

Teaching guidance: Paper 2 – Government and politics of the USA and comparative politics

This teaching guidance provides advice for teachers, to help with the delivery of government and politics of the USA and comparative politics content.

More information on our Politics specifications can be found on the [Politics pages](#) of our website.

Part one: Government and politics of the USA and comparative politics

Consistent with the synoptic aims of the specification, the main purpose of this section of the course is twofold: firstly to provide students with an in-depth study of US government and Politics and secondly to enable students to make comparisons between the British and American political systems. Throughout this paper, students will be required to identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of politics. This will ensure that students develop a critical awareness of the changing nature of politics and the relationships between political ideas, political institutions and political processes.

Mindful of the specification, students should study the mechanics of the US system of government, starting with the US Constitution and then studying the three branches of government. This should be followed by a study of elections, political parties, pressure groups and civil rights (more details about each of these topics below). A strong emphasis will be placed on students including up to date examples in their work. As such, teachers will need to be mindful that they teach up to date material relating to the Presidential and mid-term elections, and the consequences of this.

In addition to studying the US system of government and politics, students will study three theoretical approaches to the study of comparative politics: structural, rational and cultural. Students will use the above theoretical approaches to analyse key similarities and differences between the USA and UK and evaluate the extent to which they explain these similarities and differences. This will be explicitly required as part of Section A of Paper 2 (eg Question 3 of the SAMs 'Explain and analyse three ways that *structural theory* could be used to study executive/legislative relations in the UK and US'...). These are common ways to approach the study of different political systems (exact definitions below) and allow students to evaluate the synoptic elements of the course in multiple ways. It also ties in, again, to the synoptic elements of the specification.

It is advised that preparation for Paper 2 should begin with a study of the US Constitution. The reason for this is that the US Constitution underpins the entire political system and causes a number of debates within US politics. By starting with a study of the US Constitution, pupils will develop an appreciation of the aims of the Founding Fathers and an understanding of the key principles of the Constitution including federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances and the protection of civil liberties. It is impossible to teach the US Constitution without teaching the Bill of Rights and the extent to which these first 10 amendments, and subsequent amendments, have been effectively upheld. This requires an

understanding of judicial review, how this came about and the role that the US Supreme Court plays in upholding the Constitution. It is for this reason that it is advised that the US Constitution is followed by the US Judiciary. Within this topic students will be able to explore different approaches taken to interpreting the US Constitution, as well as the political significance of the Supreme Court and its relations to the other branches of government.

The two elected branches of government, Congress and the Presidency, should then be studied. It is advisable to focus on the US Congress first, drawing upon knowledge already acquired in the US Constitution on separation of powers and checks and balances. This knowledge should then be built on by looking at the powers of Congress, both in relation to domestic and foreign policy. Finally, the ability of Congress to scrutinise the other branches of government should be studied. It is therefore recommended that the study of the US government should conclude with a study of the US Presidency, focusing on the development of Presidential power, and limitation on it, in relation to the other branches of government and the US Constitution.

Once the US system of government has been taught, the remainder of the US government and politics section of Paper 2 should be taught. It is advised that preparation for Paper 2 should begin with a study of the electoral process and direct democracy. This can be linked back to knowledge acquired in the US Constitution, such as the principle of Republicanism. This should be followed by, and linked to, a study of political parties. This should be focused on the dominance of the two main parties but students should also show an understanding of the significance of third parties and independent candidates. This will be followed by pressure groups and finally, civil rights. The reason for this is that a number of significant pressure groups are linked to civil rights issues. Students should also draw upon knowledge already acquired in earlier parts of the course, most notably during the study of the US Judiciary. This brings to an end the teaching of government and politics in the USA.

Unlike for Sections A and C of Paper 2, Section B will feature an extract question and will require *no element of comparative politics* – instead, the focus will be placed solely on the USA element. Students must be able to draw out and discuss two different points of view.

In order to do well in Section C, students will be required to make full use of their knowledge of substantive politics, as developed over the full course of the A-level. There is an expectation that the comparative questions in Section C will focus on the substantive areas of the subject. Much of the substantive material required to answer questions in Section C will have been covered in the other sections of the syllabus in Paper 1 and Paper 2. For Section C, questions will focus on comparisons of the UK and the USA. As well as describing the similarities and differences in the institutions and processes of the two countries, candidates will need to explain them in terms of cultural, organisational and social factors as well as the values, policy issues, historical backgrounds, and precedents of the two countries.

Teachers should also be conscious that this section of the specification has an ‘internally synoptic’ character. Consequently, students should not merely understand each of the US government and politics topics; they should also become aware of how these topics interact and compare. In other words, teachers should aim to impart an awareness of how each of the topics overlap, encouraging pupils to look for themes and links within them. For example, teachers should encourage pupils to assess the impact of an increasingly partisan Congress on the other branches, elections and political parties. Similarly, the weaknesses of the Constitution should be evaluated alongside civil rights, pressure groups and an increasingly active Supreme Court.

The constitutional framework of US government

Reflecting the specification, the study of the US Constitution may be divided into seven stages.

(i) nature and significance of the US Constitution:

Students should begin by examining the features of the US Constitution. Students should understand that the US constitution is codified, entrenched and judicable within a federal system of government. Students should also consider the importance of the US constitution, both historically and in the present day. In particular, students should consider whether the US constitution remains, or ever was, a beacon of democracy.

(ii) framework of government laid down in the constitution:

Students should begin by examining the aims of the Founding Fathers. In particular, students should be able to evaluate whether or not these should be adhered to in the twenty-first century. In particular, students should show an appreciation of competing views on whether or not the Founding Fathers' views should be taken into account when interpreting the constitution today. Students should focus on conservative and liberal perspectives and later link this to strict and loose constructionism when studying the US Judiciary.

(iii) constitutional principles:

- separation of powers
- checks and balances
- federalism

Students should begin by learning a solid definition of each of the constitutional principles. It is important that students distinguish between the concepts separation of powers and checks and balances. Within the study of separation of powers, an emphasis should be placed on separation of personnel, and shared powers between the three branches of government. Students should understand the full range of checks and balances available to each branch to check the power of the other two. In particular, students should consider how Congress is able to check the power of the President and vice versa. It should also be understood that the Supreme Court can check the power of both branches through judicial review. Students should focus on the extent to which the three branches of the Federal government effectively check each other. Finally, students should consider whether these constitutional principles help or hinder the US system of government.

Students should begin federalism with an understanding about how and why this principle is enshrined in the constitution, even though it is not explicitly mentioned. Students should also learn about the evolution of federalism and the idea of new federalism. In particular, students should consider whether or not the principle of federalism has been eroded due to the expansion of federal government power.

(iv) amendment process:

Students will be required to understand the methods available to amend the US constitution. This will require an understanding both formal methods available to amend the constitution, involving Congress and the states as well as the option involving a constitutional convention. However, it should also be stressed that the constitution can be amended informally through judicial review. In particular, students should consider whether it is too difficult to amend the US constitution as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the process.

- (v) federal system of government and federal state relations:

Students will be required to understand the extent to which the federal government's influence over the states has increased in recent years. They should then learn about the relationship between the federal government and the states in recent years. Finally, students should consider whether or not this undermines the importance of the constitutional principle of federalism.

- (vi) debates concerning the importance of the US Constitution to the working of contemporary US government:

Students should focus on a number of key debates and criticisms of the US constitution. Students should begin by considering if the constitutional principles of separation of powers and checks and balances are an obstacle to effective government. Students should then consider if the constitution remains fit for purpose. Finally, students should consider if the modern constitution has been transformed beyond recognition from the vision of the Founding Fathers. In particular, students should consider if this is positive or negative development.

- (vii) protection of civil liberties and rights under the constitution, Bill of Rights and supreme court rulings:

Students should begin by looking at the Bill of Rights. In particular, students should learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the document. Students should also understand that as well as the Bill of Rights, other rights exist in subsequent amendments and as a result of Supreme Court rulings. It should be stressed that all of these rights come under the heading of constitutional rights. Students should focus on whether or not constitutional rights, including rights detailed in the Bill of Rights, have been effectively upheld in recent years. Students should consider barriers to civil liberties being protected such as anti-terrorism legislation.

More of this will be taught in the next topic 'the judicial branch of government' as well the topic 'civil rights'.

The judicial branch of government

Reflecting the specification, the study of the US Judiciary may be divided into seven stages.

- (i) constitutional role of the supreme court and the nature of judicial power:

Students should begin by learning about what judicial review is and how it began in *Marbury v Madison* in 1803. Students should be aware that through judicial review, the Supreme Court can check the power of the legislature and executive, as well as protect civil liberties. Students should appreciate the significance of judicial review as well as the controversy surrounding it. Students should draw on their constitutional knowledge to understand the power of the Supreme Court. However, it should be stressed that the power of the court can also be checked in a number of ways. Finally, students should learn about judicial independence.

- (ii) supreme court as the guardian of the constitution/constitutional interpretation:

Students should, again, draw upon their constitutional knowledge to understand the role the Supreme Court plays in the principle of checks and balances and as a protector of constitutional rights. Students should focus on the role of the court in amending the constitution through judicial interpretation.

- (iii) significance of judicial review:

Students should begin by understanding that the constitution is a vague document and can be interpreted in a number of ways, both depending on the specific case and on the views of the individual justices sitting on the Supreme Court. Students should understand that the judicial philosophy of the Supreme Court justices can be based on both their views on how the constitution should be interpreted as well as their political views – justices can, at times, reflect the views of the President who appoints them. Students should learn the concepts of strict and loose constructionism, and judicial activism and restraint as possible ways for justices to make decisions and interpret the constitution. Students should focus on these concepts, ensuring that they understand a clear definition of each. In particular, students should consider the merits and drawbacks of each approach.

- (iv) process of selection and appointment of supreme court judges:

- current composition
- debates and controversies

Students should begin by looking at the current composition of the Supreme Court. In particular, students should focus on recent appointments to the court and their impact. Students should learn about how justices are appointed, including the role that the Senate plays, and factors that the President takes into account when appointing justices. Students should consider why the process is so politically controversial and has been criticised. It should be stressed that justices can be placed on an ideological spectrum according to how liberal or conservative they are in their decision making. The current court is split into two ideological blocs – a conservative quartet and a liberal quartet. The two blocs are separated by a single justice, sometimes described as the 'swing justice'. Students should understand the significance of the 'swing justice'. However, it should also be stressed that this can change over time – justices can become

more or less liberal and conservative. It is also dependent upon the cases the justices hear in a particular court term.

- (v) political significance of the supreme court:
- landmark rulings
 - significance in shaping public policy in terms of, for example, federalism and civil rights

Students should begin by understanding that a number of Supreme Court cases are politically significant – either in relation to citizens' rights or as a check on executive or legislative power. However, it should also be stressed that not all cases are as politically significant as each other. Students should understand a number of landmark rulings made by the Supreme Court. Students should focus on recent cases, as well as older ones, that shape public policy in terms of civil rights, federalism and executive power. Students should learn about the outcome of each case, why it was politically significant and which justices voted in favour and against the decision. In particular, students should understand that some cases are politically significant because they split the court, sometimes ideologically. However, it should also be stressed that a high number of cases are decided in a unanimous manner. Finally, students should consider the significance of the Supreme Court and its ability to shape public policy and effectively legislate.

- (vi) supreme court as protector of citizens' rights:

Students should begin by looking at the extent to which the Bill of Rights has been protected by the Supreme Court. This should then be expanded to cover all constitutional rights. Students should consider if all groups in society have their rights equally protected by the court. Finally, students should understand the arguments in favour of and against the court as a protector of citizen' rights overall.

- (vii) relations of the Supreme Court and other branches of government:
- the Supreme Court's ability to check executive and legislative power
 - the executive and legislature challenging the Supreme Court

Students should begin by understanding that the Supreme Court uses judicial review within the constitutional principle of checks and balances to check the power of the other branches of government. As such, students should learn about significant cases relating to this. However, it should also be stressed that the executive and legislature can challenge the Supreme Court, either by amending the constitution or in other ways. In particular, students should consider if the Supreme Court has become too powerful for an unelected body in a democracy. Students should focus on whether the court can be correctly described as 'a political, not a judicial institution' and whether it can be described as an 'imperial judiciary'.

The legislative branch of government: Congress

Reflecting the specification, the study of Congress may be divided into seven stages. Student will be required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- (i) the structure, role and powers of the US Congress:

Students should begin by learning about the powers that each chamber has, as well as the joint powers that the House of Representative and Senate share. Students should understand why the Senate is considered to be more powerful and influential than the House of Representatives due to the exclusive powers it possesses. In particular, students should consider the Senate's power to filibuster legislation and appointments as well as ratifying treaties and confirming presidential appointments. Students should also consider the key factors that affect the relationship between the Senate and the House.

- (ii) composition of congress, the different terms of office and party allegiance:

Students should begin by learning about the composition of Congress and how many seats each party has in each chamber. They should focus on learning about the different terms of office and requirements set out to become either a Congressman or a Senator. In particular, students should learn about leadership in Congress, understanding the roles and significance of the Speaker, Majority and Minority leaders and the whips. Students should understand the power that each party leader exerts in Congress. Students should also consider the significance of political parties within Congress.

- (iii) debates concerning the functions, powers and effectiveness of congress in legislation, oversight and the power of the purse:

Students should begin by understanding that Congress is often accused of being an ineffective legislator. Students should understand what percentage of bills is passed in Congress. In particular, students should understand the legislative process and the blocking points which contribute to Congress passing so few bills. In particular, students should consider Congress' power of the purse. Recent examples should be used to illustrate the difficulty that the President can have in getting Congress to pass their budget. However, it should also be stressed that the power of the purse enables Congress to check Presidential power, especially in relation to executive orders and foreign policy. Students should focus on the impact of increasing partisanship on the ability of Congress to fulfil all of its functions. Finally, students should understand the oversight role Congress has and the ability of Congress to impeach the President and members of the Supreme Court.

- (iv) party system and committee system and their significance within congress:

Students should begin by learning the factors that influence the votes of members of Congress and then extent to which are parties the most significant influence on voting in Congress. Students should understand the different committees that exist in Congress and consider how committees help Congress to fulfil its roles of representation, legislation and scrutiny. In particular, students should understand the role of Committee Chairmen in Congress, their influence and why have they been the subject of criticism.

- (v) representative role of senators and representatives:

Students should begin by understanding that if Congress is to be representative, it needs to fulfil a number of functions. It needs to contain Congressman and Senators who represent the views of their constituents, it needs to be socially representative and it needs to have districts and states which are fair and competitive. Students should consider if the House of Representatives carries out its representative role more effectively than the Senate. Students should also consider if members of Congress are out of touch with the people who elect them and are more concerned with local issues than national or international issues. Students should also consider the impact of pork barrel politics on representation and the effectiveness of Congress overall.

- (vi) relative strengths of the House of Representatives and the Senate:

Students should begin by understanding the criticisms levelled at Congress – that it is significantly less effective when different parties control its two chambers, that it lacks effective leadership, it has no meaningful foreign policy role and that it is the broken branch. Students should consider these criticisms and focus on if Congress remains a powerful branch within the US system of government.

- (vii) relationship of congress to the executive branch of government and the Supreme Court:

Students should begin by identifying the checks that Congress places on the executive and Supreme Court. Students should consider how effectively Congress performs its scrutiny role. In particular, students should consider the ability of Congress to affect foreign policy and challenge a recent increase in executive power, particularly in relation to executive orders and executive agreements. Students should also consider the extent to which the President is able to circumvent Congress and if this renders Congress ineffective.

The executive branch of government: President

Reflecting the specification, the study of the US President may be divided into five stages.

- (i) the executive branch of government in the constitution:

Students should begin by looking at the executive branch in relation to the other branches of government. Students should understand the concepts and implications of the constitutional principles of checks and balances and separation of powers. In particular, students should understand that this means that the President often has to rely on the power to persuade.

- (ii) sources of presidential power:

(formal, enumerated and inherent powers outlined in Article 2 of the constitution)

Students should begin by learning what formal powers the Constitution sets out for the President – both in relation to domestic and foreign policy. As such, students should learn about the President's ability to veto and pocket veto legislation. In particular, students should consider how much influence the President has over the legislative process. Students should also look at the

President's ability to appoint individuals to the executive and judicial branches. Students should also look at the foreign policy powers the President is granted in the constitution and the constraints on the President's role as commander in chief. In particular, students should consider the effectiveness of each of the constitutional powers awarded to the President.

(informal, modern developments such as stretching of implied powers and the creation of institutions such as EXOP)

Students should focus on Article II and consider whether the vagueness of this has allowed the President to expand his powers in recent years. Students should learn about mechanisms available to the President to expand their powers such as the Executive Office of the President (EOP), and how this came about. Students should focus on methods the President uses to circumvent Congress such as executive orders, signing statements and executive agreements. Students should consider to what extent the modern presidency is an 'imperial presidency'.

(constitution, Congress and Supreme Court)

Students should begin by learning the powers which Congress and the Supreme Court have to check presidential power. Students should then consider the extent to which these powers are effective. In particular, students should consider the ability of Congress to check the Presidents foreign policy and informal powers. Students should also consider Presidential influence on the Supreme Court through appointments.

(iii) constraints on President's ability to exercise those powers:

- the effectiveness of formal checks and balances
- key variables such as party support in Congress
- the prevailing philosophy of the Supreme Court
- the attitudes of the media and public opinion.

Students should focus on the factors which limit the President's power. In particular, students should consider if a President's power inevitably declines in a second term in office and whether Presidential careers can ever live up to expectations. Students should understand the constraints placed on the President in both domestic and foreign policy. Students should consider the extent to which Presidents control foreign policy. In particular, students should consider whether the President is stronger abroad than at home.

(iv) power and influence of the Vice President, Cabinet and the Executive Office of President

Students should begin by looking at the role of the Vice President. Students should focus on the importance of the role and factors which affect it. Students should then look at the factors taken into account when the President chooses their cabinet. In particular, students should focus on the significance of the cabinet in the executive branch. Students should also understand what the EOP is and the significance of it both as a whole and the individuals within it. Students should consider how the role of such individuals is dependent upon each President and can vary over time.

- (v) role of the federal bureaucracy and federal agencies

Students should understand what the federal bureaucracy is and how it can enhance presidential power. Students should also focus on other federal agencies and their ability to enhance presidential power.

The electoral process and direct democracy

Reflecting the specification, the study of the electoral process and direct democracy may be divided into twelve stages.

- (i) electoral systems used in the USA

Students should begin by learning the different types of primaries/caucuses including invisible primaries, the national conventions, presidential debates and the Electoral College (this may include congressional elections and major propositions/initiatives). In particular, students should consider the advantages and disadvantages of the electoral system and initiatives.

- (ii) main characteristics of presidential and congressional elections and campaigns

Students should begin by learning about how often elections occur and what the requirements are for candidates. In particular, students should focus on recent elections, both Presidential and mid-term. Students should understand what mid-term elections are, when they occur and what offices are being filled. Students should consider why mid-term elections are potentially, but not necessarily, important. Students should focus on the results, campaigns and factors which have affected the outcome of recent midterm elections. Students should also consider the impact of a lack of congressional term limits.

- (iii) main influences on electoral outcomes

Students should consider the factors shaping the outcome of the most recent elections, both Presidential and mid-term. Students should understand the reasons for incumbent advantage. They should also learn the similarities and contrasts between midterm and presidential years. Students should also consider the possible implications for future elections.

- (iv) candidate selection and nomination – primaries, caucuses, national nominating conventions

Students should begin by learning what the requirements are for Presidential candidates. In particular, students should focus on how Presidential candidates are selected and how the Electoral College system works. In particular, students should understand the procedures for primary elections (closed and open) and caucuses. Students should focus on the advantages and disadvantages of each. Students should understand the pattern of primaries and caucuses and the extent of 'frontloading'. Students should also understand conventions, their frequency and when and where they are held. Students should also understand that although the traditional functions of conventions have declined, they remain important.

- (v) electoral college debates about its workings, outcomes and impact on campaigns

Students should understand the advantages and disadvantages of the Electoral College. Students should consider possible replacements for the Electoral College and focus on why it is unlikely to be reformed or abolished.

(vi) factors determining electoral outcomes

(money)

Students should understand the different methods of financing campaigns such as matching funds, federal grants and self-financing. Students should consider the arguments for and against each method. Students should learn about the role of campaign finance as well as the extent of its success and recent attempts at reform.

(media)

Students should understand the significance of the role of televised presidential debates and the media in general.

(issues)

Using examples, students should consider the issues which have affected the outcome of recent elections.

(leadership)

Using examples, students should consider the impact of leadership on the outcome of recent elections.

(vii) direct democracy at state level – referenda, initiatives, propositions, recall elections – debates concerning their use

Students should understand what propositions, referendums and recall elections are. In particular, students should understand how states use propositions. Students should consider the advantages and disadvantages of this. Students should also focus on the contribution of referendums, initiatives, propositions and recall elections on direct democracy. Students should consider the advantages and disadvantages of each.

(viii) voting behaviour and the main variables affecting the way people vote in the USA

Students should understand what factors explain voting behaviour, both in Presidential and Congressional elections. Students should consider which factors are most significant.

(ix) links between parties and their core voting coalitions

Students should understand the links between parties and their core voting coalitions. Students should consider to what extent they have strengthened or weakened in recent years.

(x) recent factors in voting behaviour – issues, candidates

Students should use examples from recent elections to identify recent factors in voting behaviour. Students should consider whether candidates or issues have played a more significant role in voting behaviour in recent elections.

- (xi) factors leading to changes in voting behaviour

Students should use examples from recent elections as well as historical examples, to identify factors that lead to changes in voting behaviour. Students should consider significant events such as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina as well recent financial crises.

- (xii) split ticket voting and high levels of abstention in US elections

Students should understand what split ticket voting and split districts are. Students should consider the extent of split-ticket voting and why this is. In particular, students should consider the consequences of split-ticket voting. Students should understand what is meant by gerrymandering. They should learn why gerrymandering takes place and the impact of this on elections and representation. Students should understand that there are high levels of abstention in the US elections and low turnout in primary and general elections. Students should consider the reasons for this and consequences of it.

Political parties

Reflecting the specification, the study of political parties may be divided into six stages.

- (i) the two main political parties (Democratic and Republican):

- ideologies
- values
- policies
- traditions

Students should begin by learning about the traditions and ideologies of the two major parties. They should understand what the parties stand for and the prevailing ideology of the two main political parties – Democrats are more liberal and Republicans are more conservative. In particular, students should understand the evolution of the main political parties from 'umbrella' parties to increasingly ideological/partisan parties. Students should understand the transformation of the two major parties from broad non-ideological coalitions of 1950s and 1960s into more ideologically cohesive parties of today. Students should learn that traditionally the two major parties covered a wide ideological spread. Democrats included liberals from the West coast and North-east America as well as conservatives from the South. Republicans included conservatives from the Midwest as well as moderates from the North-east. Students should learn about the importance of the Solid South in the 1990s and how its break up contributed to both parties becoming ideologically cohesive. This resulted in some conservative Democrat politicians switching to the Republicans and some moderate Republicans switching to Democrats. As such, students will learn about the terminology 'red America', 'blue America' and 'purple America'. Finally, students should consider the values and policies of both parties today, including similarities and differences.

- (ii) factionalised nature of the parties – internal divisions

Students should learn about the current ideological divisions within the two main parties. In particular, students should understand the differences between the fiscal conservatives, social conservatives and moderates in the Republican Party, as well as between liberal activists, centrists and moderates in the Democratic Party. In particular, students should focus on the values, influence and success of the different factions within each party.

(iii) party organisation

Students should understand how the two major parties are organised.

(iv) debates concerning party decline or renewal – weakness of US parties

Students should begin by learning about the debate that began in 1970s over the continuing relevance of political parties. Students should focus on the extent to which parties continue to carry out their core functions and the extent to which these have been taken over by other bodies such as pressure groups. Students should consider to what extent US parties are in a period of decline or renewal.

(v) two party dominance in US politics

Students should begin by defining a two-party system. In particular, students should focus on the extent to which there is two-party dominance of state politics, Congress and the Presidency. Students should consider if the US has a two-party system.

(vi) significance of third parties and independent candidates

Students should begin by learning examples of third parties and the different types in the US. They should understand the role played by third parties and the influence they have been able to exert despite a lack of electoral success. In particular, students should learn about the impact third parties have had in state and national politics, including in Congressional and Presidential elections. Students should learn the reasons why the minor parties have been unable to break the dominance of the Democrats and Republicans and factors which limit the success of minor parties. Students should consider the policy impact of third parties and independent candidates even when their electoral impact is limited.

Pressure groups

Reflecting the specification, the study of political parties may be divided into six stages:

(i) political pluralism in the USA and its extent in the USA

Students should begin by learning why pressure groups exist and why the US political system provides so many 'access points' for them to exert influence.

(ii) typologies of pressure groups

Students should begin by learning about the different types of pressure group and how they can be categorised. Students should understand the functions pressure groups perform and how they operate. Students should focus on the

institutional, demographic and cultural factors which give US pressure groups a significant role in US politics.

(iii) methods and tactics used by pressure groups to influence decision making

Students should begin by learning why each of the federal branches of government offers different opportunities for pressure groups to advance their agendas. In particular, students should learn about the different access points within the federal system which pressure groups seek to influence and the motives for choosing particular access points. Students should also understand the different methods used to influence each branch such as lobbying, campaign donation and direct action. Students should consider the extent to which activity by opposing groups is self-cancelling, and factors which conduce to the pre-eminence of some groups such as the NRA. Students should learn about the ability of pressure groups to dominate in Washington DC. Students should understand that this encompasses the three branches of the federal government - the Executive, Congress and the Supreme Court. Students should learn about policy making and enactment as well as policy execution, enforcement and interpretation. Finally, students should consider if pressure groups help or hinder policy making in the USA.

(iv) Relative power of pressure groups vis-à-vis political parties

Students should understand the power of pressure groups relative to other representative bodies such as political parties. Students should consider if pressure groups are able to represent the views of the electorate more accurately than political parties on the key policy issues that dominate US politics including the environment and global warming; the economy and taxation; law and order and capital punishment; social policy such as immigration and healthcare; moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia; and equality and rights such as gay marriage, gun control, affirmative action and freedom of speech.

(v) debates concerning the power of pressure groups in the USA

Students should understand the debate over the role of pressure groups within the political system. Students should consider how far they enhance democracy, provide the opportunity to further the interests of all groups in society, stimulate political participation and disperse power rather than concentrating it in the hands of a few. Students should consider if pressure groups are anti-democratic and work to concentrate power for a few. Finally, students should understand measures taken to limit the influence of pressure groups and their effectiveness.

(vi) Role and significance of Political Actions Committees – regarding electoral finance

Students should begin by learning the definition political action committees. Students should understand the role that PACs play in electoral finance. Students should distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' money by using recent examples. Students should consider the significance of PACs.

Civil rights

Reflecting the specification, the study of civil rights may be divided into two stages:

- (i) protection of civil liberties and rights under the Constitution, Bill of Rights, subsequent amendments and rulings of the Supreme Court

Students should begin by drawing upon knowledge acquired in the Constitution and Supreme Court topics about the ability of the US Constitution to protect civil liberties

- (ii) the impact of two recent political issues concerning civil rights and liberties on US politics. For example, in relation to race, immigration, religion, freedom of speech, gender, sexual orientation, privacy, disability or the right to bear arms

Students should consider the extent to which the Bill of Rights, subsequent amendments and Supreme Court rulings have protected civil liberties on a number of issues. In particular, students should focus on the impact of two recent political issues concerning civil rights and liberties on US politics

Part two: Comparative politics

Reflecting the specification, the comparative politics section of Paper 2 may be divided into two stages.

- (i) Theoretical approaches

The comparative politics section requires students to compare the government of the UK and USA by using three theoretical approaches. As such, students should begin by learning the definitions of the three theoretical approaches. It is advisable that the following definitions are learnt:

- the 'structural' dimension of comparative government refers to the differing structure of the UK/US constitutions and governmental systems generally
- the 'rational' dimension refers to the differing political choices that voters make in the UK/US – for example, in relation to voting behaviour or whether parties or pressure groups are the best forms of political participation
- the 'cultural' model refers to the differing histories of both countries and how this has affected the 'tone' of political debate and activity . This is useful, for example, when explaining why socialist politics has had more appeal in the UK than in the US, or why the hereditary/unelected elements inherent to the UK system are considered much less acceptable in the US.

Students should understand why theoretical approaches are a useful approach to the study of comparative politics. In particular, students should understand the different ways each approach explains similarities and differences between the governments and politics in the UK and USA. Students should focus on using the three approaches to identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of politics across the two political systems. Students should also

consider the changing nature of politics and the relationships between political ideas, political institutions and political processes.

As well as learning the similarities and differences in the institutions and processes of the two countries students will need to understand them in terms of cultural, organisational and social factors as well as the values, policy issues, historical backgrounds, and precedents of the two countries.

(ii) a comparison between the UK and USA's systems of government

Students will use the above theoretical approaches to analyse key similarities and differences between the USA and UK and evaluate the extent to which they explain these similarities and differences, based on the following issues:

(constitutional arrangements)

Students should understand the key similarities and differences between the UK and US constitutions and their impact on government and politics in their respective countries. Students should compare their nature (codified/uncodified), sources and provisions, separation of powers, checks and balances. Students should also consider the similarities and differences between the devolution model in the UK and the federal model in the USA.

(judiciaries)

Students should understand the similarities and differences between the Supreme Courts. Students should consider the impact on government and politics. Students should compare the relative powers, independence and impartiality of the two courts.

(the legislatures)

Students should compare the powers, composition and structure of the British Parliament and American Congress. In particular, students should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of each legislature in respect of their primary functions of passing legislation, scrutinising the executive and representing constituents

(the executives)

Students should focus on comparing the powers and constraints of/on the American President and British Prime Minister. Students should also learn about the similarities and differences between the British and American cabinet and executive office.

(electoral and party systems)

Students should begin by comparing elections and electoral systems used in the UK and USA. In particular, students should focus on comparing the two party systems and how they operate in the UK and the USA, as well as party politics. Finally, students should consider the impact of third party and independent candidates in the UK and the USA.

(pressure groups)

Students should begin by understanding the key similarities and differences of the influences on government in the UK and the USA. Students should consider

the debates surrounding campaign finance and party funding. In particular, students should focus on comparing the relative power, influence and methods of pressure groups in the UK and the USA.

(civil rights)

Students should understand the key similarities and differences regarding the protection of civil rights in the UK and the USA. Students should also compare debates about civil rights in the UK and USA, including issues and civil rights campaigns.