

GCE



Revised GCE

Government and Politics

Student Course Companion

A2 1: A Comparative Study of the
Government and Politics of the
United States of America and
the United Kingdom

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



GCE Government and Politics Course Companion

Unit A2 1: Comparative Government

Option A: The UK and the USA

“Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a Presidents and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country.”

F.D. Roosevelt

What is this unit about?

This unit provides an introduction to the government and politics of the United States with specific focus on its legislative and executive branches. It allows students to consider the function and powers of Congress, the role of the President and the relationship between them. Students will understand how the function and powers of the legislative and executive branches are defined by the constitution and also how they have evolved.

Having considered how things are done in the USA you will then be able to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of how this compares with the UK system. Drawing on the knowledge and understanding gained through the study of Unit AS2 – The British Political Process, you will be able to analyse the similarities and differences in the structures, power and operations of the Legislature and Executive of both countries and compare and evaluate the effectiveness of both in performing these functions.

Concepts such as democracy, representation, power, authority, scrutiny and judicial review which you encountered in the AS units are also key strands that run through this unit. In addition to this, you will also be introduced to the ideas of political continuity and change, accountability, limited government and individual rights.

What are the main areas I need to study?

Essential knowledge and understanding:

The Government and Politics of the USA – the legislative branch

- How does the Constitution define the role of Congress?
- What are the main roles and functions of Congress?
- How effectively is Congress able to fulfil its main roles?
- What is the impact of pressure/lobby groups on the legislative branch?
- What is the relationship between the Executive and Congress?
- Does the President control Congress or does Congress control the President?

The Government and Politics of the USA – the executive branch

- How does the Constitution define the role of the President?
- How is the President supported by the executive branch?
- What are the constraints on the powers of the Executive?
- How do US pressure/lobby groups impact on the executive branch?
- How and why has the role of the President changed over time?
- What is the relationship between Congress and the Executive?

Comparative Government

By this part of the unit you should be able to address key issues such as:

- What are the similarities and differences in the structures, powers and operation of Congress and Parliament?
- How do the UK and US legislatures compare as law-making, scrutiny and representative bodies?
- How do the powers of the Prime Minister and President compare?
- How do the limits on prime ministerial and presidential power compare?
- Is the UK or the US executive the more effective government?

How will I be assessed?

The exam lasts 2 hours 15 minutes.

It is divided into **two sections**.

Section A focuses on the USA alone.

It has 4 questions on the US system.

The four questions are worth 5, 10, 15 and 30 marks, making a total of 60 marks for this section.

Two of the questions require reference to a piece of source material.

Section B is the comparative section.

It has two questions on how the UK and US systems compare.

The two questions are worth 10 and 30 marks and there is a choice of one from two options for the 30 mark question.

No Source is involved.

Pay attention to the following instructions when answering each question:

Section A:

Q1: 5 marks

- The command phrase is “what is meant by?”
- This is a definition question.
- You will be asked to define a term used in the study of US politics, for example “gridlock.”
- A paragraph length answer is sufficient to achieve full marks.
- No assessment/evaluation is required.
- Reference should be made to one example. If no supporting example is given a maximum of 3 marks can be achieved.
- QWC is **not** being assessed; about 4 minutes should be spent on this answer.

Q2: 10 marks

- The command phrase is “identify and explain”.
- Two things will have to be identified and explained.
- Reference has to be made to the Source for one of the ‘ways’ and the second will be drawn from your own knowledge.
- Relevant examples will contribute to an effective explanation.
- Answers may be presented as two bullet or numbered points.
- QWC is **not** being assessed; approximately 12 minutes should be spent on this answer.

Q3: 15 marks

- The command word is “explain”.
- Assessment/evaluation is **not** required.
- The question will focus only on an aspect of the US political system.
- A more extended explanation is required.
- QWC is being assessed; approximately 20 minutes should be spent on the answer.

Q4: 30 marks

- The command word is “assess”.
- Answers should be balanced in terms of presenting arguments and evidence for both sides. An answer that is very unbalanced cannot achieve more than Level 4.
- If an answer contains no relevant examples/evidence, a maximum of Level 3 can be achieved.
- Reference should be made to the Source which will have content that is relevant to the answer.
- QWC **is** being assessed and answers should be in essay format.
- Approximately 40 minutes should be spent answering this question.

Section B: -

Q5: 10 marks

- The command phrase is “identify and explain”.
- The question will require a comparison of some aspect of the operation, structure and effectiveness of the two political systems.
- Two things have to be identified and explained.
- Relevant evidence is required to support the response.
- Answers may be presented as two bullet or numbered points.
- QWC is **not** being assessed; approximately 12 minutes should be spent on this answer.

Q6: 30 marks

- The command word is “assess”.
- Direct comparison of the two political systems is required throughout this answer.
- Answers should be balanced in terms of presenting different arguments and evidence, where these exist.
- QWC **is** being assessed and answers should be in essay format.
- You have a choice of two possible questions so take time to make the right choice.
- Approximately 40 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! British and American politics appears every day on TV, radio and in the papers. 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 lots of valuable information about British and American politics on the net but you need to be selective in how you use websites. The BBC and Guardian politics sites are first class. Blogs are one of the most amusing and informative ways to follow political events. Wikipedia also contains a lot of relevant material and has excellent links.

Read! There are many excellent textbooks on British and American politics and some of these directly compare the two systems. However, be selective and don't think that you have to read every book from cover to cover. For example, the chapters on the executive and the legislature may be particularly relevant. There are also several good political magazines and journals which have relevant and up-to-date information and articles. Politics Review has consistently relevant material. 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 much of it from your study of Unit AS 2. To manage this information you should:

- Organise your notes. Use headings such as 'The Scrutiny role of the Senate', 'The impact of US lobby groups on the executive branch' to structure your notes.
- 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 making comparisons between the UK and US political systems.

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.

- The time spent on the question should reflect the mark allocation. A 30 mark question should take about 40 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 those questions in Part A that instruct you to do so.
- The two 30 mark questions must be answered with a balanced, essay answer.
- Make sure you address both sides of the issue - this means evaluating and being critical. These questions will nearly always be about one of the key issues.
- This is about real political systems so be sure to include examples and provide evidence to support your arguments.
- In questions 5 and 6, make sure that you directly compare the relevant aspects of the US and UK political systems. This involves identifying the parallels, connections, similarities and differences between them.

Glossary

The following is a list of key terms that you should know and use correctly:

Accountability: The requirement for representatives to answer for the way that they perform their duties. Members of a legislature may be brought to account for their voting record by party officials such as whips, their local parties, or their constituents. Government ministers are accountable for decisions to the legislature and the voting public.

Cabinet government: The cabinet is a body of important members of the government, normally senior ministers. Cabinet government refers to a system such as that which operates in theory in the UK. In this system, the cabinet is appointed from the legislature and collectively decides on government policy and tactics. Presidential systems such as the US do not have cabinet government. In a presidential system, cabinet members do not sit in the legislature and act as an advisory council to the head of government.

Change: The process of transformation or transition for a political system from one condition or phase to another. Change can refer to the ability of the constitution or institutions to adapt to changes in society or to the policy agenda of different political parties. Change was a major theme of Barack Obama's successful 2009 presidential election campaign in the US and was also an important feature of the Conservatives' attempt to appeal to the UK electorate in 2010.

Constitution: The national constitution is a statement of the basic rules and principles of a political system. It specifies the structure of government and the powers, duties and procedures of different parts of the political system, principally the executive, legislature and judiciary. Most national constitutions also set out certain basic rights for those who are governed. Most countries, like the USA, have codified constitutions which are contained in a single document. Some countries, such as the UK, have uncoded constitutions which are contained in several different sources that may be either written or unwritten. The US Constitution is the supreme law of the country. It defines the three branches of the federal government, the powers of each branch and the rights which are reserved for individual states.

Continuity: This refers to features of a political system that represent an uninterrupted succession or flow over time. The term may be used in connection with the constitution and political institutions of a country or the nature of its government. At a general election, voters often have to weigh up the advantages of continuity represented by re-electing a government of the same political persuasion against those of change represented by the opposition.

Executive dominance: This describes a situation in which the executive dominates and controls the legislature. In the UK, it is sometimes argued that the legislative programme of Parliament is largely determined by the government whose bills are normally passed by the House of Commons due to the governing party's majority.

Gridlock: This is a situation in which it becomes difficult for effective legislation to be passed due to the legislature being evenly divided or the legislature and executive being in conflict. In the US, this can happen when the Senate and the House of Representatives are controlled by different parties. It can also occur when the President comes from a different party to that which controls the Senate and House of Representatives. In this instance, the President could regularly veto proposed legislation coming from Congress.

Individual rights: These are the rights of individuals rather than groups. They normally refer to civic and political rights rather than economic, social and cultural ones. In the US Constitution, individual rights are outlined within the Bill of Rights.

Judicial review: This refers to the power of the courts to set aside acts of the executive or legislature because they are in conflict with a higher authority such as the terms of a written constitution. In the US, judicial review usually refers to the review of the constitutionality of legislation by the federal or state Supreme Courts.

Limited government: This is the idea that government restrictions on personal liberties and government intervention in the economy should be kept to an absolute minimum and be specified by law, normally through a written constitution. In the US, the Ninth and Tenth Amendments to the Constitution set out the principle of limited government.

Lobby group: Also known as pressure groups or interest groups, lobby groups are a group of people with a common interest or concern who organize to influence the government and other powerful organizations such as businesses in order to secure favourable outcomes such as legislation, a change in policy and public opinion. Because of the federal nature of US politics these groups have a number of access points at which they can campaign for their aims. These include their state legislatures, executives and judiciaries as well as Congress, the White House and the Supreme Court.

Lobbyist – This is a term used to describe a paid professional who advocates/campaigns for specific legislation to be enacted by Congress. Many lobbyists are from a legal background and many legal firms in the USA have departments devoted to this activity. Lobbying firms often base themselves in Washington D.C and there is a tendency known as the ‘revolving door’ which has seen many former Senators or Representatives become lobbyists. Money spent on employing the services of lobbyists increased from less than \$100 million in 1975 to \$3.2 billion by 2015.

Parliamentary system: This is a political system in which there is a fusion of executive and legislative power. The executive sits in the Parliament and may exert considerable control over it. Parliamentary systems usually make a clear distinction between the head of government and the Head of State. The head of government is usually the prime minister or premier. The head of state is more of a figurehead, normally either an elected president or hereditary monarch.

Party discipline: This refers to the ability of a party to get its elected representatives to support the policies of the party leadership. Party discipline tends to be much stronger in parliamentary systems such as the UK than in congressional systems such as the US. In the House of Commons, it is quite rare for a member to vote against the party line. In the US Congress, members frequently cross party lines to represent the interests of their particular constituents or intra-party group.

Party loyalty: This refers to the degree to which legislative members remain faithful to the party. Party loyalty may be viewed differently by members of different political parties and by party leaders and backbenchers. For example, in the UK Conservative MPs tend to view loyalty as allegiance to the party leadership whereas many Labour MPs would consider loyalty to the purpose and aims of their party as being more important.

Political Action Committee (PAC): These groups organize to collect funds to finance the political campaigns of politicians sympathetic to their aims. They also organize campaigns to defeat candidates who are not sympathetic to their aims. This can involve financing advertisements which raise awareness of a candidate's beliefs and presents the candidate in an unfavorable manner. The lobby group/pressure group, the National Rifle Association's PAC is known as the NRA Political Victory fund and aims to support the political campaigns of those who support gun ownership.

Pork barrel politics: This is the term used to describe government expenditure that is intended to benefit a politician's constituents in return for their support by way of votes or campaign contributions. The term originates in the United States but is now also applied more generally to such spending in many political systems. It is usually used to refer to government spending which is funded from general taxation but benefits people living in a particular constituency.

Presidential system: This is a political system in which the executive branch is separate from the legislature. The executive is controlled by a president directly elected for a fixed term rather than by a cabinet of ministers. The president is not accountable to the legislature and, in normal circumstances, cannot be dismissed by it.

Separation of powers: This is the idea that there should be strict separation of political powers between the executive and the legislature. This enables each branch of government to act as a check on, and a balance to, the power of the other and helps to prevent the emergence of dictatorial government.

States' rights: These are the rights that the US constitution reserves for individual states. Only states have the right to legislate in particular areas, not the Federal Government. In the UK, with devolved government now established in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, a similar situation arises. The devolved parliament and assemblies have the right to legislate in particular areas but other powers are reserved for the UK Parliament. Unlike in the US, however, the UK government can take back devolved powers and re-impose direct rule as it did in Northern Ireland prior to the St Andrews Agreement.

Revision checklist

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

You should be able to:	✓	Notes
Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of key political terms and concepts (see the glossary).		
Explain how the US Constitution has changed.		
Analyse and evaluate different views of how relevant the Constitution is for the US today.		
Explain the roles of the Senate and House of Representatives in the US Congress.		
Compare the effectiveness of the US Congress and British Parliament as representative, law-making and scrutiny bodies.		
Analyse and evaluate different views of whether there is greater executive dominance over the legislature in the UK or the USA.		
Analyse and evaluate different views of whether the UK Prime Minister or US President is more powerful within their respective political systems.		

