5.2 Comparative Theories: Structural, Rational and Cultural Approaches: Test Pack

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 20 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 tests your understanding of the three theoretical approaches used to compare political systems on the Edexcel specification.

(a) Define what is meant by a structural approach to comparative politics. **(2)**

(b) Define what is meant by a rational approach to comparative politics. **(2)**

(c) Define what is meant by a cultural approach to comparative politics. **(2)**

(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)

2 This question tests recall of structural features of the two legislatures.

(a) State two structural features of the US Congress. **(2)**

(b) State two structural features of the UK Parliament. **(2)**

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 This question compares specific structural features of the UK and US political systems.

(a) Explain one way in which the constitutional arrangements of the USA reflect a stricter separation of powers than those of the UK. **(4)**

(b) Explain one way in which federalism in the USA differs from devolution in the UK. **(4)**

(c) Explain how the power of judicial review differs between the US Supreme Court and the courts of the UK. **(4)**

(Total for Question 3 is 12 marks)

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Mark scheme · 5.2 Comparative Theories: Structural, Rational and Cultural Approaches: Test Pack

Question 1

(a) identifies that a structural approach explains political behaviour and outcomes by reference to political institutions/structures (e.g. constitutions, electoral systems, party systems) **B1**

(a) further development, e.g. structures are relatively stable and enduring, allowing systematic comparison between countries **B1**

(a) Answer: A structural approach explains political outcomes and behaviour mainly in terms of the formal institutions and structures of a political system (e.g. its constitution, electoral system or party system), which are relatively stable and can be compared directly across countries.

(b) identifies that a rational approach explains political behaviour as the product of individuals or institutions acting to maximise self-interest/achieve defined goals (e.g. re-election, power, policy) **B1**

(b) further development, e.g. actors are assumed to weigh costs and benefits strategically within the incentives created by existing structures **B1**

(b) Answer: A rational approach explains political behaviour as the outcome of individuals or institutions acting strategically to maximise their own self-interest or achieve a defined goal (such as re-election or gaining power), given the incentives created by the institutional structures they operate within.

(c) identifies that a cultural approach explains political behaviour and institutions by reference to shared beliefs, values, traditions, history and identity (political culture) **B1**

(c) further development, e.g. cultural theory can explain why similar structures produce different outcomes in different countries **B1**

(c) Answer: A cultural approach explains political behaviour and institutions by reference to a country's shared beliefs, values, traditions, history and identity (its political culture), which can explain why similar political structures produce different outcomes in different countries.

Question 2

(a) one accurate structural feature, e.g. it is bicameral, made up of the House of Representatives (435 voting members) and the Senate (100 members, two per state) **B1**

(a) a second accurate structural feature, e.g. members of the House serve two-year terms and Senators serve staggered six-year terms **B1**

(a) Answer: Any two of: Congress is bicameral (House of Representatives and Senate); the House has 435 voting members apportioned by population, elected for two-year terms; the Senate has 100 members, two per state, elected for staggered six-year terms.

(b) one accurate structural feature, e.g. it is bicameral, made up of the House of Commons (650 elected MPs, current for the 2024 general election onward) and the House of Lords (an unelected chamber comprising life peers and Lords Spiritual) **B1**

(b) a second accurate structural feature, e.g. general elections must be held at least every five years, and MPs represent single-member constituencies elected by First Past the Post **B1**

(b) Answer: Any two of: Parliament is bicameral (House of Commons and House of Lords); the Commons has 650 MPs elected from single-member constituencies by First Past the Post; the Lords is unelected and comprises life peers and Lords Spiritual. Hereditary peerage alone no longer gives entitlement to sit and vote in the Lords; a person holding a life peerage is a life peer.

Question 3

(a) identifies the correct structural contrast, e.g. the US has a separately elected executive (President) distinct from the legislature (Congress), while the UK fuses executive and legislature **B1**

(a) accurate supporting detail, e.g. under Article I, Section 6 of the US Constitution, no person may simultaneously serve in Congress and hold federal executive office **B1**

(a) accurate supporting detail on the UK, e.g. the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are drawn from, and remain sitting members of, Parliament (by convention, almost always the Commons) **B1**

(a) explains the consequence, e.g. this gives the US system institutionally separate, and often rival, sources of power, whereas the UK executive is drawn from and normally commands a working majority in the legislature **B1**

(a) Answer: The US Constitution bars anyone from simultaneously holding a seat in Congress and federal executive office (Article I, Section 6), creating a separately elected, institutionally distinct executive; in the UK the executive (PM and Cabinet) is drawn from, and sits within, Parliament, so the two branches are fused rather than separated.

(b) identifies the correct structural contrast, e.g. US states have constitutionally entrenched powers, while UK devolved powers can be altered or revoked by Westminster **B1**

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(b) accurate supporting detail on the USA, e.g. the Tenth Amendment (1791) reserves powers not delegated to the federal government to the states or the people **B1**

(b) accurate supporting detail on the UK, e.g. the Scottish Parliament (Scotland Act 1998), Senedd Cymru (Wales Act 2017) and Northern Ireland Assembly (Northern Ireland Act 1998) hold devolved, not sovereign, powers **B1**

(b) explains the consequence, e.g. because the UK Parliament remains legally sovereign, it retains the legal power to amend or abolish a devolved institution's powers by ordinary Act of Parliament, which Congress cannot do to a US state **B1**

(b) Answer: US states hold powers reserved to them by the Tenth Amendment (1791) and protected by the federal constitutional structure; UK devolved bodies (the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru, Northern Ireland Assembly) hold powers granted by, and legally revocable or amendable by, a sovereign Westminster Parliament, since the UK remains a unitary state with devolved government rather than a federal one.

(c) identifies that the US Supreme Court can strike down (declare void) Acts of Congress and executive actions that it finds unconstitutional **B1**

(c) correctly names the case that established this power, Marbury v Madison (1803) **B1**

(c) identifies that UK courts cannot strike down a valid Act of Parliament, because of the principle of parliamentary sovereignty **B1**

(c) accurately describes the more limited UK power, e.g. under section 4 of the Human Rights Act 1998 the higher courts may issue a declaration of incompatibility, which does not itself invalidate the law but leaves Parliament to decide whether to amend it **B1**

(c) Answer: The US Supreme Court, since Marbury v Madison (1803), can strike down Acts of Congress or executive actions it finds unconstitutional. UK courts cannot strike down a valid Act of Parliament, because Parliament is legally sovereign; the most a higher UK court can do under section 4 of the Human Rights Act 1998 is issue a declaration of incompatibility, which does not itself change the law and leaves Parliament free to decide whether, and how, to respond.

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