analysis 4

Read, analyze, and interpret foundational documents and other text-based and visual sources.

Practice 5

Argumentation 5

Develop an argument in essay format.

SKILLS

1.A Describe political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.

1.B Explain political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.

1.C Compare political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.

1.D Describe political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors illustrated in different scenarios in context.

1.E Explain how political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors apply to different scenarios in context.

2.A Describe the facts, reasoning, decision, and majority opinion of required Supreme Court cases.

2.B Explain how a required Supreme Court case relates to a foundational document or to other primary or secondary sources.

2.C Compare the reasoning, decision, and majority opinion of a required Supreme Court case to a non-required Supreme Court case.

2.D Explain how required Supreme Court cases apply to scenarios in context.

3.A Describe the data presented.

3.B Describe patterns and trends in data.

3.C Explain patterns and trends in data to draw conclusions.

3.D Explain what the data implies or illustrates about political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.

3.E Explain possible limitations of the data provided.

3.F Explain possible limitations of the visual representation of the data provided.

4.A Describe the author's claim(s), perspective, evidence, and reasoning.

4.B Explain how the author's argument or perspective relates to political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.

4.C Explain how the implications of the author's argument or perspective may affect political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.

4.D Explain how the visual elements of a cartoon, map, or infographic illustrate or relate to political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.

5.A Articulate a defensible claim/thesis.

5.B Support the argument using relevant evidence.

5.C Use reasoning to organize and analyze evidence, explaining its significance to justify the claim or thesis.

5.D Use refutation, concession, and rebuttal in responding to opposing or alternate perspectives.



Reasoning Processes

Reasoning processes describe the cognitive operations that students will be required to apply when engaging with practices on the AP Exam. Students should organize their response around a specific reasoning process that aligns to the intent of the question. The reasoning processes ultimately represent the way practitioners think in the discipline. Specific aspects of the cognitive process are defined under each reasoning process.

Reasoning Process 1

Definition/Classification Process

When demonstrating their knowledge of course concepts, students should:

- Describe characteristics, attributes, traits, and elements in defining terms and concepts
- Classify concepts
- Describe structures and functions
- Describe patterns and/or trends
- Describe the perspective of a source or author
- Describe assumptions and/or reasoning of a source or author

Reasoning Process 2

Process

When explaining political processes, students should:

- Identify steps and/or stages in a process
- Explain how the steps or stages in a process relate to each other
- Explain challenges with processes and/or interactions
- Explain the relevance or significance of processes and/or interactions

Reasoning Process 3

Causation

When explaining causes and effects of political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors, students should:

- Identify causes and/or effects
- Explain the reasons for causes and/or effects
- Explain change over time
- Explain the significance of causes and/or effects
- Explain the implications of change over time

Reasoning Process 4

Comparison

When explaining similarities and differences among political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors, students should:

- Identify relevant categories of comparison
- Identify similarities and/or differences
- Explain the reasons for similarities and/or differences
- Explain the relevance, implications, and/or significance of similarities and differences

Course Content

Based on the Understanding by Design® (Wiggins and McTighe) model, this course framework provides a description of the course requirements necessary for student success. The framework specifies what students should know and be able to do, with a focus on big ideas that encompass core principles and theories of the discipline. The framework also encourages instruction that prepares students for advanced political science coursework and active, informed participation in our constitutional democracy.

Big Ideas

The big ideas serve as the foundation of the course and enable students to create meaningful connections among concepts. They are themes that become threads that run throughout the course. Revisiting the big ideas and applying them in a variety of contexts allow students to develop a deeper conceptual understanding. Below are the big ideas of the course and a brief description of each.

BIG IDEA 1: CONSTITUTIONALISM (CON)

The U.S. Constitution establishes a system of checks and balances among branches of government and allocates power between federal and state governments. This system is based on the rule of law and the balance between majority rule and minority rights.

BIG IDEA 2: LIBERTY AND ORDER (LOR)

Governmental laws and policies balancing order and liberty are based on the U.S. Constitution and have been interpreted differently over time.

BIG IDEA 3: CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY (PRD)

Popular sovereignty, individualism, and republicanism are important considerations of U.S. laws and policy making and assume citizens will engage and participate.

continued on next page

BIG IDEA 4: COMPETING POLICY-MAKING INTERESTS (PMI)

Multiple actors and institutions interact to produce and implement possible policies.

BIG IDEA 5: METHODS OF POLITICAL ANALYSIS (MPA)

Using various types of analyses, political scientists measure how U.S. political behavior, attitudes, ideologies, and institutions are shaped by a number of factors over time.

UNITS

The course content is organized into commonly taught units. The units have been arranged in a logical sequence frequently found in many college courses and textbooks.

The five units in AP U.S. Government and Politics and their weighting on the multiple-choice section of the AP Exam are listed below.

Pacing recommendations at the unit level and on the Course at a Glance provide suggestions for how to teach the required course content and administer the Personal Progress Checks. The suggested class periods are based on a schedule in which the class

meets five days a week for 45 minutes each day. While these recommendations have been made to aid planning, teachers should of course adjust the pacing based on the needs of their students, alternate schedules (e.g., block scheduling), or their school's academic calendar.

TOPICS

Each unit is broken down into teachable segments called topics. The topic pages (starting on page 40) contain the required content for each topic. Although most topics can be taught in one or two class periods, teachers are again encouraged to pace the course to suit the needs of their students and school.

Units	Exam Weighting
Unit 1: Foundations of American Democracy	15–22%
Unit 2: Interactions Among Branches of Government	25–36%
Unit 3: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	13–18%
Unit 4: American Political Ideologies and Beliefs	10–15%
Unit 5: Political Participation	20–27%

Course at a Glance

Plan

The Course at a Glance provides a useful visual organization of the AP U.S. Government and Politics curricular components, including:

- Sequence of units, along with approximate weighting and suggested pacing. Please note, pacing options are provided for teaching the course for a full year and for a single semester.
- Progression of topics within each unit, including the location of required foundational documents or Supreme Court cases.
- Spiraling of the big ideas and practices across units.

Teach

DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

Disciplinary practices spiral across units.

1 Concept Application	3 Data Analysis
2 SCOTUS Application	4 Source Analysis
	5 Argumentation

BIG IDEAS

Big ideas spiral across units.

CON Constitutionalism	PMI Competing Policy-Making Interests
LOR Liberty and Order	
PRD Civic Participation in a Representative Democracy	MPA Methods of Political Analysis

FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS AND SUPREME COURT CASES

 Foundational Document
 Supreme Court Case

Assess

UNIT 1

Foundations of American Democracy

~16/~8

Class Periods

15–22%

AP Exam Weighting

LOR 1	1.1 Ideals of Democracy 
LOR 4	1.2 Types of Democracy 
CON 1	1.3 Government Power and Individual Rights 
CON 4	1.4 Challenges of the Articles of Confederation 
CON 1	1.5 Ratification of the United States Constitution 
PMI 4	1.6 Principles of American Government 
CON 5	1.7 Relationship Between States and the Federal Government 
CON 2	1.8 Constitutional Interpretations of Federalism  
CON 5	1.9 Federalism in Action

UNIT 2


Interactions Among Branches of Government

~28/~14

Class Periods

25–36%

AP Exam Weighting

CON 1	2.1 Congress: The Senate and the House of Representatives 
CON 3	2.2 Structures, Powers, and Functions of Congress 
CON 2	2.3 Congressional Behavior 
CON 3	2.4 Roles and Powers of the President 
CON 1	2.5 Checks on the Presidency
CON 4	2.6 Expansion of Presidential Power 
CON 1	2.7 Presidential Communication
CON 2	2.8 The Judicial Branch  
CON 1	2.9 Legitimacy of the Judicial Branch
CON 2	2.10 The Court in Action
CON 1	2.11 Checks on the Judicial Branch
CON 4	2.12 The Bureaucracy
CON 1	2.13 Discretionary and Rule-Making Authority
CON 3	2.14 Holding the Bureaucracy Accountable
PMI 3	2.15 Policy and the Branches of Government

UNIT 3

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

~26/~13

Class Periods

13–18% AP Exam Weighting

LOR	3.1	The Bill of Rights	📖
1			
LOR	3.2	First Amendment: Freedom of Religion	📖⚖️
2			
LOR	3.3	First Amendment: Freedom of Speech	📖⚖️
5			
LOR	3.4	First Amendment: Freedom of the Press	📖⚖️
4			
LOR	3.5	Second Amendment: Right to Bear Arms	📖
4			
LOR	3.6	Amendments: Balancing Individual Freedom with Public Order and Safety	📖
5			
LOR	3.7	Selective Incorporation	📖⚖️
2			
LOR	3.8	Amendments: Due Process and the Rights of the Accused	📖⚖️
5			
LOR	3.9	Amendments: Due Process and the Right to Privacy	📖
2			
PRD	3.10	Social Movements and Equal Protection	📖
4			
PMI	3.11	Government Responses to Social Movements	📖⚖️
2			
CON	3.12	Balancing Minority and Majority Rights	⚖️
2			
CON	3.13	Affirmative Action	
1			

UNIT 4

American Political Ideologies and Beliefs

~22/~11

Class Periods

10–15% AP Exam Weighting

MPA	4.1	American Attitudes About Government and Politics	
1			
MPA	4.2	Political Socialization	
3			
MPA	4.3	Changes in Ideology	
3			
MPA	4.4	Influence of Political Events on Ideology	
4			
MPA	4.5	Measuring Public Opinion	
3			
MPA	4.6	Evaluating Public Opinion Data	
3			
PMI	4.7	Ideologies of Political Parties	
1			
PMI	4.8	Ideology and Policy Making	
4			
PMI	4.9	Ideology and Economic Policy	
3			
PMI	4.10	Ideology and Social Policy	
4			

UNIT 5

Political Participation

~18/~9

Class Periods

20–27% AP Exam Weighting

MPA	5.1	Voting Rights and Models of Voting Behavior	📖
1			
MPA	5.2	Voter Turnout	
3			
PMI	5.3	Political Parties	
1			
PMI	5.4	How and Why Political Parties Change and Adapt	
4			
PMI	5.5	Third-Party Politics	
3			
PMI	5.6	Interest Groups Influencing Policy Making	
3			
PMI	5.7	Groups Influencing Policy Outcomes	
1			
PRD	5.8	Electing a President	
5			
PRD	5.9	Congressional Elections	
5			
PRD	5.10	Modern Campaigns	
5			
PRD	5.11	Campaign Finance	⚖️
2			
PRD	5.12	The Media	
5			
PRD	5.13	Changing Media	
2			

Required Foundational Documents

Foundational documents are necessary for students to understand the philosophical underpinnings and political values of the U.S. political system and may serve as the focus of AP Exam questions. The following list represents the required readings for the course as they relate to the enduring understandings. Teachers are encouraged to also use both classic and contemporary scholarly writings in political science to promote the comparison of political ideas and their application to recent events.



Required Foundational Documents



A balance between governmental power and individual rights has been a hallmark of American political development. **LOR-1**

- **FEDERALIST NO. 10**
The Same Subject Continued: The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection
teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/federalist-no-10/
- **BRUTUS NO. 1**
To the Citizens of the State of New-York
teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/brutus-i/
- **THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**
www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

The Constitution emerged from the debate about the weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation as a blueprint for limited government. **CON-1**

- **THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION**
www.ushistory.org/documents/confederation.htm
- **THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES (INCLUDING THE BILL OF RIGHTS AND SUBSEQUENT AMENDMENTS)**
constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution

The Constitution created a competitive policy-making process to ensure the people's will is represented and that freedom is preserved. **PMI-1**

- **THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES (INCLUDING THE BILL OF RIGHTS AND SUBSEQUENT AMENDMENTS)**
constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution
 - **FEDERALIST NO. 51**
The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments
teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/federalist-no-51/
-

Federalism reflects the dynamic distribution of power between national and state governments. **CON-2**

- **THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES (INCLUDING THE BILL OF RIGHTS AND SUBSEQUENT AMENDMENTS)**
constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution
-

The Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause as well as other constitutional provisions have often been used to support the advancement of equality. **PRD-1**

- **"LETTER FROM A BIRMINGHAM JAIL" (BY MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.)**
web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf
-

The presidency has been enhanced beyond its expressed constitutional powers. **CON-4**

- **FEDERALIST NO. 70**
The Executive Department Further Considered
teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/federalist-no-70/
-

The design of the judicial branch protects the Supreme Court's independence as a branch of government, and the emergence and use of judicial review remains a powerful judicial practice. **CON-5**

- **FEDERALIST NO. 78**
The Judiciary Department
teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/federalist-no-78/

Information about many constitutional issues can be found on the National Constitution Center's website: constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution. This same information is also available for download for e-readers, tablets, and other mobile devices through the National Constitution Center's Interactive Constitution App, available at constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/about#download-app.

Required Supreme Court Cases

Supreme Court cases are necessary for students to understand significant legal precedents may serve as the focus of AP Exam questions. The following list represents required Supreme Court cases and their holdings as related to the enduring understandings in the content outline.

AP U.S. Government and Politics students should be familiar with the structure and functions on the U.S. Supreme Court, as well as how the court renders its decisions. This includes knowing how holdings are decided and that justices who are in the minority often write dissents that express their opinions on the case and the constitutional questions. While students will not need to know any dissenting (or concurring) opinions from the required cases, it is important for students to understand the role of dissenting opinions, especially as they relate to future cases on similar issues.

The required Supreme Court cases are widely considered essential content in college courses. Some of the cases may be seen as controversial and some were decided by thin majorities (5 to 4 decisions). Students are not expected or required to either agree or disagree with the Court's decision. Teachers should encourage students to be familiar with the legal arguments on both sides of leading constitutional cases and thoughtfully analyze the majority and dissenting opinions.



Required Supreme Court Cases

*Federalism reflects the dynamic distribution of power between national and state governments. **CON-2***

- **MCCULLOCH V. MARYLAND (1819)**
This case established supremacy of the U.S. Constitution and federal laws over state laws.
- **UNITED STATES V. LOPEZ (1995)**
Congress may not use the commerce clause to make possession of a gun in a school zone a federal crime.

*Provisions of the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights are continually being interpreted to balance the power of government and the civil liberties of individuals. **LOR-2***

- **ENGEL V. VITALE (1962)**
School sponsorship of religious activities violates the establishment clause.
- **WISCONSIN V. YODER (1972)**
Compelling Amish students to attend school past the eighth grade violates the free exercise clause.
- **TINKER V. DES MOINES INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT (1969)**
Public school students have the right to wear black armbands in school to protest the Vietnam War.

- **NEW YORK TIMES CO. V. UNITED STATES (1971)**
This case bolstered the freedom of the press, establishing a “heavy presumption against prior restraint” even in cases involving national security.
 - **SCHENCK V. UNITED STATES (1919)**
Speech creating a “clear and present danger” is not protected by the First Amendment.
-

*Protections of the Bill of Rights have been selectively incorporated by way of the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process clause to prevent state infringement of basic liberties. **LOR-3***

- **GIDEON V. WAINWRIGHT (1963)**
This case guaranteed the right to an attorney for the poor or indigent in a state felony case.
 - **MCDONALD V. CHICAGO (2010)**
The Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms for self-defense is applicable to the states.
-

*The Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause as well as other constitutional provisions have often been used to support the advancement of equality. **PRD-1***

- **BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION (1954)**
Race-based school segregation violates the equal protection clause.
-

*The impact of federal policies on campaigning and electoral rules continues to be contested by both sides of the political spectrum. **PRD-2***

- **CITIZENS UNITED V. FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION (2010)**
Political spending by corporations, associations, and labor unions is a form of protected speech under the First Amendment.
-

*The republican ideal in the U.S. is manifested in the structure and operation of the legislative branch. **CON-3***

- **BAKER V. CARR (1962)**
This case opened the door to equal protection challenges to redistricting and the development of the “one person, one vote” doctrine by ruling that challenges to redistricting did not raise “political questions” that would keep federal courts from reviewing such challenges.
 - **SHAW V. RENO (1993)**
Majority-minority districts, created under the Voting Rights Act of 1965, may be constitutionally challenged by voters if race is the only factor used in creating the district.
-

*The design of the judicial branch protects the Supreme Court’s independence as a branch of government, and the emergence and use of judicial review remains a powerful judicial practice. **CON-5***

- **MARBURY V. MADISON (1803)**
This case established the principle of judicial review, empowering the Supreme Court to nullify an act of the legislative or executive branch that violates the Constitution.

Exam Overview

The AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam assesses student understanding of the disciplinary practices and learning objectives outlined in the course framework. The exam is 3 hours long and includes 55 multiple-choice questions and 4 free-response questions. The details of the exam, including exam weighting and timing, can be found below:

Section	Question Type	Number of Questions	Exam Weighting	Timing
I	Multiple-choice questions	55	50%	80 minutes
II	Free-response questions	4		100 minutes (recommended timing below)
	Question 1: Concept Application (3 points)		12.5%	20 minutes
	Question 2: Quantitative Analysis (4 points)		12.5%	20 minutes
	Question 3: SCOTUS Comparison (4 points)		12.5%	20 minutes
	Question 4: Argument Essay (6 points)		12.5%	40 minutes

The exam assesses content from the five big ideas for the course:

Big Idea 1: Constitutionalism

Big Idea 2: Liberty and Order

Big Idea 3: Civic Participation in a Representative Democracy

Big Idea 4: Competing Policy-Making Interests

Big Idea 5: Methods of Political Analysis
