

GCE



Revised GCE

# Government and Politics

## Student Course Companion

A2 2: Political Power

For first teaching from September 2016  
For first award of AS Level in Summer 2017  
For first award of A Level in Summer 2018





# A2 Government and Politics Course Companion

## Unit A2 2: Political Power and Political Ideas

### Option A: Political Power

**“Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”**

Mao Zedong

#### **What is this unit about?**

This unit looks at the topic that is central to the study of politics: Power. What is it? Who has it and who hasn't? Who benefits from it? You need to be aware of how different theories provide very different answers to these questions.

The unit also looks at why some states enjoy the support of their people and are stable while other states are rejected by their own people and are unstable.

The intention is that in studying this unit you will draw upon the knowledge and understanding of politics you have gained from the study of the two AS Units and, if you have already studied it, the A2 1 Comparative Government unit.

But don't stop there! Consider some other political systems which you haven't previously studied, particularly those that are currently in the news. These are often the ones with particular problems and can be particularly interesting to study.

## **What are the main areas I need to study?**

You need to examine:

- the factors that are involved in the exercise of political power such as different types of authority, coercion, legitimacy and the reasons for state survival and collapse.
- different theories of political power, the differences between them and the criticisms that can be made of each.

**By the end of the unit, you should be able to address the following key issues:**

- Are modern liberal democracies really democratic?
- Are we controlled by a ruling class?
- Are political systems inevitably male dominated?
- Is real democracy a possibility in any political system or is it just an impossible dream?
- Can coercive systems survive in the long term?
- Why do some states collapse?
- Why are some states legitimate and stable while others are illegitimate and unstable?

## **Factors Affecting the Exercise of Political Power**

### **Essential knowledge and understanding:**

- What are the different forms of authority?
- What factors can make a state legitimate?
- What can undermine the legitimacy of the state?
- How do social, economic, religious and international factors affect the legitimacy of the state?
- Can authoritarianism be a basis for long-term rule?
- If a state tries to rule through coercion, can this work?

## **Theories of Political Power**

### **Essential knowledge and understanding:**

What are the main features of each of the following theories?

- Marxism;
- Pluralism;
- Elite theories; and
- Feminism.

### **What does each theory have to say about?**

- where power comes from
- who has power
- what power is used for
- whether this should and can be any different?
- How can each theory be criticized?

## How will I be assessed?

The exam lasts 1 hour 30 minutes.

There are five questions worth 5, 10, 20, 5 and 35 marks, making a total of 75 marks.

There are two sections in the paper:

### **Section A: Factors affecting the exercise of political power**

This will consist of three questions worth 5, 10 and 20 marks.

You have to read a Source and use it in your answer to questions.

Question 1 will require the definition of a term used in the Source.

Question 2 will require the explanation of two things, one of which is identified in the Item.

Question 3 will require the explanation of some aspect of the exercise of power discussed in the Source.

### **Section B: Theories of Power**

This will consist of two questions worth 5 and 35 marks. There will be a choice of one from two options in the 35 marks question.

Question 4 will require definition of a term used in political analysis.

Question 5 will require explanation and evaluation of a theory of political power, in the form of an extended essay answer. There will be choice of two questions.

**Pay attention to the following instructions when answering each question:**

### **Section A: Factors affecting the exercise of political power.**

#### **Q1: 5 marks**

- The command phrase is “what is meant by”.
- The question requires definition of a term used in the Source.
- The Source will not provide an explanation of this term.
- A short paragraph answer is enough to achieve full marks.
- A relevant example should be included.
- QWC is **not** being assessed; about 4 minutes should be spent on this answer.

#### **Q2: 10 marks**

- The command phrase is “identify and explain”.
- The question requires the identification and explanation of two things, one of which must come from the source material.
- QWC is **not** being assessed.
- Approximately 12 minutes should be spent answering this question.

#### **Q3: 20 marks**

- The command word is “explain”.
- The question requires explanation of some aspect of the Source or criticism of an argument put forward in the Source.
- The Source provides information which should be included in an answer.
- A balanced answer is **not** required but examples and evidence are.

- QWC **is** being assessed; approximately 24 minutes should be spent answering this question.

## **Section B: Theories of Power**

### **Q4: 5 marks**

- The command phrase is “what is meant by”.
- The question requires definition of a term.
- A short paragraph answer is enough to achieve full marks.
- Relevant supporting evidence is required.
- QWC is **not** being assessed; about 4 minutes should be spent on this answer.

### **Q5: 35 marks**

- The command word is “evaluate”.
- This question requires an extended essay answer.
- Answers should be balanced: they should provide argument and evidence for both sides.
- Relevant evidence and examples should be included throughout.
- You have choice of one question from two options so take time to make the correct choice.
- QWC **is** being assessed.
- Approximately 45 minutes should be spent answering this question.

## **How can I make the most of my ability?**

Government and politics affect the lives of everybody. To develop real understanding you need to relate what you study in class to the national and international political events and issues that are reported in the media. Following the tips below will help to develop your interest and understanding of the content of this unit.

**Watch the news!** Political issues and ideas feature every day on TV, radio and in the papers. It is often the unstable political systems that make the international news and are the most interesting. Paying attention to the news will not only increase your understanding but give you examples you can use in your examination.

**Surf the net!** There is a great deal of valuable information about political power on the internet but you need to be selective in how you use websites. The BBC and Guardian politics sites are very useful and simply keying 'political power' or a related term into their search engines can help you access illuminating discussions, debates and examples. Wikipedia also contains a lot of relevant material and has excellent links.

**Read!** There is a wide range of reading material on political power. It is not just limited to politics textbooks and journals but can also be found in sociological and historical sources. However be selective and don't think that you have to read every book from cover to cover. For example, chapters on the different political theories or key concepts may be particularly relevant. There are also several good political magazines and journals which have relevant and up-to-date information and articles. Reading around what you discuss in class is an excellent way of broadening and deepening your understanding.

**But there's so much information!** True, but you should already be familiar with some of the key ideas and concepts from your study of the AS units and, if you have already studied it, Unit A2 1 on Comparative Politics. To manage this information you should:

- Organise your notes under clear topic headings, for example, Pluralism, Coercion etc.
- Be clear on the key issues. Keep them in your mind throughout your study of this unit.
- Understand fully what the examiners expect you to be able to do. Familiarise yourself with the specimen questions and mark schemes that CCEA has produced.
- Write practice answers to the different types of question and check them against your notes. Make sure you practice using examples to illustrate your points and arguments.

**Examination technique:** Exams can be stressful but by being well prepared and confident of how you are going to approach the paper, you can minimise the stress and make sure you give of your best on the day. Following the advice below will help.

- Make sure you revise all aspects of the unit's content and have a good understanding of the key issues associated with each political theory and with the ideas of legitimacy and stability. Do not avoid studying any of the theories of power listed as this will reduce the breadth of your understanding and exam answers.

- The time spent on the question should reflect the mark allocation. A 20 mark question should take about 24 minutes and a 35 mark question about 45 minutes.
- Only do what the question asks you to do - there are no marks for including information that the question doesn't ask for.
- Make sure you use the Source in answering the questions in Section A.
- This unit is about real political systems so be sure to include examples and provide evidence to support your arguments.
- The exam is not just a test of your knowledge and understanding. It assesses how well you interpret questions and select relevant information. It examines how effectively you can analyse and evaluate and how clearly you can communicate your ideas.
- Remember! To score highly, you must answer the questions directly. Read and re-read the questions and make sure you know exactly what they are asking before you start writing. Think carefully about the command words and what they require you to do, for example, explain, criticise and evaluate.

## Glossary

The following is a list of key terms that you should know and be able to use correctly.

**Authority:** This is the claim to the legitimate exercise of power. Political leaders have authority when those who are ruled accept this willingly and support those who govern them. Authority can take several different forms.

**Civil war:** This is a war between organised groups within a country. It usually results from major social division which may have its roots in economic or identity issues. In such a situation, the legitimacy of the state has broken down for a large section of the population who may aim to take power or change government policies. Civil wars tend to be very intense and result in large numbers of casualties. They also consume a large amount of a country's resources.

**Coercion:** This is the use of pressure or force to compel others to act in a way which they would not have done voluntarily. There are several types of coercion, for example, physical, psychological and economic.

**Democracy:** This literally means "rule by the people." Most political systems claim to be democratic but the democratic credentials of some systems can be challenged. The most popular form of democracy today is often referred to as 'liberal' or 'constitutional' democracy. Liberal democracies are characterised by universal adult suffrage, free and fair elections, a competitive political process and a constitution which sets out basic rights, freedoms and limits on government authority.

**Elite theories:** These are a group of theories of the state which seek to explain how power is held and exercised within society. The central principle of these theories is that a small elite group with economic and policy planning power is really in control of public resources regardless of what happens in elections.

**Feminism:** This political theory seeks to explain inequality between the sexes and concentrates on gender politics and power relations between men and women. Feminist theory is closely linked with the promotion of equality for women and the campaign for women's rights and interests.

**Legitimacy:** This occurs when the institutions of the state, a political regime or laws have a high degree of support from its people. In most countries, legitimacy is a basic requirement for a government to rule. Without a minimum level of popular support, a government is considered illegitimate. However, in some countries, unpopular regimes do survive with the support of a small but influential elite.

**Marxism:** This is the political and economic theory that is derived from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Its central feature is a critical analysis of capitalism and a theory of social change. It is closely related to the political ideology of communism.

**Pluralism:** This theory suggests that political power is not really held by the electorate and that it is not concentrated in the hands of a small elite group. Instead it is dispersed throughout society in a number of groups and coalitions such as business organisations, trade unions, interest and pressure groups.

**Political power:** Power is the ability to influence people to do something that they otherwise would not have done. Political power refers to the ability of a person or group of people to control national or international resources: human, physical and financial. Such power may be obtained in a variety of ways and people may submit willingly or unwillingly to its exercise. Political power is not necessarily limited to heads of state or governments and may be dispersed.

**Political theory:** This is a set of ideas or views that tries to explain governmental power and law making. Political theories are often heavily influenced by the ethical stances, beliefs and attitudes of those who propose them.

**Regime change:** This is a change of government influenced, launched and/or supported by people from outside the country concerned. It may involve external military intervention or invasion.

**Revolution:** This is a fundamental change in power or political structures brought about from within a society in a relatively short period of time. It may involve complete change from one constitution to another or the modification of an existing constitution.

**Social divisions:** This refers to significant distinctions between groups in society that might have political impacts. Significant divisions would be class, race, ethnicity, national identity, religion, and gender.

**Stability:** Political stability refers to the ability of a political system to maintain itself and respond to the changing demands and opinions of its citizens without resorting to violent conflict. Democracies are often claimed to be inherently more stable than other types of political system as they provide the public with regular opportunities to remove governments that they do not like through elections without any change in the legal basis of government.

**State:** This refers to the collection of institutions that has the authority to make and implement the rules that govern a society. It includes the government, the legislature, the civil service or state bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police and the armed forces. Citizens can be opposed to the current political regime but still support the institutions of the state.

## Revision checklist

As a final check before the exam, make sure you can do the following:

You should be able to:	✓	Notes
<b>Demonstrate knowledge and understanding</b> of key political terms and concepts (see the glossary).		
<b>Explain</b> the main features of each of the political theories you have studied: Marxism, pluralism, elite theories and feminism.		
<b>Analyse, compare and contrast</b> how these theories differ in their explanations of views of the origin, nature and distribution of political power.		
<b>Criticise and evaluate</b> these theories with reference to relevant evidence and arguments.		
<b>Analyse and evaluate</b> the factors that can contribute to the legitimacy and stability of a state.		
<b>Analyse and evaluate</b> the factors that might undermine legitimacy and contribute to instability of a state.		

