



Topic Assessment System

Component 3A: USA Politics

Tests – Set A

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Teacher's Introduction

This pack is part of the comprehensive Topic Assessment System for Edexcel A Level Politics Component 3A: Government and Politics of the USA.

Tests: Set A

For each topic there is a short-answer test worth 40–52 marks, designed to take around 1 hour. Note that for comprehensive specification coverage, the Presidency and Democracy tests are worth the maximum 52 marks, so please ensure you allocate enough time for these (for instance, if a 52-mark test is too long for your lesson, you may wish for students to complete the 12-marker as homework).

The tests combine 4-mark explanation questions with exam-style 12-mark analysis questions, primarily focused on AO2 skills. For each 4-mark question there are four possible answers, double the number required by the question. Each 12-mark question includes a possible answer which is indicative rather than exhaustive.

Structure

The Tests are divided into the following topics: Constitution and Federalism, Congress, The Presidency, The Supreme Court, Civil Rights, Democracy and Comparative Theories. The final topic, Comparative Theories, covers the previous subtopics, assessing their relationship to the rational, cultural and structural approaches outlined in the specification. Questions assessing the similarities and differences between the US and UK political systems are included throughout the resource.

Also available:

The complete Topic Assessment System	
Quizzes: Set A For each topic, a 30-mark multiple-choice quiz with answers and explanations.	Quizzes: Set B A second quiz per topic, covering the same content, allowing students to retry after completing the first test.
Tests: Set A One-hour set of short-answer questions per topic. Each question is a bite-size challenge towards an essay. ✓	Tests: Set B A second one-hour test per topic, with questions cleverly mirrored from Test A.
Essays: Set A 10 essay questions with model answers for students to analyse and compare with their own.	Essays: Set B 10 more essay questions on similar topics, with indicative content for easy self- or peer-marking.

Set B mirrors Set A, by, for instance, asking for disadvantages where the equivalent question in Test A asked for advantages. The key principle is that trying and then reviewing answers for Set A should help students do better on Set B.

Ideas for using Set A and Set B: These tests could be used one after the other, but are designed to be more effective if they are spaced out throughout the one-year course (e.g. Test A used to consolidate knowledge and provide a standard assessment during delivery, and Test B used to identify weaknesses in knowledge and analysis skills prior to revision sessions).

December 2021

Constitution and Federalism

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1. Explain **two** advantages of the amendment process.

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2. Explain **two** strengths of the Constitution.

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3. Explain **two** ways in which the Constitution is vague.

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4. Explain **two** reasons why amending the Constitution is difficult.

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5. Explain **two** ways in which the Constitution guarantees the separation of powers.

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6. Explain **two** ways in which state governments are different from the federal government.

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7. Explain **two** ways in which the Constitution can be seen as democratic.

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8. Explain **two** advantages of the Constitution being vague.

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9. Explain **two** positives of federalism.

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10. Analyse the differences between how constitutional reform is achieved in
In your answer you should refer to at least one comparative theory.

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Preview of Questions Ends Here

This is a limited inspection copy. Sample of questions ends here to avoid students previewing questions before they are set. See contents page for details of the rest of the resource.

Comparative Theories

1. Explain **two** differences between Congress and Parliament according to the structure of the legislature.
 - The US Congress is part of a system of checks and balances between different branches of government, whereas the executive sits within UK Parliament in the direction of debate and policy
 - The upper house of Parliament is unelected, giving it less democratic legitimacy
 - Legislation in the UK Parliament requires a simple majority in the lower house, which is simpler and easier to legislate than in the US, where Congress is restrained by the experiences of divided government and legislative gridlock
 - The UK Parliament is sovereign, giving it greater authority over the law and is superior to the Constitution
2. Explain **two** differences between civil rights in the US and the UK according to the historical context.
 - The US and the UK have different historical social relationships to rights and freedoms have been codified since the formation of the republic, but in the UK the Act is relatively new
 - This reflects the fact that rights in the UK have been more engrained into culture, whereas in the US rights are more of a formal and legal discussion
 - In the UK, basic rights and freedoms have emerged over time as the nation developed its parliamentary system, whereas in the US basic rights and freedoms have been enshrined at the inception of the nation
 - This makes the culture of rights in the UK more fluid and responsive to social change, whereas in the US it is more contested
3. Explain **two** similarities between members of Congress and Parliament according to the role of the legislature.
 - Both have an interest in ensuring their constituents are well represented to the public
 - Both may use their platform in the legislature to raise their profile and seek re-election
 - Members of the upper house in both countries have less electoral pressure from their respective lower houses, and so are freer to pursue causes or issues of interest
 - Politicians in both legislatures will usually need to demonstrate loyalty to the party or coalition within the legislature
4. Explain **two** similarities between the US president and the UK prime minister according to the cultural approach.
 - Both are commonly regarded as the figurehead of their respective nations, and their agenda are seen as a reflection of the wider political culture in the country
 - While in office, both will have to balance the interests of various pressure groups and the electorate in the governing of the country
 - Both tend to represent a wider political movement or development among the public
 - Both will seek to be in control of events and prevent the opposition from disrupting their agenda
5. Explain **two** differences between the US and UK electoral systems according to the process of election.
 - In the US, the head of state is directly elected, giving them a greater personal mandate to implement policy. In the UK, the prime minister must command the support of the majority in parliament, and is dependent on parliamentary approval, lessening their own individual authority
 - The UK uses different electoral systems for different elections, resulting in different assemblies having a different way of operating from Parliament. In the US, the electoral college is used to elect the federal government, and state legislatures closely monitor the process
 - The UK occasionally has the involvement of a third party in government, such as the Liberal Democrats in 2010, or the Democratic Unionist Party in 2017. This means there is room for compromise and concessions. In the US, only one of two parties can form a government, and the other is in opposition
 - In the US, candidates are chosen through a series of open primaries, and in the UK, incumbent MPs are usually reelected by default and rarely challenged. In the US, representatives in the US are often required to be more responsive to their constituents in order to guarantee reselection.

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6. Explain **two** differences between the US and UK Supreme Courts according to the following approaches:
 - The differing appointment processes produce different outcomes. In the US, the process is politicised as the president usually seeks to select justices which reflect their own political approach to government. This means justices are more likely to be appointed on the basis of political commitments than in the UK, where the process is largely depoliticised.
 - It is generally accepted in the US that Supreme Court justices will base their rulings on their own views and may well use their position within reason to advance certain interests. In the UK, Supreme Court justices are expected to base rulings purely on legal grounds.
 - The 'job for life' guarantee given to Supreme Court justices in the US could lead to justices ruling against judges pursuing their own interests than in the UK. In the UK, a majority of justices may result in judges benefiting from their rulings after their tenure is complete.
7. Explain **two** similarities between political parties in the US and the UK according to the following approaches:
 - The major political parties in both countries are seen 'oppositional' in nature, often leading to a confrontation generated by a long-standing tradition of two-party politics.
 - The major political parties in both countries are regarded as 'broad church' parties, encompassing a range of political views.
 - The major political parties in both countries have a 'base' that is usually concentrated in specific areas, and this is often the source of internal conflict within parties.
 - The major political parties in both countries have a similar geographic make-up, with left-leaning liberals in urban areas and right-leaning conservatives in rural areas.
8. Analyse the similarities between constitutional arrangements in the US and the UK. *In your answer you should refer to at least one comparative theory.*

Level	Mark	Description
No level	0	Student produced no material worthy of a single mark.
Level 1	1–3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – Students portray surface knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding US and UK politics, with little or no analysis. • AO2 – Students show little to no reasoned comparative analysis, making simple links between material and issues. On one side of the argument they cannot achieve above a level 1.
Level 2	4–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – Students portray some knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding US and UK politics, which are sometimes used in evaluation. Some relevant general points are made. • AO2 – Students show some signs of comparative analysis, making some relevant links between material and issues.
Level 3	7–9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – Students portray accurate knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding US and UK politics. Knowledge is used effectively in analysis and evaluation. Mostly relevant general points are made. • AO2 – Students show mainly reasoned comparative analysis, making relevant links between material and issues.
Level 4	10–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1 – Students portray detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding US and UK politics, which are used to support analysis and evaluation. Relevant general points are made. • AO2 – Students show consistently good, reasoned comparative analysis, making multiple reasoned links between material and issues.

- An answer using the structural approach may highlight: the difficulty of controlling a large government such as a large majority government in the UK and unified government in the US; the tensions in jurisdiction with multiple layers of government creating tensions in jurisdiction with multiple layers of government in the UK; the limitations placed on the executive by the judiciary in the US; these are often overcome by an executive with a convincing mandate.
- An answer using the cultural approach may highlight: there is a lot of vague arrangements and as such legislation, judicial review, and changing social norms are significant in filling in the constitutional gaps; civil society campaigning has been significant in achieving universal suffrage and a range of other civil rights; major parties are broad churches seeking to represent large swathes of society, and this is often reflected in their policies.
- An answer using the rational approach may highlight: both countries have a strong emphasis on leadership from the head of government, who has significant powers and little restraint from their cabinets; elected representatives in both countries are expected to act as checks on their conduct; the judiciary is independent and is not involved in making political rulings.

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Preview of Answers Ends Here

This is a limited inspection copy. Sample of answers ends here to stop students looking up answers to their assessments. See contents page for details of the rest of the resource.