



POLITICS - Year 13 A Level: Autumn Term



Government and Politics of the US and Comparative Politics

AQA: A Level Politics explores 3 units, which are all assessed in three exams at the end of Year 13.

- **Paper 1: Government and Politics of the UK**
- **Paper 2: Government and Politics of the US and Comparative Politics**
- **Paper 3: Political Ideas**

For further information, past papers and examiners reports visit - [AQA | Politics | A-Level | A-level Politics](#)

Throughout the autumn term of year 13 students will be exploring direct democracy, the electoral process and the key political parties in the USA. They will carry out a detailed exploration of the US electoral system, for both state and federal elections. They will explore the impact of the duopoly in party politics. They will examine data on voter participation and the influence of interest groups in US politics. As well as learning the theory students are again encouraged to keep up to date with political developments and to build up a comprehensive record of contemporary political examples which they can use to support their explanations, arguments and comparisons with the UK.

The USA unit on the electoral process and direct democracy will cover the following topics:

- ✓ the electoral systems used in the USA
- ✓ main characteristics of presidential and congressional elections and campaigns
- ✓ candidate selection and nomination: primaries, caucuses and national nominating conventions
- ✓ debates concerning the workings, outcomes and impact of the electoral college system on campaigns
- ✓ factors determining electoral outcomes: money, media, issues, leadership and the significance of incumbency
- ✓ debates about campaign finance
- ✓ direct democracy at state level: referendums, initiatives, propositions, recall elections and debates concerning their use
- ✓ voting behaviour and the main variables affecting the way people vote in the USA
- ✓ links between parties and their core voting coalitions
- ✓ factors in voting behaviour: issues, candidates and the significance of recent (post 1980) and historic (eg 1932 and 1968) re-aligning elections can be used to illustrate arguments relating to factors influencing voting
- ✓ split ticket voting and high levels of abstention in US elections.

The USA unit on political parties will cover the following topics:

- ✓ the two main political parties: ideologies, values, policies, traditions, party organisation
- ✓ the ideological changes in both the Democratic and Republican parties making them more distinct and polarized
- ✓ factionalised nature of parties and internal divisions
- ✓ debates concerning party decline or renewal
- ✓ weakness of US parties
- ✓ the two-party dominance in US politics
- ✓ significance of third parties and independent candidates

Assessment:

Students' knowledge and understanding skills are assessed through 9-mark explain questions. Evaluation and judgment skills are assessed through a 25-mark extract question and a 25-mark essay questions. In Autumn term 1 students will focus on developing skills to be able to tackle the 9-mark questions and begin to create plans, and responses to the longer essay questions.

Specialist key terms:

electoral process and direct democracy

- **electoral college system**
- **primaries**
- **caucuses**
- **national nominating conventions**
- **direct democracy**
- **voting behaviour**
- **popular vote**
- **split ticket voting**
- **abstention**
- **incumbency**

Specialist key terms:

Political parties

- **ideology**
- **factionalism**
- **party decline**
- **party renewal**
- **party organisation**
- **third parties**
- **independent candidates**

Suggested Enrichment Activities

To watch, read and listen to:

- [Who are the main US political parties? - US political system - National 5 Modern Studies Revision - BBC Bitesize](#) A basic guide to the US political system for pre-reading
- The election of a century, Wayne and Wilcox. A book discussing the election of 2000 and a discussion of changes in the political landscape.
- Party politics in America, Hershey. Long regarded as the key text on party politics in the USA
- The Political Brain by Drew Westen. This book provides a fascinating insight into the nature of democratic politics and the emotional, rather than rational, way in which people respond.
- www.politico.eu – The European edition of an excellent US news site often has good British stories and comment.
- Democracies in change: Britain and the USA in the 20th century by Stuart Clayton and Derrick Murphy
- Promised Land by Barack Obama
- US Politics Annual Update 2025 – similar to the UK edition, this book is written for A Level Politics students, and includes updates about the 2024 Presidential Election and first part of Trump's second term
- The New York Times