5.12 Comparative US/UK Legislatures: Congress and Parliament: Test Pack

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 15 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Write full sentences for extended answers and for any question marked 'Analyse' or 'Evaluate'. The final 30-mark essay should be well structured, use comparative evidence, and reach a judgement.

1 This question tests basic knowledge of bicameral structure in the US Congress compared to the UK Parliament.

(a) State the two chambers that make up the United States Congress, naming each chamber. **(1)**

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 This question concerns the constitutional principle that separates the US executive from Congress.

(a) Explain briefly what is meant by the 'separation of powers' between Congress and the US Presidency. **(2)**

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 This question asks for one clear contrast about party discipline between the two systems.

(a) State two ways in which party discipline in the UK Commons is typically stronger than party discipline in the US House of Representatives or Senate. **(3)**

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

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4 This question asks about the UK majority government and the phrase 'elective dictatorship'.

(a) Explain briefly why a large Commons majority can lead commentators to describe UK government as an 'elective dictatorship'. **(4)**

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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5 This question asks for a short analysis of committee powers in the two systems and their role in scrutiny.

(a) Analyse two differences in how standing committees in the US Congress and select committees in the UK Parliament contribute to scrutinising the executive. **(6)**

(Total for Question 5 is 6 marks)

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Mark scheme · 5.12 Comparative US/UK Legislatures: Congress and Parliament: Test Pack

Question 1

(a) one mark for naming both chambers correctly, 'the Senate and the House of Representatives' cao **B1**

(a) Answer: The Senate and the House of Representatives.

Question 2

(a) identifies that separation of powers means different branches have distinct roles and legal powers **B1**

(a) adds that this leads to checks and balances, for example congressional oversight and presidential veto power **B1**

(a) Answer: Separation of powers means the legislative branch (Congress) and the executive (the President) have distinct constitutional roles and legal powers, creating checks and balances such as congressional oversight, Senate confirmation of appointments, and the presidential veto.

Question 3

(a) one accurate point, e.g. the UK has the whipping system with sanctions including losing the party whip **B1**

(a) second accurate point, e.g. UK ministers and parliamentary careers are more directly controlled by party leaders **B1**

(a) development, e.g. US Congress members have independent electoral bases and often campaign on personal record, reducing central control **B1**

(a) Answer: UK party discipline is stronger because the whipping system can sanction MPs by removing the whip and blocking ministerial promotion, and because MPs depend on party leaders for career advancement; in the US, members have independent electoral bases and personal campaign funding, which weakens central party control.

Question 4

(a) identifies that a large majority allows the executive to pass legislation with little effective opposition in the Commons **B1**

(a) identifies the role of party whips and the government payroll vote in reducing the impact of backbench criticism **B1**

(a) identifies that the fusion of powers means the executive sets the Commons agenda **B1**

(a) brief consequence, e.g. critics say this concentration of power can avoid meaningful scrutiny and reduce checks on the executive **B1**

(a) Answer: A large Commons majority allows the government to pass laws with little effective opposition because the whipping system and the payroll vote keep MPs aligned, and the fused executive controls the Commons agenda, so critics call this an 'elective dictatorship' to highlight the concentration of power and reduced legislative scrutiny.

Question 5

(a) identifies a US committee feature, e.g. congressional committees have powers of subpoena, mandatory hearings and detailed oversight of executive agencies **B1**

(a) explains effect, e.g. this gives Congress a legal means to compel evidence and investigate administration actions **B1**

(a) identifies a UK committee feature, e.g. UK select committees carry out inquiries and publish reports but have more limited formal powers to compel ministers compared with US committees **B1**

(a) explains effect, e.g. select committee influence often relies on publicity and moral authority rather than strong legal compulsion **B1**

(a) identifies a further comparative point, e.g. US committees are often chaired by majority party members in each chamber but can be sites of cross-party cooperation; UK select committees have chairs elected by the whole House and sometimes have a cross-party membership intended to increase independence **B1**

(a) explains consequence, e.g. the structural differences shape the practical effectiveness of scrutiny in different political contexts **B1**

(a) Answer: Congressional standing committees have formal legal powers such as subpoenas and mandatory hearings that can compel evidence from the executive, giving Congress strong procedural tools to investigate administration actions. UK select committees conduct inquiries and publish influential reports but rely more on publicity and moral authority since their formal compulsion powers over ministers and civil servants are more limited; additionally, chairs of UK select committees are elected by the whole House to encourage independence, while US committee chairs reflect chamber party control, so institutional design and political context combine to shape differing scrutiny strengths.

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