



PiXL6 Gateway

PiXL Gateway: Progression

Politics

For Students Studying AQA A Level

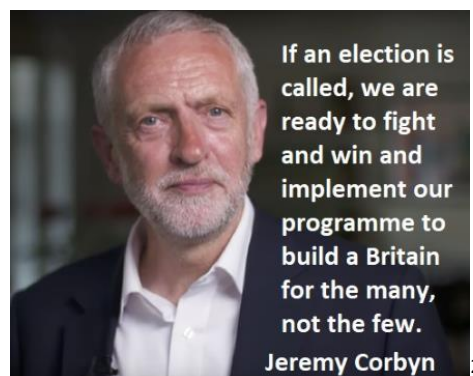


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Introduction

Welcome to A Level study! You will quickly learn that power is at the heart of politics. It determines who gets what, when, and how. Politics is the struggle over scarce resources and the means through which the struggle is conducted.



Debate and disagreement lie at the heart of this subject – even when competing politicians seem to be saying the same thing. It is a subject of rival views and one without any absolute answers, so you need to take on the challenge of considering different viewpoints, perspectives, and opinions – and to think for yourself – so that you can formulate powerful arguments and express them convincingly. Moreover, you will study politics not as a neutral observer but as an active participant, developing your personal opinions as you acquire a strong understanding of the factors shaping both the British and American systems of government and politics. You will also gain insight into some of the great political ideas that have shaped the world we live in.

This booklet is designed to help you to start thinking as an A Level Politics student and includes tasks which will support you throughout your studies, including assisting you in preparing for your final exams.

¹ <http://bentelevision.com/prime-minister-theresa-may-speech-britain-after-brexite-2016-a-vision-of-a-global-britain/>, <http://lybio.net/jeremy-corbyn-queens-speech-2017/people/>

² <http://lybio.net/jeremy-corbyn-queens-speech-2017/people/>

“A week is a long time in politics”



Uniquely, Politics is a living subject so you will see much of what you are studying happening in the ‘real world’. It can also be a very fast moving one, as Wilson’s famous quote above indicates. This means that any textbook is, to some degree, out of date by the time it is published. This may sound daunting, especially when this is part of your introduction to the subject, but it also provides you with a great opportunity. It is precisely because no book can give you the most up-to-date examples that using recent/current examples effectively will be highly rewarded by examiners. Consequently, you should be keeping an eye on American government and politics during Year 1, when you are studying the UK, and continue to follow what is happening in the UK during Year 2, when the focus of the course is on the USA.

Following politics in the media should, therefore, be a regular part of your independent study throughout the course. First, however, you need to be organised. One file per exam paper is recommended. Buy or use ‘homemade’ dividers and label them as follows. You will then be able to file your examples in the appropriate section. (*Be aware that some examples will be relevant to two or more topics – more on this later.*) Make a start on this now, establishing a good habit to continue throughout the course, so that **by the end of the summer you will have filed five examples plus your reflections on each one**. The expectation is that you will have five examples in total – i.e. it does not matter which topics they relate to. The summer is usually a quiet time in the political world but Brexit is set to ensure that this is not the case this summer.

Paper 1

○ **The Government of the UK**

- The nature and sources of the British Constitution
- The structure and role of Parliament
- The Prime Minister and cabinet
- The judiciary

³ <http://www.quotecounterquote.com/2016/04/a-week-is-long-time-in-politics.html>

- ***The politics of the UK***
 - Democracy and participation
 - Elections and referendums
 - Political parties
 - Pressure groups
 - The European Union

Paper 2 Government and politics of the USA and comparative politics

- ***Government and politics of the USA***
 - The constitutional framework of US government
 - The legislative branch of government: Congress
 - The executive branch of government: President
 - The judicial branch of government
 - The electoral process and direct democracy
 - Political parties
 - Pressure groups
 - Civil rights

- ***Comparative politics***
 - Constitutional arrangements
 - The executives
 - The judiciaries
 - Electoral and party systems
 - Pressure groups
 - Civil rights

In **Paper 3** you will also study Political ideas' – the 'core ideologies' (liberalism, conservatism, and socialism) and one optional ideology (out of anarchism, ecologism, feminism, multiculturalism, or nationalism).

The most highly recommended resource of all (because it succeeds so well in providing intelligent analysis which is accessibly written without being at all dumbed down) is <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics>

Try the other reading/listening/watching recommendations below, with the intention of continuing with what you find useful and enjoyable. Few subjects can offer such entertaining homework.

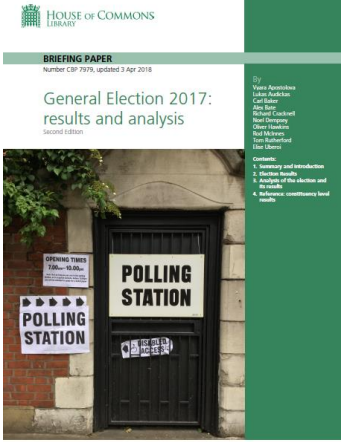
- The following are all quality newspapers which are free to access:
 - <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
 - <https://www.independent.co.uk/>
 - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/>

- <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- <https://www.washingtontimes.com/>
- TV and Radio, which can be accessed, respectively, via <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio> and <https://www.itv.com/hub/shows>
(Be aware that these programmes are not all available throughout the year and that schedules may change):
 - Monday – Friday: *PM Radio* 4 17:00 – 18:00; *Newsnight* BBC2 22:30 – 23:15
 - Tuesday: *The Mash Report* BBC2 22:00
 - Thursday: *Question Time* BBC1 22:45 – 23:45; *This Week* BBC1 23:45 – 00:45
 - Friday: *The News Quiz/The Now Show/Dead Ringers* Radio 4 18:30 – 19:00; *Have I Got News For You* BBC1 21:00 – 21:30; *Tracey Breaks the News* BBC1 21:30 – 22:00; *Mock the Week* BBC2 22:00 – 22:30
 - Saturday: *The Week in Westminster* Radio 4 11:00 – 11:30
 - Sunday: *The Andrew Marr Show* BBC1 09:00 – 10:00; *Pienaar’s Politics* Radio 5 10:00 – 11:00; *Peston on Sunday* ITV 10:00 – 11:00, repeated 22:20 – 23:20

Synoptic thinking

Synoptic can be broken down to *syn-*, meaning together, and *-optic*, meaning view or sight. Politics is a highly synoptic subject and, as the specification advises, “students must identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between content studied”. This is especially important in Component 3, where comparisons with the UK need to be made when answering exam questions on the USA. Furthermore, thinking synoptically about the topics within Components 1 and 2, as well as making links between the two components, is a very effective way to demonstrate a high level of understanding of Politics at A Level.

This may well sound daunting but synoptic thinking is a skill that can be mastered with practice and it is also worth emphasising that you are not expected to start the course with any prior knowledge: just the commitment to acquiring it, including through independent study. The tasks below will give you some insight into how this skill can be applied to the most recent major political event in the UK – the general election of 2017. This event is studied, to a greater or lesser degree, in all UK topics. At the time when Theresa May decided to call this ‘snap’ election, the Conservatives had 331 MPs and a small majority of twelve. May began the campaign with an opinion poll lead in double figures but afterwards had to do a ‘confidence and supply’ deal with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), whose ten MPs could provide a majority in crucial votes in the Commons – on the budget (*i.e. the supply of money needed for the government to implement its legislative programme*) and on any votes other parties propose to bring the government down (*i.e. a vote of ‘no confidence’ in the government*).



The image shows the cover of a House of Commons Library Briefing Paper. The title is 'General Election 2017: results and analysis'. It includes a photograph of a polling station entrance with signs that say 'POLLING STATION'. The cover also lists authors and a table of contents.

The 2017 UK Parliamentary general election was held on Thursday 8th June. The election was called early, under Section 2(1) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, after the Prime Minister announced her intention on 18th April for an election to be held. Voting was held in all 650 constituencies across the UK: 533 in England, 59 in Scotland, 40 in Wales and 18 in Northern Ireland.

The election resulted in a hung Parliament, with no single party winning an overall majority. The Conservative Party, led by Prime Minister Theresa May, won the largest number of seats and votes, taking 317 seats and 42.3% of the vote across the UK. The Conservatives gained 20 seats but lost 33, leaving them with 317, 13 fewer than they won in 2015.

The Labour Party, led by Jeremy Corbyn, won 262 seats, and 40.0% of the vote, up from 232 seats and 30.4% of the vote in 2015. The Conservatives’ share of the vote is the highest for any single party since the 43.2% won by Labour in 1997, and their total of 13.6 million votes is the second highest total in UK electoral history.

⁴ <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7979/CBP-7979.pdf>

1. The Conservatives' share of the vote is the highest for any single party since the 43.2% won by Labour in 1997, and their total of 13.6 million votes is the second highest total in UK electoral history. Why, then, is the 2017 general election result seen as such a poor outcome for the Conservatives in general and May in particular?
2. May began the general election campaign with an opinion poll lead in double figures. What does the outcome of the election suggest about the importance of the conduct of their respective campaigns by the Conservatives and Labour and the nature of the policies they offered to the electorate? *Note: ensure that your answer reflects the actual outcome of the election – i.e. that the Conservatives won more votes and seats than Labour.*
3. How certain can May be that she will be able to win votes and so be able to implement her legislative programme (on matters other than 'confidence and supply')?
4. Undertake an independent research task and write short explanations of the terms 'hard Brexit' and 'soft Brexit', which could be understood by typical Year 10 students.
5. The 'confidence and supply' agreement with the DUP will only succeed if Conservative MPs support the party line. Why is it a virtual certainty that Conservative MPs will do so, even on Brexit, despite Brexiteers fearing that the country will not get the 'hard' Brexit which they claim is what "the people voted for" and pro-Europeans who fear the damage to the UK's economy that they believe anything other than a 'soft' Brexit will do?
6. Collective ministerial responsibility is a convention (*i.e. a principle of expected practice*) that members of the cabinet must publicly support all governmental decisions made in cabinet, even if they do not privately agree with them. If they do not do so, it is expected that they either resign from the government or are sacked by the Prime Minister. Boris Johnson, the Foreign Secretary, is the most notable example of a cabinet member who is a repeat offender for breaking this convention. This has most frequently been on the issue of Brexit.
 - a) What is revealed about the strength and authority of May that she has not sacked Johnson?
 - b) What is the underlying reason for your answer to Question a)?
 - c) What is revealed about the influence of Johnson within the cabinet when he criticises government policy on Brexit outside of cabinet meetings?

7. Political cartoonists typically craft their creations with great attention to detail and can produce work which offers considerable insight. Look very closely at the two examples below and explain what can be learnt about each cartoonist's view of the 2017 general election.

Cartoon A by Dave Brown, *The Independent*⁵



Cartoon B by Gerald Scarfe, *Sunday Times*⁶



⁵ <https://www.indy100.com/article/cartoonists-react-general-election-2017-theresa-may-hung-parliament-7781241>

⁶ <https://www.slideshare.net/jeffreyhill/uk-general-election-2017-cartoons>

10 key facts to learn for the start of the course

AS with any A Level course, there are key facts that it is very useful to learn because they can be examples that illustrate the points you want to make and provide the basis from which you can develop explanation and evaluation. You will need to learn the following key facts, ready for a test in September. The test will replicate the information below – except there will be gaps in which you will need to write what is highlighted here.

1. Name the party leader:
 - Conservatives = Theresa May
 - Labour = Jeremy Corbyn
 - Liberal Democrats = Vince Cable
 - SNP = Nicola Sturgeon
 - Plaid Cymru = Leanne Wood
 - DUP = Arlene Foster
 - Greens = Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley (Co-Leaders)
 - UKIP = Gerard Batten
2. In the 2016 EU referendum, Leave gained 52% of votes compared to Remain's 48%.
3. 'Initiatives' occur in Switzerland and some US states, where citizens gather signatures on a petition for a public vote on a proposed new law. These are similar to a referendum but they are initiated (started) by citizens, not by a national or a regional/state government.
4. In the 2017 general election the Conservatives won 49% of seats with 42% of the votes.
5. In the 2017 general election the Liberal Democrats gained 1.8% of seats with 7.4% of the votes.
6. Turnout in the 2017 general election (at 69%) was the highest in 25 years.
7. For every ten years older a voter was, their chance of voting Tory in 2017 increased by around nine points and the chance of their voting Labour decreased by nine points. The

tipping point, that is the age at which a voter was more likely to have voted Conservative than Labour, was 47.

8. A hung parliament is a parliament in which no single party has majority control. Either a minority government or a coalition will then result.
9. An electoral manifesto is a document produced by a political party at election times, stating what policies it intends to implement if it gains power.
10. An electoral mandate refers to the authority to govern granted to the winning party at an election by voters. The mandate suggests that the government may implement the measures in its election manifesto.



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