5.13 Comparative US/UK Executives: The President and the Prime Minister

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be brief; extended answers and levels-marked responses should use full sentences and relevant comparative detail. The final question is a 30-mark evaluative essay. Total time suggested 55 minutes.

1 Evaluate the extent to which the US President is more constrained by other branches of government than the UK Prime Minister is constrained by Parliament and party mechanisms.

(Total for Question 1 is 30 marks)

2 Explain two ways in which the UK Prime Minister typically has stronger day-to-day control over Cabinet appointments and government business than the US President has over the US Cabinet and congressional agenda.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Compare in two developed points how Senate confirmation and congressional oversight affect a US President's choice of cabinet and senior appointees differently from the UK Prime Minister's appointment of UK ministers.

(Total for Question 3 is 6 marks)

4 Source for use with Question 4: Two brief extracts on executive constraints. Extract A, from a US constitutional studies textbook, 2021: 'The US President is constrained by the checks of a separate legislature and judiciary. Fixed terms and an impeachment process mean the President cannot be removed except through constitutionally prescribed procedures, while the need to secure majorities in both houses of Congress for major legislation requires negotiation and compromise.' Extract B, from a British government studies chapter, 2022: 'The UK Prime Minister, while powerful when commanding a Commons majority, is vulnerable to loss of office from a parliamentary vote of no confidence or from party leadership challenges. Party discipline and control of the legislative timetable give the Prime Minister greater capacity to pass the government's programme.' Using the source, analyse the similarities and/or differences in how the two extracts present constraints on the US President and the UK Prime Minister.

(Total for Question 4 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · 5.13 Comparative US/UK Executives: The President and the Prime Minister

Question 1

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Limited knowledge of institutional constraints in either system; argument is undeveloped or descriptive with little analysis or evaluation.	**1-7**
Level 2 Knowledge of key constraints in both systems with some analysis of how they operate. Evaluation present but may be one-sided or lacking sustained comparative judgement.	**8-15**
Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge and developed analysis of constitutional and political constraints on both executives. Evaluation weighs evidence and begins to reach a comparative judgement supported by examples.	**16-23**
Level 4 Sophisticated, well-evidenced analysis and evaluation across AO1, AO2 and AO3. Direct, sustained comparison of the institutional and political constraints with precise examples and a clear, balanced final judgement on the extent of constraint.	**24-30**

Indicative content:

- Point: US President faces formal separation of powers meaning Congress can block legislation, control the purse, and the Senate confirms appointments and ratifies treaties; judicial review can overturn executive actions. Evidence: examples such as gridlock when opposition controls one or both houses, Senate rejection of nominees, and court decisions limiting executive orders.
- Point: The fixed term provides insulation from immediate removal but forces reliance on congressional coalitions; impeachment is rare and politically fraught, so removal is possible but difficult. Evidence: impeachment proceedings in modern history and their political dynamics.
- Point: UK Prime Minister is not constitutionally separated from the legislature and can usually pass legislation when commanding a Commons majority, but is vulnerable to loss of office via no confidence or party leadership challenges. Evidence: examples where PMs with large majorities passed major programmes, and instances where internal party challenges forced PMs to resign or moderate policy.
- Point: The UK PM appoints ministers without legislative confirmation, giving managerial freedom; however party discipline and the whip system act as both a tool and a constraint, since rebellion can force concessions. Evidence: use of the whip to secure votes, and cases where backbench rebellions constrained policy.
- Point: Compare how judicial review operates in both systems: US courts have a more prominent role in checking executive policy through constitutional litigation, while UK courts have more limited review of prerogative powers post-Miller but still respect parliamentary sovereignty; political mechanisms often dominate in the UK.
- Counterpoint: When the US President and the UK Prime Minister are from the same collaborative party position with legislative majorities, practical constraints can look similar: a President with a friendly Congress can pass much of their programme, and a PM without a Commons majority can be heavily constrained.
- Evaluation: weigh the formal, legal constraints in the US against the political, party-based constraints in the UK. Consider which type of constraint is stronger in practice and how context, such as divided government or a slim majority, changes the balance.
- Judgement: a reasoned conclusion might argue the US President is structurally more constrained in law by separate branches, but in practice constraint depends on political alignment; the UK Prime Minister can often act more decisively when commanding a majority, yet can be more quickly removed by party or parliamentary action, so neither office is uniformly more constrained in all circumstances.

Question 2

identifies the PM can appoint and dismiss ministers without legislative confirmation	**B1**
explains that this ability allows the PM to shape the Cabinet and discipline ministers quickly	**B1**
identifies that the PM sets the government's legislative programme in the Queen's/King's Speech and controls parliamentary timetable via the majority and the Whips	**B1**
explains that this means UK government business is usually easier to prioritise and pass when the PM has a Commons majority	**B1**

Answer: The Prime Minister can appoint and dismiss ministers without a formal legislative confirmation process, enabling swift reshuffles to reward loyalty or remove dissenters; additionally the Prime Minister sets the government's legislative programme in the King's Speech and, when commanding a Commons majority and effective Whips, can usually control the parliamentary timetable to prioritise government bills, giving stronger day-to-day control over government business than Presidents typically exercise over the US legislative agenda.

Question 3

identifies that senior US appointees require Senate confirmation	**B1**
explains how this can limit the President to candidates acceptable to the Senate majority or require concessions	**B1**
identifies that UK ministers do not require a legislative confirmation process	**B1**
explains how this gives the UK Prime Minister more freedom to choose loyalists but also increases party-centred accountability	**B1**
identifies congressional oversight hearings as a constraint on executive appointments and behaviour	**B1**
explains that UK ministers face parliamentary questions and select committee scrutiny but not a formal confirmation veto	**B1**

Answer: In the US senior executive appointments typically require Senate confirmation, meaning Presidents often select candidates who can win Senate approval or accept that nominees may be rejected, which can force compromises; in the UK the Prime Minister appoints ministers without a legislative confirmation process, giving the PM greater freedom to install loyal colleagues quickly, though ministers remain politically accountable to Parliament and the party. Congressional oversight hearings can also publicly constrain and delay US appointments; UK ministers face parliamentary questions and select committee scrutiny but lack a formal confirmation veto, so the balance is greater formal legislative check in the US and greater executive managerial freedom in the UK.

Question 4

Level 0 No relevant material from the source.	**0**
Level 1 Simple, partial use of the source. Identifies one or two basic similarities or differences without development or with limited reference to institutional detail.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear use of the source to identify a range of similarities and differences, with some developed explanation of how constitutional or parliamentary mechanisms operate.	**4-6**
Level 3 Thorough use of both extracts to analyse key similarities and differences, with accurate institutional detail and some evaluation of the weight or significance of each constraint.	**7-9**
Level 4 Sophisticated, source-driven analysis that compares and contrasts the extracts with precision, explains how constitutional design and political practice produce different patterns of constraint, and reaches a reasoned judgement about the degree to which each executive is constrained as presented in the extracts.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- Similarity: both extracts recognise formal mechanisms for removal, but they differ in form; the US relies on impeachment and fixed terms, the UK on parliamentary confidence and party mechanisms.
- Similarity: both extracts imply there are checks beyond removal, for example legislative requirements to pass major measures and oversight by other branches or bodies.
- Difference: Extract A emphasises separation of powers and the need for congressional majorities, framing constraint as institutional bargaining across independent branches; Extract B emphasises party discipline and Commons control of the legislative timetable, framing constraint as intra-party and parliamentary.
- Difference: Extract A presents removal as procedurally difficult but legally codified (impeachment, conviction), whereas Extract B presents removal as politically contingent and potentially rapid through party processes or a no confidence vote.
- Analysis: discuss how fixed terms can insulate Presidents from short-term political pressures but make them reliant on legislative coalitions, while PMs may be more immediately vulnerable to party dynamics yet can typically pass legislation when they have a strong majority.
- Evaluation: consider the relative strength of judicial review and congressional oversight in the US versus parliamentary scrutiny and select committees in the UK, and judge which extract gives greater weight to institutional or political constraints.
- Judgement: a balanced conclusion might argue the extracts present different types of constraint rather than a simple more-or-less comparison, with the US described as constrained by cross-branch bargaining and formal legal checks, and the UK described as constrained by party politics but empowered by parliamentary majorities when present.