

AP Government Free Response Questions 1988 – 2006

1988 – *The Bureaucracy, Political Parties*

1. To what extent does the United States federal bureaucracy stand above politics and administer impartially the laws enacted by Congress? In your answer be sure to discuss both of the following.
 - a. The relationship between the federal bureaucracy and organized interests
 - b. The role of the federal bureaucracy in shaping public policy
2. Evaluate the claim that there is “not a dime’s worth of difference” between the contemporary Republican and Democratic parties. In your answer discuss the relationship between the domestic policy preferences of party members in Congress and the social bases of party support in the electorate.

1989 – *The Presidency and Public Opinion, Civil Rights*

3. “The greatest source of presidential power is not to be found in the Constitution but in politics and public opinion.”

Assess the accuracy of this statement in terms of how Presidents attempt to achieve their policy goals as they deal with two of the following: Congress, the courts, the bureaucracy.

4. To what extent has the federal government been successful in its attempts since 1950 to combat discrimination against black people in the United States? In your answer discuss both of the following.
 - a. Specific legislative and judicial actions aimed at combating racial discrimination
 - b. Social and political factors that have hindered the government’s attempts to foster change

1990 – *Political Parties and Elections, The Supreme Court and Public Opinion*

5. After the 1984 elections, Republican leaders claimed that a major realignment had taken place and that the Republicans had become the majority party. Briefly define party realignment, and evaluate the contention that a major realignment took place during the 1980’s by examining presidential, congressional, and state level politics.
6. It is sometimes said that “the Supreme Court follows the election returns” implying that the Court cannot stray too far from public opinion in its decisions. Using concrete examples from the period since 1954, critically evaluate evidence that both supports and refutes this contention. In your answer, be sure to examine the factors that account for the relationship between the Court and public opinion.

1991 – *Participation, Voting and Interest Groups, Federalism, Civil Rights and Public Policy*

7. Compare the strengths and weaknesses of voting and one nonelectoral form of participation that groups use in attempting to achieve policy goals. In your essay, refer to the political activities of two of the following groups in the contemporary United States. Your essay should be an analysis of political activities and not a historical narrative.
 - a. Women
 - b. Senior Citizens
 - c. Big business leaders
 - d. Farmers

8. Analyze the effects of federalism on contemporary policy making in two of the following areas.
 - a. Civil rights policy
 - b. Social welfare policy
 - c. Environmental policy

In your answer, include a brief definition of federalism and use specific examples of its impact on policy making in the two areas you select.

Your essay should focus on the analysis of the contemporary political effects of federalism and should not be a historical examination of the development of federalism.

1992 – *Voting and Demographics, Congress and Public Policy*

9. Explain how three of the following voter characteristics influenced voting decisions in the presidential elections of the 1980's.
 - a. Party identification
 - b. Socioeconomic status
 - c. Race/ethnicity
 - d. Issue preferences

10. Discuss how congressional committees function in making and implementing public policy in two of the following areas.
 - a. Legislation
 - b. Confirmation of presidential appointees
 - c. Oversight of the bureaucracy

Your essay should not focus on the mechanics of how a bill becomes a law.

1993 – *Budgetary Policy, Public Opinion, Public Policy, the Presidency and the Media*

11. There is a widespread belief that the federal government's budget should be balanced, but the budget deficit increases every year. How can you explain this discrepancy in terms of the tax and spending policies that come from Congress and the President?
12. Discuss the impact of public opinion on policy making. How is the impact affected by presidential leadership and the mass media? Apply your analysis to the issue of tax policy and the Persian Gulf War.

1994 – *Constitutional Underpinnings, Congress and the Presidency, Participation, Civil Rights, Elections and Public Policy*

13. "In a republican government, the legislative authority necessarily predominates. The remedy for this inconveniency is to divide the legislature.... [And] the executive... should be fortified."

James Madison
The Federalist, Number 51

Using specific examples, discuss how Madison's observations apply to the relationship between the legislative branch and modern presidency.

14. Discuss the changes in the participation of women in United States politics since 1970. Using specific examples, analyze the impact of women's participation on both of the following.
 - a. Electoral politics
 - b. Economic and social policy

1995 – *Iron Triangles, Political Parties*

15. The concept of iron triangles, also referred to as sub governments, is used to explain how various interests influence public policy. Applying this concept to agriculture, briefly identify the key players in the iron triangle, analyze how they interact to achieve policy goals, and evaluate the impact of this iron triangle on the democratic process.
16. The contention that American political parties have been in decline since 1960 is challenged by some scholars who suggest instead that parties are resurgent. Which position do you take? Summarize the arguments that support your position and provide evidence to support your analysis.

1996 – *The Presidency, Campaigns and Elections and Political Parties*

17. Discuss whether changes in the roles and responsibilities of the White House staff have led to greater presidential accountability and effectiveness. Support your argument with examples from two presidencies since 1961, making sure to define both presidential “accountability” and “effectiveness.”
18. Have changes in the formal presidential nomination procedures since the mid-1960’s made the process more democratic? In your response, support your argument by describing three specific changes in the procedures and discussing their effects.

1997 – *Budgetary Policy, Federalism*

19. The United States continually faces political crises over the federal budget. Write an essay explaining why the budgetary process is so problematic with respect to each of the following.
 - a. The governmental structures involved in the budgetary process
 - b. The role of politics in the budgetary process

Based on your discussions in (a) and (b), evaluate whether the current budgetary process is likely to lead to continued political crises.

20. Analyze whether federalism, over the last twenty-five years, has changed due to the increase in federal mandates on state and local governments. In your essay, identify one federal mandate and discuss each of the following with respect to the mandate you have identified.
 - a. The objectives of the federal government in enacting the mandate
 - b. The impact on state and local government budget priorities as a result of the mandate
 - c. The potential consequences of the removal of the mandate

Generalizing from your discussion in (a), (b), and (c), assess the impact of increased federal mandates on federalism.

1998 – *Campaigns and Elections and Political Parties, The Supreme Court, Civil Liberties and Federalism, Congress and the President, Voting and Demographics*

21. Since the 1960’s, the process of selecting presidential candidates has been altered by the changing role of presidential primaries and national party conventions. Discuss four effects that have resulted from this change in the presidential selection process.

22. The Supreme Court ruled in *Baron v. Baltimore* (1833) that the Bill of Rights did not apply to the states. Explain how the Court has interpreted the Fourteenth Amendment to apply the Bill of Rights to the states. In your answer, briefly discuss the Court's decision in one of the following cases to support your explanation.

- a. *Gitlow v. New York* (1925)
- b. *Wolf v. Colorado* (1949)
- c. *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963)

23. In the 1970's, in order to limit the power of the President and to reassert congressional authority in the policy making process Congress passed the following.

- a. The War Powers Act
- b. The Budget and Impoundment Control Act

Briefly describe the provisions of each of these two legislative acts. Evaluate the extent to which each act has affected the balance of power between the presidency and the Congress in the 1990's.

24. Elections in the United States are characterized by low voter turnout. Discuss two demographic characteristics associated with nonvoting and three institutional obstacles associated with nonvoting.

1999 – *Campaigns and Elections and the Media, Interest Groups, Congress and the Bureaucracy, Budgetary Policy*

25. In the 1990's presidential election campaigns have become more candidate centered and less focused on issues and party labels. This change has been attributed both to how the media cover presidential campaigns and to how candidates use the media. Identify and explain two ways in which the media have contributed to candidate centered presidential campaigns. Identify and explain two ways in which presidential candidates' use of the media has contributed to candidate centered campaigns. Your answer should not simply be a discussion of presidential primary elections.

26. National interest groups often target national level policy making institutions to achieve their policy objectives.

Select one of the following national interest groups.

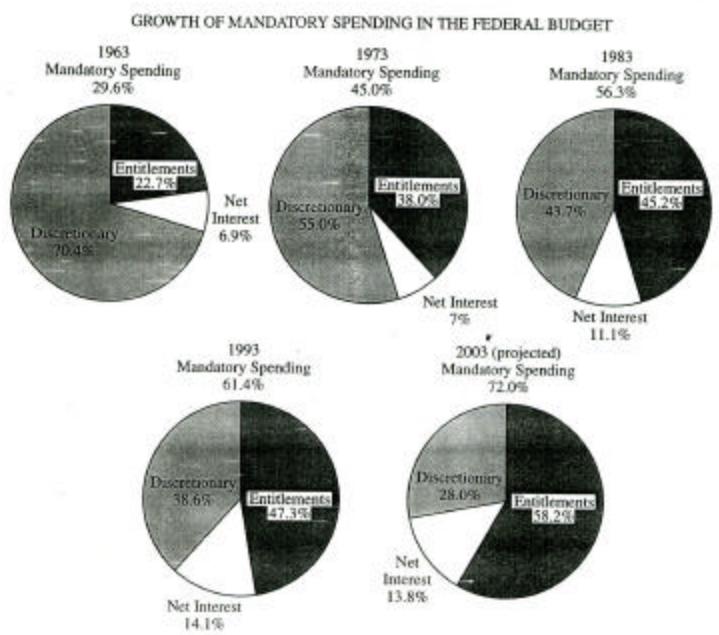
- a. American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
- b. American Medical Association (AMA)
- c. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- d. National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)

For the group you selected do each of the following.

- a. Identify one major national level policy making 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).

27. Is Congress effective in exercising legislative oversight of the federal bureaucracy? Support your answer by doing one of the following.
- a. Explain two specific methods Congress uses to exercise effective oversight of the federal bureaucracy.
 - b. Give two specific explanations for the failure of Congress to exercise effective oversight of the federal bureaucracy.

28. Using the information in the pie charts, identify two budgetary barriers that hinder the creation of new policy initiatives. Explain why each of the barriers you identified persists. Using your knowledge of United States politics, identify one nonbudgetary barrier and explain how this barrier hinders the creation of new policy initiatives.



2000 – *Constitutional Underpinnings, The Supreme Court and Interest Groups, Voting and Elections, Congress and Campaigns*

29. The Constitution was an attempt to address problems of decentralization that were experienced under the Articles of Confederation.

a. List 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. Some have argued that the tensions between decentralized and centralized power continue to exist. Support this argument by explaining how one of the following illustrates the continuing tension.

- Environmental Policy
- Gun Control
- Disability Access

30. 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.

b. Identify two methods that have been used by interest groups to influence the appointment process. Explain how each of these methods has been used to influence that process.

31. The three obstacles listed below have made it difficult for Congress to enact significant campaign finance reform.

a. *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976)

b. Soft money

c. 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

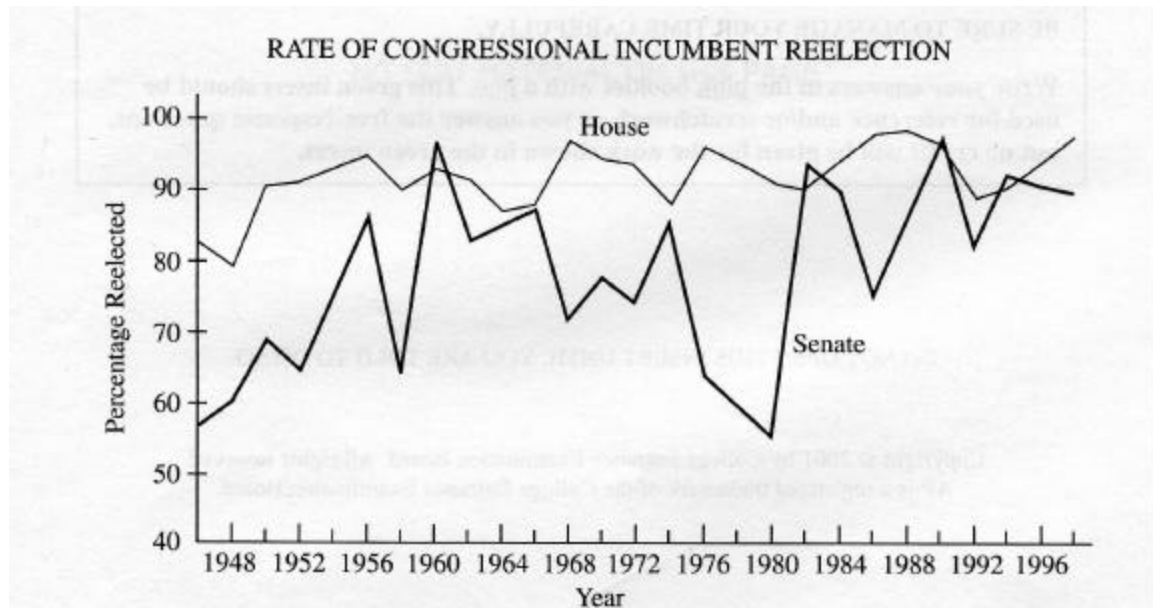


32. The figure displays voting patterns by state in the 1992 and 1996 elections. Using the information in the figure and your knowledge of United States voting behavior, perform the following tasks.
- a. Using the map below, identify one of the numbered regions with strong support for the Democratic presidential candidate and identify and explain two factors that contribute to that support.
 - b. Using the map below, identify one of the numbered regions with strong support for the Republican presidential candidate and identify and explain two factors that contribute to that support.

2001 – *Constitutional Underpinnings, Congress and Elections, Civil Liberties, Public Policy, Political Parties and Interest Groups*

33. The United States Constitution has endured for more than two centuries as the framework of government. However, the meaning of the Constitution has been changed both by formal and informal methods.
- a. Identify two formal methods for adding amendments to the Constitution.
 - b. Describe two informal methods that have been used to change the meaning of the Constitution. Provide one specific example for each informal method you described.
 - c. Explain why informal methods are used more often than the formal amendment process

34. The graph below shows reelection rates for incumbents in the House and Senate. From this information and your knowledge of United States politics, perform the following tasks.
- Identify two patterns displayed in the graph.
 - Identify two factors that contribute to incumbency advantage. Explain how each factor contributes to incumbency advantage.
 - Discuss one consequence of incumbency advantage for the United States political process.



35. Many scholars and observers have argued that the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution has become the single most important act in all of United States politics.
- Identify which provision of the Fourteenth Amendment was applied in one of the following Supreme Court cases. For the case you select, explain the significance of the decision in United States politics.
 - *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954)
 - *Baker v. Carr* (1962)
 - *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978)
 - Identify which provision of the Fourteenth Amendment was applied in one of the following Supreme Court cases. For the case you select, explain the significance of the decision in United States politics.
 - *Mapp v. Ohio* (1961)
 - *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963)
 - *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966)

36. Explain how each of the political factors listed below makes it difficult for the federal government to enact public policy. Provide one example for each explanation.
- Divided government
 - Weak party discipline
 - Growth in the number of interest groups and political action committees (PAC's)

2002 – *Political Parties and the Presidency, Public Policy, Civil Rights, Federalism, Political Parties and Elections, Voting*

37. The concept of divided government in the United States means that one political party can control the executive branch while another controls the legislative branch. This poses problems for the President in making appointments to federal offices.
- Describe two problems that divided government poses for the President in making federal appointments.
 - Identify and explain two ways presidents try to overcome the problems described in (a).
38. Using the information in the graph below and your knowledge of United States politics, complete the following tasks.
- Describe what the figure demonstrates about the distribution of government benefits over time.
 - Identify two politically relevant factors that have affected the changing distribution of government benefits between children and the elderly.
 - Explain how each of the two factors identified in (b) has affected the changing distribution of government benefits.

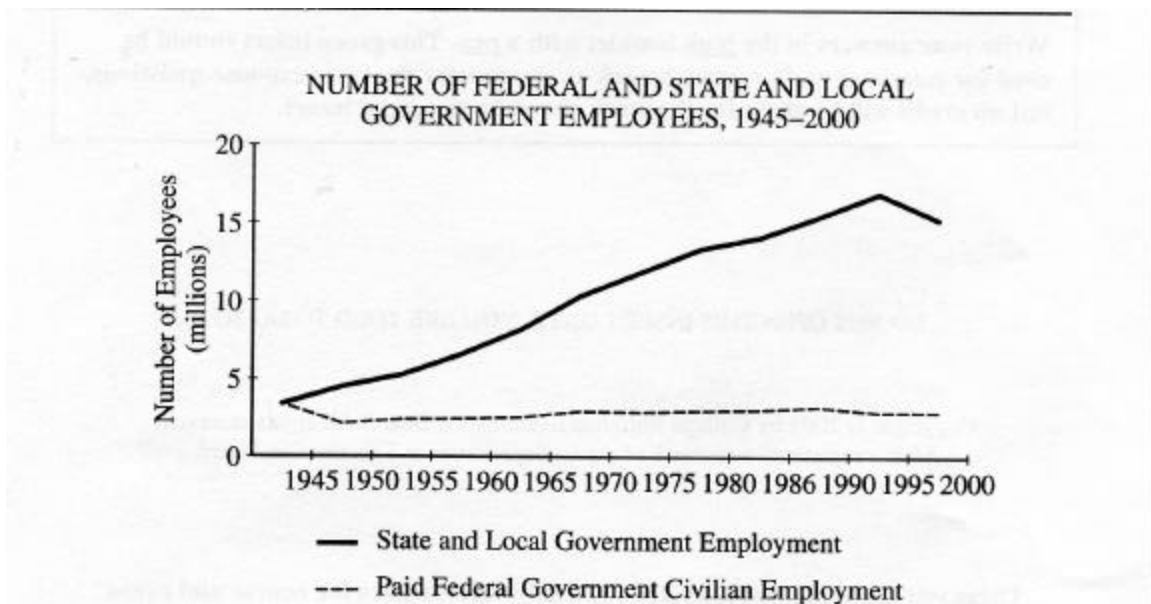


39. Political institutions can present both obstacles and opportunities to racial minority groups in their efforts to gain political influence.
- a. Identify one feature of one of the following and explain how that feature has presented obstacles to racial minority groups in their efforts to achieve political goals.
 - Federalism
 - The United States political party system
 - The United States electoral system
 - b. Identify one feature of one of the following and explain how that feature might present opportunities to racial minority groups in their efforts to achieve political goals.
 - Federalism
 - The United States political party system
 - The United States electoral system
40. In the last half of the twentieth century, voter turnout in federal elections has declined. During the same period, voter turnout has been higher in presidential elections than in midterm elections.
- a. Identify two factors that have contributed to the overall decline in turnout in federal elections and explain how each factor has contributed to the overall decline.
 - b. Identify and explain two reasons why voter turnout has been higher in presidential elections than in midterm elections.

2003 – *Public Opinion and the Presidency, Participation and Voting, Federalism and the Bureaucracy, Political Parties and Congress*

41. Presidential approval ratings fluctuate over the course of each presidential administration.
- a. Identify two factors that decrease presidential approval ratings and explain why each factor has that effect.
 - b. Identify two factors that increase presidential approval ratings and explain why each factor has that effect.
42. Citizens often choose to participate in the political process in ways other than voting.
- a. Identify two forms of participation in the political process other than voting.
 - b. Explain two advantages of each form of participation you identified in (a).

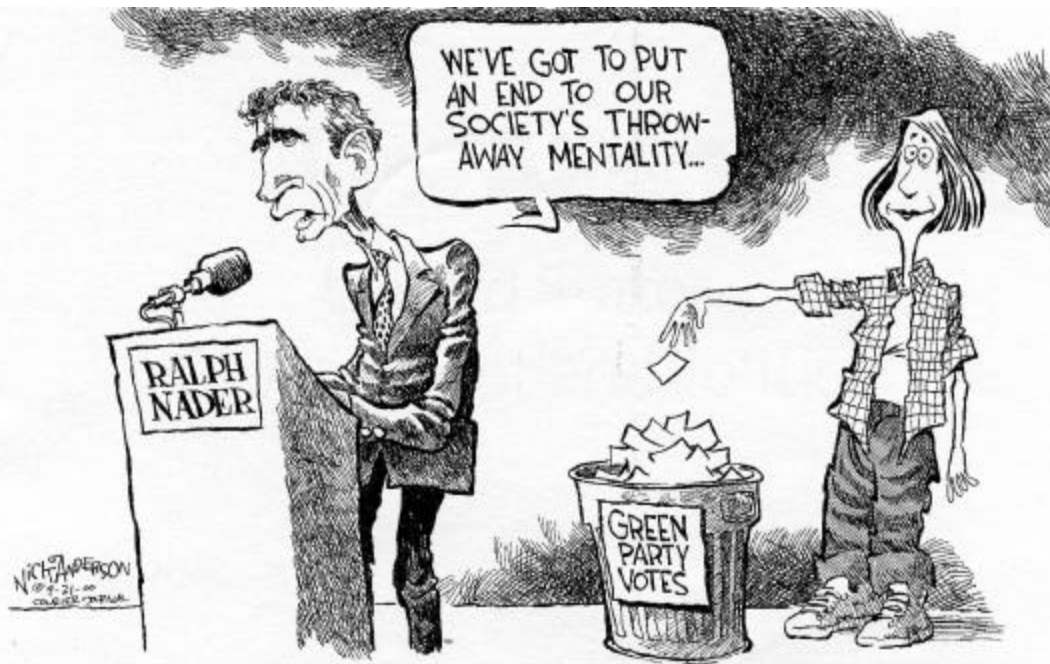
43. Using the data in the graph and your knowledge of United States politics, perform the following task.
- Identify two trends found in the graph.
 - Explain how each of the following contributes to the difference between the federal and the state and local lines in the graph.
 - Block grants
 - Federal mandates



44. Both party leadership and committees in Congress play key roles in the legislative process.
- Define two of the following elements of the congressional committee system and explain how each influences the legislative process.
 - Specialization
 - Reciprocity/logrolling
 - Party representation on committees
 - Identify two ways party leadership in Congress can influence the legislative process, and explain how each way influences the process.

2004 – *Congress and the President and Foreign Policy, Interest Groups, Political Parties, Public Opinion*

45. Presidents are generally thought to have advantages over Congress in conducting foreign policy because of the formal and informal powers of the presidency.
- Identify two formal constitutional powers of the President in making foreign policy.
 - Identify two formal constitutional powers of Congress in making foreign policy.
 - Identify two informal powers of the President that contribute to the President's advantage over Congress in conducting foreign policy.
 - Explain how each of the informal powers identified in (c) contributes to the President's advantage over Congress in conducting foreign policy.
46. Different interest groups will choose different techniques to achieve their objectives based on their resources, characteristics and goals.
- Describe each of the following techniques and explain why an interest group would choose each technique.
 - Litigation
 - Campaign contributions
 - Grassroots lobbying/mass mobilization
 - Select one of the following groups and identify the primary technique it uses from the list in part (a). Explain why the group you selected would employ that technique over the other two techniques.
 - American Medical Association (AMA)
 - Sierra Club
 - National Rifle Association (NRA)
 - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
47. Trust and confidence in government have declined in recent decades.
- Explain how divided government has contributed to the decline in trust and confidence in government. Be sure to include a definition of divided government in your response.
 - Explain how the increased cost of election campaigns has contributed to the decline in trust and confidence in government.
 - Explain two specific consequences of the decline in trust and confidence in government for individual political behavior.



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48. Minor parties have been a common feature of United States politics.
- Describe the point of view expressed about minor parties in the political cartoon.
 - Identify and explain how two rules of the United States electoral system act as obstacles to minor party candidates winning elections.
 - Minor parties make important contributions to the United States political system in spite of the institutional obstacles to their candidates' success. Describe two of these contributions.

2005 – *The Supreme Court and Public Opinion, Federalism, The Supreme Court and Civil Liberties, Congress and Campaigns and Public policy*

49. The judicial branch is designed to be more independent of public opinion than are the legislature or the executive. Yet, the United States Supreme Court rarely deviates too far too long from prevalent public opinion.
- Describe two ways in which the United States is insulated from public opinion.
 - Explain how two factors work to keep the United States Supreme Court from deviating too far from public opinion.

50. The power of the federal government relative to the power of the states has increased since the ratification of the Constitution.
- a. Describe two of the following provisions of the Constitution and explain how each has been used over time to expand federal power.
 - The power to tax and spend
 - The “necessary and proper” or “elastic” clause
 - The commerce clause
 - b. Explain how one of the following has increased the power of the federal government relative to the power of state governments.
 - Americans with Disabilities Act
 - Civil Rights Act of 1964
 - Clean Air Act

51. Initially, the United States Constitution did little to protect citizens from actions of the states. In the 20th century, the Supreme Court interpreted the Constitution to protect the rights of citizens from state governments in a process referred to as incorporation.
- a. Define selective incorporation.
 - b. For two of the following, explain how each has been incorporated. Each of your explanations must be based on a specific and relevant Supreme Court decision.
 - Rights of criminal defendants
 - First Amendment
 - Privacy Rights

52. The United States Congress has debated a variety of campaign finance reforms over the last decade. The proposals debated have included the following:

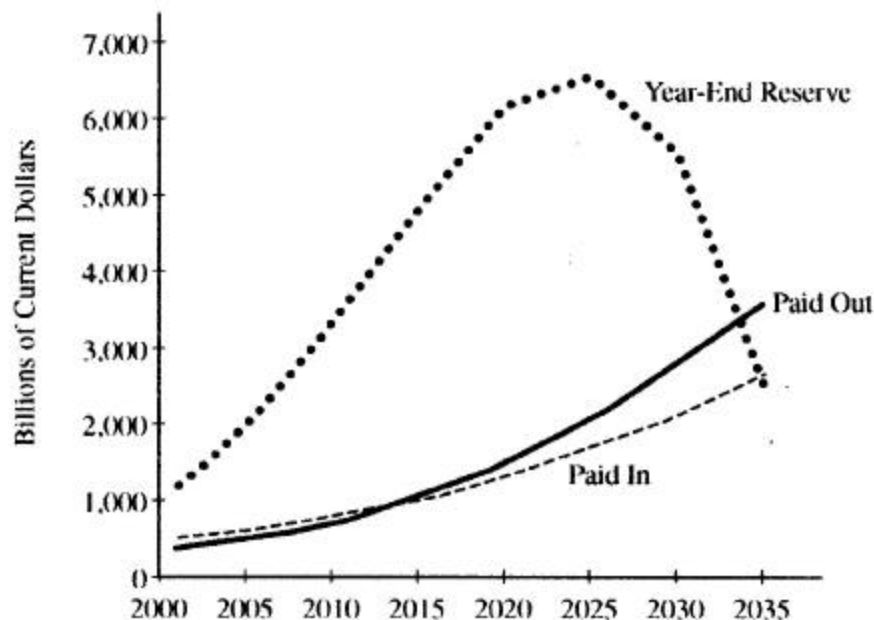
Eliminating soft money
Limiting independent expenditures
Raising limits on individual contributions

- a. Select one of the listed proposals and do all of the following:
 - Define the proposal.
 - Describe an argument that proponents make in favor of the proposal.
 - Describe an argument that opponents make against the proposal.
- b. Select a different listed proposal and do all of the following:
 - Define the proposal.
 - Describe an argument that proponents make in favor of the proposal.
 - Describe an argument that opponents make against the proposal.

2006 – Interest Groups and Political Parties, Voting and Demographics, Public Policy, Congress and the Bureaucracy, Constitutional Underpinnings

53. While interest groups and political parties each play a significant role in the United States political system, they differ in their fundamental goals.
- Identify the fundamental goal of interest groups in the political process.
 - Identify the fundamental goal of major political parties in the political process.
 - Describe two different ways by which interest groups support the fundamental goal of political parties in the political process.
 - For one of the forms of support you described in (c), explain two different ways in which that form of support helps interest groups to achieve their fundamental goal in the political process.

SOCIAL SECURITY RECEIPTS, SPENDING, AND RESERVE ESTIMATES, 2001–2035



54. In recent decades, entitlement programs have constituted a substantial portion of the United States federal budget. Social Security is the largest entitlement program in the United States. From the information in the chart above and your knowledge of United States government and politics, perform the following tasks.
- Define entitlement program.
 - What is the primary source of revenue for the Social Security program?
 - Identify one threat to the future of the Social Security program should the trends depicted in the chart above continue.
 - Describe one demographic trend that threatens the future of the Social Security program AND explain how it is responsible for the threat that you identified in (c).
 - Explain how any one of the trends in the chart above would change if the age of eligibility for Social Security were raised.

55. The United States Congress and the President together have the power to enact federal law. Federal bureaucratic agencies have the responsibility to execute federal law. However, in the carrying out of these laws, federal agencies have policy-making discretion.

- a. Explain two reasons why Congress gives federal agencies policy-making discretion in executing federal laws.
- b. Choose one of the bureaucratic agencies listed below. Identify the policy area over which it exercises policy-making discretion AND give one specific example of how it exercises that discretion.
 - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
 - Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
 - Federal Reserve Board
- c. Describe two ways in which Congress ensures that federal agencies follow legislative intent.

56. The framers of the United States Constitution created a legislative system that is bicameral. However, it is not just bicameral; the framers also established two houses of distinctly different character and authority.

- a. Discuss two reasons why the framers created a bicameral legislature.
- b. Identify one power unique to the House of Representatives and explain why the framers gave the House that power.
- c. Identify one power unique to the Senate and explain why the framers gave the Senate that power.