

Edexcel A level Government and Politics – Transition Work from Year 11 to Year 12

Paper 1 - UK Politics

Paper 2 – UK Government

Paper 3 – Comparative studies: US Government and Politics

Welcome to A Level Politics! This document is designed to give you a clear and engaging introduction to the subject, helping you to prepare over the summer break before you begin your studies. By the end of this introduction, you should have a strong understanding of what politics is, why it matters, what you'll study in the Edexcel A Level Politics course, how politics in the UK works, and who the key political figures and parties are.

Week	Activity	Description	How long should I spend on this activity?
1	Introduction to Parliament	Watch the video for task 1 and make notes on: • How did Parliament start? • What are the three parts of Parliament? • What is the role of each part of Parliament? • Who makes up the Government? • What does the Government do? • Who makes up the Opposition? • What do the Opposition do? • How are laws made? • What is the role of an MP? • How do people influence their MPs?	1 hour
2	Introduction to Political Parties	Use the resources and your own research to produce a summary of each of the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Reform parties • What do they believe in? • Why? • Who votes for them? • Why?	1 hour
3	Introduction to democracy	Using the resources below and your own research, create a for and against table for each of representative and direct democracy, as well as definitions of each of these	2 hours
4	Introduction to First Past the Post	Watch the video for 'task 4' and consider: • Definition of 'first past the post' • Positives of 'first past the post' • Negatives of 'first past the post' Then, do some research on the alternatives: • Additional Member System • Single Transferable Vote • Supplementary Vote Be ready to have an opinion – should we change our voting system?	1 hour

Resources/web links to use

Required reading – Introduction to A Level Politics document, next page

Edexcel Specification

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/Politics/2017/Specification%20and%20sample%20assessments/A-level-Politics-Specification.pdf>

Task videos:

Task 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAMblz3Y2JA&t=166s>

Task 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bc78rgUfsFw>

Podcasts:

Politics live: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0lglvdl>

Newscast: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0lg82f5>

The Rest is Politics: <https://open.spotify.com/show/1Ysx8g1lw42gESAtegrFaH>

Americast: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/p07h19zz>

Websites:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zxnwkty>

Videos:

House of Lords explained: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U0LhurGW0c&t=41s>

Alternative Voting explained: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y3jE3B8HsE>

STV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8XOZJkozfl>

UK Parliament channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@ukparliament>

Suggested reading:

UK Politics Annual Update

This Land – Owen Jones

We're Living Through the Breakdown – Tatton Spiller

British Politics: A Very Short Introduction – Tony Wright

Prisoners of Geography – Tim Marshall

What is Politics and Why is it Important?

Politics is about power, influence, and decision-making. It determines who makes the rules we live by, how those rules are enforced, and how resources are distributed in society. Studying politics means exploring how governments work, how laws are made, how people gain political power, and how citizens can participate in shaping their society. Politics is important because it affects almost every aspect of our lives — from the taxes we pay and the education we receive, to our rights, freedoms, and responsibilities. Understanding politics gives you the tools to be an informed, active citizen and to critically evaluate the world around you.

The Edexcel A Level Politics Course Overview

The Edexcel A Level Politics course is divided into three main components:

Paper 1: UK Politics and Core Political Ideas

- Democracy and participation
- Political parties
- Electoral systems
- Voting behaviour and the media
- Core ideologies: conservatism, liberalism, socialism

Paper 2: UK Government and Optional Political Ideology (Nationalism)

- The UK constitution
- Parliament
- The Prime Minister and executive
- Relationships between the branches of government
- Optional ideology: Nationalism

Paper 3: Comparative Politics (USA)

- US Constitution and federalism
- US Congress
- US Presidency
- US Supreme Court and civil rights
- US democracy and participation
- Comparative theories (how and why we compare political systems)

Assessment is through three written exams at the end of the two-year course. Each paper is worth 33.3% of your A Level grade.

How Politics in the UK Works

The Mechanics of Law-Making:

1. The UK is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.
2. Laws begin as proposals called bills, usually introduced by the government.
3. A bill must pass through both Houses of Parliament — the House of Commons and the House of Lords — before receiving Royal Assent and becoming law.
4. MPs (Members of Parliament) and peers debate, amend, and vote on bills during several readings.
5. Being Involved in Politics:
6. You can get involved in politics in many ways: joining a political party, campaigning on issues, voting in elections, writing to your MP, or attending protests.
7. Young people are increasingly active in politics through social media, youth organisations, and pressure groups.
8. While the voting age is 18 in general elections, you can still shape political conversations from an earlier age.

Mini-Profiles of Major Political Parties

To understand UK politics, it's essential to know the major political parties — their values, priorities, and influence. These are the key players you'll study and hear about in the news and during elections.

Labour Party

- **Political Position:** Centre, formerly centre-left
- **Founded:** 1900 by trade unions and socialist groups
- **Core Beliefs:** Labour traditionally supports social equality, the welfare state, publicly funded services like the NHS, and workers' rights. It promotes redistributive taxation, greater state involvement in the economy, and social justice.
- **Recent Manifesto Themes:** Green investment, protecting workers' rights, improving public services, increasing funding for education and health.
- **Support Base:** Historically strong among working-class communities, trade unions, and in urban areas and the north of England.
- **Key Figures:** Andy Burnham, Keir Starmer, Angela Rayner, Rachel Reeves
- **Interesting Fact:** Labour was in government from 1997 to 2010 under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, known for 'New Labour' — a more centrist, neoliberal rebranding of the party.

Conservative Party (Tories)

- **Political Position:** Centre-right
- **Founded:** 1834 (modern form)
- **Core Beliefs:** The Conservatives favour free market economics, individual responsibility, traditional institutions, and national sovereignty. The party often promotes lower taxes, reducing government spending, and a strong national defence.
- **Recent Manifesto Themes:** Controlling immigration, growing the economy, investment in infrastructure, and reforming public services.
- **Support Base:** Generally strongest in rural areas, the south of England, among older voters and business interests.
- **Key Figures:** Rishi Sunak (former Prime Minister), Kemi Badenoch, Mel Stride
- **Interesting Fact:** The party has been in power either alone or in coalition for most of the past century.

Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems)

- **Political Position:** Centre to centre-left
- **Founded:** 1988 (from a merger of the Liberal Party and Social Democratic Party)
- **Core Beliefs:** Lib Dems support civil liberties, electoral reform, social justice, internationalism, and tackling climate change. They are pro-European and advocate decentralisation of power.
- **Recent Manifesto Themes:** Electoral reform (proportional representation), mental health funding, universal childcare, and net-zero emissions.
- **Support Base:** Historically strong in university towns, parts of south-west England, and among liberal professionals and younger voters.
- **Key Figures:** Ed Davey, Layla Moran, Daisy Cooper
- **Interesting Fact:** The Lib Dems were in coalition with the Conservatives from 2010 to 2015 — a period which still shapes public perception of the party.

Reform UK

- **Political Position:** Right-wing, populist
- **Founded:** Originally as the Brexit Party in 2018, rebranded as Reform UK in 2021
- **Core Beliefs:** Reform UK campaigns for lower immigration, radical tax reform, withdrawal from international climate commitments, and a reduction in the size of the state. It promotes a vision of direct democracy and “common-sense” politics.
- **Recent Manifesto Themes:** Ending net zero targets, scrapping inheritance tax, reducing legal immigration to near-zero, NHS reform
- **Support Base:** Particularly strong among Brexit supporters, disaffected Conservative voters, and those critical of mainstream parties.
- **Key Figures:** Nigel Farage (party leader), Richard Tice (chairman)
- **Interesting Fact:** Although it only won 5 seats (0.8%) in the 2024 General Election, Reform UK won 14.3% of the votes

The Green Party

- **Political Position:** Left wing, semi-populist
- **Founded:** 1990 as a single-issue environmental party, out of the PEOPLE Party formed 1973
- **Core beliefs:** The environment is the most pressing issue in global politics and the issues causing climate change are rooted in capitalism and neoliberalism. Supports proportional representation, LGBTQ rights, drug policy reform, and loosened immigration policies. Trying to combat the ‘alternative populism’ of the far right with a ‘hopeful’ left-wing option
- **Recent Manifesto Themes:** ‘Real Hope. Real Change.’ Focusing on solving the climate crisis, investment in the NHS, wealth tax, nationalising rail/water/energy, and rent control
- **Support Base:** younger, highly educated people but not predominantly urban. Strongest areas are university towns or urban areas with large student populations. The Green Party’s anti-Gaza stance has also seen it increase in popularity among Muslim voters.
- **Key Figures:** Zack Polanski (party leader), Caroline Lucas (former leader and first MP)
- **Interesting Fact:** In the 2024 election, the Green Party won 4 seats but gained 6.4% of the votes

Politics A Level Starter Glossary

- **Accountability:** The principle that politicians and public officials must be answerable for their actions.
- **Backbencher:** An MP who is not a government minister or opposition spokesperson
- **Bicameral:** A legislature made up of two chambers, such as the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
- **Cabinet:** The group of senior ministers, led by the Prime Minister, who make key government decisions.
- **Checks and balances:** A system that allows each branch of government to amend or veto acts of another to prevent abuse of power.
- **Civil liberties:** Basic freedoms and rights that are protected from government interference.
- **Coalition government:** A government formed by two or more political parties sharing power
- **Constituency:** A geographical area represented by an MP in the House of Commons.
- **Constitution:** The rules that set out how a state is governed.
- **Democracy:** A system where people have the power, often through voting.
- **Devolution:** Transfer of powers from central to regional governments.
- **Direct democracy:** A form of democracy where citizens make decisions themselves, such as in referendums.
- **Electoral system:** The method used to count votes and allocate seats.
- **Executive:** The branch of government responsible for implementing laws.
- **Faction:** A smaller group within a larger political party that holds different views from the party leadership.
- **First Past the Post:** The UK’s main voting system for general elections.
- **Franchise:** The right to vote in public elections.
- **House of Commons:** The lower and primary chamber of the UK Parliament, where elected MPs sit.
- **House of Lords:** The unelected upper chamber of Parliament, made up of life peers, bishops, and hereditary peers.
- **Ideology:** A set of political beliefs or values.

- **Judiciary:** The branch of government that interprets and applies the law.
- **Legislature:** The law-making branch of government (e.g., Parliament).
- **Mandate:** The authority given by voters to a party or government to implement its policies.
- **Manifesto:** A political party's public set of policy promises before an election.
- **Monarchy:** A form of government where a king or queen is the head of state.
- **MP (Member of Parliament):** An elected representative in the House of Commons.
- **Opposition:** The political parties not in government.
- **Parliament:** The UK's legislature, made up of the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the monarch.
- **Party whip:** An MP responsible for party discipline, ensuring members vote in line with party policy.
- **Pluralism:** The belief that power should be spread among a range of political, social, and economic groups.
- **Political participation:** Activities that allow people to influence politics, such as voting or campaigning.
- **Pressure group:** An organisation that seeks to influence public policy without standing for election.
- **Prime Minister:** The head of government in the UK (two separate words)
- **Proportional representation:** An electoral system where seats match votes.
- **Referendum:** A direct vote by the public on a specific issue.
- **Scrutiny:** The process of examining and questioning the actions of the government.
- **Shadow Cabinet:** Senior members of the main opposition party who 'shadow' government ministers.
- **Sovereignty:** Supreme power or authority in a state.
- **Turnout:** The percentage of eligible voters who vote in an election.
- **Universal suffrage:** The right of almost all adults to vote, regardless of gender, race, or property ownership.

We hope this guide gives you a confident starting point for A Level Politics. Stay curious, ask questions, and follow the news — politics is happening all around you. Enjoy your summer, and we look forward to seeing you in September!