

History and Politics Department: Revision Advice

Subject	Politics
Exam Board	Edexcel
Unit	Key Themes in Political Analysis and Extended Themes in Politics Advanced
Unit Code	6GPO3/1, 6GP04/2
Format of Exams	1 hour 30 minutes 3 short answer questions from a choice of 5. 1 essay from a choice of 3
Link to Specification	http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/asa_levelgceforfirstteachingin2008/history_a/index.html

Key Issues for Revision

6GPO3

Elections

Primaries –

The 'invisible primary' – how significant? Positive/negative?

Differences between primaries and caucuses. Types of primaries. Advantages/Disadvantages

Outcome of primary elections – Obama/McCain victory

Possible reforms

National Conventions –

Changing role

Significance.

Recent Conventions

Electoral College –

How does it work?

Strengths/Weaknesses

Other alternatives

Chances for change?

Voting (Presidential)

Turnout

Determinants of voting behaviour/outcome

Party identification

Outcome of recent elections

Voting (Congressional)

Determinants of outcome

Incumbency

Outcome of recent elections

Significance of mid-term elections

Direct Democracy –

Different types of direct elections

Growth in use of referendums and initiatives

Advantages/Disadvantages?

Finance –

Campaign finance legislation

Spending in recent elections

Methods of fund-raising/spending

Race and Ethnicity

Contribution made by Supreme Court/Congress/Presidents to protecting liberties

Affirmative Action –

What is it?

Arguments for/against

Impact – Has it been a success?

Reparations –

What are they? Why have they been suggested?

Arguments for/against

Minority Representation

In government (Congress, presidency, executive, judiciary, state/local)

Racial Profiling

Voting behaviour –

Why do specific ethnic groups vote as they do?

The Current State of Affairs –

Is Racism still an issue?

Political Parties

Exploring issues related to concerns that parties are not effective vehicles for ensuring that the concerns of all groups are properly considered in policy making, and that they promote the interests of a wealthy, influential minority.

What the parties stand for:

The evolution of the main political parties from 'umbrella' parties to increasingly ideological / partisan parties

Analysis of the changes in the two main parties

The strands of opinion within each party and the balance of power between the strands.

Patterns of support for the main parties

Which groups of voters are reliable supporters for the two main parties and why

Reasons why patterns of support have changed

Which groups of voters 'float' and why

The role of minor parties

Reasons why minor parties have been unable to break the dominance of the Democrats and Republicans

The influence they have been able to assert despite the lack of electoral success

Pressure Groups

Exploring issues related to concerns that like political (and sometimes in conjunction with them) pressure groups are not effective vehicles for ensuring that the concerns of all groups are properly considered in policy making, and that they promote the interests of a wealthy, influential minority.

How and why pressure groups exploit the political landscape

Why pressure groups exist and why the US political system provides so many 'access points' for them to exert influence

Why each of the branches of federal government offer different opportunities for pressure groups to advance their agendas and the different methods used to influence each branch

The impact of pressure groups on the democratic system

Analysis of whether pressure groups enhance democracy by stimulating political participation, or damage democracy by providing excessive influence for some (mainly wealthy) groups at the expense of the common good

Measures taken to limit the influence of pressure groups and their effectiveness.

6GPO4

The Supreme Court

Appointments

The process, including the role of the Senate Judiciary Committee

Recent appointments/confirmation battles

A feature of the 'politicisation' of the judiciary.

Loose constructionism/strict constructionism.

Ensure that you can distinguish between them and are able to provide examples of cases and individual justices which reflect these philosophies.

Activism/Restraint.

Ensure that you can distinguish between these approaches and point to phases of activism and restraint.

Judicial Review – the process

How powerful is the Supreme Court? Can its extensive powers be justified?

Is the Supreme Court a political or judicial institution?

How conservative is the Roberts Court?

Political: composition/decisions

Judicial: active/restrained – strict/loose

What impact has the Supreme Court had on civil rights and liberties?

The rights of racial minorities

The rights of arrested persons

Capital punishment

Abortion

Freedom of religion

Freedom of speech, expression and the press

Freedom to bear arms

Freedom from unreasonable searches

NB You must be able to support analysis with relevant cases.

The Executive

The formal powers of the president

How powerful an office is the US presidency? Imperial or not?

Trends. What factors explain the growth in presidential power?

Powers

Limits on presidential power

Variables

NB – Distinguish between domestic and foreign policy.

Relationship with Congress – is the president the ‘bargainer-in-chief’ is ‘the president’s power the power to persuade’

What makes a good president? – How successful was the Bush presidency?

Presidential impeachment

The process and why so difficult?

The Cabinet

Appointments

Role and importance

Executive Office of the President

Structure

Role and importance (How much power?)

Why increasingly controversial?

The vice-presidency

Selection, election and appointment.

Role/powers.

The increasing importance – the role of Cheney

Federalism

Key characteristics of federal systems.

What are the constitutional provisions for federalism?

Differing forms/phases of federalism – ensure you can outline the timing and key features of each.

Dual federalism

Creative federalism

New federalism (including the 'revival of the states' and developments in the wake of the 94 watershed)

Coercive federalism

Attacks on moral federalism

What explains the growth in federal power? Has there been a shift back towards dual federalism?

Is the US a federal system in name only?

The Federal Bureaucracy

Structure/functions

Reasons for growth

(Presidential) control of the federal bureaucracy.

Constitution

Examination of the core principles that underpin the US political system, the key features of the constitution designed to ensure that these principles are realised, and viewpoints on the effectiveness of the constitution.

The principles of separation of powers and the system of checks and balances

Understanding why separation of powers and checks and balances are central to the founding fathers' constitutional design

How they operate

Analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the constitutional features

Entrenched rights

Understanding why a bill of rights was added to the constitution

The rights they protect

Why the amendment process is so difficult

Analysis of whether the constitution is too inflexible as a result

Perspectives on the constitution

Analysis of the viewpoint that the constitution has (largely) protected civil liberty and promoted equality of opportunity as intended

Analysis of the viewpoint that the constitution has never protected liberty for marginalised sections of the population and has not been robust enough when the country has been at war

Congress

An examination of the constitutional roles of the two houses of Congress, their roles in the system of checks and balances and how effectively they fulfil them.

The roles of the House of Representatives and the Senate

Understanding the constitutional powers and checks on the two houses

The power centres in Congress

Understanding the structure of Congress, including the role of committees, chairmen and party leaders

The legislative process

Understanding how laws are passed, including the obstacles that bills have to overcome and ways in which these obstacles may be overcome

Scrutiny of the executive

Understanding the ways in which either or both of the two houses scrutinise the executive branch (appointments, treaties, declaring war etc)

Analysis of the effectiveness of each form of scrutiny

Representation

Understanding of how members of Congress promote the interests of constituents and analysis of their effectiveness

The use of legislative power

Analysis of whether Congress uses its power in ways which advance or undermine the principles embodied in the constitution.

Tips for the Exam

Format:

Section A: 3 from 5 (15 mins. each/15 marks each)

Section B: 1 from 3 (45 mins./45 marks)

Short Answer:

Try to advance 4 or 5 clear points.

Support points with appropriate examples.

NB Are you being asked to advance one side or both sides or an argument?

Don't take longer than 30 minutes for these three questions.

Essays:

Different question styles require different kinds of response. They tend to fall into 2 categories:

Explaining a development/event – Advance a range of factors, but consider their relative importance.

Judgement (You will be asked ‘To what extent’ or ‘How far’) Provide a balance response, with a final judgement. They usually provide a statement which lacks balance/subtlety.

Synoptic Marks

Synopticity is assessed through the essay question in Section 2. You will be assessed on your ability to identify alternative viewpoints or perspectives on the question; to recognise the nature and extent of rivalry between these view points; and to recognise how these viewpoints shape political analysis.

How can you ensure you secure these marks?

Ensure both sides of the argument are fully considered, and reach a synthesis.

Refer to specific political scientists/commentators

Suggest, in conclusions, that the answer depends on ‘perspective’

Use ‘synoptic’ indicator expressions:

Some commentators argue that....

X, who has done extensive research on the nature of discrimination in the US, argues that...

Suggested Revision Activities

Produce detailed essay plans in response to past/possible questions. Examples of these are in the revision guide.

Practice responding to past/possible questions in timed conditions

Make detailed revision notes on the key issues

Revision must involve an activity – simply reading through notes/text-books is not enough.