
The Top 10 Acts of Congress

AP U.S. Government and Politics texts discuss a large number of congressional acts. Is it necessary to memorize a list of these acts? Fortunately, there is a better way of using your valuable study time. This chapter discusses the key features of 10 congressional acts that have played a role in multiple-choice and free-response questions. As you study each act, pay particular attention to how the act affected the relationship between state governments and the federal government.

1. THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

- ▶ Enforced the Fourteenth Amendment.
- ▶ Ended Jim Crow segregation in hotels, motels, restaurants, and other places of public accommodation.
- ▶ Prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, or gender.
- ▶ Created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to monitor and enforce protections against job discrimination.
- ▶ Prohibited discrimination in employment on grounds of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex.
- ▶ Upheld by the Supreme Court on the grounds that segregation affected interstate commerce.

2. THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

- ▶ Outlawed literacy tests and other discriminatory practices that had been responsible for disenfranchising African American voters.
- ▶ Provided for federal oversight of voter registration in areas with a history of discriminatory voting practices.
- ▶ Improved the voter registration disparity between whites and African Americans.

3. THE CLEAN AIR ACT (1970)
 - ▶ Increased the power of the federal government relative to the power of state governments.
 - ▶ Established national air quality standards.
 - ▶ Required states to administer the new standards and to appropriate funds for their implementation.
 - ▶ Included a provision allowing private citizens to bring lawsuits against individuals and corporations that violated the act.
4. THE WAR POWERS RESOLUTION (1973)
 - ▶ Enacted to give Congress a greater voice in presidential decisions committing military forces to hostile situations overseas.
 - ▶ Requires that the president notify Congress within 48 hours of deploying troops.
 - ▶ Requires the president to bring troops home from hostilities within 60 to 90 days unless Congress extends the time.
5. THE BUDGET AND IMPOUNDMENT CONTROL ACT OF 1974
 - ▶ Enacted to help Congress regain powers previously lost to the executive branch.
 - ▶ Created the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to evaluate the president's budget.
 - ▶ Established a budget process that includes setting overall levels of revenues and expenditures.
6. THE FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN ACT (1974)
 - ▶ Created the Federal Election Commission.
 - ▶ Tightened reporting requirements for campaign contributions.
 - ▶ Provided full public financing for major party candidates in the general election.
7. AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (1990)
 - ▶ Increased the power of the federal government relative to the power of the states.
 - ▶ Requires employers and public facilities to make "reasonable accommodations" for people with disabilities.
 - ▶ Prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment.

- ▶ *Extends the protections of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to people with physical or mental disabilities.*

8. WELFARE REFORM ACT (1996)

- ▶ *Increased the power of the states relative to the federal government.*
- ▶ *Replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program with block grants to the states.*
- ▶ *Illustrated the process of devolution by giving states greater discretion to determine how to implement the federal goal of transferring people from welfare to work.*

9. NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT (2001)

- ▶ *Requires the states to set standards and measurable goals that can improve individual outcomes in education.*
- ▶ *Requires the states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades.*
- ▶ *Represents a dramatic expansion of the federal role in education.*

10. USA PATRIOT ACT (2001)

- ▶ *Expands the definition of terrorism to include domestic terrorism.*
- ▶ *Authorized searches of a home or business without the owner's or the occupant's permission or knowledge.*
- ▶ *Increases the ability of law enforcement agencies to search telephone, e-mail communications, medical, financial, and other records.*