

# **AP United States Government and Politics Syllabus**

## **Course Overview:**

The AP course in United States Government and Politics is an intensive study of the formal and informal structures of government and the processes of the American political system, with an emphasis on policymaking and implementation. AP United States Government and Politics introduces students to key political ideas, institutions, policies, interactions, roles, and behaviors that characterize the political culture of the United States. The course examines politically significant concepts and themes, through which students learn to apply disciplinary reasoning, assess causes and consequences of political events, and interpret data to develop evidence-based arguments. This course will give students an analytical perspective on government and politics in the United States. This course includes both the study of general concepts used to interpret U.S. government and politics and the analysis of specific examples of historical & contemporary policy decisions. It also requires familiarity with the various institutions, groups, beliefs, and ideas that constitute U.S. government and politics. This course is designed to prepare students for the AP Exam.

## **AP United States Government and Politics Course Content:**

Students study general concepts used to interpret U.S. government and politics and analyze specific topics, including:

- Foundations of American Democracy;
- Interactions Among Branches of Government;
- Civil Liberties and Civil Rights;
- American Political Ideologies and Beliefs; and
- Political Participation.

## **Course Goals and Objectives:**

Students successfully completing this course will:

- Describe and compare important facts, concepts, and theories pertaining to U.S. government and politics.
- Explain typical patterns of political processes and behavior and their consequences (including the components of political behavior, the principles used to explain or justify various government structures and procedures, and the political effects of these structures and procedures).
- Interpret basic data relevant to U.S. government and politics (including data presented in charts, tables, and other formats).
- Critically analyze relevant theories and concepts, apply them appropriately, and develop their connections across the curriculum.
- Enhance their knowledge of political socialization and the factors that contribute to it.
- Explain how citizens can participate in politics and why this is a crucial part of American democracy.
- Articulate critical arguments and well-developed theses, both in writing and speaking.
- Analyze and interpret data, primary source documents, and contemporary news articles in order to strengthen their understanding of the curriculum.
- Answer interpretive and analytical free response questions on a frequent basis.

## **Teaching Strategies:**

The course will use a multitude of teaching strategies. Lecture will be used to reinforce, clarify and expand on key course terms and concepts. Discussion will be used to explore the claims made in the supplemental readings and some project/papers will be assigned to add depth to particular concepts and units of study. Because the central goal of this course is to prepare you for the AP exam you will have quizzes on assigned textbook readings throughout a unit and an exam on every unit following the AP format which includes multiple choice questions and free response questions. Exams and Quizzes will include the use of quantitative and visually presented information (maps and graphs). In addition to these exams you will complete several analytical papers/projects/ etc. to deepen both your writing and research skills.

## **Participation:**

To get the most out of this class, you will be expected to participate in lectures and debates. I encourage you to voice your opinion, ask questions, and choose sides in debates. In our discussions I expect you to act civil and treat each other and other's opinions with respect. This classroom is a safe zone; we are open minded and welcome different opinions. Different opinions help us to better understand each other; we do not always have to agree.

## **Materials:**

Textbook: *Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy* by George C. Edwards III and Martin P. Wattenberg.

Reader: *The Enduring Debate* by David Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer.

Recommended: *Barron's How to Prepare for the Advanced Placement Exam in U.S. Government and Politics*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition.

In addition to the text, we will be reading several primary source documents, such as selected *Federalist Papers*, excerpts from the Constitution, speeches and Supreme Court Cases, as well as articles specifically pertaining to our six units.

Also, we will look at charts, quantitative graphs and other visual data and interpret its information to strengthen understanding of the government and in practice for the test which uses chart-based questions.

## **Current Events:**

Students should have a clear grasp of daily news events. Throughout the semester, we will weave national and world events into our class discussions. Part of the focus of this class is to analyze the power of the media and so we should be on constant lookout for how daily events and their perception shape the nature of United States government and political culture. You will be periodically required to report on current events in class.

Students are expected to spend about fifteen minutes every day bringing themselves up to speed on current events by reading relevant articles in the newspaper and by checking news websites. Politico is generally the most helpful website to monitor, as the news is focused on politics, though other websites, news shows, and newspapers are also good sources of news.

## Assessments:

### Exams

After every major unit of instruction, students will complete a multiple choice test with a free response question similar to those that students will encounter on the AP exam.

### Assignments / Participation

Students will periodically submit short essays and research assignments related to course content and outside readings. Students may also be called upon to present their research to the class. In order to be successful in this course, it is imperative that students participate in class discussions, simulations, projects, online forum assignments, and all other assigned activities. Both quality and quantity of class participation will be considered in determining a student's participation grade.

## Course Outline:

### UNIT I: Foundations of American Democracy (Approximately Three Weeks)

**Content Goals:** Students will be able to understand the doctrines and historical background to the Constitution, explain key principles in the Constitution such as: the separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism. Students will also be able to explain powers given to the government since the passage of the Constitution, such as judicial review and implied powers. Students will be able to explain the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of American government, such as limited government and natural rights. Students will also be able to explain interpretations of the Constitution including democratic theory, republicanism, pluralism, and elitism. Students will be able to identify and describe the power struggles that have taken place between the states and the federal government since the inception of the Republic.

Topics	Enlightenment Thinkers, The U.S. Constitution, Articles of Confederation, Constitutional Convention, Effects of Federalism, Federal-State Relations, Constitutional Underpinnings of Federalism, Checks and Balances, Separation of Powers, Theories of Democratic Government
Textbook	Chapters 1-3
Readings	Articles of Confederation Declaration of Independence US Constitution The Bill of Rights <i>The Federalist, Number 10</i> <i>The Federalist, Number 51</i> <i>Brutus 1</i>
Court Cases	<i>McCulloch v. Maryland</i> <i>US v. Lopez</i>

## Unit II: Interactions Among Branches of Government (Approximately Seven Weeks)

### Content Goals:

Students will become familiar with the organization and powers, both formal and informal, of the major political institutions in the U.S.: The Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy and the federal courts. Students should understand the power balances and relationships between these institutions and the implications of that. The functions these institutions perform and do not perform, as well as the powers that they do and do not possess, are important. Students will understand the change and evolution of the powers and relationships between these institutions. Students are also expected to understand ties between the various branches of national government and political parties, interest groups, the media, and state and local governments.

Topics	The major formal and informal institutional arrangements of power Relationships among the four institutions and varying balances of power Linkages between institutions and the following: Public opinion and voters, Interest groups, Political parties, The media, Sub-national governments
Textbook	Chapters 11-15
Readings	The Constitution <i>Federalist No. 70</i> <i>Federalist No. 78</i> Hatch Act Debating the Issues: Pork Barrel Politics <i>Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It</i> (Excerpt) James Q. Wilson “The Court and American Life,” from <i>Storm Center: The Supreme Court in American Politics</i> David O’Brien
Court Cases	<i>Baker v. Carr</i> <i>Shaw v. Reno</i> <i>Marbury v. Madison</i>

## Unit II: Political Beliefs & Behaviors (Approximately Four Weeks)

**Content Goals:** Students will study and understand the formation and foundation of US political culture. Students will examine how Americans come to find and develop their political beliefs, how demographics, geographic region, and lifestyle impact these beliefs throughout our lifetime, and how citizens politically socialize. The different types of political participation available to citizens, and how changes in participation can affect the political system, will also be studied. Students will take the time to study, interpret, and analyze articles, data, charts, and polls, as well as participate in some self-reflection and contemporary analysis.

Topics	Political culture, Political socialization, Political ideology, Public opinion, Political participation, American demographics
Textbook	Chapters 6 & 9
Readings	Voting Rights Act of 1965 Motor Voter Act of 1993 <i>Why We Vote</i> David Campbell

### Unit III: Political Parties, Interest Groups and Mass Media (Approximately Three Weeks)

#### Content Goals:

Students will understand the mechanisms that allow citizens to organize and communicate their interests and concerns, including political parties, elections, political action committees (PACs), interest groups, and the mass media. Students will examine the evolution, functions, structures and effects of political parties, as well as issues of party reform and of campaign strategies and financing. Students will study elections and voting behavior on several levels. Students will consider the roles played by lobbying and interest groups. Students will understand the media's role in and impact on the political system. Students will examine the goals of the media and the consequences of the growth and concentration of the media.

Topics	Political Parties: Purposes, Functions, Organization, Development, Effects on the political process, Electoral laws and systems, demographic trends in party identification, Party platforms Interest Groups, including political action committees(PACs): interests represented, activities, effects on political process, characteristics & roles of PACs The Mass Media: functions and structures of news media, impacts of news media on politics, news media industry and its consequences
Textbook	Chapters 7, 8, 10
Readings	Party Platforms <i>The Federalist, Number 10</i> <i>Democracy in America</i> Alexis De Tocqueville <i>Polling the Public</i> George Gallup
Court Cases	<i>Buckley v. Valeo</i> <i>Bush v. Gore</i> <i>Citizens United v. FEC</i>

### Unit V: Public Policy (Approximately Two Weeks)

#### Content Goals:

Public policy is the result of interactions and dynamics among actors, interests, institutions, and processes. The formation of policy agendas, the enactment of public policies by Congress and the president, and the implementation and interpretation of policies by the bureaucracy and the courts are all stages in the policy process with which students should be familiar. Students should also investigate policy networks and issue networks in the domestic and foreign policy areas. The study of these will give students a clear understanding of the impact of federalism, interest groups, parties, and elections on policy processes and policymaking in the federal context. Students should be familiar with major public policies.

Topics	Policy agendas, Policy process, Policy networks, Major public policies, Policymaking in a federal system, Role of institutions in enactment of policy, role of bureaucracy and courts in policy implementation and interpretation, Iron triangle
Textbook	Chapters 16-18
Readings	<i>The Rise and Fall of the GDP</i> Jon Gertner <i>Why We Can't Ignore Growing Income Inequality</i> Timothy Noah <i>Three Cheers for Income Inequality</i> Richard A. Epstein <i>American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies, and Political Theory</i> Theodore J. Lowi

## Unit VI: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (Approximately Two Weeks)

### Content Goals:

Students will analyze the workings of the U.S. Supreme Court and become familiar with its most significant decisions. Students will examine judicial interpretations of civil rights and liberties, the rights of the accused, and the rights of minority groups and women.

Topics	Development of civil rights and liberties, Federal judiciary, The Supreme Court, Civil rights, First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment, Rights of the accused, Judicial activism
Textbook	Chapters 4 & 5
Readings	Civil Rights Act of 1968
Court Cases	<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> <i>Tinker v. Demoiner</i> <i>Gideon v. Wainwright</i> <i>Griswold v. Connecticut</i> <i>Korematsu v. U.S.</i> <i>Mapp v. Ohio</i> <i>Miranda v. Arizona</i> <i>Miller v. California</i> <i>Gitlow v. New York</i> <i>Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier</i> <i>Roe v. Wade</i> <i>Engel v. Vitale</i> <i>Lemon v. Kurtzman</i> <i>Schenk v. U.S.</i>