



# AP<sup>®</sup> US Government

## Syllabus

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### Course Description

AP<sup>®</sup> US Government and Politics is a one-semester college-level course designed to prepare students for the Advanced Placement (AP) US Government and Politics exam. The goal of this course is to explore and analyze important US government and politics concepts. Students will demonstrate their understanding and acquisition of skills through written work, project-based activities, and practice exams.

### Course Materials

#### Textbook

Wilson, James Q., John Dilulio, Jr., and Meena Bose. *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, 14th ed. Connecticut: Cengage Learning, 2015.

#### Reader

Woll, Peter. *American Government: Readings and Cases*, 19th ed. Illinois: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012.

### Topics of Study

This course is organized into six topics of study. Students are encouraged to make comparative analyses among issues, events, and ideas discussed both inside and outside of the course.

#### Topic 1: Constitutional Underpinnings of the United States Government

- Principles and ideals of the Constitution and constitutional theories
- The need and purpose of the Bill of Rights
- Significance of Federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances
- Historical context of Supreme Court decisions concerning the Constitution

#### Topic 2: Political Beliefs and Behaviors

- The political values of US citizens
- Influences on political beliefs of US citizens
- Various ways that political participation can be completed
- Impact of political beliefs on the political system



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### **Topic 3: Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media**

- Political parties, elections, PACs, the media, and interest groups
- Structures of political parties and their influence on the political system
- Political election laws and systems at the federal and state levels
- Formation and influences of third parties, interest groups, and others
- Uses and impact of mass media on the political system and elections

### **Topic 4: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

- Development of civil liberties and rights
- Significant Supreme Court decisions
- Impact of the Fourteenth Amendment
- Impact of Supreme Court decisions on social change

### **Topic 5: Institutions of National Government**

- Formal vs. informal powers
- Congress, the president, bureaucracy, courts
- Changes and development of powers in government institutions
- Relationships between institutions, the media, and state and local governments

### **Topic 6: Public Policy**

- Policymaking in a federal system
- Enforcement of public policy by various government branches and groups
- Policy and issue networks that influence foreign and domestic policy
- Introduction of major past and present public policies



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### Key Readings and Activities

#### Readings

Students will be asked to complete reading activities to help build upon key concepts, analyze and interpret data, and establish real-world connections.

Reading materials will appear in the textbook, reader, and other primary and secondary sources throughout the course, including contemporary news sources.

#### Writing Assignments

Students will have frequent writing assignments that require them to analyze primary and secondary sources; draw comparisons; argue and support opinions; identify similarities and differences among events, groups of people, and places; and identify causes and effects.

Throughout the course, students practice analyzing information related to the US government and politics in the form of written responses to short-answer questions. Also, several free-response questions are present throughout the course that allow students to answer analytical and interpretive questions regarding US government and politics in the same format presented on the AP US Government and Politics exam.

In this course, students will also conduct research to find a current news article from a national source that discusses a modern constitutional issue. Students will write a brief summary of the article, as well as a detailed analysis of the implications of the issue being discussed and how it reflects governmental and political processes.

#### Projects

Students will research and analyze Supreme Court decisions throughout the course and complete other projects that provide opportunities to apply their learning, such as writing an opening statement about policy for a presidential candidate.



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### Course Outline

Each unit has three main learning objectives:

1. Answer a series of guiding questions.
2. Identify a set of key terms.
3. Answer multiple-choice questions or write responses to free-response questions based on the AP US Government and Politics goals and the content contained in the topic outline.

The key topics, readings, and assignments for each unit are designed to help students be successful on the AP US Government and Politics exam.

### Unit 1: Constitutional Underpinnings of the United States Government

#### Topics

- Shaping of and influences on politics
- Types of politics
- The US Constitution
- Federalism

#### Readings

Wilson et al.

- Chapter 1: "The Study of American Government"
- Chapter 2: "The Constitution"
- Chapter 3: "Federalism"

Woll

- Selections from Chapter 2, including: Federalist 16, Federalist 17, Anti-Federalist Papers No. 17, and McCulloch v. Maryland



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### Other

- Students will read a letter from Thomas Jefferson.
- Students will read Federalist and Anti-Federalist viewpoints.

### Assignments

Students will respond to the following prompts in short writing assignments:

- A democracy is a government ruled by many, usually through direct citizen participation or elected representation. Taking politics into account, is the United States a democracy? Make a clear statement of opinion, and support your position using no fewer than three specific examples.
- Take the side of either a Federalist or an Anti-Federalist to answer the following question: Should the Constitution be ratified?
  - Make a clear statement of your position, and provide at least two arguments supporting your position.
  - Provide an argument that could be made by the other faction, and then refute it.
- According to John Locke, what is the purpose of government? Does the US Constitution meet this purpose?
  - Support your conclusion using Beard's "Framing the Constitution" and Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government* as references.
- With the ratification of the US Constitution, the United States switched from a confederal system to a federal system. Explain how these two systems differ on state sovereignty. Then, use at least three supporting examples from the Constitution to justify the United States' classification as a federal system.



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- What effect did *McCulloch v. Maryland* have on the interpretation of the Constitution as the “supreme law of the land”? Based on your understanding of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist positions on the power of state and national governments, which faction would have most supported this ruling? Explain your answer using at least two supporting arguments.
- A democracy is a government ruled by many, usually through direct citizen participation or elected representation. Taking politics into account, is the United States a democracy? Make a clear statement of opinion, and support your position using no fewer than three specific examples.

Students will respond to the following free-response question prompt:

The American system of government has historically been referred to as an “experiment in democracy” that blends elements of thought on self-rule with historical and philosophical thought.

- a) Describe two historical examples of self-rule or democratic rule from which the Framers of the American Constitution drew inspiration. Connect each example to one of these elements of American democracy.
  - Voting and elections
  - Limits on government power
- b) Explain how Enlightenment philosophy influenced the Framers in their drafting of these key documents:
  - The Declaration of Independence
  - The US Constitution
- c) Explain the purpose of government as accepted by the Framers, and identify one major influence on the development of that purpose.

Students will also be asked to do the following:

- Write about the principles of the Constitution.
- Analyze the works of Thomas Hobb and John Locke.



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## Unit 2: Political Beliefs and Behaviors

### Topics

- Comparison of American democracy to other democratic countries
- Political tolerance
- Political socialization, ideologies, and identification
- Voting and polling

### Readings

Wilson et al.

- Chapter 4: "American Political Culture"
- Chapter 7: "Public Opinion"
- Chapter 8: "Political Participation"

Other

- Students will read excerpts from a speech about lobbyists.
- Students will read about the debate over the Bill of Rights.

### Assignments

Students will respond to the following prompts in short writing assignments:

- Since the late 1950s, there has been a general decline in the proportion of Americans who believe that the national government can be trusted to "do the right thing." Develop a theory explaining this decline, and support your theory with two pieces of evidence.
- Political socialization is the process by which background traits influence one's political views. It can be argued that people's families have the greatest influence on the development of their political views. Do you agree or disagree with this argument? Support your conclusions with arguments and evidence.
- How has the American electorate changed since the first presidential election? Identify three major expansions of the franchise since the election of 1788.



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- Some democratic countries, like Australia, have enacted a system of mandatory voting, under which all eligible voters are required by law to cast a ballot in an election. Based on your understanding of voter behavior and responsibilities in a democracy, should the United States adopt similar laws for mandatory voting to increase voter turnout? Support your opinion with argument and evidence.

Students will respond to the following free-response question prompts:

In a democratic political system with a “living” constitution, the ebb and flow of public opinion influences public policy decisions, the positions of elected officials and candidates for office, and even the interpretation of constitutional principles.

- a) Explain how public opinion is measured. Briefly evaluate the efficacy of modern polling methods for determining public opinion on political issues.
- b) Explain the relationship between public opinion and political ideology.
- c) Identify and explain two sources of political socialization in the development of one’s political ideology.

While a “voting citizenry” is vital to a functioning democracy, its definition has changed dramatically since the ratification of the US Constitution.

- a) Identify three major expansions of the franchise enacted through constitutional amendments and briefly explain the historical impetus for each.
- b) Explain the significance of each of the following on voting rights in the United States.
  - Jim Crow laws
  - Voting Rights Acts of the 1960s

Students will also be asked to do the following:

- Analyze the connection between the media and political campaigns. [\[SC5\]](#), [\[SC11\]](#)





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- Analyze data about trends in voter registration and election participation in the United States.

### Unit 3: Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media

#### Topics

- Purpose and functions of major political parties
- Changes in the nominating process
- Understanding minor parties
- Comparison of America's two-party system to the systems of other democratic countries
- Comparison of political action committees and interest groups
- Mass media and politics

#### Readings

Wilson et al. [\[SC3\]](#), [\[SC4\]](#), [\[SC5\]](#), [\[SC10\]](#)

- Chapter 9: "Political Parties"
- Chapter 10: "Elections and Campaigns"
- Chapter 11: "Interest Groups"
- Chapter 12: "The Media"

Woll [\[SC11\]](#)

- Selections from Chapter 4, including: "Government by Discussion," "Party Government," *Federalist* 10, "A Theory of Critical Elections," and "The Responsible Electorate"
- Selections from Chapter 5, including: "The Role of Interest Groups in Government" and "Misplaced Obsession with PACs"

#### Other

- Students will also read about the history of the Fifteenth Amendment.



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### Assignments

Students will respond to the following prompts in short writing assignments:

- What is the purpose of a primary election, and how is it different from a general election? Discuss the roles of primary elections and conventions in the process of nominating parties' candidates for public office in a general election.
- What is a political party, and what useful purpose do political parties and their platforms serve to the electorate in American politics? Define the term "political party." Then, identify and explain what purposes political parties have in American politics and how the political platform serves to fulfill those purposes.
- Supporters of campaign finance reform argue that the outcomes of modern elections are more a product of money spent by campaigns rather than the message of the candidates. Detractors argue that donating money to a campaign constitutes free speech—if people or organizations want to show support to a candidate by giving them money, they are permitted to do so under the First Amendment. What is the role of money in modern American elections? Should that role be legally changed or restricted? State a clear opinion and support your opinion with at least two arguments or pieces of evidence.
- In "The Responsible Electorate," V. O. Key Jr. argues that voters "are not fools," but rather behave as rationally as can be expected when voting, given the nature of modern campaigns. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Present supporting evidence and/or arguments.
- Compare and contrast institutional and membership interests. What incentives entice people to become members of a political organization or interest group? Provide specific examples in your explanation.
- Differentiate between interest groups and political action committees. Compare and contrast the purposes and strategies of each using at least two examples.



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- The media are often referred to as a “gatekeeper” with regard to the role of gathering information about the government and politics and informing the public. Briefly evaluate the media’s performance as a “gatekeeper” in modern politics, including a discussion of potential issues like bias, selective attention, and the nature of an adversarial press.

Students will respond to the following free-response question prompts:

Political parties exist in representative democracies around the world, but the United States is unique in having maintained a two-party system throughout its history. While political parties have evolved over time and minor parties have emerged, two dominant political parties have consistently held America’s political stage.

- a) Briefly discuss the historical origins of the two-party system in the United States.
- b) Explain the role of political parties with regard to:
  - developing public policy.
  - informing the electorate.
- c) Describe the role of minor parties in modern American politics.

While voting is considered the de facto method of civic participation in the American democratic system, citizens may influence government policy through participation in nongovernmental organizations and institutions seeking to further a stated agenda.

- a) Analyze the role of interest groups in national politics with regard to each of the following:
  - Lobbying
  - Campaign funding
  - Use of media to influence public opinion
- b) Describe the relationship between interest groups and political action committees.
- c) Analyze the impact of political action committees on elections for federal office.



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Students will also be asked to do the following:

- Explore political party platforms.
- Analyze the connection between the media and political campaigns.
- Analyze data related to campaign finance issues.
- Conduct research to find a current news article from a national source that discusses an issue related to this unit, such as a current national election, the role of the media in the political process, or legislative issues raised by either of the two major parties. Students will provide a brief summary of the article, as well as a detailed analysis of the implications of the issue being discussed and how it reflects governmental and political processes.

## Unit 4: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

### Topics

- Civil liberties and conflicts involved
- Incorporation
- The First Amendment
- US Supreme Court decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education*

### Readings

Wilson et al.

- Chapter 5: "Civil Liberties"
- Chapter 6: "Civil Rights"



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### Woll [SC11]

- Selections from Chapter 3, including: *Anti-Federalist Paper* No. 84, starting on page 104; “The Nationalization of the Bill of Rights,” starting on page 106; *Gideon v. Wainwright*, starting on page 110; *Plessy v. Ferguson*, starting on page 127; *Brown v. Board of Education* I and II, starting on page 130; “Freedom of Speech and Press,” starting on page 115; *Abrams v. United States*, starting on page 117; and “The Judicial Sources of Political Controversies over Civil Liberties and Rights” on pages 140–73

### Assignments

Students will respond to the following prompts in short writing assignments:

- What does and does not constitute free speech as protected by the First Amendment? Provide at least three pieces of evidence from Supreme Court rulings to support your conclusion.
- The constitutional issue at the core of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education* cases was the interpretation of the “equal protection” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Briefly describe the facts of each case and differentiate between each ruling’s interpretations of the equal protection clause.
- A common aspect of many civil rights issues is a discussion of equality of results versus equality of opportunity. Keeping this in mind, evaluate the practice of affirmative action. Use legal precedent to support your conclusions.
- Does the US Constitution protect the right to privacy? Support your conclusion with at least two well-developed examples of case law.

Students will respond to the following free-response question prompts:

Following the ratification of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the civil liberties identified therein were understood to apply only to the federal government. Since the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, that understanding has slowly changed to apply to the states.



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- a) Explain selective incorporation and discuss why it is performed by the federal courts rather than through legislative action by Congress.
- b) Explain the role of the Fourteenth Amendment in establishing the practice of selective incorporation.
- c) Identify two of the following Supreme Court cases and discuss each case's significance in applying a specific civil liberty under the Bill of Rights to the states.
  - o *Gitlow v. New York*
  - o *Mapp v. Ohio*
  - o *Gideon v. Wainwright*
  - o *McDonald v. Chicago*

While the Bill of Rights is generally considered to be a series of protected individual civil liberties, it also acknowledges liberties afforded to the states, addressing the fear of many Framers of the Constitution that state sovereignty would eventually be challenged by federal supremacy.

- a) Explain the principle of federalism with regard to:
  - o delegated powers.
  - o shared or concurrent powers.
- b) Explain the Tenth Amendment and analyze its significance to the practice of federalism.
- c) Compare and contrast the Ninth and Tenth Amendments of the Constitution.

Students will complete the following project:

- From the role of Supreme Court Justice, write a three- to four-paragraph Supreme Court opinion for the fictional case of *United States v. Fields*. Your opinion must summarize the facts of the case, state your decision, and cite precedent to support your ideas.



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Students will also be asked to do the following:

- In this unit, students will conduct research to find a current news article from a national source that discusses a modern civil rights issue. Students will provide a brief summary of the article, as well as a detailed analysis of the implications of the issue being discussed and how it reflects governmental and political processes.

## Unit 5: Institutions of National Government

### Topics

- Committees in the House of Representatives and the Senate
- The legislative process
- Role of the president and federal bureaucracies
- US Supreme Court rulings and their influence on the power of the court
- Comparison of majority opinion and dissenting opinion

### Readings

Wilson et al. Chapter 13: "Congress"

- Chapter 14: "The Presidency"
- Chapter 15 "The Bureaucracy"
- Chapter 16: "The Judiciary"

Woll

- Selections from Chapter 8, including: "Congress in the Twenty-First Century" and *Federalist Papers* 53, 56, 57, 58, 62, and 63
- Selection from Chapter 6: "The Presidency—Focus of Leadership"
- Selection from Chapter 7: "Constitutional Democracy and Bureaucratic Power"
- Selections from Chapter 9, including: *Federalist* 78 and *Marbury v. Madison*



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### Additional

- Students will read about changes to the cabinet's role in defending the nation.

### Assignments

Students will respond to the following prompts in short writing assignments:

- How do political parties impact the effectiveness of Congress? Define what constitutes an "effective" Congress and then discuss the role of political parties in the function of the legislative branch. Consider the effects of polarization and the power of leadership in each chamber.  
While Congress is generally considered to be the lawmaking body for the national government of the United States, the Framers had in mind some different functions for the House of Representatives and the Senate as bodies that were representative of the American people. Based on your understanding of *Federalist Papers* 53, 56, 57, 58, 62, and 63 as excerpted in the Woll reader, differentiate between the representative roles and purposes that the Framers intended for the House and Senate.
- One important check that the President of the United States may exercise over Congress is the power of the veto. Some critics of the veto provision argue that the practice places too much power in the hands of one person to undo the work of Congress, which more closely represents the voice of the people. Others argue that the veto is vital because it is the last line of defense against Congress passing a bad law. Briefly evaluate the role of the presidential veto in the lawmaking process and include arguments and examples to support your conclusion.
- In "The Presidency—Focus of Leadership," Clinton Rossiter discusses the many leadership roles of the president of the United States. Identify what you conclude to be the two most vital or important leadership roles of the president. Briefly explain both roles, and justify their importance using argument and examples.





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- How have the size and scope of the bureaucracy changed since the Washington administration? Briefly describe the original state of the bureaucracy. Then, identify and discuss at least one major event that led to a change in bureaucratic structure, and explain its lasting effects.
- While, constitutionally speaking, the administrative branch of the federal government is under the purview of the executive branch, the expansion of the bureaucracy has created it as a unique “fourth branch” that both has power over and is answerable to the executive and legislative branches. Briefly discuss the nature of the administrative branch, focusing on its relationships with the president and Congress.
- What is jurisdiction? Discuss the differences between original and appellate jurisdiction and identify at least one example of a situation in which the US Supreme Court would have original jurisdiction in a case and one example of a situation in which it would have appellate jurisdiction.

### [SC6]

- The organization and function of the national judiciary was only briefly discussed in Article III of the US Constitution. The US Supreme Court, over time, has defined its own role via landmark cases such as *Marbury v. Madison*. What was the lasting impact of this landmark case with regard to the role of the Supreme Court in checking the power of other parts of government? Support your conclusion using arguments and examples.

Students will respond to the following free-response question prompts:

Per the US Constitution, Congress and the president have distinct powers and duties. Over time, however, the role of the president and the executive branch have evolved to overlap some powers with those of the Congress.

- a) Explain the development of the executive bureaucracy with regard to:
  - enacting policy carrying the force of law.
  - the role of Congress in the expansion of executive powers.
- b) Analyze the relationship between the war-making powers of the president and Congress.



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- c) Evaluate the constitutionality of the expanding role of the executive branch with regard to:
- o lawmaking and enforceable policy.
  - o use of military force abroad.

While created by Article III of the US Constitution, the federal court system is largely a product of legislative action and presidential appointment. The courts' dependence of the legislative and executive branches is counterbalanced by its own checks on the other two branches.

- a) Explain the different methods by which the US Supreme Court and subordinate courts have been created and their jurisdictions established.
- b) Identify and explain one check exercised by each of the following over the federal judiciary:
- o President of the United States
  - o Congress
- c) Analyze the role of judicial review as a check exercised by the federal courts.

In recent years, public opinion on the effectiveness of the US Congress has become increasingly reliant on the number of bills passed as a metric for success. However, the lawmaking process is complex, making the passage of many bills a long and difficult process.

- a) Assuming a bill is introduced in the House of Representatives, identify and describe two points in the lawmaking process at which a bill may be "killed" or rejected.
- b) Analyze the role of political parties in both expediting bill passage and hindering it in the House of Representatives or Senate.
- c) Explain the role of committees in the development and passage of legislation.

Students will also be asked to do the following:

- Analyze the structure and role of the judicial branch.
- Analyze the Supreme Court's decision in *Yarborough v. Alvarado*.
- Analyze Supreme Court decisions on equal access.



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### Unit 6: Public Policy

#### Topics

- Public opinion on social issues
- Influence of public opinion on the government
- Comparison of US social welfare programs to those of other countries
- Comparison of US environmental policymaking to that of other countries
- Comparison and contrast of fiscal policy and monetary policy
- The Federal Reserve
- Comparison of economic approaches to taxation, spending, and budgeting
- Changes in war-making powers of the president and Congress over time

#### Readings

Wilson et al.

- Chapter 17: "Domestic Policy"
- Chapter 18: "Economic Policy"
- Chapter 19: "Foreign and Military Policy"
- Chapter 20: "American Democracy, Then and Now"

Woll

- Selection from Chapter 6: *Boumediene et al. v. Bush*
- Selection from Chapter 8: "Why I'm Leaving the Senate"

#### Assignments

Students will respond to the following prompts in short writing assignments:

- Compare and contrast monetary policy and fiscal policy. Identify and explain at least one example of both monetary and fiscal policy action as part of your analysis.
- Identify the four major worldviews that shape the foreign policy perspectives of America's political leaders. Categorize each worldview as part of either an "introversion" or "extroversion" mood and



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support each categorization using a specific historical example. How would you characterize the prevalent worldview today? Explain.

- In what ways does the ruling in *Boumediene v. Bush* support or reject the power of the president and Congress to establish and enact foreign policy? What foreign policy matter was at issue in the case, and what effect did the case have on the future establishment of foreign policy?
- How has American government changed from the “old system” to the “new system” of today? In your opinion, have these changes been for the better? Identify and briefly explain three major changes in American government to support your conclusion.
- In his op-ed piece, Senator Evan Bayh discusses a number of ways in which he believes the Senate may be improved to reduce partisanship and increase effectiveness as both a lawmaking and representational body. Based on your understanding of American government, which of Senator Bayh’s recommendations do you think would be most effective? Which would be least effective? Support your conclusions using argument and examples.

Students will respond to the following free-response question prompt:

In recent years, support has grown for a “balanced budget” amendment that would place a constitutional limit on deficits permitted in the budget passed by Congress each year. Supporters hope to reduce the national debt, while detractors say that deficit spending is necessary to meet national needs.

- a) Explain the relationship between the executive and legislative branches in creating and enforcing the fiscal policies supporting the national budget.
- b) Evaluate the practice of including deficit spending as part of the national budget.
- c) Explain the process by which a balanced-budget amendment may be added to the Constitution.

Students will also be asked to do the following:

- Analyze data about financial issues facing Medicare and Social Security.

### Unit 7: Exam Prep and Review

This unit will help students prepare for the AP US Government and Politics exam.



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## Topics

Students will learn exam strategies, practice test-taking techniques on exam-like questions, and review content covered in the six units.

- Exam Strategies
- Unit 1 Review\_
- Unit 2 Review\_
- Unit 3 Review\_
- Unit 4 Review\_
- Unit 5 Review\_
- Unit 6 Review\_

## Readings

There are no assigned readings in this unit, but students are encouraged to review their notes and re-read any previously assigned readings, as needed.

## Assignments

Students will complete two practice exams that follow the same structure as the AP US Government and Politics exam.

Both practice exams consist of:

- four free-response questions (FRQs).
- 60 multiple-choice questions.