

US Government & Politics with Mr Spurgeon & Miss Chandler

What are we actually going to do?

We study Component 3. It's called **Comparative Politics**

Comparative Politics is split into six sections:

1. The US Constitution and federalism
2. The US Congress
3. The US Presidency
4. The US Supreme Court and US civil rights
5. US democracy and participation
6. Comparative theories

US Government and Politics

The US Constitution and federalism:

- The nature of the US Constitution - vagueness of the document, codification and entrenchment.
- The constitutional framework (powers) of the US branches of government.
- The amendment process, including advantages and disadvantages.
- The principles of the US Constitution and an evaluation of their effectiveness today: Federalism; Separation of powers and checks and balances; Bipartisanship; Limited government.
- The main characteristics of US federalism - the federal government and its relationship with the states.
- Interpretations and debates: the extent of democracy within the US Constitution; the strengths and weaknesses of the Constitution and its impact on the US government today; the extent to which the USA remains federal today.

US Congress:

- The structure of Congress – its bicameral nature and the membership of Congress.
- The distribution of powers within Congress: powers given in the Constitution, powers exclusive to each House and the concurrent powers of Congress.

- The functions of Congress: Representation; Legislation; Oversight.
- Representation - congressional elections and incumbency, factors affecting voting behaviour within Congress e.g. parties, caucuses, constituency, PGs and lobbyists.
- Legislation - the strengths and weaknesses of the process, the different input of each Chamber, impact and effectiveness of laws passed.
- Oversight - the relationship between Congress and the presidency, the checks on the other branches of government.

- Interpretations and debates: the changing roles and powers of Congress and their relative importance; the adequacy of its representative role; the changing significance of parties in Congress; the significance and effectiveness of its constitutional powers

US Presidency (with specific reference to presidents since 1992):

- Formal sources of presidential power from US Constitution including both roles, as the Head of State, and as the Head of Government.
- Informal sources of presidential power: the electoral mandate, EOs, national events and the cabinet; powers of persuasion; EXOP, NSC, OMB and WHO.
- The presidency: relationships between the presidency & Congress and the presidency & the Supreme Court; limitations on presidential power e.g changing nature of power and relations with other branches of government, the election cycle, divided government etc.
- Interpretations and debates: the imperial presidency; the presidency and foreign policy and others.
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US Supreme Court and civil rights:

- The nature and role of the Supreme Court: in the US Constitution; its independent nature; the judicial review process.
- The appointment process: its strengths and weaknesses; factors influencing the president's choice of nominee; the current composition and ideological balance.
- The Supreme Court and public policy: the impact, exemplified, with a range of examples, including examples post-2005; political significance debate - judicial activism and judicial restraint.
- The protection of civil liberties and rights in the US today: via the Constitution, via the Bill of Rights, via subsequent constitutional amendments and via the Supreme Court.

- Race and rights in contemporary US politics: racial rights campaigns and the impact on current domestic policy – e.g, voting rights, affirmative action etc
- Interpretations and debates: the political v judicial nature of SC; ‘living Constitution’ v originalism; effectiveness of SC’s defence of civil and constitutional rights; the successes and failures of measures to promote equality

US democracy and participation:

Electoral systems in the US

- Presidential elections and their significance: the invisible primary, primaries and caucuses, the role of National Party Conventions and the Electoral College, and the resulting party system.
- Congressional elections
- Incumbency
- Campaign finance: the role of campaign finance and the current legislation on campaign finance, including McCain-Feingold reforms 2002 & Citizens United vs FEC 2010.

US political parties.

- The key ideas and principles of the Democrat and Republican parties
- The changing distribution of power between the two dominant parties
- The current conflicts and tendencies within the parties: factions and tension
- Coalition of supporters for each party: who votes for who and why

Interest groups in the USA.

- their significance, resources, tactics and debates about their impact on democracy.
- the influence, methods and power of at least one single interest group, professional group or policy group.

Interpretations and debates of US democracy and participation,

- advantages and disadvantages of the electoral process and the Electoral College and the debate around reform.
- the role of campaign finance and difficulty in achieving effective reform.
- the role of incumbency in elections.
- the ways in which interest groups can influence the three branches of government.

Comparative Approaches

Theoretical approaches:

- Rational
- Cultural
- Structural

Similarities and differences in the UK and USA:

- the UK and US Constitutions: nature (codified/uncodified) and their sources; provisions and principles, including separation of powers, checks and balances; the similarities and differences between the US federal system and the UK system of devolution.
- the UK and US legislative branches: powers, strengths and weaknesses of each of the Houses; the extent to which each of the Houses are equal.
- the US President and the UK Prime Minister: their roles and power and their impact on politics and government; extent of accountability to the US and UK legislatures.
- the UK and US Supreme Courts and civil rights: the basis for and relative extent for their powers; the relative independence of the Supreme Court in the US and UK; the effectiveness of the protection of rights in each country; the effectiveness of interest groups in the protection of civil rights in the USA and the UK.
- the UK and US democracy and participation: the different nature of the party systems (two-party and multi-party); the degree of internal unity within parties; the policy profiles of the two main parties in each country; the debates around campaign finance and party funding; the relative power, methods and influence of pressure groups.

What will the exam be like ?

The exam will be 2 hours and consists of three sections – A, B and C

Section A: this section is worth 12 marks

There is a choice of two questions and you will answer one. Both questions are comparative that require analysis of the similarities or differences of UK and US Government & Politics.

Section B: this section is worth 12 marks

There is only one compulsory question in this section. It requires analysis of the similarities or differences of UK and US Government & Politics. It also requires the application of political comparative theory.

Section C: this section is worth 60 marks

You will answer two (non-source) essay questions, from a choice of three.

Total: 84 marks.

There are three assessment objectives against which your work will be marked:

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of political institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.(35%)

AO2: Analyse aspects of politics and political information, including in relation to parallels, connections, similarities and differences. (35%)

AO3: Evaluate aspects of politics and political information, including to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions. (30%)

Anything else?

Yes.

We will:

- Try to make lessons interesting, accessible and challenging
- Be up to date with our understanding of politics
- Provide materials where appropriate, and guidance to relevant material where not
- Be on time for lessons
- Set homework that is useful
- Explain, and explain again, including in different ways, if necessary
- Not mind if people don't understand
- Mind if a) people don't understand and don't say so or b) don't do their home or classwork or c) don't know things they should
- Encourage opinions and debate
- Help create a supportive and positive atmosphere so we can enjoy ourselves, learn lots and do well

You will:

- Be on time to lessons
- Do your homework on time, every time
- Ask if you don't understand
- Contribute to class debate
- Follow the news
- Help create a supportive and positive atmosphere so we can enjoy ourselves, learn lots and do well