

POLS 2020: Study Guide I

Use the following prompts to help you study for the first POLS 2020 exam. Think critically about these issues and be thorough in your preparations. Remember that the exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer prompts, so you should be prepared to explain in written form your answer to each of these study questions.

1. Define the concepts, “politics” and “government,” and understand how the latter helps to dictate the terms of the former.
2. Why does government exist? How does it help us to address collective action problems as a society?
3. What are the different collective action problems we discussed, and think of some examples of how these work in real life.
4. What is a market failure, and what kind of collective action problem might this represent?
5. How does government help to address collective action problems?
6. What is the principal-agent problem? How does it confound our desire for government to find solutions to collective action problems?
7. What are the eras of United States government, from colonialism to the Constitution of 1789? How did states’ rights change across these eras?
8. What were some of the collective action problems posed by the Articles of Confederation? Use Shays’ Rebellion to help you better understand these issues with the Articles.
9. What were three major bones of contention at the Constitutional Convention of 1787? How were they resolved in the Constitution that was eventually ratified by the states?
10. What is the difference between enumerated and unenumerated powers? Identify examples of each from the Constitution of 1789.
11. Understand major constitutional provisions such as the necessary and proper (elastic) clause, the interstate commerce clause, and the supremacy clause.
12. Know how the American system of separated powers works in practice. What roles do each of the three branches of government perform?
13. Explain the concept behind “checks and balances,” and know how the three branches of American government check one another.
14. What are some of the powers that the Constitution specifically affords or deprives the states? How have some of these powers evolved over time as the Constitution has been amended?
15. There are two enumerated routes by which the Constitution can be amended. We’ve only ever used one of these. There’s an additional “back-door” through which the Constitution can be changed. How? How difficult are each of these methods—that is, how do they work, and what does it take to change the Constitution?
16. How did the U.S. Constitution change state versus federal power compared to the Articles of Confederation? How did the Bill of Rights immediately restructure federalism after the founding? How did things change once again following the ratification of the Civil War Amendments?
17. What were the four changes to the U.S. Constitution that resulted from the Progressive Era?

18. How have voting rights been protected via constitutional amendment over the past 100 years? Note that these have been among the most common types of amendments over this period.
19. Cooperative and dual federalism are two popular theories of government power-sharing. What's the difference between the two? Think of examples that illustrate these two theories at work.
20. Understand intergovernmentalism and why this is arguably the best way to summarize today's system of federalism in the United States.
21. What are some advantages and disadvantages to federalism? Can you think of specific examples?
22. What types of powers do state and local governments generally enjoy the most control over?
23. What are some of the methods by which local governments are funded with federal grants? Which types of grants do states prefer, and why?
24. What are initiatives, referenda, and recall elections in American states? How widespread are these institutions across the United States? Are these good or bad ideas (or neither)?
25. Understand how local politics can be run via commission systems, mayor-commissions, and city managers.