

2026



AP[®] United States Government and Politics

Scoring Guidelines

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Question 1: Concept Application**3 points**

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- A** Describe an impact the third-party candidate had on the 1992 presidential election as described in the scenario. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:

- Ross Perot won 19% of the popular vote and took votes away from the two major political party candidates.
- Perot's self-funding allowed him to run a nationally visible campaign without party backing, increasing his share of the popular vote.
- Because Perot emphasized the need for economic reform, Clinton and Bush were forced to adapt their campaign strategies and adopt his ideas as part of their campaign platforms.

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- B** Explain how structural barriers limited the impact of the third-party candidate as described in part A. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:

- Although Perot was able to win a large share of the popular vote, winner-take-all states prevented Perot from winning electoral votes.
 - Perot had to organize a large volunteer effort just to get on the ballot in all states. These requirements make it harder for third-party candidates to focus on campaigning and can limit their overall effectiveness.
 - As a third-party candidate, Perot did not have the infrastructure and resources of a major political party and this left him without advantages such as voter data and voter mobilization campaigns, which made it difficult for him to attract more voters.
 - Because Democrats and Republicans adopted parts of Perot's campaign into their own messages, Perot's ideas were not unique enough to attract voters away from the other two candidates.
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C	Explain how a model of voting behavior could be used to explain how citizens vote in presidential elections as described in the scenario.	1 point
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Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:

- Since the Democrats focused their campaign more heavily on the middle class, those voters might have chosen Clinton because they believed he would better serve their economic interests.
 - According to the rational choice model, voters choose the candidate they believe will best serve their own interests. In 1992, voters may have supported any of the three candidates they believed would improve economic conditions.
 - Since retrospective voters make choices based on past performance, they may have voted against President Bush because of the poor economic conditions in the country.
 - The prospective voting model predicts that voters will cast a ballot based on predictions of how a candidate will perform in the future. In 1992, many voters believed Clinton or Perot would do a better job on the economy than Bush.
 - Straight ticket voting predicts voters will choose all the candidates from one particular party. Democratic or Republican voters who chose to vote straight ticket would not have considered voting for Ross Perot since he was not a member of their party.
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Question 2: Quantitative Analysis**4 points**

A Identify the state with the highest individual income tax rate. **1 point**

Acceptable identification:

- California (CA)

B Describe a difference in individual income tax rates between the Northeast region and the Southeast region. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:

- States in the Northeast region generally have higher individual income tax rates than states in the Southeast.
- There are more states in the Southeast that do not have an individual income tax rate compared to states in the Northeast.
- States in the Southeast tend to have lower tax rates than states in the Northeast.

NOTE: Any accurate comparison between the two regions as indicated on the map may earn the point.

C Draw a conclusion about the impact of participatory democracy based on the differences in the data as shown in the map. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:

- Voters in different states have different preferences for tax policy and elect representatives who promise to enact those policies.
- People dissatisfied with the tax rate in their state may form interest groups to lobby state governments to change their tax policy.
- Voters who favor expanded government services elect officials willing to raise taxes resulting in higher tax rates in some states.

D Explain how state income taxes demonstrate the principle of federalism based on the data in the map. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:

- In the federal system, each state is allowed to set its own income tax policy, leading to the variations shown on the map.
 - Each state must make a decision about tax policy that works best for that state. Federalism allows different states to decide how much to tax their citizens to pay for government services.
 - Both the federal and the state governments have the power to set tax rates, and states are free to set their own income tax rates regardless of the federal rate.
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Question 3: SCOTUS Comparison**4 points**

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- A** Identify the constitutional clause common to both *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819) and *Bonito Boats, Inc. v. Thunder Craft Boats, Inc.* (1989). **1 point**

Acceptable identification:

- The Supremacy Clause

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- B** Explain how the facts in *McCulloch* and *Bonito Boats* led to similar holdings. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:

One point for **describing** relevant information (facts or holdings) about the required Supreme Court case.

- Congress chartered a national bank that was built in Maryland.
- The state of Maryland tried to impose a tax on a newly created national bank.
- The Necessary and Proper Clause gave Congress the power to institute a new economic policy, such as the creation of a national bank.
- In *McCulloch*, the Supreme Court ruled that while states retain the power to tax, federal law takes precedence over state law when they come into conflict.

OR

Two points for correctly **explaining** how the facts in *McCulloch* and *Bonito Boats* led to similar holdings.

OR**2 points**

- In both *McCulloch* and *Bonito Boats*, there was conflict between state laws and national laws. *McCulloch* held that the Supremacy Clause allowed Congress to protect its interests and override a state law. In *Bonito Boats*, the Supreme Court ruled that a Florida law that attempted to protect the patent rights of this company could not invalidate national patent laws because the Supremacy Clause establishes that the federal law supersedes the state law.
 - Both cases addressed the power of the national government relative to state power. In *McCulloch*, the Court affirmed the power of the federal government through the Supremacy Clause by limiting the state's ability to tax the national bank. In *Bonito Boats*, the Court upheld the power of the national government through the Supremacy Clause by invalidating a state law that conflicted with a national law.
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C	Explain how the <i>Bonito Boats</i> case illustrates the concept of stare decisis.	1 point
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Acceptable explanations include the following:

- The Supreme Court did not create a new interpretation of state power but instead reaffirmed earlier holdings that only the federal government can regulate patents. This demonstrates stare decisis because the Court followed previous decisions rather than overturning them.
 - In *Bonito Boats*, the Court relied on earlier cases that invalidated similar state laws, demonstrating stare decisis by consistently applying the principle of federal supremacy.
 - The Court’s decision in *Bonito* followed the reasoning of earlier rulings that state laws cannot offer intellectual property protections where the federal law has not. By relying on established precedent, the Court demonstrated the principle of stare decisis through consistency in legal interpretation.
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Question 4: Argument Essay

6 points

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Claim/Thesis (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to the prompt with a defensible claim or thesis that establishes a line of reasoning.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Only restate the prompt. - Do not make a claim that responds to the prompt.	Responses that earn this point: - Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt and establish a line of reasoning. - Provide a defensible claim or thesis that establishes a line of reasoning about whether social movements or congressional actions have done more to expand opportunities for voting.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <i>“Both social movements and Congress have sought to increase voting opportunities.”</i> Do not respond to the prompt <i>“Congressional action has done more to expand opportunities for voting because they pass laws.”</i>	Examples that earn this point: <i>“Social movements have done more to expand voting opportunities because organized protests raise awareness about voting injustices and pressure lawmakers to act.”</i> <i>“Social movements have done more than Congress to expand voting opportunities because individuals have greater power when they form groups to advocate for change.”</i> <i>“Congress has done more to expand voting opportunities because by passing national laws, it has been able to protect voting rights and limit unfair state restrictions.”</i> <i>“Congress has done more than social movements to expand voting opportunities because it has initiated constitutional amendments that protect and expand voting rights.”</i>
Additional Notes: - The claim or thesis must consist of one or more sentences that may be located anywhere in the response. - A claim or thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning.		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria			
Row B Evidence (0–3 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Provides one piece of evidence that is <u>relevant to the topic</u> of the prompt.	2 points Uses <u>one</u> piece of specific and relevant evidence to <u>support the claim or thesis</u> . OR Provides two pieces of evidence that are relevant to the topic of the prompt.	3 points Uses <u>two</u> pieces of specific and relevant evidence to <u>support the claim or thesis</u> .
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
Responses that do not earn points: - Do not provide any accurate evidence. - Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic.	Responses that earn 1 point: - Must provide one piece of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt. - This evidence can come from one of the foundational documents listed in the prompt, any other foundational document, or from knowledge of course concepts.	Responses that earn 2 points: - Provide one piece of specific and relevant evidence that supports the claim or thesis. OR - Must provide two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt. This evidence can come from one of the foundational documents listed in the prompt, any other foundational document, or from knowledge of course concepts.	Responses that earn 3 points: Provide two pieces of specific and relevant evidence that support the claim or thesis. One of these pieces of evidence must come from a foundational document listed in the prompt. The other piece of evidence can come from a different foundational document or from knowledge of course concepts.	
Examples that do not earn points: Provide evidence that is not specific “Social movements raise money to advocate for their cause.” Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic of the prompt “The Constitution does not include provisions about voting.”	Examples of evidence that are relevant to the <u>topic</u> of the prompt: “Suffrage amendments such as the 15th, 19th, 23rd, 24th, and 26th Amendments” “Voting Rights Act of 1965” “State and local laws overturned by national policy such as literacy tests and poll taxes” Examples of acceptable specific and relevant evidence that support the claim or thesis (one example is one piece of evidence): “Protests and marches during the Civil Rights Movement brought national attention to voter suppression and led to changes that expanded voting rights.” “Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which eliminated discriminatory voting practices and expanded access to the ballot.” “Article I gives Congress the power to pass legislation, which can be used to expand voting access.” “The First Amendment protects the right to assemble, allowing citizens to form social movements that advocate for expanded voting rights.” “Letter from a Birmingham Jail encouraged people to participate in social movements to challenge unjust laws such as those that restricted voting rights.”			
Additional Notes: - To earn one or two points in Row B, the response does not need to have earned the point for claim/thesis in Row A. - To earn three points in Row B, the response must have a defensible claim/thesis (earned the point in Row A). - To earn three points in Row B, the response must use one of the foundational documents listed in the prompt.				

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Reasoning (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Uses reasoning (classification, process, causation, or comparison) to explain how or why the evidence supports an argument relevant to the prompt.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn this point: • Include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to the claim or thesis. • Restate the prompt without explaining how the evidence supports the claim or thesis.	Responses that earn this point: • Explain the relationship between the evidence provided and an argument.
		Examples of reasoning that explain how the evidence supports the claim or thesis: • <i>“If social movements generate sufficient public pressure, policymakers are more likely to pass legislation that expands voting opportunities.”</i> • <i>“When social movements raise public awareness about voting injustices, they create pressure on lawmakers to pass laws that expand voting rights.”</i> • <i>“Congressional action directly expands voting opportunities via their powers to pass legislation and initiate amendments.”</i> • <i>“Congressional action has done more to expand opportunities for voting by superseding local and state laws that restricted access.”</i>
Additional Notes: • To earn this point, the response must have provided at least one piece of specific and relevant evidence. • The explanation of the relationship between one piece of evidence and a well reasoned argument relevant to the prompt is sufficient to earn this point.		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row D Responds to Alternate Perspectives (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to an opposing or alternate perspective using rebuttal or refutation.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Restate the opposite of the claim or thesis. - May identify or describe an alternate perspective but do not rebut or refute that perspective. - Rebut or refute a foundational document rather than an alternate perspective.	Responses that earn this point: Must describe an alternate perspective AND rebut or refute that perspective.
	Examples of responses that do not earn the point: Restate the opposite of the claim or thesis <i>“Some might argue that social movements have not done more to expand opportunities for political participation in voting.”</i> Describe an alternate perspective but do not rebut or refute that perspective <i>“Some people say Congressional action has done more to expand voting rights since they are a more direct route, but that argument is flawed.”</i>	Examples of acceptable responses to an alternate perspective may include: <i>“While some argue that congressional action has done more to expand opportunities for voting because of their direct powers to change national policy, these laws and amendments would not have happened without the pressure from social movements.”</i> <i>“While some argue that Congressional action has done more to expand opportunities for voting because they replace discriminatory state policies, those decisions would not have been made had social movements not raised national pressure for the legislature to act.”</i> <i>“Some might argue that social movements have done more to expand opportunities for voting because they raise awareness of injustices faced by groups that historically could vote; however, only Congress has the constitutional authority to pass legislation and create lasting legal change.”</i> <i>“Some might argue that social movements have done more to expand opportunities for voting because they bring people together to advocate for change. However, without legislation, their activism has no real impact on voting access.”</i>
Additional Notes - To earn this point, the response must have a defensible claim or thesis (earned the point in Row A). - Responses that demonstrate an incorrect understanding of the alternate perspective do not earn this point.		