



A-LEVEL POLITICS

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

7152/2
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General comments

In general students were able to access the entirety of the question paper, however, a minority of students did not attempt questions 1 and 2. There was also a very small minority that failed to attempt any of the section A questions.

Questions 1 and 2 were challenging for some students (one or both were often not attempted), while question 3 (the comparative theory question) proved to be more accessible than in previous years. Question 4 (the extract question) was also challenging for some students. Otherwise, the other the essay questions were comparable in difficulty. Most students did not seem to experience any significant time management issues and it was common for students to answer section B and C questions before the 9-mark questions.

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 the extent to which the US Constitution still works as the Framers intended. Some students appeared not to be fully aware of the assessment criteria in terms of using the extracts and provenance. Many such responses were often descriptive, restating what the extract said with very little added. 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 (judiciaries) proved to be more popular than 06 (third parties). 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 a sophisticated answer in terms of synopticity for Section C.

Section A

Question 01

Some students did not attempt this question or left it until the end of the exam, which meant incomplete responses. There were a surprising number of students who did not seem to know what the national nominating conventions were. This suggests selective revision and centres are reminded of the need to teach all the specification. Some responses confused the NNCs with the primary process or the Electoral College (with some confusion between delegates and rogue voters). Moreover, some responses attempted to make links to Supreme Court appointments or executive appointments.

Level 2 responses were common and only listed functions or were descriptive, with little to no analysis. Some responses did not provide three clear points. The best answers analysed the formal v informal functions and were able to discuss the changing functions over time. Such responses were awarded level 3 marks.

Question 02

This question proved not to be accessible for some students, and it saw a significant range of responses in terms of quality. As with question 1 some students did not attempt this question or left it until the end of the exam which meant incomplete responses. Again, centres are reminded of the need to teach all the specification. Students should be encouraged to engage in wider reading and research to be aware of developments in US politics, including intra-party differences within the main political parties.

The most common reason students were not rewarded high level 2 and level 3 marks was because students wrote very generalised responses which focused on policy positions adopted by the Republican party (such as being pro the second amendment or anti-abortion) rather than focusing on internal party differences. There was a tendency to describe policy stances as factions. Some students also used historic and not current factions such as the now defunct Tea Party faction. However, credit was given when links were made to the Tea Party being replaced by the current Freedom Caucus. The best responses went beyond references to supporters or not of Trump and were able to discuss what a faction is, differences between factions and commented on their significance and impact along with named members of Congress.

Question 03

Pleasingly, the comparative theory question was more accessible than in previous years. However, some students 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 previous series, 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 structural theory and how it could be used to study the legislative process in the US Congress and UK Parliament. However, common errors were that structural theory was not defined or mentioned at all and that points made were generalised about the legislatures rather than the legislative process in the US and UK.

Also, some students decided to discuss the role of committees, however, many discussed select committees for the UK rather than Public Bills Committees. Other common errors included trying to make links between the Judiciaries in the US and UK in the legislative process and focusing on the constitutional amendment process in the US and the role played by Congress. 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, however, the focus of the question and extract 2 challenged some students. 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, some responses tended to be more descriptive than analytical. Most students were able to identify some of the points made in both of the extracts such as the constitution being vague, difficult to change and the issues relating to the electoral college.

In terms of provenance, most students did pick out that both were academics and that their views reflect the on-going debate about the relevance of the US Constitution today. As stated in previous reports 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. Some students appeared not to be fully aware of the assessment criteria in terms of using the extracts and provenance. Many such responses were often descriptive, restating what the extract said with very little added. 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.

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 Extract 2. Many students were able to describe perceived short comings in the US Constitution with just passing reference to the extracts. There was a disappointing lack of focus on what the Framers' intentions were, especially with respect to the Electoral College (and how it works) which was often just written off as undemocratic. It is relevant to remind centres that when they begin teaching the US Constitution, they should begin by examining the aims of the Framers and the context within which the Constitution was written. Some responses contained historical errors such as when the Constitution was written (not 1776), how many amendments there have been and when the last amendment was ratified.

Section C

Question 05

This was the most popular essay question. Generally, there was a sound understanding of the roles and powers of the respective judiciaries with well deployed political vocabulary. Most students were able to give a balanced response in terms of US and UK content, but weaker responses dealt with the UK and US in separate paragraphs whilst the strongest responses focused on an aspect of the judiciaries and compared within paragraphs. There were some very good answers that had depth and detail as well as being well structured and analytical. Common points made included comparing appointment processes, the power of judicial review and the relative age of the institutions. Some also discussed the ability of Supreme Court to hold the executives to account both in the UK and the US. However, when it came to using examples of decisions made by the Courts many responses merely stated a case without explaining how it showed the political significance of the court. It was common that some responses were predominantly descriptive with students laying out what they knew about the UK court and then what they knew about US court.

There were a minority of responses which attempted to refer to the comparative theories. As stated in previous reports it is important to remind teachers and students that when answering section C comparative essays, there is no requirement to apply any of the three comparatives theories needed for question 03. This approach is not advised as neither the questions nor mark schemes warrant such an approach.

Question 06

This question was less popular of the two optional questions in this section and it produced the clearest distinctions between strong and weak answers. The main problem was the failure to answer the question as set, with some students not getting into level 3 and above because of very generalised responses. Often, the impact of independents in the US was ignored and for some students their knowledge on the UK was more secure than that relating to the US.

Most students who that attempted this question argued that third parties are more influential in the UK than the US. Common points included reference to Liberal Democrats in coalition 2010-15 and the SNP in Scotland. Some references also discussed the impact of UKIP in 2015. For the US, evidence used included Perot (1992) and Nader (2000), but few responses looked at the impact of Wallace in 1968. The best responses were able to make synoptic links as the question naturally led to a discussion of party systems, electoral systems, and devolution. A limited number of responses focused on pressure groups rather than third parties. Moreover, it was rare to see reference to Richard Hofstadter and his ideas relating to the potential impact that third parties and independents can have in 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.