

AP US Government and Politics Syllabus

RCAS Policies/Procedures

Students will be required to follow all RCAS policies and procedures. To view the RCAS High School Student Handbook, click [handbook](#).

Course Description

This course is an in-depth study of the American political system. The course focuses on the foundations of American democracy, interactions between branches of government, civil liberties and civil rights, American political beliefs and ideologies, and political participation. Students will be required to do substantial reading and writing; active participation in classroom discussion is expected.

Grading

Points shall be awarded for assignments, quizzes, and tests. Points will be awarded and collected cumulatively through the year.

Textbook

Bianco, William T., and David T. Canon. *American Politics and Government Today*. AP ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 2022.

Reading

Federalist No. 10
Brutus No. 1
The Declaration of Independence
The Articles of Confederation
The Constitution of the United States
(including the Bill of Rights and
subsequent Amendments)
Federalist No. 51
Letter from a Birmingham Jail (Martin
Luther King, Jr.)
Federalist No. 70
Federalist No. 78
McCulloch v. Maryland (1819)
United States v. Lopez (1995)
Engel v. Vitale (1962)
Wisconsin V. Yoder (1972)
*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent
Community School District (1969)*
*New York Times Co. v. United States
(1971)*
Schenck v. United States (1919)

Gideon v. Wainwright (1963)
McDonald v. Chicago (2010)
Brown v. Board of Education (1954)
*Citizens United v. Federal Election
Commission (2010)*
Baker v. Carr (1961)
Shaw v. Reno (1993)
Marbury v. Madison (1803)

In addition to the required cases and documents, recent and *student-selected* articles regarding political science concepts and current political issues will be provided to students to supplement the primary text.

Optional Reading

NA

Instructional Resources

NA

Essential Questions

NA

Essential Learning Intentions

Unit 1 Foundations of American Democracy Enduring Understandings

- A balance between governmental power and individual rights has been a hallmark of American political development. (Topics 1.1 and 1.2)
- The Constitution emerged from the debate about the weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation as a blueprint for limited government. (Topics 1.3, 1.4, 1.5)
- The Constitution created a competitive policy-making process to ensure the people's will is represented and that freedom is preserved. (Topic 1.6)
- Federalism reflects the dynamic distribution of power between national and state governments. (Topics 1.7, 1.8, 1.9)

Unit 1 Topics (Learning Objectives)

- **1.1 Ideals of Democracy:** I will be able to explain how democratic ideas are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.
- **1.2 Types of Democracy:** I will be able to explain how models of representative democracy are visible in major institutions, policies, events or debates in the U.S.
- **1.3 Government Power and Individual Rights:** I will be able to explain how Federalist and Anti-Federalist views on central government and democracy are reflected in U.S. foundational documents.
- **1.4 Challenges of the Articles of Confederation:** I will be able to explain the relationship between key provisions of the Articles of Confederation and the debate over granting the federal government greater power formerly reserved to the states.
- **1.5 Ratification of the U.S. Constitution:** I will be able to explain the ongoing impact of political negotiation and compromise at the Constitutional Convention on the development of the constitutional system.
- **1.6 Principles of American Government:** I will be able to explain the constitutional principles of separation of powers and "checks and balances." I will be able to explain the implications of separation of powers and "checks and balances" for the U.S. political system.

- **1.7 Relationship Between the States and Federal Government:** I will be able to explain how societal needs affect the constitutional allocation of power between the national and state governments.
- **1.8 Constitutional Interpretations of Federalism:** I will be able to explain how the appropriate balance of power between national and state governments has been interpreted differently over time.
- **1.9 Federalism in Action:** I will be able to explain how the distribution of powers among three federal branches and between national and state governments impacts policy making.

Unit 2 Interactions Among the Branches of Government Enduring Understandings

- The republican ideal in the U.S. is manifested in the structure and operation of the legislative branch. (Topics 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)
- The presidency has been enhanced beyond its expressed constitutional powers. (Topics 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7)
- 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. (Topics 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11)
- The federal bureaucracy implements federal policies. (Topics 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 2.15)

Unit 2 Topics (Learning Objectives)

- **2.1 Congress: The Senate and the House of Representatives:** I will be able to describe the different structures, powers and functions of each house of Congress.
- **2.2 Structures, Powers and Functions of Congress:** I will be able to explain how the structure, powers and functions of both houses of Congress affect the policy-making process.
- **2.3 Congressional Behavior:** I will be able to explain how congressional behavior is influenced by election processes, partisanship and divided government.
- **2.4 Roles and Powers of the President:** I will be able to explain how the president can implement a policy agenda.
- **2.5 Checks on the Presidency:** I will be able to explain how the president's agenda can create tension and frequent confrontations with Congress.
- **2.6 Expansion of Presidential Power:** I will be able to explain how presidents have interpreted and justified their use of formal and informal powers.
- **2.7 Presidential Communication:** I will be able to explain how communication technology has changed the president's relationship with the national constituency and the other branches.
- **2.8 The Judicial Branch:** I will be able to explain the principle of judicial review and how it checks the power of other institutions and state governments.
- **2.9 Legitimacy of the Judicial Branch:** I will be able to explain how the exercise of judicial review in conjunction with life tenure can lead to debate about the legitimacy of the Supreme Court's power.

- **2.10 The Court in Action:** I will be able to explain how the exercise of judicial review in conjunction with life tenure can lead to debate about the legitimacy of the Supreme Court's power.
- **2.11 Checks on the Judicial Branch:** I will be able to explain how the exercise of judicial review in conjunction with life tenure can lead to debate about the legitimacy of the Supreme Court's power. I will be able to explain how other branches in the government can limit the Supreme Court's power.
- **2.12 The Bureaucracy:** I will be able to explain how the bureaucracy carries out the responsibilities of the federal government.
- **2.13 Discretionary and Rule-Making Authority:** I will be able to explain how the federal bureaucracy uses delegated discretionary authority for rule making and implementation.
- **2.14 Holding the Bureaucracy Accountable:** I will be able to explain how Congress uses its oversight power in its relationship with the executive branch. I will be able to explain how the president ensures that executive branch agencies and departments carry out their responsibilities in concert with the goals of the administration.
- **2.15 Policy and Branches of Government:** I will be able to explain the extent to which governmental branches can hold the bureaucracy accountable given the competing interests of Congress, the president and the federal courts.

Unit 3 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights Enduring Understandings

- 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. (Topics 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6)
- 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. (Topics 3.7, 3.8, 3.9)
- The Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause as well as other constitutional provisions have often been used to support the advancement of equality. (Topic 3.10)
- Public policy promoting civil rights is influenced by citizen-state interactions and constitutional interpretation over time. (Topic 3.11)
- The Court's interpretation of the U.S. Constitution is influenced by the composition of the Court and citizen-state interactions. At times, it has restricted minority rights and, at others, protected them. (Topics 3.12 and 3.13)

Unit 3 Topics (Learning Objectives)

- **3.1 The Bill of Rights:** I will be able to explain how the U.S. Constitution protects civil liberties and rights. I will be able to describe the rights protected in the Bill of Rights.
- **3.2 First Amendment: Freedom of Religion:** I will be able to explain the extent to which the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First and Second Amendments reflects a commitment to individual liberty.

- **3.3 First Amendment: Freedom of Speech:** I will be able to explain the extent to which the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First and Second Amendments reflects a commitment to individual liberty.
- **3.4 First Amendment: Freedom of the Press:** I will be able to explain the extent to which the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First and Second Amendments reflects a commitment to individual liberty.
- **3.5 Second Amendment: Right to Bear Arms:** I will be able to explain the extent to which the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First and Second Amendments reflects a commitment to individual liberty.
- **3.6 Amendments: Balancing Individual Freedom with Public Order and Safety:** I will be able to explain how the Supreme Court has attempted to balance claims of individual freedom with laws and enforcement procedures that promote public order and safety.
- **3.7 Selective Incorporation:** I will be able to explain the implications of the doctrine of selective incorporation.
- **3.8 Amendments: Due Process and the Rights of the Accused:** I will be able to explain the extent to which states are limited by the due process clause from infringing upon individual rights.
- **3.9 Amendments: Due Process and the Right to Privacy:** I will be able to explain the extent to which states are limited by the due process clause from infringing upon individual rights.
- **3.10 Social Movements and Equal Protection:** I will be able to explain how constitutional provisions have supported and motivated social movements.
- **3.11 Government Responses to Social Movements:** I will be able to explain how the government has responded to social movements.
- **3.12 Balancing Minority and Majority Rights:** I will be able to explain how the Court has at times allowed the restriction of the civil rights of minority groups and at other times has protected those rights.
- **3.13 Affirmative Action:** I will be able to explain how the Court has at times allowed the restriction of the civil rights of minority groups and at other times has protected those rights.

Unit 4 American Political Beliefs and Ideology Enduring Understandings

- Citizen beliefs about government are shaped by the intersection of demographics, political culture and dynamic social change. (Topics 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)
- Public opinion is measured through scientific polling, and the results of public opinion polls influence public policies and institutions. (Topics 4.5 and 4.6)
- Widely held political ideologies shape policy debates and choices in American policies. (Topics 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10)

Unit 4 Topics (Learning Objectives)

- **4.1 American Attitudes About Government and Politics:** I will be able to explain the relationship between core beliefs of U.S. citizens and attitudes about the role of government.
- **4.2 Political Socialization:** I will be able to explain how cultural factors influence political attitudes and socialization.
- **4.3 Changes in Ideology:** I will be able to explain how cultural factors influence political attitudes and socialization.
- **4.4 Influence of Political Events on Ideology:** I will be able to explain how cultural factors influence political attitudes and socialization.
- **4.5 Measuring Public Opinion:** Describe the elements of a scientific poll.
- **4.6 Evaluating Public Opinion Data:** I will be able to explain the quality and credibility of claims based on public opinion data.
- **4.7 Ideologies of Political Parties:** I will be able to explain how ideologies of the two major parties shape policy debates.
- **4.8 Ideology and Policy Making:** I will be able to explain how U.S. political culture (e.g., values, attitudes and beliefs) influences the formation, goals and implementation of public policy over time.
- **4.9 Ideology and Economic Policy:** I will be able to describe different political ideologies on the role of government in regulating the marketplace. I will be able to explain how political ideologies vary on the government's role in regulating the marketplace.
- **4.10 Ideology and Social Policy:** I will be able to explain how political ideologies vary on the role of the government in addressing social issues. I will be able to explain how different ideologies impact policy on social issues.

Unit 5 Political Participation Enduring Understandings

- Factors associated with political ideology, efficacy, structural barriers and demographics influence the nature and degree of political participation. (Topics 5.1 and 5.2)
- Political parties, interest groups and social movements provide opportunities for participation and influence how people relate to government and policymakers. (Topics 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7)
- The impact of federal policies on campaigning and electoral rules continues to be contested by both sides of the political spectrum. (Topics 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11)
- The various forms of media provide citizens with political information and influence the ways in which they participate politically. (Topics 5.12 and 5.13)

Unit 5 Topics (Learning Objectives)

- **5.1 Voting Rights and Models of Voting Behavior:** I will be able to describe the voting rights protections in the Constitution and in legislation. I will be able to describe different models of voting behavior.
- **5.2 Voter Turnout:** I will be able to explain the roles that individual choice and state laws play in voter turnout in elections.

- **5.3 Political Parties:** I will be able to describe linkage institutions. I will be able to explain the function and impact of political parties on the electorate and government.
- **5.4 How and Why Political Parties Change and Adapt:** I will be able to explain why and how political parties change and adapt.
- **5.5 Third-Party Politics:** I will be able to explain how structural barriers impact third-party and independent candidate success.
- **5.6 Interest Groups Influencing Policy Making:** I will be able to explain the benefits and potential problems of interest group influence on elections and policy making. I will be able to explain how variation in types and resources of interest groups affects their ability to influence elections and policy making.
- **5.7 Groups Influencing Policy Outcomes:** I will be able to explain how various political actors influence public policy outcomes.
- **5.8 Electing a President:** I will be able to explain how the different processes work in a U.S. presidential election. I will be able to explain how the Electoral College facilitates and/or impedes democracy.
- **5.9 Congressional Elections:** I will be able to explain how the different processes work in U.S. congressional elections.
- **5.10 Modern Campaigns:** I will be able to explain how campaign organizations and strategies affect the election process.
- **5.11 Campaign Finance:** I will be able to explain how the organization, finance and strategies of national political campaigns affect the election process.
- **5.12 The Media:** I will be able to explain the media's role as a linkage institution.
- **5.13 Changing Media:** I will be able to explain how increasingly diverse choices of media and communication outlets influence political institutions and behavior.