

Unit 2 Review List

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Political Parties

Section 1: Parties and What They Do

Political parties are essential to democratic government. In the United States, political parties have shaped the way the government works. Today, the major parties perform several important functions without which our government could not function.

Section 2: The Two-Party System

The two-party system in the United States is a product of historical forces, our electoral system, and the ideological consensus of the American people. It provides more political stability than a multiparty system and more choice than a one-party system.

Section 3: The Two-Party System in American History

The origins and history of political parties in the United States help explain how the two major parties work today and how they affect American government.

Section 4: The Minor Parties

Minor parties provide alternatives to the positions of the major parties, and sometimes have affected particular elections and shaped public policies.

Section 5: Party Organization

The major parties of the United States have decentralized structures, and the different parts and elements work together primarily during national elections.

Voters and Voter Behavior

Section 1: The Right to Vote

Successful democratic government depends on the participation of its citizens through voting. The history of the United States has been marked by a steady expansion of the electorate through the elimination of restrictions on voting qualifications.

Section 2: Voter Qualification

All States have citizenship, residence, and age requirements for voting. Other voting qualifications differ from State to State. Some requirements—especially those that were used to disenfranchise certain groups—have been eliminated over time.

Section 3: Suffrage and Civil Rights

The 15th Amendment declared that the right to vote cannot be denied on account of race. Nevertheless, a variety of tactics were used in southern States to disenfranchise African Americans. The Supreme Court struck down a number of these efforts, and, beginning in the 1950s, Congress passed laws to protect minority voting rights.

Section 4: Voter Behavior

Low voter turnout is a serious problem in this country. Among those who do vote, sociological and psychological factors work together to influence voter behavior over time and in particular elections.

The Electoral Process

Section 1: The Nominating Process

The nominating process narrows the field of possible candidates for office, and thus is an essential part of an election. The caucus and convention were important nominating methods in the past. The direct primary has largely replaced them. Self-announcement and petitions are also used today as nominating devices.

Section 2: Elections

The election process lies at the very heart of the democratic concept. It is impossible to picture a democratic society in which popular elections are not held.

Section 3: Money and Elections

Money is an indispensable campaign resource. Yet money also poses a variety of problems in the election process, and therefore the use of money is regulated in today's elections.

Summary

Mass Media and Public Opinion

Section 1: The Formation of Public Opinion

All of us have opinions on a variety of issues, from school prayer to which political party should be in power. Several factors help shape our opinions. The two most important factors are family and education.

Section 2: Measuring Public Opinion

Polls are the most effective means for measuring public opinion. Other measures include election returns, the activities of interest groups, and direct personal contact.

Section 3: The Mass Media

The American public gets information on public issues through several forms of mass media, especially through television. The media influence American politics by helping to set the public agenda and by playing a central role in electoral politics.

Summary

Interest Groups

Section 1: The Nature of Interest Groups

Interest groups are private organizations that try to persuade public officials to respond to the shared attitudes of their members. They stimulate interest in public affairs and serve as a vehicle for participation in the political process.

Section 2: Types of Interest Groups

Most interest groups represent economic interests such as business, labor, agriculture, and certain professions. Others are devoted to specific political and social causes, religious interests, or the welfare of a certain segment of the population.

Section 3: Interest Groups at Work

Most interest groups take a balanced approach to affecting public policy. Some, on the other hand, focus on an individual issue and fight for this issue aggressively. Lobbyists use a variety of techniques to try to persuade policy makers to share an interest group's point of view.