5.1 US Presidency: 30-minute Pack

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For levels-marked questions, write a well-structured, developed response using accurate political knowledge, named examples and precise terminology. This pack forms part of Edexcel Paper 3A (9PL0/3A): Comparative Politics - USA.

1 This question is about informal presidential power.

(a) Identify one informal power available to a US President that is not set out in the Constitution. **(2)**

(b) Explain how a President might use the 'bully pulpit' to influence public opinion or Congress. **(4)**

(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)

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2 Analyse the extent to which the President's veto power is an effective tool for controlling the legislative agenda.

(Total for Question 2 is 9 marks)

3 Analyse the extent to which impeachment is an effective check on presidential power.

(Total for Question 3 is 12 marks)

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Mark scheme · 5.1 US Presidency: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

(a) identifies a valid informal power, e.g. the 'bully pulpit' (using the office's visibility to shape public opinion), agenda-setting, or issuing signing statements **B1**

(a) brief accurate description of that power **B1**

(a) Answer: Example: the 'bully pulpit' - using the high visibility of the presidency to appeal directly to the public and shape opinion, applying indirect pressure on Congress.

(b) identifies the national media platform of the presidency, e.g. televised addresses, press conferences or social media **B1**

(b) explains how the President uses that platform to explain a policy and build public support **B1**

(b) develops the persuasion mechanism, e.g. supporters contact their representatives or public opinion raises the political cost of opposition **B1**

(b) explains how this pressure can encourage members of Congress to support the policy; accept equivalent developed explanations of influence on public opinion or Congress **B1**

(b) Answer: The President can use national addresses, press conferences and public appearances to explain a policy and build public support. Supporters may then contact their representatives, raising the political cost of opposing the policy. Members of Congress may respond to this constituent pressure by supporting the proposal.

Question 2

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of the veto power, with little or no developed analysis. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear, accurate knowledge with some developed analysis of the veto's strengths and/or limitations, though the argument may be one-sided or only loosely evidenced. **4-6**

Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge used to construct a sustained analysis weighing the veto's effectiveness against its limitations, using accurate named examples, and reaching a supported judgement on the extent of its effectiveness. **7-9**

Indicative content:

- Case for effectiveness: the veto is a strong formal power because overriding it requires a two-thirds majority in both the House and the Senate (Article I, Section 7), a very high bar that is rarely reached in practice, meaning a veto (or even the credible threat of one) can force Congress to negotiate or abandon a bill.
- Case for effectiveness: the pocket veto (allowing a bill to die without signature if Congress adjourns within ten days of presentment) gives the President an additional, harder-to-override route to block legislation.
- Case against effectiveness: the veto is a purely negative, reactive power - it can block legislation the President dislikes but cannot itself create or pass a legislative agenda, so it does little to advance a President's own priorities without congressional cooperation.
- Case against effectiveness: the President cannot use a line-item veto to strike out individual provisions of a spending bill; the Supreme Court ruled the Line Item Veto Act of 1996 unconstitutional in Clinton v City of New York (1998), so the President must accept or reject an entire bill, which can force acceptance of unwanted provisions bundled with wanted ones.
- A balanced conclusion might argue the veto is highly effective as a blocking tool given the high override threshold, but limited as an agenda-setting tool, so its overall effectiveness depends heavily on whether the question is about stopping unwanted legislation or advancing the President's own programme.

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Question 3

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of the impeachment process, with little or no developed analysis.	**1-4**
Level 2 Clear, accurate knowledge of the process with some developed analysis of its effectiveness or limitations, though the argument may be one-sided.	**5-8**
Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge (including relevant historical examples) used to construct a sustained analysis weighing the strengths and limitations of impeachment as a check, reaching a supported judgement.	**9-12**

Indicative content:

- Process: the House of Representatives can impeach a President by a simple majority vote (bringing formal charges); the Senate then holds a trial, and conviction and removal from office require a two-thirds majority vote of Senators present.
- Case for effectiveness: impeachment is the ultimate constitutional check, capable of removing a President entirely from office, and the process (public hearings, formal charges, a Senate trial) imposes serious political and reputational cost even short of removal.
- Case against effectiveness as a removal tool: the two-thirds Senate threshold is extremely high, and to date no US President has been convicted and removed from office by the Senate. The House has impeached three Presidents - Andrew Johnson (1868), Bill Clinton (1998), and Donald Trump (impeached twice, in 2019 and 2021) - and in each case the Senate did not convict, showing the removal mechanism itself has never succeeded in practice.
- Case against effectiveness: because impeachment and conviction are ultimately political votes rather than a purely legal process, an outcome may depend heavily on party control of the Senate rather than solely on the underlying conduct, which some argue undermines its effectiveness as a neutral constitutional check.
- A balanced conclusion might argue impeachment is a highly significant symbolic and political check (formal censure, historical record, political damage) but a weak practical removal mechanism given the high Senate threshold and its unbroken record of non-conviction to date, so its effectiveness depends on whether 'effective' is judged by political consequence or by actual removals achieved.

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