The Simple AP® US Government and Politics Unit 2 Cheat Sheet

2.1–2.2 Congress: Structure & Powers

Bicameral Design (Art. I)

	House	Senate
Size	435 (by pop.)	100 (2/state)
Term	2 yrs	6 yrs
Min. age	25	30
Unique	Revenue, impeach	Confirm, treaties
Style	Majority rules	Filibuster

Why 2 chambers? Great Compromise: House = by population; Senate = equal states.

Reapportionment: House seats reassigned after each census. **Redistricting**: states redraw lines.

Enumerated & Implied Powers

Enumerated powers (Art. I, Sec. 8): tax, borrow, regulate commerce, declare war, coin money.

Implied powers: from the Necessary & Proper (elastic) clause (e.g., a national bank).

Senate only: confirm appointments, ratify treaties (2/3), hold impeachment trials.

House only: start tax bills, impeach (majority vote).

Leadership

Speaker of the House: sets agenda. **Majority leader**: runs Senate floor. **Whips**: round up votes.

Committee chairs: from the majority party; decide which bills move or die in committee.

Incumbency advantage: name recognition + money → most members reelected.

⚠ The VP only votes in the Senate to break a tie.

2.2–2.3 Lawmaking & Congressional Behavior

How a Bill Moves

Bill path: introduce → **committee** (most die) → floor vote → other chamber → **conference cmte** → president signs or vetoes (or pocket veto).

Standing cmte = permanent. **Conference** cmte = merges House + Senate versions.

Filibuster: endless Senate debate to block a bill. **Cloture** (60 votes) ends it → need both parties.

Budget Terms

Mandatory spending (Social Security, Medicare) is set by law and is the biggest share.

Discretionary spending is voted on yearly.

Pork barrel: money for home district. **Logrolling**: "vote for mine, I'll vote for yours."

Representation & Districts

Role	Votes based on
Delegate	Constituents' wishes
Trustee	Own judgment
Politico	Mix, depends on issue

Gerrymandering: drawing districts to help a party or group. **Baker v. Carr** (1962): courts can hear redistricting cases → "one person, one vote." **Shaw v. Reno** (1993): districts drawn mainly by race violate equal protection (14th).

Divided government + **polarization** → **gridlock**.

✓ Baker = equal-size districts (one person, one vote). Shaw = race-based districts.

2.4 Roles & Powers of the President

Formal Powers (Art. II)

Power	What it does	Check
Veto	Reject bill	2/3 override
Pocket veto	Let bill die	Congress adj.
Commander	Leads military	War Powers
Treaties	Negotiate	2/3 Senate
Appoint	Judges, cabinet	Senate OK
Pardons	Forgive crimes	None

Formal = written in the Constitution. **Informal** = grew through practice over time.

Informal Powers

Executive order: directive to agencies; no Congress vote. Next president can undo it.

Executive agreement: deal w/ another country, no Senate vote. **Signing statement**: how the president will interpret & enforce a law.

Executive privilege: keep advice private, but it's limited (*U.S. v. Nixon*, 1974, Watergate tapes).

Roles

Roles: chief executive, chief diplomat, commander in chief, chief legislator, party leader.

Cabinet & Staff

Cabinet: heads of 15 departments; Senate confirms. **White House staff**: no confirmation.

⚠ Executive orders aren't laws. They only direct the executive branch & can be undone.

✓ FRQ: name the power, then explain how another branch can check or limit it.

2.5–2.7 Checks, Expansion & Communication

Checks on the Presidency

Congress: override veto (2/3), reject nominees, control funding, hold hearings, impeach + remove.

Courts: strike down actions. **22nd Am.**: 2-term limit. **War Powers Resolution** (1973): 48-hr notice; 60-day limit on troops w/o approval.

Senate: can reject treaties (2/3 needed to ratify) and the president's nominees for office.

Expansion of Power

Federalist 70 (Hamilton): one energetic executive → fast, decisive, accountable decisions.

Why power grew: wars, crises, bigger government, media focus on the president.

Tool	Why it expands power
Executive orders	Act w/o Congress
Signing statements	Shape how laws work
Exec. agreements	Skip the Senate

Unitary executive: idea that the president fully controls the whole executive branch.

Communication

Bully pulpit (T. Roosevelt): use the spotlight to rally the public → pressure Congress.

Social media + TV: speak straight to voters. More popular → more leverage w/ Congress.

Going public: speeches, rallies + State of the Union set the national media agenda.

⚠ Impeached (House charges) ≠ removed (needs a 2/3 Senate vote to convict).

2.8–2.10 The Judicial Branch

Foundations (Art. III)

Article III: creates the Supreme Court; Congress creates lower courts; judges serve for life.

Federalist 78 (Hamilton): courts = "least dangerous" branch. Life terms → **independence**.

Marbury v. Madison (1803): creates **judicial review** (strike down unconstitutional laws).

Court Structure

Level	Jurisdiction	Notes
District	Original	Trials
Appeals	Appellate	Review
Supreme	Mostly appeal	Final say

Original = hears the case first (trial). **Appellate** = reviews a lower court's decision.

Most cases end at the appeals level; SCOTUS hears only ~60 a year of ~4,000+.

How SCOTUS Decides

Writ of certiorari: Court agrees to hear a case.

Rule of four: 4 justices must agree.

Opinion	Meaning
Majority	The ruling; sets precedent
Concurring	Agrees, diff. reason
Dissenting	Disagrees

Stare decisis: follow **precedent** (past rulings).

Judicial review + precedent let the Court shape policy, but only in real cases brought to it.

✓ Court legitimacy → Fed. 78 + life terms.

2.11 Checks on the Judicial Branch

Activism vs. Restraint

	Activism	Restraint
View	Courts act	Defer
Precedent	May overturn	Follow
Critique	Unelected	Ignores rights

Activism and **restraint** describe a ruling's approach, not liberal vs. conservative.

Originalism: framers' meaning. **Living Constitution**: adapt it to today's world.

How Other Branches Check Courts

Appointments: president picks, Senate confirms → shapes the Court for decades.

Congress: pass new laws, propose **amendments**, change # of justices, impeach judges.

Executive: enforces rulings. The Court has no army ("no sword") to enforce them.

Public opinion: the Court depends on public trust; low trust → calls for reform (term limits).

New justices can reverse precedent (*Dobbs* v. Jackson, 2022, overturned *Roe* v. Wade).

Debates

Life tenure: independence vs. accountability.

Term limits need an amendment or law.

Court-packing: Congress could change the # of justices; FDR's 1937 plan to add up to 6 failed.

⚠ A constitutional ruling can only be undone by an amendment or a later Court.

✓ Court power essay: Fed. 78 (independence) vs. checks by the other 2 branches (Fed. 51).

2.12–2.14 The Bureaucracy

Structure

Type	Example	Note
Cabinet dept.	Defense	15 total
Indep. agency	NASA	Not cabinet
Regulatory	FCC, SEC	Set rules
Gov. corp.	USPS	Business

Bureaucracy: unelected agencies that carry out laws. **Merit system** replaced **patronage** (spoils) via the Pendleton Act (1883) for most jobs.

Discretionary & Rule-Making Power

Discretionary authority: agencies decide how to carry out laws. **Rule-making**: write regulations.

Example: EPA sets pollution limits under the Clean Air Act (an example of rule-making power).

Iron triangle: agency + congressional committee + interest group help each other.

Issue network: looser, shifting web of experts, interest groups, and staff on 1 issue.

Holding It Accountable

Congress: oversight hearings, funding. **President**: appoints + fires agency heads.

Courts: rule an agency went beyond the law.

Tension: broad laws → more agency power; expertise vs. democratic accountability.

⚠ Agencies write regulations, not laws.

✓ FRQ: name an agency, then explain how Congress or the president checks it.

2.15 Policy, Branches & Exam Strategy

How Branches Shape Policy

Policy: Congress writes → president enforces → agencies carry out → courts review.

Linkage institutions (parties, groups, media, elections) push all 3 branches on policy.

Example: ACA passed (2010) → HHS wrote rules → Court upheld it (NFIB v. Sebelius, 2012).

Exam Format

FRQ type	Unit 2 angle
Concept app.	Name power + check
Quant. analysis	Read data, explain
SCOTUS comp.	Baker, Shaw, Marbury
Argument essay	Fed. 70, 78

MCQ: 55 Qs, 80 min (50%). **FRQ**: 4 Qs, 100 min (50%). Each FRQ = 12.5% of the score.

Quant. FRQ: describe the trend → draw a conclusion → explain with a concept.

High-Yield Comparisons

Know the pairs: veto vs. pocket veto, impeach vs. remove, delegate vs. trustee, activism vs. restraint.

Required Docs & Cases (Unit 2)

Fed. 70: strong executive. **Fed. 78**: independent courts. **Marbury**, **Baker**, **Shaw**.

⚠ "Explain" means how or why. One-word or list-only answers earn no points at all.

✓ Argument essay: claim + 2 evidence (1 required doc) + reasoning + rebuttal.