Woodhouse College Department of Politics
Use this guide to plan your revision and answer questions
Also consult woodle for past papers and mark schemes
Democracy and Participation

- Definition of democracy
- Difference between direct and representative democracy
- Nature of direct democracy — principles and features, eg direct popular participation; Athenian democracy; referendums.
- Nature of representative democracy — principles and features (link between representation and democracy, liberal democracy etc).
- Advantages of direct democracy — eg freedom, participation, personal development.
- Advantages of representative democracy — eg practicable, expertise, stability.
- Nature and features of UK democratic system — eg democratic franchise, electoral democracy, party competition, parliamentary democracy (advantages and disadvantages), devolved assemblies.
- Enhancing democracy — referendums (when/why used, advantages and disadvantages); other reforms (eg compulsory voting, fixed–term elections, e-democracy, recalls).

Elections

- Definition of elections (distinguish from referendums).
- Functions of elections — eg formation of governments, representation of public opinion.
- Link between elections and democracy — how elections promote democracy; nature of electoral representation; electoral mandates and their viability.
- Features of the ‘first-part-the-post’ (FPTP), or simple plurality electoral system.
- Features of the other electoral systems used in the UK — additional member system (AMS); single transferable vote (STV); regional party list; supplementary vote; where and how they operate.
- Reasons for the wider use of proportional representation (PR) electoral systems since 1997.
- Impact of FPTP and PR on party representation and political systems generally (with reference to recent UK examples), emphasising the difference between majoritarian representation and proportional representation.
- Electoral reform debate — drawbacks of PR and strengths of FPTP including the tendency towards strong and stable government, mandate democracy and the containment of political extremism; drawbacks of FPTP and strengths of PR including fairer representation, more legitimate government and stronger emphasis on consensus building.
- Alternative Vote (AV) and the recent referendum
Party Policies and Ideas

- Definition of political party — distinguish from and identify overlaps with pressure groups; differences between major and minor parties (eg Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats and nationalist parties).

- Functions of political parties — eg representation, goal formation, political recruitment, organisation of government.

- The Political Spectrum, left, right and centre ideas.

- Ideological tradition of Labour Party — socialism; Keynesian social democracy; Blairism and modernisation; beyond Blairism and New Labour - Ed Miliband.

- Ideological tradition of Conservative Party — Conservatism; One Nationism; Thatcherism; beyond Thatcherism? ‘Cameronism’, Big Society, localism, deficit reduction, coalition.

- Ideological tradition of the Liberal Democrats — modern liberalism; constitutionalism; pro-Europeanism, Clegg’s coalition calculation, electoral reform.

- Ideological and policy differences within major parties. Left and right within parties.

- Ideological and policy similarities and differences between major parties (consensus and adversary politics).

- Smaller parties, Green Party, UKIP, BNP etc. and their role in government.

- The policies of the Coalition, the Lib Dem impact on the Coalition.

Pressure Groups

- Definition of pressure group — distinguish from and identify overlaps with political parties.

- Types of pressure group — sectional (interest) and promotional (cause) groups; ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ groups.

- Pressure groups’ methods and strategies — eg links to executive, lobbying, links to political parties, public opinion campaigns.

- Factors that influence the success or failure of groups — why are some groups more successful than others (eg economic power, financial strengths, membership base, public support)?

- Changing importance of pressure groups — why have they become more important (eg proliferation of groups, membership growth)?

- Relationship between pressure groups and democracy — functional representation; pluralism and pluralist democracy; elitism; criticisms of pressure groups.

- New pressure groups - UKUNCUT, Wikileaks and the use of social media

- The role of lobbying
The Constitution

- Definition of a constitution.
- Features of written/codified constitution — eg single source, two-tier legal system, entrenchment, judicial review.
- Features of unwritten/uncodified constitutions — eg variety of sources, flexibility.
- Sources of UK constitution — eg statute law, common law, conventions, works of constitutional authority, EU law and treaties.
- Location of sovereignty within UK system — eg nature of sovereignty, parliamentary sovereignty, implications of EU membership, ‘pooled’ sovereignty.
- Strengths of UK’s uncodified constitution — eg organic and adaptable, responsiveness to public opinion.
- Drawbacks of uncodified constitution — eg elective dictatorship, weak checks and balances, weak protection for individual rights.
- Constitutional reform since 1997 — eg devolution, PR electoral systems, referendums.
- Coalition attempts and constitutional reforms - fixed term parliaments, EU Referendum Act, attempts at redrafting boundaries, AV referendum.

Parliament

- Composition, role and powers of House of Commons.
- Composition, role and powers of House of Lords.
- Features of parliamentary government — eg fusion of powers, interlocking relationship between legislature and executive.
- Features of presidential government — semi-presidential system, eg separation of powers.
- Functions of Parliament — eg legitimation, representation, legislation, scrutiny/accountability.
- Mechanisms by which the executive is made accountable to Parliament, eg question time, select committees.
- Effectiveness of House of Commons — eg factors affecting effectiveness (party system, patronage, size of government majority).
- Reforming the House of Commons — eg modernising reforms, select committees.
- Reforming the House of Lords — reform process to date; advantages and disadvantages of fully elected second chamber.
- Coalition proposals to reform parliament - failed House of Lords reform.
The Prime Minister and Cabinet

- Structure of executive branch of government — Prime Minister; Cabinet; junior ministers; civil service.
- Theories of executive power — cabinet government model; presidential government model; core executive model.
- Collective responsibility — theory and practice.
- Individual responsibility — theory and practice.
- Role of the Prime Minister — contrast with president; styles of prime ministerial leadership.
- Powers of the Prime Minister — eg patronage, party leadership, management of cabinet, influence over the mass media.
- The presidentialism thesis — basis of thesis; similarities and difference between prime ministers and presidents.
- Limitations of prime ministerial power — eg the role of the Cabinet, Parliament, party and mass media in checking prime ministerial power.
- Role and influence of the Cabinet — eg power base of individual ministers, departmental resources, party cohesion.
- Use of informal powers - Thatcher, Major, Blair, Brown and Cameron (with examples).

Judges and Civil Liberties

- Judges and the judiciary — eg role of judiciary (adjudicating the meaning of law, presiding over the courts, sitting on government bodies).
- Relationship between the UK judiciary, the European courts and EU law.
- The rule of law — eg features of the rule of law, benefits of rule-based governance.
- Principle of judicial independence and how it is maintained (including limitations)
- Principle of judicial neutrality and how it is maintained (including limitations).
- Civil liberties and individual rights in the UK.
- The Human Rights Act — implications for civil liberties, implications for judiciary. Arguments to repeal it.
- Strengthening civil liberties — reforms of the judiciary or court system, (CRA) including the introduction of a supreme court and a proposed constitutional bill of rights.
- Civil Liberties under New Labour - authoritarianism, DNA database, Anti-Terror laws
- Coalition reforms, Freedom Bill, reversing 28 days, green paper on ‘secret courts’, internet ‘snooping’
Exam Technique

How to answer Unit 1 and Unit 2 questions

You will sit two exams, they will be:
Each worth 50% of your overall AS grade
and 25% of your overall A-Level grade
Worth 80 marks in total each
Each will be 1 hour 20 minutes long

The unit 1 exam

5 mark question:
* 5 Minutes to answer the question.
* Focus is on facts not opinion or analysis.
* Write in sentences not bullet points, 1 long paragraph is enough.
* Unless a figure is stated in the question, make 3 factual points with explanation and examples.

10 mark question:
* 7 marks AO1 (factual recall and knowledge).
* 3 marks AO2 (Evaluation and comprehension).
* Make 3 points in 3 paragraphs.
* In each paragraph explain your points and example them.
* End each paragraph with a short evaluation of the concept. Without evaluation you will only obtain a maximum of 7 marks.

25 mark question
* Can be 1 sided (assess the advantages...) or balanced (to what extent).
* If 1 sided - 4 - 5 - distinct points and a conclusion. However always analyse and evaluate your point within the paragraph and show limitations to your point.
* If balanced - 2 points on wither side and a conclusion.
* Make sure you start paragraphs with your point, then explain the point (with examples), evaluate (with examples if possible) and link back to the question.
The unit 2 exam
Unit 2 is structured differently. You have 2 sections. The first section is a source based question, with the option of answering 1 question from 2. This will have 5, 10 and 25 mark components.
The second section is assessment by a 40 mark extended essay, you have to choose 1 from a choice of 2.

All 4 topics will come up and can appear in any section.

5 mark question:
• 5 minutes to answer the question
• The question will ask you to read the source and ‘describe’ or ‘outline’ the advantages or criticisms mentioned in the source.
• Make 2 points and explain with your own understanding the points.
• Don’t quote the source, paraphrase it in your own words.

10 mark question:
• Source and own knowledge
• 2 points from source and 1 point from own knowledge (3 para)
• Suggested structure:
  • Para 1: Firstly the source identifies...
  • Para 2: Secondly the source identifies...
  • Para 3: In addition to the source... [here make sure you address a point not mentioned in the source]
• To get a level 3 answer, you have to address the source and your own knowledge

25 mark question
• 25 mark question identical to unit 1 - no need to quote from sources but you may as part of your explanation/evidence.
• Can be 1 sided (assess the advantages...) or balanced (to what extent).
• If 1 sided - 4 - 5 distinct points and a conclusion.
• If balanced - 2 points on either side and a conclusion.
• Make sure you start paragraphs with your point, then explain the point (with examples), evaluate (with examples if possible) and link back to the question.

40 mark depth question
• You need to spend 40 minutes on this
• MAKE a PLAN - even if that take a few minutes.
• Build a structure - need 4 - 5 points altogether.
• 4 points can get you a high level answer, you are judged on the depth of your answer so bring in a lot of analysis.
• Must show balance of factors.
• Must have an introduction - show appreciation of topic and if you want how you propose to answer it
• Pay attention to key words in the question
• There may be more than 2 sides to the debate
• REMEMBER paragraphing
• Remember start by displaying your knowledge and then evaluate
• Have a conclusion where you answer the question according to your own opinion.
• You gain marks for ‘communication’ so try to use sophisticated terminology and use contemporary examples.
AS Politics – Possible question

Unit 1

25 mark questions -

Parties
Has the Conservative Party abandoned Thatcherism?
To what extent is ‘Cameronism’ a continuation of Thatcherism?
To what extent is the modern Conservative Party influenced by ‘One Nation’ principles?
To what extent are there differences between the modern Labour and Conservative parties over policies and ideas?
To what extent is the Labour Party still committed to its traditional principles?
To what extent have the parties involved in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition remained faithful, since 2010, to their manifesto pledges?
To far do the major parties accept Thatcherite ideas and policies?
To what extent are the Labour and Conservatives internally united over ideas and policies?
‘Modern parties are ‘broad churches’”, how far do you agree?
To what extent is the Coalition united over policies and ideas?

Democracy
How and why has UK democracy been criticised?
To what extent is there a ‘democratic deficit’ in the UK?
Assess the arguments in favour of the greater use of direct democracy in the UK.
Evaluate the effectiveness of the various ways in which participation and democracy could be strengthened in the UK.
‘British democracy is harmed by the two party system’ explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.
Explain and assess why voter turnout has declined since 1945.
How effectively does representative democracy operate in the UK?
To what extent would the wider use of referendums improve democracy in the UK?
Should referendums be more widely used in the UK?
To what extent does democracy in the UK suffer from a ‘participation crisis’?
Assess the various measures, other than electoral reform, that have been suggested to improve democracy in the UK.
Pressure Groups
Why are some pressure groups more influential than others?
To what extent do pressure groups promote political participation in the UK?
How far do pressure groups promote pluralist democracy?
To what extent have pressure groups become more important in recent years?
‘Pressure groups harm democracy’ – evaluate
‘Only insider pressure groups are successful’ do you agree or disagree?
Are pressure groups becoming more powerful, or less powerful?
To what extent are the largest pressure groups the most successful ones?
Is pressure group politics in the UK better described as pluralist or as elitist?
To what extent is the success of pressure groups a reflection of their level of public support?

Elections
Should proportional representation be introduced for Westminster elections?
Assess the criticisms of the various electoral systems used in the UK.
Assess the advantages of the ‘first past the post’ electoral system.
Assess the advantages of the ‘proportional electoral system.
Make out a case against keeping the ‘first past the post’ electoral system for the House of Commons.
How far does the Westminster electoral system ensure strong and stable government?
Should the Westminster electoral system be reformed?
To what extent do the various electoral systems used in the UK produce different outcomes?
Unit 2 - Possible questions

PM and Cabinet

25 mark questions
To what extent has prime ministerial power grown in recent years?
To what extent have UK prime ministers become ‘Presidential’?
To what extent can the Prime Minister control the Cabinet?
How important is the cabinet?

40 mark questions
To what extent does the prime minister dominate the political system in the UK?
Are UK prime ministers as powerful as is sometimes claimed?
Is the UK Prime Minister now effectively a president?
‘The Coalition has returned the UK to cabinet government’ to what extent do you agree?
Has the experience of coalition government strengthened or weakened prime ministerial power?

Parliament

25 mark questions
Analyse the main factors that limit the effectiveness of Parliament.
Make out a case against an elected second chamber.
To what extent has the formation of a coalition altered the relationship between Parliament and government?
To what extent will the coalition government’s proposals bring about an effective reform of Parliament?
To what extent has the formation of a coalition altered the relationship between Parliament and government?
To what extent is the House of Commons effective in carrying out its various functions?
Assess the arguments in favour of a largely or wholly elected second chamber.

40 mark questions
To what extent has parliamentary sovereignty in the UK changed in recent years?
How effective is Parliament in checking executive power?
How effective are backbench MPs?
How effective are the opposition in the House of Commons?
The House of Lords is now more effective than the House of Commons in checking government power. ’ Discuss.
Constitution
25 mark questions
Outline the case for a codified constitution in the UK?
To what extent have government proposals to reform the constitution been controversial?
Assess the arguments for a codified constitution
Assess the argument against recent reforms to the UK constitution

40 mark questions
‘Constitutional reform since 1997 has not gone far enough.’ Discuss.
‘The advantages of a codified constitution now outweigh its disadvantages’. Discuss.
Should the UK’s constitution remain un-codified?
To what extent have constitutional reforms since 1997 reduced the powers of UK governments?
To what extent have constitutional reforms introduced since 1997 made the UK more democratic?
‘Attempts at constitutional reform in recent years has been driven more by political considerations’ discuss.

Judiciary
25 mark questions
To what extent are UK judges both independent and neutral?
To what extent have civil liberties in the UK been eroded?
Explain how and to what extent the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 has changed the judiciary.
To what extent can judges check the power of the executive and the legislature?
To what extent is there conflict between the judiciary and the executive in the UK?
Should judges, rather than politicians be responsible for protecting civil liberties?
Assess the arguments for a UK Bill of Rights

40 mark questions
How effectively can the judiciary control executive and legislative power in the UK?
Is the judiciary too powerful, or is it not powerful enough?
To what extent do judges protect individual rights and freedoms in the UK?
In what ways and to what extent is the Human Rights Act controversial?
Assessment

Assessment Objectives
You will be assessed according to 3 broad criteria, known as assessment objectives. These criteria can be described as follows:

- Assessment objective 1 (AO1): Knowledge recall
- Assessment Objective 2 (AO2): Comprehension, Analysis, Evaluation
- Assessment Objective 3 (AO3): Communication

AO1: Knowledge recall
The study of politics requires gaining knowledge about people, processes and institutions. A key part of your assessment will be your ability to put names to positions, explain processes for example how bills work their way through parliament and define key institutions. Throughout the year we shall give you facts tests to help you. Keeping your own glossary and key terms list will also help.

AO2: Comprehension and Analysis
Comprehension is all about understanding. You illustrate comprehension by the way you explain your knowledge. Examiners want to know you appreciate the relevance of knowledge you have acquired. It often helps to use examples, because this shows you can apply your knowledge upon real life. Analysis is all about forming opinions. Studying politics requires you to have opinions that are based on a balanced and thorough study of the factors. This means you must appreciate both sides of an argument and attempt to form a view based on the strengths and weaknesses.

AO3: Communication
Communication is all about how you articulate an argument. In 25 and 40 mark essays, you will be assessed on how well you construct your argument. Examiners like logical structures, with a clear line of argument and a conclusion.
Use the site to get contemporary analysis and examples
If you get stuck planning exam questions, utilise the advanced search facility on the site - or search by unit and topic
Tips and advice for exams

Follow @patelshop for links to relevant news articles.