The Ultimate 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, staggered
Age / citizen	25 / 7 yrs	30 / 9 yrs
Unique power	Revenue bills, impeach	Confirm, ratify, try
Rules	Rules Cmte, limits	Filibuster, holds
Style	Majority rules	Individual power

Why 2 chambers? Great Compromise: House = popular, responsive; Senate = stable, equal states. Slows lawmaking on purpose; senators elected directly since 1913.

Reapportionment: seats reassigned after census (every 10 yrs). **Redistricting**: state lines redrawn.

Enumerated & Implied Powers

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

Implied: via **Necessary & Proper (elastic) clause** → e.g., national bank (*McCulloch* v. Maryland, Unit 1).

Senate only: confirm appointments (simple majority), ratify treaties (2/3), try impeachments (2/3 to remove).

House only: start revenue bills, impeach (simple majority), choose president if no Electoral College majority.

Leadership

Speaker of the House: most powerful member; sets agenda, assigns bills. **Majority leader** (Senate): schedules floor. **Whips**: count votes + keep members in line.

Incumbency advantage: name recognition, casework, franking, fundraising → ~90%+ House reelection.

⚠ The VP is president of the Senate but only votes to break ties. The Senate majority leader, not the VP, runs the agenda; president pro tem presides if the VP is absent.

2.2–2.3 Lawmaking & Congressional Behavior

How a Bill Moves

Introduce → **committee** (most bills die) → **floor** → other chamber → **conference cmte** → both pass same text → president signs/vetoes in 10 days (or pocket veto).
Committees: **standing** (permanent), **joint** (both chambers), **conference** (resolve versions), **select** (temporary).
House Rules Cmte: sets debate limits + amendments.
Discharge petition (218 signatures) forces bill out of committee onto the floor; rarely succeeds.
Filibuster: unlimited Senate debate to stall. **Cloture**: 60 votes to end it. **Hold**: senator delays a bill/nominee. **Unanimous consent**: set debate terms w/o objection.

Budget Terms

Mandatory spending: set by law (Social Security, Medicare, interest) — largest share. **Discretionary**: voted yearly via appropriations (defense, education, NASA).
Pork barrel: spending for home district. **Earmark**: funds set aside for specific project. **Logrolling**: vote trading.

Representation & Districts

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

Gerrymandering: drawing lines for party advantage (**partisan**) or race (**racial**). **Baker v. Carr** (1962): redistricting is justiciable → "one person, one vote." **Shaw v. Reno** (1993): districts drawn mainly by race must pass strict scrutiny (14th Am. equal protection). Both are required cases.
Divided government (pres. + Congress split) + **polarization** → **gridlock**, fewer laws passed, confirmation fights.
Lame duck: outgoing official w/ less clout. **Trust in Congress** low even as voters reelect own member.

✓ SCOTUS comparison FRQ: Baker = equal-size districts; Shaw = race-based districts. Name the clause (14th Am.).

2.4 Roles & Powers of the President

Formal Powers (Art. II)

Power	What it does	Check
Veto	Reject bill	2/3 override
Pocket veto	Ignore bill 10 days	Only if Congress adj.
Commander in chief	Directs military	War Powers Res.
Treaties	Negotiates	2/3 Senate
Appointments	Judges, cabinet	Senate confirms
Pardons	Forgive federal crimes	None (not impeach.)

Formal = written in Constitution. **Informal** = developed by practice; not explicit in Art. II (e.g., executive orders).

Informal Powers

Executive order: directive to fed agencies; force of law, no Congress vote. Can be undone by next president or courts.
Executive agreement: deal w/ foreign leader, no Senate ratification. **Signing statement**: pres. says how he'll interpret/enforce a law (no line-item veto).
Executive privilege: keep advice confidential — limited by *U.S. v. Nixon* (1974). **Bargaining + persuasion**: lobby Congress for agenda ("power to persuade").

Roles

Chief executive, **chief diplomat**, **commander in chief**, **chief legislator** (agenda, veto threat), **party leader**, **head of state**.

Cabinet & Staff

Cabinet: heads of 15 exec. depts.; confirmed by Senate.
White House staff + **EOP** (e.g., Chief of Staff, OMB): no confirmation, loyal to pres. & closest advisers.

⚠ Executive orders ≠ laws passed by Congress. They direct the executive branch only and can't override statutes.

✓ Concept app FRQ: identify the power (formal/informal) → explain how another branch can check it.

2.5–2.7 Checks, Expansion & Communication

Checks on the Presidency

Congress: override veto (2/3), reject nominees, refuse funding (power of the purse), oversight hearings & subpoenas, impeach (House) + remove (Senate 2/3).
Courts: rule actions unconstitutional (judicial review). **22nd Amendment**: 2-term limit. **War Powers Resolution** (1973): notify Congress in 48 hrs; 60-day limit w/o approval.
Senate: reject treaties (2/3 needed) + nominees.

Expansion of Power

Federalist 70 (Hamilton): **energetic, single executive** → decisive, accountable. Used to justify broad power.
Why power grew: wars + crises (Lincoln, FDR, post-9/11), bigger bureaucracy, executive orders, media focus on the president; Congress often delegates power.

Tool	Why it expands power
Executive orders	Act w/o Congress
Signing statements	Reshape law in practice
Exec. agreements	Skip Senate ratification
Military action	Troops w/o declared war

Unitary executive: view that president fully controls exec. branch. Debate: efficiency vs. checks & balances.

Communication

Bully pulpit (T. Roosevelt): use visibility to rally public → pressure Congress. **State of the Union**: formal agenda-setting address to Congress & the nation each year.
Modern tech (TV, social media): speak directly to voters, bypass press filter. Popularity ↑ → more leverage w/ Congress; low approval → weaker agenda.
Going public: speeches, rallies, social posts → shape media agenda. Risk: overexposure, gaffes, polarizing base vs. opponents, less room to bargain w/ Congress.

⚠ Impeachment = House charges (majority). Removal needs a Senate 2/3 conviction. Impeached ≠ removed.

2.8–2.10 The Judicial Branch

Foundations (Art. III)

Article III: creates Supreme Court; Congress creates lower courts. Judges serve during "good behavior" (life). Salary can't be cut while in office, protecting independence.
Federalist 78 (Hamilton): judiciary = "least dangerous" branch (no sword, no purse, only judgment). Life terms → **independence**. Defends judicial review.
Marbury v. Madison (1803): establishes **judicial review** — courts can strike down laws/actions that violate Constitution.

Court Structure

Level	Jurisdiction	Notes
District (94)	Original	Trials, juries
Appeals (13)	Appellate	Panels review
Supreme (9)	Mostly appellate	Final say

Original jurisdiction: first to hear case. **Appellate**: reviews lower court. SCOTUS original only for states + ambassadors.
Lower courts: most federal cases end at appeals level; circuit rulings bind only that circuit (splits → SCOTUS).

How SCOTUS Decides

Writ of certiorari: order to review a case. **Rule of four**: 4 justices must agree. Hears ~60 of ~4,000+ petitions/yr.

Opinion	Meaning
Majority	Ruling + reasoning; precedent
Concurring	Agrees, diff. reasons
Dissenting	Disagrees; may guide future

Stare decisis: follow **precedent** → stability. Overturning precedent is rare but happens (*Brown* overturned *Plessy*).
Judicial review + precedent → Court shapes policy (e.g., civil rights). Limits: only decides real cases brought to it; can't self-start a case or enforce its own rulings.

✓ Legitimacy question? Cite Fed. 78 + life tenure → independence from public pressure.

2.11 Checks on the Judicial Branch

Activism vs. Restraint

	Activism	Restraint
View	Courts fix wrongs	Defer to branches
Precedent	Will overturn	Follow closely
Critique	Unelected policy	Ignores rights

Judicial activism and **restraint** describe a ruling's approach, not its ideology — either can be liberal or conservative.
Originalism: read Constitution as framers meant. **Living Constitution**: adapt meaning to modern conditions.

How Other Branches Check Courts

Appointments: president nominates, Senate confirms → shapes Court for decades. Nomination fights reflect polarization (e.g., 2016 Garland, 2018 Kavanaugh).
Congress: pass new law to respond to ruling, propose **amendments** (overturn ruling), change jurisdiction, set # of justices, impeach judges (rare; 15 impeached, 8 removed).
Executive: enforcement — Court has no army; compliance depends on president + states ("no sword").
Public opinion: Court relies on legitimacy; low trust → pressure for term limits, court expansion.
Ideology shifts: new appointees can reverse precedent (e.g., *Dobbs*, 2022, overturned *Roe*). This shows the appointment power's long reach (3 Trump appointees, 2017–2020).

Debates

Life tenure: protects independence vs. reduces accountability. **Term limit** proposals (18 yrs) need an amendment or a new law (debated by scholars).
Court-packing: Congress can change # of justices (FDR tried 1937, failed). Seen as threat to independence.

⚠ Congress can't overturn a constitutional ruling by simple law. It needs an amendment (or a future Court reversal).

✓ Argument essay on Court power: Fed. 78 (independence) vs. Fed. 51 (checks). Use a case as evidence.

2.12–2.14 The Bureaucracy

Structure

Type	Example	Note
Cabinet dept.	Defense, State	15 depts.
Indep. agency	NASA, CIA	Outside cabinet
Indep. regulatory	FCC, SEC	Rules for industry
Gov. corporation	USPS, Amtrak	Business-like

Bureaucracy: unelected agencies that carry out (implement) laws. **Merit system** (Pendleton Act, 1883) replaced **patronage** (spoils) after Garfield's assassination.

Discretionary & Rule-Making Power

Discretionary authority: agencies decide *how* to carry out vague laws. **Rule-making**: write regulations w/ force of law (public comment period, Federal Register).
Examples: EPA sets emission limits (Clean Air Act); FCC regulates broadcast indecency; DHS manages border security; FDA approves drugs; SEC polices stocks.
Iron triangle: agency + congressional committee + interest group → stable mutual benefit. **Issue network**: looser web of experts, groups, staff, media around 1 policy issue.

Holding It Accountable

Congress: **oversight hearings**, power of the purse, rewrite laws, confirm agency heads. **President**: appoint/fire heads, executive orders, budget proposals via OMB.
Courts: rule agency actions exceed law. **Political patronage** still covers top posts; **civil service** covers most jobs.
Bureaucratic discretion grows when Congress writes broad laws; agency expertise vs. democratic accountability is the key tension (who decides: experts or elected officials?).

⚠ Agencies write regulations under authority Congress delegates; they cannot pass laws. Congress can override a rule by new law or the Congressional Review Act.

✓ FRQ: explain how Congress (purse, hearings) or the president (appoint, E.O.) checks a named agency.

2.15 Policy, Branches & Exam Strategy

How Branches Shape Policy

Policy results from branch interaction: Congress writes law → president signs/enforces → bureaucracy implements → courts review; each branch can block another.
Linkage institutions (parties, interest groups, media, elections) pressure all branches; changing **public opinion** shifts policy over time (e.g., same-sex marriage).
Example: ACA (2010) passed by Congress → HHS wrote rules → SCOTUS upheld mandate as tax (*NFIB v. Sebelius*, 2012); Congress later zeroed the penalty (2017).

Exam Format

FRQ type	Unit 2 angle
Concept app.	Scenario → name power + check
Quant. analysis	Data on vetoes, approvals
SCOTUS comparison	Baker, Shaw, Marbury
Argument essay	Fed. 70/78, Art. I–III

Section I: 55 MCQ, 80 min, 50%. Many use texts, charts, cartoons. **Section II**: 4 FRQs, 100 min, 50%.
Quant. FRQ: identify data → describe trend → draw conclusion → explain w/ concept. Read axes + titles first.

High-Yield Comparisons

Veto vs. pocket veto. **Executive order vs. law**. **Impeach vs. remove**. **Delegate vs. trustee**. **Original vs. appellate**. **Activism vs. restraint**. **Iron triangle vs. issue network**.

Required Docs & Cases (Unit 2)

Fed. 70 (energetic executive). **Fed. 78** (judicial independence, review). **Marbury** (judicial review). **Baker** (one person, one vote). **Shaw** (racial gerrymander).

⚠ FRQ verbs matter: "describe" = details; "explain" = how/why with a link. One-word answers earn nothing.

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