

Free Response (Type) Questions

(You should be able to answer the following types of questions for the exam.)

Foundations

1. Americans value the concept of “equality of opportunity” but disagree as to what role the government should play. Support and provide evidence of this statement by analyzing a specific equality of opportunity issue since 1990. Your analysis must contain evidence from:
 - a. party policy differences over the issue
 - b. differences in the majority and minority opinions of relevant Supreme Court cases, and public
 - c. opinion about the issue
2. Why did the Founding Fathers create the Electoral College? Explain the arguments for and against the retention of the Electoral College.

The Constitution

3. The Founding Fathers believed that it is in our human nature to pursue our own self-interest. Does the Constitution reflect this belief? Justify your answer with specific references.
4. What are the formal methods for amending the Constitution? What are some informal ways that the meaning of the Constitution can be changed? Give examples.

Federalism

5. 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 discussion of the nature of federalism and use specific examples of its impact on policy-making in the two areas you select, as well as reference to relevant Supreme Court rulings.

6. Explain the evolution of federalism in the United States. Be sure to include a discussion of dual federalism, cooperative federalism, the “devolution revolution”, and fiscal federalism. Provide specific examples to support your answer.
7. Explain how the federal government sometimes attempts to assert a unitary system of government, whereas the states try to assert a confederal system. Provide specific examples of actions each entity takes, and the arguments they use to justify their position as constitutional.

Political parties

8. The contention that American political parties have been in decline since 1960 is challenged by some scholars who suggest instead that parties are resurgent. Evaluate the current status of American political parties by analyzing:
 - a. campaigns and elections
 - b. the role of parties in the legislative agenda
 - c. party influence over public opinion
9. Discuss the influence of third parties by analyzing their performance in national elections in the latter half of the 20th century and their impact on the policy agendas of the two major parties. What challenges do third parties and their candidates face?

Political participation

10. Explain how three of the following voter characteristics have influenced voter decisions in recent elections (shifting trends are important):
 - a. party identification
 - b. socioeconomic status
 - c. race/ethnicity
 - d. issue preferences
11. 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

Interest groups

12. Analyze the effectiveness of the tactics used by interest groups to influence the interpretation of the Bill of Rights by addressing three of the following:
 - a. the National Rifle Association
 - b. the American Civil Liberties Union
 - c. the Christian Coalition
 - d. the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Mass media

13. Americans frequently complain about bias by the media in reporting the policies and activities of the president and Congress, but officeholders also manipulate the media. In fact, modern political success depends upon control of the mass media. Analyze two ways in which the media manipulate the policy agenda and analyze two ways in which political figures use the media to their advantage.

Campaigns and elections

14. Analyze and explain a positive and a negative impact the following have had on the processes and legitimacy of elections:
 - a. polling
 - b. primaries
 - c. television
15. Money is a major issue in elections. Assess the impact of money today by addressing:
 - a. how and why money has become so important to candidates.
 - b. reform efforts to the raising and use of campaign contributions.
 - c. the limitations on these reform efforts.
16. Since the 1960s, the process of selecting presidential candidates has been altered by the changing role of presidential primaries and national party conventions. List as many effects of this change as you can.

The executive branch

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 three presidencies since 1961, making sure to define both presidential “accountability” and “effectiveness.”

18. It is not uncommon for the president to receive credit or blame for many things that may or may not be under the president's control. Does the president have more responsibility than power? Address the question by analyzing the amount of influence the president has and the amount of responsibility attributed to the president in two of the following three areas:
 - a. the economy
 - b. social changes
 - c. foreign affairs
19. During the 20th century, numerous presidents have attempted to reform the bureaucracy to meet the public's contradictory demands for responsiveness, efficiency, participation, and due process.
20. Analyze three factors that make the bureaucracy resistant to change and how they shape the nature of the bureaucracy.
21. Do we have an imperial presidency? Explain.
22. Describe the pathologies of the bureaucracy.
23. Describe the checks on bureaucratic power in the executive branch.

The legislative branch

24. Why do incumbents for the House have a higher reelection rate than those for the Senate? Provide reasons with examples to support your answer.
25. Current analysts charge that there are few quality challengers to oppose incumbent members of Congress. What challenges exist that impede the success of Congressional challengers and what proposals are currently being discussed that would create a political environment conducive to more viable candidates and a more "representative system?"
26. Presidents have failed 20 percent of the time to get Senate confirmation of their nominees to the Supreme Court, a percentage much higher than any other federal position. Assess the relative importance of three factors that contribute to the success or failure of a Supreme Court nomination. Be sure to address two nominations since 1975 and explain why one was successful and why one failed.
27. Analyze the effectiveness of Congress' oversight of the bureaucracy. Discuss its strengths and weaknesses.
28. In terms of the legislative process, why is it hard to pass a law? Be specific.

29. What are the underlying reasons that explain why Congress moves slowly and inefficiently? Give at least four broad reasons to explain why Congress operates this way.
30. How did Congress change the balance of power between Congress and the president in reaction to Nixon's presidency?
31. What options does the Congress have if it does not like a decision of the Supreme Court? Give an example for each one.

The judicial branch

32. Over the past 20 years there has been a trend towards activism on the Supreme Court in a conservative direction. Evaluate this statement by analyzing key decisions of the Supreme Court in any two of the following:
 - a. due process and the rights of the accused
 - b. equal protection and employment discrimination
 - c. federalism and states' rights issues

You must use two specific Supreme Court cases in their evaluation for each of the areas chosen. Be sure to pay attention to the evolution of the Court's thinking in each of these areas.

33. Trace the Supreme Court's application of the Bill of Rights to the states, otherwise known as incorporation, and selective incorporation.
34. In Federalist 78, Hamilton said that "the judiciary... has no influence over either the sword or the purse... it may truly be said to have neither force nor will, but merely judgment... the judiciary is beyond comparison, the weakest of the three departments of power..."

Assess the validity of Hamilton's comments in light of recent Supreme Court decisions. Be sure to include the following:

- a. the concepts of judicial review and original intent regarding the role of the federal judiciary in our government
- b. the various external and internal influences on the judicial decision making process
- c. relevant and recent Supreme Court or Federal judicial decisions as examples to support your position
- d. an assessment of the Supreme Court and its decision making

35. Explain the decision in three Supreme Court cases that have touched on how our legislators are elected, and summarize what the Court intends with these cases.
36. What are the arguments in favor of judicial activism? What are the arguments in favor of judicial restraint? Try to give an example for each point you make.

Public policy

37. Explain the different parts of the federal budget, including their relative sizes.
38. The United States continually faces political crises over the federal budget. Explain how specific institutional obstacles and politics cause the budgetary process to be so problematic. Use two specific examples of institutional obstacles and two specific examples of politics in your explanation.
39. Explain the budgetary challenges facing the United States in the coming decades, and the possible solutions that lawmakers face (and have so far avoided).
40. The concept of iron triangles, also referred to as subgovernments, is used to explain how various interests influence public policy. Identify the key players in the iron triangles, analyze how they interact to achieve policy goals in the following areas:
 - a. agriculture
 - b. defense
 - c. the environment

Conclude your essay by evaluating the impact of the iron triangles on the democratic process.