AP U.S. Government Flashcards

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Contents

1. AP Gov Foundational Documents — 40 cards
2. AP Gov Required Supreme Court Cases — 25 cards

1. AP Gov Foundational Documents

40 cards

QUESTION	ANSWER
How many foundational documents does the AP U.S. Government course require from 2026-27?	13. Added in fall 2026: Emancipation Proclamation, Federalist No. 39, Gettysburg Address, Adam Smith's The Wealth of Nations.
In which free-response question must you cite a foundational document as evidence?	The argument essay. Use at least one piece of evidence from one of the foundational documents listed in the prompt.
Who was the main drafter of the Declaration of Independence?	Thomas Jefferson, helped by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Adopted on July 4, 1776.
Which unalienable rights does the Declaration of Independence name?	“Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” It restates John Locke's philosophy of natural rights.
Which phrase of the Declaration of Independence grounds popular sovereignty?	Governments derive “their just powers from the consent of the governed.” The people may alter or abolish a government that destroys their rights.
In which year were the Articles of Confederation ratified?	1781 (drafted in 1777). The first national government: a “firm league of friendship” among sovereign states.
How was Congress organized under the Articles of Confederation?	One house, one vote per state. Major laws needed 9 of 13 states; amendments needed all 13.
Which powers did the national government lack under the Articles of Confederation?	No executive, no national courts, no power to tax or to regulate interstate commerce. Nor the exclusive power to coin money.
Which event of 1786-1787 exposed the military weakness of the Articles of Confederation?	Shays' Rebellion, an uprising of indebted Massachusetts farmers. Congress had no army to put it down, which pushed the call for a stronger government.

QUESTION	ANSWER
When was the U.S. Constitution signed?	September 17, 1787, at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Ratified in 1788, once nine states had approved it.
When was the Bill of Rights ratified, and why was it added?	1791: the first ten amendments. Promised to win over Anti-Federalists who feared a government without listed rights.
Which four principles in the Constitution keep government limited, according to the AP course?	Separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, republicanism.
Who wrote Federalist No. 10, and when was it published?	James Madison, under the pen name Publius, in November 1787. Part of the essays urging New York to ratify the Constitution.
How does Federalist No. 10 define a faction?	A group of citizens, majority or minority, united by a common passion or interest. That interest goes against the rights of others or the good of the community.
What remedy for faction does Federalist No. 10 propose?	Control its effects, not its causes, through a large republic run by elected representatives. Many competing factions make it hard for one majority to oppress the rest.
According to Federalist No. 10, what is the most common and durable source of factions?	“The various and unequal distribution of property.” Madison holds that the causes of faction are “sown in the nature of man.”
Who is Brutus, author of Brutus No. 1?	An Anti-Federalist pen name, long attributed to Robert Yates; some historians now credit Melancton Smith. The essay appeared in October 1787, addressed to the citizens of New York.
What is the main argument of Brutus No. 1 about the size of the country?	A free republic cannot work over so large a territory with such varied interests. Too few representatives, too far from the people: the direct answer to Federalist No. 10.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Which clauses of the Constitution does Brutus No. 1 attack?	The Necessary and Proper Clause and the Supremacy Clause, with the power to tax. Together, he warns, they would let the national government absorb the states.
Who wrote Federalist No. 39, and when?	James Madison, in January 1788. Title: “Conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles.”
How does Federalist No. 39 define a republic?	A government that derives all its powers, directly or indirectly, from the people. Run by officials who serve for a limited time or during good behavior.
Is the Constitution national or federal, according to Federalist No. 39?	“Neither a national nor a federal Constitution, but a composition of both.” The House represents the people (national), the Senate represents the states (federal).
What is the main argument of Federalist No. 51?	Separation of powers and checks and balances let each branch resist the others. Madison, February 1788: “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.”
Complete Madison in Federalist No. 51: “If men were angels…”	“…no government would be necessary.” Since men are not angels, government must be able to control itself.
What is the “double security” for rights in Federalist No. 51?	Power is divided between two governments, national and state, then among separate branches within each. Federalism adds a second layer to separation of powers.
What kind of executive does Federalist No. 70 defend?	A single, energetic president rather than a council. Hamilton, March 1788: unity brings decision, speed and clear accountability.
Complete Hamilton in Federalist No. 70: “Energy in the executive is…”	“…a leading character in the definition of good government.” He ties it to defense against foreign attacks and to the steady administration of the laws.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Why does Federalist No. 78 call the judiciary the least dangerous branch?	It has “neither FORCE nor WILL, but merely judgment.” Hamilton: no control of the sword (executive) or the purse (Congress).
Which tenure for federal judges does Federalist No. 78 defend?	Appointment for life, “during good behavior.” Independence from elections lets judges protect the Constitution against the other branches.
Which power of the courts, later established in Marbury v. Madison (1803), does Federalist No. 78 defend?	Judicial review: courts can declare void any law contrary to the Constitution. The Constitution, the will of the people, outranks an ordinary law.
When did Lincoln issue the Emancipation Proclamation, and whom did it free?	January 1, 1863: enslaved people in the states in rebellion. It did not apply to the loyal border states.
On which presidential power did Lincoln base the Emancipation Proclamation?	His power as commander in chief, as a war measure against the rebellion. A course example of how presidents justify the use of their powers.
Which amendment made the abolition of slavery permanent after the Emancipation Proclamation?	The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified in 1865. The start of civil rights for the formerly enslaved.
When and where did Lincoln deliver the Gettysburg Address?	November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the soldiers' cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. It opens with “Four score and seven years ago.”
Which closing words of the Gettysburg Address express popular sovereignty?	“…government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” It also restates that the nation is dedicated to the proposition that “all men are created equal.”
Who wrote The Wealth of Nations, and when?	Adam Smith, Scottish economist and philosopher, in 1776. The same year as the Declaration of Independence.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Which core value of U.S. political culture does The Wealth of Nations illustrate in the AP course?	Free enterprise: self-interest and competition allocate resources efficiently, with limited regulation. “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner.”
When and why did Martin Luther King Jr. write the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”?	April 1963, jailed after nonviolent protests against segregation in Birmingham, Alabama. An open reply to eight white Alabama clergymen who had criticized the protests.
How does the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” justify breaking a law?	An unjust law, one that degrades people or is imposed on a minority without a voice, need not be obeyed. It must be broken openly and nonviolently, accepting the penalty: civil disobedience.
In which AP Gov topic is the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” named as a required document?	Topic 3.10, Social Movements and Equal Protection (Unit 3). An example of how citizens use protest and civil disobedience to change policy.

2. AP Gov Required Supreme Court Cases

25 cards

QUESTION	ANSWER
What principle did Marbury v. Madison (1803) establish?	Judicial review: the Supreme Court can declare an act of Congress or the executive unconstitutional. Facts: William Marbury sued Secretary of State James Madison for his withheld commission as justice of the peace. The Court struck down part of the Judiciary Act of 1789.
What did McCulloch v. Maryland (1819) decide?	Congress could create a national bank (Necessary and Proper Clause), and a state could not tax it (Supremacy Clause). Facts: Maryland taxed the Baltimore branch of the Second Bank of the United States.
What test did Schenck v. United States (1919) create for limiting speech?	“Clear and present danger”: speech creating one is not protected by the First Amendment. Facts: Charles Schenck mailed leaflets urging men to resist the World War I draft.
What did Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decide?	Race-based segregation in public schools violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. It overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). Facts: Black children in Topeka, Kansas, and other school districts were assigned to segregated public schools.
What did Baker v. Carr (1962) decide?	Redistricting is not a “political question”: federal courts can hear challenges under the Equal Protection Clause. Facts: Tennessee had not redrawn its legislative districts since 1901. It opened the way to the principle of “one person, one vote”.
What did Engel v. Vitale (1962) decide?	A school-sponsored prayer in public schools violates the Establishment Clause, even if it is voluntary. Facts: New York's Board of Regents wrote a nondenominational prayer to open the school day.

QUESTION	ANSWER
What did Gideon v. Wainwright (1963) decide?	States must give a lawyer to felony defendants who cannot afford one (Sixth Amendment, applied to the states). Facts: Clarence Earl Gideon, accused of breaking into a Florida pool hall, was refused a lawyer and defended himself.
What did Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (1969) decide?	Students' black armbands against the Vietnam War were symbolic speech protected by the First Amendment. Schools can limit student speech only if it would substantially disrupt school. Facts: students in Des Moines, Iowa, were suspended for wearing the armbands.
What did New York Times Co. v. United States (1971) decide?	The government could not block newspapers from publishing the Pentagon Papers: a “heavy presumption against prior restraint”. This holds even when national security is invoked. Facts: the Pentagon Papers were a secret Defense Department study of the Vietnam War.
What did Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972) decide?	Forcing Amish children to attend school past eighth grade violates the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. Facts: Wisconsin required school attendance until age 16, and Amish parents refused.
What did Shaw v. Reno (1993) decide?	A district drawn with race as the only factor can be challenged under the Equal Protection Clause. Facts: North Carolina's majority-Black 12th District stretched about 160 miles along Interstate 85.
What did United States v. Lopez (1995) decide?	Congress exceeded its Commerce Clause power with the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990. Carrying a gun near a school is not an economic activity, so it is left to the states. Facts: Alfonso Lopez, a high school senior in San Antonio, Texas, brought a handgun to school.
What did McDonald v. Chicago (2010) decide?	The Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms for self-defense applies to the states. Facts: Chicago residents challenged the city's laws banning almost all private possession of handguns.

QUESTION	ANSWER
What did Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010) decide?	Political spending by corporations, associations and labor unions is protected speech under the First Amendment. It struck down limits on their independent spending in elections. Facts: federal law barred Citizens United from airing “Hillary: The Movie” within 30 days of the 2008 primaries.
What is selective incorporation?	Applying parts of the Bill of Rights to the states, one right at a time, through the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.
Which two required cases made a Bill of Rights guarantee binding on the states?	Gideon v. Wainwright (Sixth Amendment right to counsel in all felony cases) and McDonald v. Chicago (Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms).
Which three required cases were decided under the Equal Protection Clause?	Brown v. Board of Education (school segregation), Baker v. Carr (redistricting can be heard in court) and Shaw v. Reno (racial gerrymandering).
Which six required cases turn on the First Amendment?	Speech: Schenck, Tinker, Citizens United. Press: New York Times Co. v. United States. Religion: Engel v. Vitale, Wisconsin v. Yoder.
How do Engel v. Vitale and Wisconsin v. Yoder differ?	Engel: Establishment Clause, the government cannot sponsor religion. Yoder: Free Exercise Clause, the government cannot burden religious practice without a strong reason.
How do Baker v. Carr and Shaw v. Reno differ?	Baker: courts can hear cases about districts of unequal population. Shaw: a district cannot be drawn using race as the only factor.
How do McCulloch v. Maryland and United States v. Lopez differ?	McCulloch expanded federal power (implied powers, national supremacy over the states). Lopez set a limit on it (the Commerce Clause does not reach everything), in favor of the states.
How do Schenck v. United States and Tinker v. Des Moines differ?	Schenck: speech can be punished when it creates a clear and present danger. Tinker: students keep their free speech rights at school unless their speech substantially disrupts it.

QUESTION	ANSWER
In a Supreme Court case, what is the difference between the holding and the reasoning?	Holding: the court's answer to the legal or constitutional question (the issue). Reasoning: the court's explanation of why it answered that way.
What does free-response question 3, SCOTUS Comparison, ask you to do?	Compare a required case with a non-required case summarized in the question, and link them to a course concept. 4 points, about 20 minutes.
Is Roe v. Wade (1973) a required case for the 2026-27 AP Gov exam?	No: the course and exam description effective Fall 2026 lists 14 cases without it. Older lists of 15 include it; Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022) overturned it.