

Study Guide: Wilson - Ch. 1 - What Should We Know About American Government?

Question 1) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

- A) How our government operates is quite different from how most other democratic governments, such as those in Western Europe, operate.

Explanation: We have a presidential system; most European countries have a parliamentary system (one exception is France, which also has a presidential system).

- B) In a parliamentary democracy, such as the United Kingdom, the legislature typically approves any policy the chief executive proposes, and does so without making any changes.

Explanation: Because the majority party (or party coalition) in parliament chooses the chief executive and cabinet ministers, there is usually no disagreement between the two branches.

- C) No citizen can sue the government in a British court; if one tried, the judge would throw out the case.

Explanation: The United Kingdom, like most parliamentary democracies, gives little power to the judicial branch. As we will see in Ch. 10, the U.S. Constitution gives important powers to the judicial branch of the federal government.

- D) In the United States, the police and the public schools are controlled by towns, cities, and states. In Europe, they are usually controlled by the national government.

Explanation: The U.S. has a "federal" governmental system in which important powers are divided by the Constitution between the national and state levels of government. State governments in the U.S. exercise important "reserved" powers that include public order and public education. In Europe, most countries have a "unitary" governmental system in which all important powers are centralized by their Constitution in the national government alone, and regional governments exercise only those lesser powers delegated to them by the national government.

- E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 2) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

- A) In Europe, there usually aren't any primary elections that allow the voters to choose which candidates will represent each party in the general election. Instead, party leaders decide who gets on the general-election ballot.

Explanation: As we will see in Chapter 5, the power to select their own candidates was stripped from Republican and Democratic party leaders in the U.S. during the 20th century. European party leaders still enjoy this power.

- B) In the U.S., fewer than one worker in five now belongs to a labor union. In many European nations, a much larger proportion of workers is unionized.

Explanation: Between the 1930s and the 1950s, a much larger proportion of workers in the U.S. were union members. With upward mobility created by educational opportunities, many of the blue-collar workers moved up into middle-class status and white-collar jobs that, until recently, were not the focus of union organizers.

- C) Unlike most European democracies, the U.S. has no large and powerful socialist political party.

Explanation: As we will discuss in Ch. 5, socialist parties endorse widespread nationalization (government ownership) of industry and agriculture. The Democratic party endorses a greater level of government regulation of the national economy than does the Republican party. However, its principles and policy proposals are significantly less committed than European socialist parties to centralized planning and control of the economy.

- D) Europe, like the U.S., has many politically active persons who consider themselves born-again Christians.

Explanation: As we will see in ch. 5, politically active, born-again Christians constitute approximately 20% of the national electorate. These "Christian right" voters generally support socially conservative policies and candidates. However, as a group, they tend to be more moderate on economic issues.

- E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 3) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

- A) Unlike most European democracies, in the U.S., state and federal legislative decisions about the availability of legal abortion can be appealed to the courts, which can either uphold or strike down those legislative decisions.

Explanation: This power of "judicial review" will be discussed in Ch. 10.

- B) When the president of the U.S. signs a treaty, he is making a promise only to try to get the U.S. Senate to grant their approval for making the treaty the law of the land.

Explanation: This is an example of a "shared" power that Ch. 2 will discuss in the context of our constitutional system of "checks and balances." The Senate has the power to reject all or part of any treaty submitted to it by the president.

- C) The tax burden in the U.S. is higher than in most western European nations.

Explanation: European nations have a much greater commitment to "cradle-to-the-grave, welfare-state" democracy, i.e., to extensive and expensive government programs providing universally available access to health care, educational opportunities, employment security, etc.

- D) The U.S. adopted federal policies to provide benefits to the elderly and the unemployed about a quarter of a century after such policies were already in effect in much of western Europe.

Explanation: These "New Deal" programs of Franklin Roosevelt were enacted in response to the great depression of the 1930s. U.S. social-welfare programs continue to be much less extensive than those in most western European democracies.

- E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 4) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

- A) The U.S. government owns very few industries.

Explanation: The U.S. federal government regulates many industries, but owns very few. In contrast, many European governments own airlines, the telephone system, steel mills, automobile factories, and even oil companies.

- B) In democratic centralism, government policies are made by authoritarian or totalitarian elites NOT subject to citizen control.

Explanation: Such authoritarian or totalitarian democracies can be EITHER left-wing (communist or pro-communist) dictatorships or right-wing (capitalist or pro-capitalist) dictatorships. Communist dictatorships today include China, Cuba, North Korea, & Vietnam. Capitalist dictatorships today include Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Kenya. During DECLARED wars, the U.S. Congress turns over emergency powers to the president that make that office something approaching a constitutional dictatorship.

- C) In direct democracies, government policy is made directly by the voters through the initiative, the referendum, and/or the recall powers.

Explanation: Some, but not all states have given their voters such direct-democracy powers. NC allows the voters to participate in referendum elections in which state bond issues and/or state constitutional amendments are submitted to the voters for ratification or rejection. NC does NOT give its voters the initiative or recall powers.

- D) The initiative is a petition procedure, used in some states, that allows as few as 5% of the voters to propose new state or local laws that are then submitted for voter approval through a referendum election.

Explanation: A few states, like California and Michigan, are famous for their many voter initiatives that place controversial "propositions" as referendum items on election ballots. An early example from California was Proposition 13 which the California voters approved that required any future increases in local property taxes to be approved by voters in a local election referendum.

- E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 5) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

- A) The referendum is an election in which a proposed law or state constitutional amendment is submitted to the voters for ratification or rejection.

Explanation: NC uses the referendum for state bond issues and state constitutional amendments.

- B) The recall is a petition procedure, used in some states, that allows a minimum percentage of the voters to force a

recall election that would allow the voters to remove an elected office holder prior to the completion of their elected term of office.

Explanation: NC does not give its voters the recall power over state officials; however, the charters of some NC city and county governments do give their voters the recall power over city or county officials.

- C) The U.S. Constitution gives voters the initiative and referendum power over federal elections and the recall power over federal officials.

Explanation: The founding fathers were too afraid of "hasty and passionate majorities" to give these direct democracy powers to U.S. voters in federal elections. A minority of states have given one or more of these powers to voters in state and local elections. These states are exercising their authority over the "time, place, and manner" of elections granted to them by Article I, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution.

- D) In a representative democracy, government policy is made by popularly elected officials who are subject to popular control through free, fair, frequent, and competitive elections.

Explanation: Some critics point out that the federal judges and bureaucrats, who are NOT popularly elected, have a great deal of influence in the making of public policy. This is certainly true, however, as we will see in chapters 9 & 10, both federal judges and bureaucrats are subject to many "checks and balances" placed on them by Constitutional provisions, legislative statutes, presidential authority, and various customs and traditions in U.S. politics.

- E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 6) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

- A) Direct democracies are also called republics.

Explanation: Representative democracies are called republics. The founding fathers called our new nation a republic.

- B) The founding fathers rejected direct democracy because they did NOT believe that it was possible or practical for the voters to decide all of the issues facing government.

Explanation: The founding fathers did NOT believe that enough voters would have the time, energy, interest, or information to make good judgments on many complex and divisive issues.

- C) The founding fathers opted for a republic because they wanted the voters to have significant (but not immediately total) control over the elected and appointed government officials who did make public policy.

Explanation: Hence, the Constitution provided for direct election of members of the U.S. House of Representatives but, as we will see in Ch. 2, indirect election of the president and U.S. senators.

- D) Another reason that the founding fathers rejected direct democracy is that it makes compromise among contending groups less likely to happen.

Explanation: In direct-democracy voting on referendum items, one side wins and the other loses -- even when there may have been a middle ground that both sides would have accepted through the bargaining and compromise processes found in representative democracy.

- E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 7) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

- A) Prerequisites for successful representative democracy include: freedoms of speech, press, assembly & petition.

Explanation: Freedoms of speech & press are essential so that voters can learn what their representatives are doing and communicate their preference to them. Freedom to organize and petition government for redress of grievances is essential so that voters can organize into pressure groups and political parties with like-minded individuals to gain strength in numbers. Otherwise, most isolated voters would have no real power to influence government officials between elections.

- B) Prerequisites for successful representative democracy include a widespread respect among the voters and government officials for the rights and opinions of others.

Explanation: Otherwise, incumbent officials would not step aside when recalled by the voters and tyrannical majorities would too often abridge or deny the fundamental rights of those not in the numerical majority.

- C) Prerequisites for successful representative democracy include a widespread belief among voters that the political system is legitimate -- even if their candidates and parties do not win a particular election.

Explanation: As we will see in Ch. 4, there has been a serious & troubling decline in trust in government among U.S. voters since

the 1960s. The causes & consequences of this rise in political cynicism will be an important topic of discussion in that chapter.

✔ D) There are two major types of direct democracies: presidential and parliamentary.

Explanation: Read carefully -- presidents and parliaments are elected by the people to make government policies. In direct democracies, the people -- not elected representatives -- make government policies. Parliamentary democracies outnumber presidential democracies by a significant margin, world wide. In Ch. 3, we will see that there are two other forms of representative democracy common throughout the world -- federal and unitary.

✘ E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 8) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

✘ A) A basic assumption supporting the choice of a presidential system is the belief that policies should be tested for their political acceptability at every stage of the policy-making process, not just at election time.

Explanation: This is why a presidential system vests political power in separately elected branches of the national government -- a president and Congress. In addition, in the U.S., we have an independent judiciary that can strike down actions of either elected branch if they violate the Constitution.

✘ B) A basic assumption supporting the choice of a parliamentary system is the belief that a majority party or party coalition should have undivided control of the policy-making process and only be held accountable to the voters at the next election.

Explanation: Hence, a parliamentary system vests political power in an elected legislature that then, in turn, chooses the chief executive and other cabinet officers, often from within the membership of the legislature. Thus, political power at the national level is centralized in a parliamentary democracy -- the chief executive and cabinet make all the important decisions and neither the bureaucracy nor the courts have the power to interfere.

✘ C) In our presidential system, the executive-branch bureaucracy works for BOTH the president and Congress, in the sense that both have powers to strongly influence the behavior of the bureaucracy.

Explanation: Presidents have far less power to control their bureaucracy than do parliamentary chief executives. Because of its exclusive "power of the purse," the U.S. Congress has extraordinary influence over executive-branch bureaucrats. In addition, Congress is granted by the Constitution the power to create, to reorganize, and even to eliminate any executive-branch agencies or departments. Hence, savvy executive-branch bureaucrats know that they owe not only their salaries and their budgets but also ultimately their jobs to Congress.

✘ D) U.S. voters are highly unlikely to support the Constitutional revisions that would be necessary to change our presidential system into a parliamentary one.

Explanation: Few U.S. voters would be content with voting only once every four years to approve or reject what the government is doing. Most U.S. voters want more chances to influence policy as it is being formulated by the many people who are involved in our system of dispersed and shared powers.

✔ E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 9) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

✘ A) A parliamentary system is a union or merger of the executive and legislative branches.

Explanation: In a parliamentary system, the chief executive [and sometimes other cabinet officers] is a member of the parliament and elected to executive office by the majority party or party coalition in parliament.

✘ B) The voters elect only members of parliament, but not the chief executive, in a parliamentary system.

Explanation: The same party or party coalition controls both the executive and legislative branches in a parliamentary system.

✘ C) Parliamentary systems are more efficient in policy-making than our presidential system.

Explanation: Because there are fewer "checks and balances" in the parliamentary system compared to our presidential system.

✔ D) Parliamentary systems are less responsive than presidential systems to the "will of the majority" of voters.

Explanation: There is no possibility of partisan "gridlock" between branches controlled by opposing parties in a parliamentary system. Such divided control of government is quite common in presidential systems.

✘ E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.

Question 10) Which one of the following statements, A through D, is false?

A) The president and Congress in the U.S. system represent the same constituencies.

Explanation: Only the president is elected by a nation-wide electorate. U.S. senators are elected within separate states. U.S. representatives are elected within separate congressional districts.

B) The presidential system offers more safeguards against "hasty and passionate" majorities.

Explanation: The separation of branches with their overlapping and shared powers offers many opportunities for those not in the majority to influence government policy making.

C) The presidential system is far less efficient than parliamentary democracies in making and enforcing government policies.

Explanation: We have much more delay and even "gridlock" in the U.S. government than is seen in parliamentary systems like the U.K.

D) It is much more difficult for voters in a presidential system to assign responsibility for good or poor performance by the two elected branches.

Explanation: Because of the dispersion of power and resulting delays, bargaining, and compromises or deadlocks it is very difficult to know how to judge the individual performance of so many participants.

E) None of the above statements, A through D, is false.