The Ultimate AP® US Government and Politics Unit 1 Cheat Sheet

1.1 Ideals of Democracy

Core Democratic Ideals

Ideal	Meaning
Natural rights	Born w/ them; unalienable
Social contract	Swap some liberty → order
Popular sovereignty	Consent of the governed
Limited govt	Govt power never absolute

Limited govt is kept by 4 principles: separation of powers, checks & balances, federalism, republicanism.
Republicanism: people elect reps who govern for them (not direct rule); regular elections keep govt accountable.

Enlightenment Thinkers

Locke (2nd Treatise, 1690): life, liberty, property; people may revolt if the govt breaks the social contract.
Hobbes (Leviathan, 1651): anarchic "state of nature" w/o govt → people trade some liberty for order & safety.
Montesquieu (Spirit of the Laws, 1748): split power among branches so no one person or group can rule alone.
Mayflower Compact (1620): early colonial social contract.

Required Documents

Declaration of Independence (1776; Jefferson w/ Adams & Franklin): natural rights + popular sovereignty (consent of the governed); grievances vs. King George III justify revolt.
Locke → Jefferson: "life, liberty, property" becomes "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."
Constitution (Madison drafted; Convention led by Washington): a social contract → limited govt.
Gettysburg Address (Lincoln, 1863): "all men are created equal" + govt "of the people, by the people, for the people" → equality & popular sovereignty (new for 2026).

⚠ The Declaration isn't law: it justifies independence. The Constitution builds, empowers & limits the govt.

✓ Quote → ideal: "consent of the governed" = popular sovereignty; "unalienable rights" = natural rights.

1.2 Types of Democracy

3 Models of Representative Democracy

Model	Power to...	U.S. example
Participatory	Most citizens	Initiatives
Pluralist	Groups compete	Interest groups
Elite	Educated few	Electoral Coll.

Participatory: broad participation in politics & civil society. E.g., initiatives, referendums, recalls, town halls, 17th Amend. (direct election of senators), protests & petitions.
Pluralist: nongovernmental groups compete for influence. E.g., interest groups, lobbying, amicus briefs, PACs.
Elite: limited participation; wealthy, educated few decide. E.g., Electoral College, senators once picked by state legislatures, appointed federal judges w/ life tenure.
Critiques: participatory → uninformed majorities; pluralist → rich groups dominate; elite → few speak for many.

Models in the Founding Debate

Fed 10 (Madison): large republic filters passions through elected reps → leans toward pluralist & elite models.
Brutus 1: small republic, reps close to & like the people they serve → leans toward **participatory** democracy.
Constitution mixes all 3: House directly elected (participatory); 1st Amend. petition & assembly (pluralist); EC & life-tenure judges (elite). One system, 3 models.

Models Today

All 3 persist: protests & online campaigns (participatory); lobbying (pluralist); big donors' clout (elite).
Ballot initiatives: voters pass laws directly (participatory).
Clues: "grassroots," "referendum" → participatory; "coalition," "lobby" → pluralist; "wealthy," "experts" → elite.

⚠ U.S. = representative democracy (republic), not direct democracy. The models describe who influences reps.

✓ MCQ: find WHO acts. Many citizens → participatory; organized groups → pluralist; a wealthy few → elite.

1.3 Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists

The Ratification Debate

	Federalists	Anti-Feds
Leaders	Madison/Hamilton	Brutus, P. Henry
Central govt	Strong	Weak; pro-state
Republic	Large	Small
Bill of Rights	Unneeded	Demanded
Key doc	Fed 10, Fed 51	Brutus 1
Biggest fear	Faction, mobs	Tyranny, elites

The Federalist Papers: 85 essays by Madison, Hamilton & Jay ("Publius") urging NY to ratify. **Brutus** = likely Robert Yates, a New York Anti-Federalist judge & delegate.

Federalist No. 10 (Madison)

Faction: group united by interest vs. others' rights or the public good. Causes "sown in the nature of man" → can't remove w/o killing liberty, a cure worse than the disease.
Control the effects: large republic → many factions check each other; elected reps "refine and enlarge" public views.
Majority faction = biggest threat; in a large republic, a majority sharing 1 interest is much harder to form & act.

Brutus No. 1

Large republic fails: reps too far from people to know their views → govt drifts to elites & away from the people.
N&P + Supremacy Clauses → near-unlimited national power; states get swallowed. Broad taxing power & a peacetime standing army = threats to individual liberty & the states.
Too few reps: 65 in the 1st House can't represent millions of people → only the rich & well-known elite win seats.

⚠ Fed 10 controls the EFFECTS of faction; it never bans factions. "Eliminate factions" = wrong answer.

✓ Argument essay: Fed 10 backs a large republic/pluralism; Brutus 1 backs state power & small units.

⚠ Anti-Feds weren't anti-govt: they wanted power close to the people (states) + a Bill of Rights to protect liberty.

1.4 Articles of Confederation

Design (1781–1789)

Confederation: "firm league of friendship"; states sovereign; weak unicameral Congress, 1 vote per state.
Laws needed 9 of 13 states; **amendments** needed all 13 (unanimity) → almost impossible to fix its flaws.
Why weak? Fear of a King George–style tyrant after the Revolution → states kept nearly all of the power.
Success: Northwest Ordinance (1787) set a path to statehood; banned slavery in NW Territory.

Key Weaknesses → Constitution Fix

Weakness	Fix
No central military	Congress raises army
No executive to enforce	Art. II president
No power to tax	Art. I taxing power
No national courts	Art. III courts
Can't regulate commerce	Commerce Clause
No sole power to coin $	Only Congress coins $

Shays' Rebellion (1786–87)

Shays' Rebellion: indebted MA farmers (many Revolutionary War vets) revolt vs. foreclosures & taxes; Congress has no army to respond, so MA hires a private militia.
Effect: elites alarmed → push for the Constitutional Convention (1787) and a stronger central govt.
Annapolis Convention (1786): only 5 states came → Hamilton & Madison call for the Philadelphia meeting.
Interstate chaos: states print own money, tax each other's goods, ignore Congress's requests for funds.
Core tension: too little central power (Articles) vs. too much (Anti-Fed fear) → Constitution's federalism = the balance.

⚠ The Convention's official goal was to REVISE the Articles; delegates wrote a new Constitution instead.

✓ Link weakness → fix: no tax power → Art. I, Sec. 8 taxing power; no executive → Art. II; no courts → Art. III.

1.5 Ratification & Compromises

Convention Compromises

Compromise	Result
Great (Connecticut)	Bicameral Congress
Electoral College	Electors pick president
Three-Fifths	3/5 of enslaved counted
Slave trade	No ban until 1808
Bill of Rights	Promised to Anti-Feds

Great Compromise: VA Plan (by population) + NJ Plan (equal) → House by population, Senate 2 per state.
Three-Fifths: 3/5 of enslaved pop. counted for House seats & direct taxes → ↑ Southern power in the House.
Electoral College: electors, not popular vote or Congress, choose the president (a compromise between the two).

Ratification (Art. VII)

9 of 13 state conventions needed; NH 9th (1788). VA & NY won only after a Bill of Rights was promised.
Bill of Rights (1791): 1st 10 amendments; 10th Amend. reserves undelegated powers to the states.

Article V: Amending

Propose: 2/3 of both houses OR a national convention called by 2/3 of state legislatures (never used).
Ratify: 3/4 of states. All 27 amendments were proposed by Congress; the 21st was ratified by conventions.

Unresolved Debates Today

Surveillance after 9/11 (USA PATRIOT Act, 2001): national security vs. individual privacy & civil liberties.
Public education: federal role (No Child Left Behind, 2002; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015) vs. state & local control.

⚠ Amending = 2 steps: propose ≠ ratify. The president has no formal role in Article V (no signature or veto).

✓ FRQ: show WHO gained from each deal: small vs. large states, North vs. South (slavery & trade).

1.6 Separation of Powers & Checks

Separation of Powers

Separation of powers: Art. I Congress makes laws; Art. II president enforces; Art. III courts interpret.

Check	Example
Pres. → Congress	Veto bills
Congress → Pres.	Override veto (2/3)
Senate → Pres.	Confirm, ratify treaties
Congress → courts	Set jurisdiction, budget
Pres. → courts	Nominate judges
Courts → both	Judicial review

Federalist No. 51 (Madison)

"Ambition must be made to counteract ambition": each branch gets the means & motive to resist the others.
"If men were angels...": govt must first control the governed AND then be obliged to control itself (Madison).
Double security: power split between nat'l & state govts AND then among distinct, separate branches of govt.
Legislature dominates in a republic → split it into 2 houses (bicameralism) w/ different terms & elections.

Effects on the System

Multiple access points: groups lobby Congress, sue in court, or work w/ agencies & state or local govts.
More checks: president pardons; Senate tries impeachments; Congress can propose amendments to undo rulings; Senate ratifies treaties (2/3 vote).
Gridlock: divided govt + checks → slow, compromise-driven policy; hard to pass major laws (shutdowns).
Impeachment: House charges (simple majority) → Senate trial; removal needs 2/3. A. Johnson, Clinton, Trump (×2) impeached, none removed; Nixon resigned first.

⚠ Impeach ≠ remove. The House impeaches (charges); only a 2/3 Senate conviction removes from office.

⚠ Judicial review isn't in the text of the Constitution: it comes from Marbury v. Madison (1803).

1.7 & 1.9 Federalism: Powers & Money

Dividing Power

Federalism: power shared by national & state govts. **Fed 39**: Constitution is partly national, partly federal → limits concentrated power, adds access points.
Dual ("layer cake"): separate spheres, pre-1930s.
Cooperative ("marble cake"): shared programs & funding, New Deal on (e.g., Medicaid, highways).

Power	Examples
Exclusive (enumerated)	Coin $, declare war
Implied (N&P Clause)	Create national bank
Reserved (10th Amend.)	Schools, licenses
Concurrent	Tax, make laws, roads

Fiscal Federalism

Funding	Strings attached
Revenue sharing	Almost none; rarest
Block grant	Few; states prefer
Categorical grant	Many; most common
Mandate	Required; may be unfunded

Conditions of aid: 1984 Nat'l Minimum Drinking Age Act → states lose highway $ unless age is 21.
Devolution (1980s on, Reagan): power & block grants shifted back to states (e.g., 1996 welfare reform).

Federalism in Action (1.9)

Access points: blocked in DC → try the states (e.g., CO & WA legalize recreational marijuana, 2012, despite federal law).
Concurrent powers constrain national policy: states run elections, schools & most law enforcement.
Disasters (Katrina, Sandy): shared roles → shared blame.

⚠ Mandate ≠ grant. A mandate is a requirement; an unfunded one sends no money (e.g., ADA).

✓ Grant preference: feds → categorical (more control); states → block (flexibility, fewer federal strings).

1.8 Interpreting Federalism (SCOTUS)

Key Clauses

Clause	Effect
Commerce (Art. I)	Regulate interstate trade
Necessary & Proper	Implied powers (elastic)
Supremacy (Art. VI)	Fed law beats state law
10th Amendment	Reserved powers → states
14th (DP & EP)	Rights enforced on states

McCulloch v. Maryland (1819)

Facts: MD taxed the 2nd Bank of the U.S.; Baltimore branch cashier James McCulloch refused to pay the tax.
Holding (7-0, Marshall): N&P Clause → Congress can create a bank (implied power); Supremacy Clause → states can't tax it. "The power to tax involves the power to destroy." → ↑ national power. Broad reading of implied powers.

U.S. v. Lopez (1995)

Facts: Gun-Free School Zones Act (1990) used the Commerce Clause; Lopez brought a gun to a TX high school.
Holding (5-4, Rehnquist): gun possession near a school isn't economic activity & doesn't substantially affect interstate commerce → beyond Commerce Clause; law struck down.
Impact: 1st limit on the Commerce Clause since 1937 → ↑ state power; part of a new federalism era.
Supremacy limits: valid fed law preempts state law, but feds can't order state officials to enforce it (Printz v. U.S., 1997).

Related Cases (Not Required)

Gibbons v. Ogden (1824): broad reading of "commerce" (NY steamboat monopoly). **U.S. v. Morrison** (2000): VAWA civil suit beyond Commerce Clause. **Gonzales v. Raich** (2005): Congress can ban homegrown medical marijuana.

⚠ McCulloch = N&P + Supremacy. Lopez = Commerce Clause. Don't swap them on the SCOTUS FRQ.

✓ SCOTUS FRQ: name the shared clause, then show how different facts → different holding (Lopez vs. Raich).