



# PiXL Gateway: Progression

## Politics

For Students Studying AQA A Level



*Updated May 2020, by A Reeves*

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## Introduction

Welcome to A Level study! You will quickly learn that power is at the heart of politics. It determines who gets what, when, and how. Politics is the struggle over scarce resources and the means through which the struggle is conducted.



Debate and disagreement lie at the heart of this subject – even when competing politicians seem to be saying the same thing. It is a subject of rival views and one without any absolute answers, so you need to take on the challenge of considering different viewpoints, perspectives, and opinions – and to think for yourself – so that you can formulate powerful arguments and express them convincingly. Moreover, you will study politics not as a neutral observer but as an active participant, developing your personal opinions as you acquire a strong understanding of the factors shaping both the British and American systems of government and politics. You will also gain insight into some of the great political ideas that have shaped the world we live in.

This booklet is designed to help you to start thinking as an A Level Politics student and includes tasks which will support you throughout your studies, including assisting you in preparing for your final exams.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://bentelevision.com/prime-minister-theresa-may-speech-britain-after-brexite-2016-a-vision-of-a-global-britain/>, <http://lybio.net/jeremy-corbyn-queens-speech-2017/people/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://lybio.net/jeremy-corbyn-queens-speech-2017/people/>

“A week is a long time in politics”



Uniquely, Politics is a living subject so you will see much of what you are studying happening in the ‘real world’. It can also be a very fast moving one, as Wilson’s famous quote above indicates. This means that any textbook is, to some degree, out of date by the time it is published. This may sound daunting, especially when this is part of your introduction to the subject, but it also provides you with a great opportunity. It is precisely because no book can give you the most up-to-date examples that using recent/current examples effectively will be highly rewarded by examiners. Consequently, you should always be keeping a keen eye on the news to keep yourselves updated on both current affairs in the UK and the USA (as well as around the world in general).

Following politics in the media should, therefore, be a regular part of your independent study throughout the course. First, however, you need to be organised. One file per exam paper is recommended. Buy or use ‘homemade’ dividers and label them as follows. You will then be able to file your examples in the appropriate section. (*Be aware that some examples will be relevant to two or more topics – more on this later.*) Make a start on this now, establishing a good habit to continue throughout the course, so that **by the end of the summer you will have filed five examples plus your reflections on each one**. The expectation is that you will have five examples in total – i.e. it does not matter which topics they relate to. The summer is usually a quiet time in the political world but Covid-19 is set to ensure that this is not the case this summer.

### Paper 1

- **The Government of the UK**
  - The nature and sources of the British Constitution
  - The structure and role of Parliament
  - The Prime Minister and cabinet
  - The judiciary
- **The politics of the UK**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.quotecounterquote.com/2016/04/a-week-is-long-time-in-politics.html>

- Democracy and participation
- Elections and referendums
- Political parties
- Pressure groups
- The European Union

**Paper 2 Government and politics of the USA and comparative politics**

○ ***Government and politics of the USA***

- The constitutional framework of US government
- The legislative branch of government: Congress
- The executive branch of government: President
- The judicial branch of government
- The electoral process and direct democracy
- Political parties
- Pressure groups
- Civil rights

○ ***Comparative politics***

- Constitutional arrangements
- The executives
- The judiciaries
- Electoral and party systems
- Pressure groups
- Civil rights

In **Paper 3** you will also study Political ideas’ – the ‘core ideologies’ (liberalism, conservatism, and socialism) and one optional ideology (out of anarchism, ecologism, feminism, multiculturalism, or nationalism).

The most highly recommended resource of all (because it succeeds so well in providing intelligent analysis which is accessibly written without being at all dumbed down) is <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics>

Try the other reading/listening/watching recommendations below, with the intention of continuing with what you find useful and enjoyable. Few subjects can offer such entertaining homework.

○ The following are all quality newspapers which are free to access:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- <https://www.washingtontimes.com/>

- TV and Radio, which can be accessed, respectively, via <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio> and <https://www.itv.com/hub/shows>  
(Be aware that these programmes are not all available throughout the year and that schedules may change):
  - Monday – Friday: *PM Radio* 4 17:00 – 18:00; *Newsnight* BBC2 22:30 – 23:15
  - Tuesday: *The Mash Report* BBC2 22:00
  - Thursday: *Question Time* BBC1 22:45 – 23:45; *This Week* BBC1 23:45 – 00:45
  - Friday: *The News Quiz/The Now Show/Dead Ringers* Radio 4 18:30 – 19:00; *Have I Got News For You* BBC1 21:00 – 21:30; *Tracey Breaks the News* BBC1 21:30 – 22:00; *Mock the Week* BBC2 22:00 – 22:30
  - Saturday: *The Week in Westminster* Radio 4 11:00 – 11:30
  - Sunday: *The Andrew Marr Show* BBC1 09:00 – 10:00; *Pienaar’s Politics* Radio 5 10:00 – 11:00; *Peston on Sunday* ITV 10:00 – 11:00, repeated 22:20 – 23:20

Online resources:

- <https://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/magazines/magazines-extras/politics-review-extras> - this is an excellent supply of current opinion about topics (I will look into registering us for the magazine, but even without that subscription there is a good amount of free stuff here)
- <https://www.talkingpoliticspodcast.com/> - regular podcasts on a range of political issues. Again, worth perusing through and listening to some

## Synoptic thinking

Synoptic can be broken down to *syn-*, meaning together, and *-optic*, meaning view or sight. Politics is a highly synoptic subject and, as the specification advises, “students must identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between content studied”. This is especially important in Component 3, where comparisons with the UK need to be made when answering exam questions on the USA. Furthermore, thinking synoptically about the topics within Components 1 and 2, as well as making links between the two components, is a very effective way to demonstrate a high level of understanding of Politics at A Level.

This may well sound daunting but synoptic thinking is a skill that can be mastered with practice and it is also worth emphasising that you are not expected to start the course with any prior knowledge: just the commitment to acquiring it, including through independent study.

The tasks below will give you some insight into how this skill can be applied to the last general election in the UK, that of 2019. This event is studied, to a greater or lesser degree, in all UK topics. At the time when Boris Johnson, the new leader of the Conservatives but as yet unelected Prime Minister, the Conservatives had 317 MPs. This had made governing for Theresa May (Prime Minister in 2017) exceptionally difficult as she did not have a majority in Parliament to pass her laws through (parties require 326 MPs in Parliament to rule with a majority).



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The 2019 United Kingdom general election was held on Thursday 12 December 2019. The Conservative Party, having failed to obtain a majority in the 2017 general election, had faced prolonged parliamentary deadlock over Brexit while it governed in minority with the support of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), a situation which had forced the resignation of the previous Prime Minister Theresa May. As a result, Boris Johnson called for an early election to take place in December; legislation to achieve this was eventually approved.

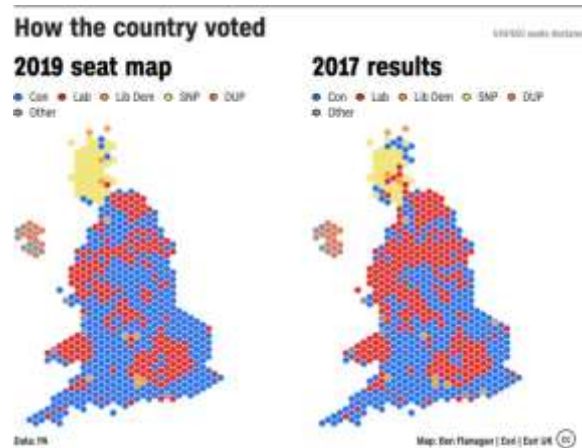
The election resulted in a Conservative landslide majority of 80 seats, the party's largest since 1987. It made a net gain of 48 seats and won 43.6% of the vote — the highest percentage by any party since 1979. Many Conservative gains were made at the expense of the Labour Party in the latter's long-time stronghold in Northern England, which had been dubbed the 'red wall'. Many of these seats had not had a Conservative MP in decades, if ever, but registered a strong 'Leave' vote in the 2016 EU referendum. The Labour Party won 202 seats, making this its worst result (in terms of number and proportion of seats) since the 1935 general election

<sup>4</sup><https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8749/>

## Research activity:

Use these focus questions to write a one page analysis of the 2019 general election. Research online, using the resources advised above including the analysis report by the House of Commons: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8749/>

1. “The election resulted in a Conservative landslide majority of 80 seats, the party's largest since 1987.”  
Yet only two years beforehand, Theresa May’s Conservatives failed to win any majority. What had changed? (Was it simply the impact of Boris Johnson, or was it more complicated than that?)
2. “Many Conservative gains were made at the expense of the Labour Party in the latter's long-time stronghold in Northern England, which had been dubbed the 'red wall'. Many of these seats had not had a Conservative MP in decades, if ever”  
Why did this happen?



3. “Many of these seats had not had a Conservative MP in decades, if ever, but registered a strong 'Leave' vote in the 2016 EU referendum”  
How important was Brexit to the election result? Was it all that mattered?
4. “The Labour Party won 202 seats, making this its worst result (in terms of number and proportion of seats) since the 1935 general election”

Yet Labour promised so much to so many. What was their problem? The manifesto? The leaders? Credibility that they wouldn't deliver their promises?





5. “A Conservative landslide majority of 80 seats”

Does this mean Boris Johnson will be able to do whatever he likes?

**Task 2:**

Political cartoonists typically craft their creations with great attention to detail and can produce work which offers considerable insight. Look very closely at the two examples below and explain what can be learnt about each cartoonist’s view of the 2019 general election.

Cartoon A by Milano, *The Times*<sup>5</sup>



Cartoon B by James Forsythe, *The Sun*<sup>6</sup>



<sup>5</sup> <https://www.resetera.com/threads/uk-general-election-12th-december-2019-ot1-hindsight-is-20-19-tory-majority-confirmed.151404/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9973342/jeremy-corbyn-labour-brexit-policy-fence-sitting/>

## 10 key facts to learn for the start of the course

As with any A Level course, there are key facts that it is very useful to learn because they can be examples that illustrate the points you want to make and provide the basis from which you can develop explanation and evaluation. You will need to learn the following key facts, ready for a test in September. The test will replicate the information below – except there will be gaps in which you will need to write what is highlighted here.

1. Name the party leader:
  - Conservatives = Boris Johnson
  - Labour = Sir Keir Starmer
  - Liberal Democrats = Ed Davey and Mark Pack (acting)
  - SNP = Nicola Sturgeon
  - Plaid Cymru = Adam Price
  - DUP = Arlene Foster
  - Greens = Sian Berry and Jonathan Bartley (Co-Leaders)
  - UKIP = Richard Braine
  - Brexit Party = Nigel Farage
2. In the 2016 EU referendum, Leave gained 52% of votes compared to Remain's 48%.
3. 'Initiatives' occur in Switzerland and some US states, where citizens gather signatures on a petition for a public vote on a proposed new law. These are similar to a referendum but they are initiated (started) by citizens, not by a national or a regional/state government.
4. In the 2019 general election the Conservatives won 56% of seats with 43.6% of the votes.
5. In the 2019 general election the Labour party won 31% of seats with 32.2% of the votes.
6. Turnout in the 2019 general election was 67.3%
7. For every ten years older a voter was, their chance of voting Tory in 2019 increased by around nine points and the chance of their voting Labour decreased by eight points. The tipping point, that is the age at which a voter was more likely to have voted Conservative than Labour, was 39 (this has reduced from age 47 in the 2017 election).
8. A hung parliament is a parliament in which no single party has majority control. Either a minority government or a coalition will then result. Following the 2019 election, the Conservative government have a majority of 80 seats.

9. An electoral manifesto is a document produced by a political party at election times, stating what policies it intends to implement if it gains power.
10. An electoral mandate refers to the authority to govern granted to the winning party at an election by voters. The mandate suggests that the government may implement the measures in its election manifesto.



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