
A-LEVEL POLITICS

7152/2 Comparative Politics: Government and Politics of the USA
Report on the Examination

7152
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General comments

In general students were able to access the entirety of the question paper, apart from question 3. Most students did not seem to experience any significant time management issues. It was common for students to attempt section B and C questions before the 9-mark questions. However, some students did not allocate time well and when this occurred too much time was spent on section A at the expense of section B and C questions. It is advisable that students seek to spend 40 minutes on each of the sections. Section A questions were generally well answered, with three clear paragraphs and supporting evidence.

As in previous years question 04 proved to be a challenge for students. It is important to stress that the extracts should be seen as a 'springboard' for students to evaluate and analyse. There were some answers that almost totally ignored the extracts, which resulted in responses being limited to level 2. Level 2 responses also did little more than identify an element in the extracts and describe or restate the point. Question 04 provided the widest range of responses with most students familiar with the debate regarding lobbying in US politics. Some students appeared not to be fully aware of the assessment criteria in terms of using the extracts and provenance. Many responses were often descriptive, a restating of what the extracts said with very little added to it except a reference to the NRA. The best responses used a 'pair and compare' approach, taking quotes from each extract and using this as the basis of analysis.

Section C has an optional element and question 05 (civil rights) proved to be more popular than 06 (federalism and devolution). The best responses focused clearly on the questions set and were based on well-structured and coherent answers with up-to-date information, evidence, and examples. As section C essays are comparative students must engage with the US and UK when answering these questions, otherwise level 3 and above marks are unlikely to be awarded.

Overall, those who scored well across the paper managed their time effectively and were aware of the assessment objectives. As with previous years, the most successful students were able to offer sophisticated answers in terms of synopticity.

Section A

Question 01

This question proved accessible, and it saw a significant range of responses in terms of quality. The best answers were able to identify three different factors and how they impact voting behaviour in the US. However, many students were not awarded high level 2 or level 3 marks because they didn't explain why certain groups of voters are regular supporters of the Democrats and Republicans. The best responses used election results from a range of years including 2008, 2016 and 2020. The mark scheme allowed for students to be awarded marks for combining primacy and recency factors or for the selection of three primacy or three recency factors, the most common and successful was the primacy approach with students focusing on three from: race, religion, age, education, region. There were some excellent responses considering recency factors such as how Trump's protectionism meant that Rust Belt states changed hands in 2016 election or how the October Surprises of Hurricane Sandy and Clinton's emails caused late swings in voting patterns. However, this question also attracted many weak responses, with students writing simplistic and over-generalised responses about voting patterns. Weaker responses also tended to be vague and often just referred to the 'media' and described Trump's behaviour on

Twitter without linking it to voting. Some responses also drifted into turnout or campaigns and funding; these approaches were not rewarded.

Question 02

Most responses were able to identify three ways in which executive power can be constrained by the other branches of government. This was well answered, and students were able to identify three ways in which presidential power can be limited with some excellent knowledge and understanding of the impeachment process, the Senate's consent and advice role, and the power of the purse. Some weaker responses struggled to understand the role of the Supreme Court; they were unsure of its role within the impeachment process or implied that the Court automatically checks on legislation and executive orders. The most common reason students were not rewarded high level 2 and level 3 marks was not giving specific examples to support which method of constraint was being discussed, for example when a presidential veto was overridden or a piece of presidential legislation that was amended.

Question 03

As noted earlier some students did not attempt this question. The reason for this may relate to the form of the advanced information given. Many students who did attempt to answer the question left it until the end of the exam and wrote incomplete answers. Teachers are advised to make sure students have a secure definition of each of the comparative theories which can then be applied to question 03. As stated in 2019, students do not need to name, or list academics associated with the comparative theories in their responses. It is important also to stress that students need to refer to both the US and UK when answering question 03.

The best responses gave a definition of rational theory and how it could be related to the study of how members of Congress and Parliament vote within their respective legislatures. Many responses used the mandate/trustee/delegate theories to approach the question, and some exemplified them well with evidence from both countries. However, a more common error was that rational theory was not mentioned at all or that points made about legislatures were generalised rather than about how members of each chamber might vote. It was also rare for responses to refer to the House of Lords. Weaker responses struggled to provide balance and tended to focus on one country and ignore the other.

Section B

Question 04

This question elicited a wide range of responses. Most students found the extracts accessible and were able to find arguments within them. This then meant most students found something of relevance to write about when answering the question. However, the focus of the question and extract 1 challenged some students but those who answered it well understood lobbying is a contentious issue in US politics and were able to apply the theories of pluralism and elitism when evaluating the claims made in each of the extracts. It is important to stress that the students who were awarded level 4 and 5 marks were able to apply their own knowledge to evaluate the assertions of the extracts.

A significant number of responses struggled to focus on lobbying with many seeking to discuss PACs, Super PACs and campaign finance. Well prepared students sought to discuss the provenance of the extracts and the best responses were able to give examples of the revolving door in action and make links to iron triangles. Responses often balanced this with examples of pressure groups achieving aims through lobbying such as the NAACP and Civil Rights Act 1965, as well as the meetings between JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs lobbyists on the Dodd-Frank bill in 2010. Stronger students acknowledged the existence of the revolving door and were able to evaluate it and make links to the extracts. Many students also examined iron triangles accurately using the Military Industrial Complex as an example. Overall, students usually had some theoretical understanding of lobbying.

The weakest responses saw students merely paraphrasing from the extracts and adding very little of their own knowledge. These tended to receive marks in the bottom of level 2. Common issues were that the extracts were largely re-written with little or no reference to wider own knowledge (particularly understanding of lobbying) and confusion over the focus of extract 1. Weaker responses did not apply pluralism or elitism in any degree of depth nor offer clear definitions of the revolving door syndrome and iron triangles. As ever, with any question relating to lobbying and pressure group politics there was numerous mentions of the NRA.

Section C

Question 05

This was the most popular essay question. Most responses were able to discuss the impact of the Constitutions and Judiciaries in both countries whilst some also discussed legislation and pressure groups. Abortion and gun rights played heavily in responses reflecting up to date current affairs knowledge. The abortion issue led into some often-nuanced discussion over which judiciary is actually better at protecting rights given the ideological balance on the US Supreme Court. Well prepared students also discussed proposals to replace the Human Rights Act with a UK Bill of Rights.

Responses generally identified the role of the US Supreme Court as a greater protector of rights in its ability to strike down legislation. Comparisons were made between the entrenched and unentrenched nature of the two constitutions and how this also meant that rights in the US were better protected. Many students were able to identify the Bill of Rights and the Human Rights Act (1998) as the source of most rights. Better responses also focused on the 14th amendment, the Civil Rights Act (1965) and the Equalities Act (2010) as ways in which rights have been protected. Many responses were able to draw on the *Dobbs v Jackson* case (and its potential ruling) to demonstrate that the Supreme Court and federalism meant that rights were not always well protected.

Some students struggled to find a balance between the two countries and weaker students tended to focus more on the US and its codified constitution. Students were less well aware of the proposed British Bill of Rights (2022) but some used it well to demonstrate how Parliamentary Sovereignty meant that rights could never be entrenched.

Question 06

This question was less popular of the two optional questions in this section, and it produced the clearest distinctions between very good and very weak answers.

The main problem was the failure to answer the question as set, some students did not get into level 3 and above because of very generalised responses about the division and distribution of power within the US and UK. Most students were able to compare the constitutional basis of federalism and devolution and how they have evolved over time. The best responses were structured around comparative paragraphs and themes.

Good responses had a clear understanding of the constitutional origins of devolution, and most students also identified the 10th amendment as entrenching federalism in the US. The best responses were able to discuss how the balance of power waxes and wanes in both countries and used examples such as No Child Left Behind encroaching on states' rights. Most responses looked at how laws relating to marijuana and the death penalty vary between states or how tuition fees have been removed in Scotland. Some students struggled to find a balance between the two countries and some answers were often dominated by examination of the UK system with little mention of the US.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.