

# Welcome to A Level Politics

Year 11 to Year 12 Transition pack



# Contents

## 1. Welcome

Welcome

What will I study?

What skills will I develop?

Course Outline

## 2. Getting Started

Key words task

## 3. Next Steps

Developing good habits – how to become more politically-aware

## 4. Building Skills

Convincing arguments

## 5. Are you A-Level Ready?

Task 1: Unit 1 Research task into the UK's three major political parties

Task 2: Unit 2 History of Parliament and the UK's constitution activity



# 1. Welcome

## Welcome

Welcome to the Politics A Level course! It is a fascinating and enriching course which couldn't be more relevant in today's turbulent times! It is a subject which is constantly evolving, and it focuses very much on the now – on current affairs.

Studying A Level Politics will develop your knowledge and understanding on how decisions are made, especially in Britain; how power is shared; what rights people have and whether the political system works effectively and fairly. You will hone your skills in essay writing, critical thinking, analysis, evaluation and judgement making. You will learn about how the British and political system is structured, it's history, it's functions and how ordinary people can participate in the political process and influence decision-making.

## What will I study in Year 12?

You will study:

- **British politics** – how people participate in politics: the role of elections and the effectiveness of different electoral systems; political parties; pressure groups and social movements, e.g. Extinction Rebellion; the role that referendums have increasingly made in decision-making and how democratic British politics is.
- **British government** – how the British government is organised and the features of the different branches of government (PM, cabinet, Parliament, judiciary – courts, devolved assemblies and parliaments, constitution and sovereignty).

## What skills will I develop in Year 12 and Year 13?

Although, essay writing is the main way in which you will be formally assessed in Politics, the lessons will be largely discussion-based, and you will learn how to construct a supported argument.

Alongside the written skills, you will develop your research skills; you will learn how to find relevant evidence and to use this to produce a persuasive case.

You will develop your evaluation skills and learn how to weigh up the strength/s of different opinions.

Above all, you will learn how to think critically; how to question and debate; how to make judgments and how to weigh up evidence to reach a logical, supported and justifiable conclusion.

## Course outline

More detailed information about the content of Year 12 A Level Politics is below:

### **UK Politics and Government**

- Democracy and participation
- Political parties
- Electoral systems
- Voting behaviour and the media
- The Constitution
- Parliament
- Prime Minister and Executive
- Relations between the branches

## 2. Getting Started

The study of Politics requires several key terms. Please find out definitions for the following words.

### Key Words Task

**Apathy**

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**Authority**

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**Coalition**

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**Constitution**

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**Devolution**

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**Direct action**

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**Direct democracy**

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**Entrenched**

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**Executive**

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**Federal**

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**Franchise**

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**Government**

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**Judiciary**

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**Legislation**

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**Legitimacy**

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**Lobbying**

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**Mandate**

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**Manifesto**

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**Participation**

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**Pressure group**

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**Representative democracy**

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**Rights**

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**Royal Prerogative**

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**Social justice**

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**Solidarity**

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**Suffrage**

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**Think Tanks**

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**Unitary**

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### 3. Next Steps

To succeed in Politics, you need to be able to analyse political information, research issues and keep up to date with current affairs. It is important that you get into good habit of following current affairs right from the start. If you start now, it will become second nature when you begin the course.

It is important that you use a wide range of media sources to follow the news, so that you aren't adversely affected by political bias. Some suggestions are below:

- **Apps to download**

Make sure you stay up to date with news articles and current affairs. One of the easiest ways to achieve this is to 'save' articles from apps such as BBC News and create a news folder on your smart phone or tablet. You can then come back to these articles and political developments during your revision at the end of Year 12.

- (1) BBC News and BBC reality check
- (2) The Guardian
- (3) Apple News+ The Times

- **Political magazines**

(1) The Spectator (<http://www.spectator.co.uk/>) contains articles written by a wide range of columnists. Articles will concern British politics, controversial policies, party developments etc... but will also consider global politics and American politics

(2) Private Eye (<http://www.private-eye.co.uk/>) is a long-running political satire publication. It is often provocative and amusing!

(3) New Statesman (<http://www.newstatesman.com/>) - wide range of political articles

(4) The Economist (<http://www.economist.com/>) – particularly useful for students studying both Politics and Economics

(5) The Week (<http://www.theweek.co.uk/>) bite-sized review of the week's big news stories

- **Newspapers**

- (1) "The Times" (<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/>) – leans to the right
- (2) "The Daily Telegraph" (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>) – leans to the right
- (3) "The Financial Times" (<http://www.ft.com/home/uk>) – primarily focused on economic issues but contains a significant number of relevant articles
- (4) "The Independent" (<http://www.independent.co.uk/>) – news stories and articles
- (5) "The Guardian" (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/>) – leans to the left.

Remember that all the newspapers can be read online, but some, like "The Times" charge for their online subscription. Newspapers can also be read on Kindles/tablets and subscriptions to these are often much cheaper. The I's online subscription is £5 a month and whole paper. You should aim to read a range of newspapers and bear in mind the political leanings of each one!

- **Podcasts**

Podcasts are one of the best ways to extend your knowledge and develop your understanding of current and past political affairs. Here are our topic recommendations:

- (1) Five Thirty-Eight Politics Podcast - American Politics
- (2) Talking politics podcast – via Spotify
- (3) UnHerd - Ayesha Hazarika
- (4) The Political Party Matt Forde
- (5) 'The A Level Politics Show' by Nick De Souza

- **News Channels**

We particularly recommend:

- (1) Newsnight – current affairs programme. Weekday nights on BBC Two
- (2) Question Time – panel show. Thursday nights BBC1
- (3) The Andrew Marr Show – Sunday mornings, BBC1

Please remember that all these programmes are available on the i-player.

- **Twitter**

Virtually every MP and columnist has their own twitter feed. We particularly recommend the following:

- (1) @bbcnickrobinson.
- (2) Each political party has a Twitter account as does the newspapers, periodicals and news channels.
- (3) @BBCBreaking will keep you in touch with changing news stories
- (4) @gdnpoliticswire is The Guardian's political Twitter feed
- (5) @C4Politics is recommended
- (6) Sky's political editor's Twitter @bethrigby
- (7) BBC's Laura Kuenssberg's Twitter account @bbclauark

- **Youtube channels**

Youtube can be an exceptionally useful resources for keeping up to date with current affairs. Add these to your subscriptions.

- (1) UK Parliament
- (2) TLDR News
- (3) Channel 4 News

## 4. Building Skills

Convincing arguments

**TASK 1:** Read the article in the box below

Key words (find out what they mean FIRST before reading the article)

<b>Codification</b>
<b>Uncodified</b>
<b>Constitution</b>
<b>Entrenchment</b>

### Problems with the lack of a Codified Constitution

It appears that the biggest problem with not codifying a constitution is that it cannot be pointed at, and named as, a closed list of rules which govern a state. Another problem is that the United Kingdom's constitution is 'liquid' in a sense that it is not entrenched, nor any special procedure must be followed in order to change it. The lack of entrenchment in the UK firmly contrasts with other states' approach where a specific, usually onerous, procedure must be followed before constitution can be changed. Lord Hailsham argued that the lack of a codified constitution may result in 'elective dictatorship' whereby newly elected Parliament, with enough majority can legislate whatever the government wishes. However, parliament's will is constrained by political implications of making controversial decisions and the consequences are that MPs may suffer if they decide to enact unpopular or controversial laws.

### Argument against Codification

It is commonly said that 'if it isn't broken, don't fix it' and it is difficult to disagree with this argument. The current state of constitutional affairs has been working effectively for over 300 years. Changing it for the sake of making a change only is unreasonable at best. Uncodified constitutions can be changed quickly when necessary. The benefits of an uncodified constitution can be clearly seen in the aftermath of the Dunblane Massacre in 1996, where Parliament passed Acts which either restricted or almost completely banned possession of firearms in the UK. Another problem with codified and supreme constitution is that it is likely to create significant tensions between legislative and judiciary. On the other hand it may be argued that judges are impartial, able to make well-reasoned and necessary but unpopular decisions. The fact that most countries have a written constitution is not an indication that UK should follow the same path.



**TASK 2** – complete these tasks in full sentences / paragraphs.

(1). Identify the arguments (for and against) codification.

<u>Arguments for</u>	<u>Arguments against</u>

(2). Which side do you find most convincing? Why?

(3). What implications does this have for British democracy?



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\_ Party: \_\_\_\_\_

Manifesto policy:

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**(2) Election results**

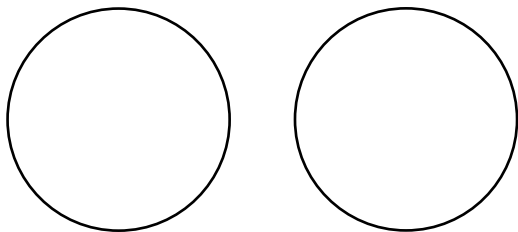
Research the election results from the previous 4 general elections and draw up your findings on the pie charts below (colour code: blue = conservatives; yellow = lib dems; red = labour; greens = green; SNP = orange; UKIP = purple). One pie chart needs to contain TOTAL VOTES from all parties and the other needs to contain TOTAL SEATS. Then answer the questions below:

*I would recommend that you listen to Talking Politics (via Spotify) episode 'Election fallout' (13<sup>th</sup> May 2021).  
The episode highlights patterns and provides analysis to voting trends and behaviour.*

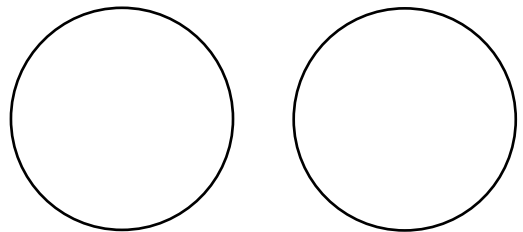
[Results of the 2019 General Election - BBC News](#)

[2015 UK General election results, manifestos | UK Political Info](#)

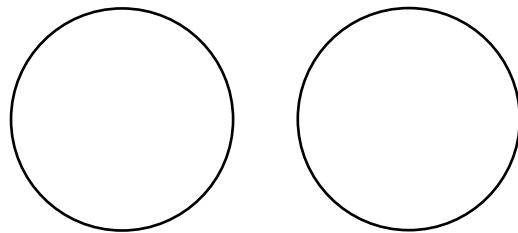
Election results 2019



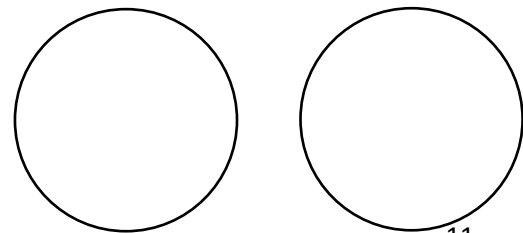
Election results 2017



Election results 2015



Election results 2010



- (1) What patterns can you infer from voting since 2010?
- (2) Why do total seats differ from total votes per party?
- (3) What issues can you infer about the FIRST PAST THE POST voting system?

## Task 2: UNIT 2

### History of Parliament and the development of the UK's constitution

Use the following websites to create a timeline of the history of the UK's Parliament and the development of the UK's constitution.

[The evolution of Parliament - UK Parliament](#)

[A brief history of the UK Parliament - BBC News](#)

[The Constitution of the United Kingdom - Historic UK \(historic-uk.com\)](#)

*I would recommend that you listen to Talking Politics (via Spotify) episode 'Why constitutions matter' (3<sup>th</sup> June 2021). The episode provides arguments for and against the value of constitutions.*

#### **Key events to research and include in your timeline:**

Magna Carter 1215

Provisions of Oxford 1258

Petition of right 1628

Bill of rights 1689

Act of Settlement 1701

The Great Reform Act

The Parliament Act 1911

Equal Franchise Act 1928

Entry into the European Union 1973

Formation of the Supreme Court 2009

Brexit 2016

### **Extending your knowledge...**

If you have reached the end of your transition pack now it is time to extend your knowledge.

- David Runciman (2017) *The Confidence Trap: A History of Democracy in Crisis from WW1 to the Present*

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- David Runciman (2014) *Politics Profile books.*

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- David Runciman (2006) *Politics of Good Intentions: History, Fear, and Hypocrisy in the New World Order.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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- Jan Verner Muller *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-century Europe*

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- Jan Verner Muller *What is Populism* Penguin

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- Bernard Crick (2002) *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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- John Dunn (2005) *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy.* London: Atlantic.