5.2 Comparative Theories: Structural, Rational and Cultural Approaches: 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 formal and informal checks in each system.

(a) State two examples of checks and balances built into the US constitutional structure. **(2)**

(b) Explain one way the UK constitution provides a check on executive power, despite the absence of a codified constitution. **(3)**

(Total for Question 1 is 5 marks)

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2 Evaluate the extent to which the differences between the UK and US political systems are better explained by structural theory than by cultural theory.

(Total for Question 2 is 30 marks)

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Mark scheme · 5.2 Comparative Theories: Structural, Rational and Cultural Approaches: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

(a) one accurate example, e.g. presidential veto of legislation, which Congress can override by a two-thirds vote in both chambers	**B1**
(a) a second accurate example, e.g. Senate 'advice and consent' over major presidential appointments and treaties, or Supreme Court judicial review of Acts of Congress	**B1**

(a) Answer: Any two of: the presidential veto (overridable by a two-thirds vote of both chambers of Congress); Senate confirmation ('advice and consent') of major presidential appointments and treaties; Supreme Court judicial review of the constitutionality of federal laws and executive actions.

(b) identifies a genuine UK check, e.g. judicial review of the lawful use of prerogative or statutory powers by the executive	**B1**
(b) accurate supporting example, e.g. the Supreme Court's ruling in R (Miller) v The Prime Minister; Cherry v Advocate General for Scotland [2019] UKSC 41 that the 2019 prorogation of Parliament was unlawful	**B1**
(b) explains the consequence, e.g. this shows UK courts can constrain how the executive exercises its powers even without a codified constitution, by applying constitutional principles developed through case law and convention	**B1**

(b) Answer: UK courts can check the executive through judicial review of the lawfulness of its use of power, even though the UK constitution is uncodified. For example, in R (Miller) v The Prime Minister; Cherry v Advocate General for Scotland [2019] UKSC 41, the Supreme Court ruled that the 2019 prorogation of Parliament was unlawful, void and of no effect, showing that constitutional principles developed through case law can constrain the executive.

Question 2

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of structural and/or cultural theory, with little or no developed analysis or evaluation. Examples, if present, are generalised or inaccurate.	**1-7**
Level 2 Clear, mostly accurate knowledge of structural and cultural approaches with some developed analysis; evaluation is present but may be one-sided, assertive rather than substantiated, or only loosely tied to named examples.	**8-15**
Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge deployed in a sustained analysis that engages with both structural and cultural theory using well-selected, accurate examples; evaluation weighs the two approaches against each other and reaches a reasoned judgement, though development of counter-arguments may be uneven.	**16-23**
Level 4 Sophisticated, wide-ranging and accurate knowledge used to construct a sustained, tightly argued evaluation that directly compares structural and cultural explanations (and may bring in the rational approach as a further point of comparison), using precise, well-chosen examples throughout; reaches a clearly substantiated, balanced judgement on the extent of the claim.	**24-30**

Indicative content:

- Structural case for the claim: the US separation of powers (a separately elected President, distinct from Congress, per Article I, Section 6) contrasts with the UK's fusion of executive and legislature (the PM and Cabinet sit in and are drawn from Parliament); this formal, codified difference can be identified and compared precisely.
- Structural case for the claim: US federalism entrenches state powers under the Tenth Amendment (1791), whereas UK devolution grants powers that remain legally revocable by a sovereign Westminster Parliament (Scotland Act 1998, Wales Act 2017, Northern Ireland Act 1998); a structural theorist argues this formal difference in the entrenchment of sub-national power is the primary driver of observed differences in how devolved/state government behaves.
- Structural case for the claim: the codified US Constitution and the Supreme Court's power of judicial review (Marbury v Madison, 1803) versus the UK's uncodified constitution and doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty (limited only by mechanisms such as section 4 declarations of incompatibility under the Human Rights Act 1998) is a further precise, testable structural contrast.
- Cultural case against the claim (for cultural theory instead): American political culture, shaped by the historical experience of breaking from British colonial rule, has long emphasised individualism and suspicion of concentrated central power; this cultural disposition can be argued to have driven the original choice of a fragmented, checked-and-balanced structure, rather than the structure existing independently of culture.
- Cultural case against the claim: UK political culture reflects an evolutionary, non-revolutionary constitutional history and a deep-rooted deference to the convention of parliamentary sovereignty, which helps explain why the UK has been comparatively willing to concentrate power in a sovereign Parliament and a fused executive, something a purely structural account (which treats the rules as a fixed starting point) does not itself explain.
- Balanced/synthesis point: structural and cultural theories are not necessarily rivals - political culture may explain why a set of structures was originally adopted, after which those structures become self-reinforcing (path dependency) and shape behaviour largely independently of the culture that produced them; a sophisticated answer can therefore argue the two approaches are complementary layers of explanation rather than competitors.
- A substantiated conclusion might reasonably favour structural theory on the grounds that formal rules are more precisely comparable and testable across cases, or might reasonably favour cultural theory on the grounds that identical structures (e.g. two federal-style systems) can produce very different outcomes depending on political culture; either conclusion should be credited provided it is supported by accurate, well-explained evidence and does not present one theoretical school as objectively 'correct'.

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