

Politics In The USA

2007 - Question C9

To what extent do ethnic minorities influence the outcome of elections in the USA? (15)

2008 - Question C9

Assess the effectiveness of Congress and the Supreme Court in checking the powers of the President. (15)

2009 - Question C9

To what extent do ethnic minorities achieve the American Dream? (15)

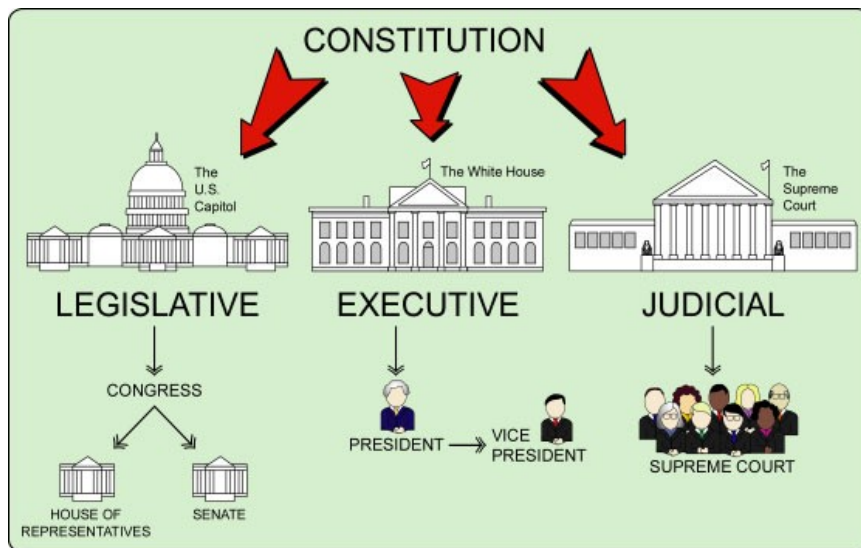
2010 - Question C9

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The President, Congress and Supreme Court

American politics and government is based on the C_____n. This describes the rights US citizens have and separates the power of the three br_____s of Government: the E____ve, Le____ve and Ju_____y.

At national level the Executive is the fe_____l government headed by the _____ and V_____ , who are elected for at most two _____ year terms. The USA President is often said to be the most powerful elected w_____ leader. He (it has never been a she so far) is Commander in C_____ of the a_____d forces, head of the federal g_____ with the power to appoint the cabinet (who are not e_____d unlike most of the UK cabinet), j_____s and other important officials. He recommends laws to Con_____. However the separation of the power and the ch____s and b____s built into the system impose limits on presidential p____ers.



The President and cabinet cannot be part of Congress and have to get Congress' app_____ to pass l____s, approve the bud____ or declare _____. Even when the President's party has a majority in one or both houses, Senators and Congressmen/women are more independent than British MPs and will not always support the President's plans. When a President is getting near the end of his eighth year in office he is seen as 'lame duck' since everyone knows he will soon be out of power.

The S_____ Court is an important feature in American politics and has the power to declare governmental actions uncon_____al.

Both houses in Congress have important powers. Both are involved in the p_____g of laws. The Senate has 100 Senators, two from each s_____, elected for 6 years. (One third is elected every 2 years.)

The Senate tends to spend quite a bit of time on for_____n affairs and nat_____l issues. The House of Representatives has 435 members, elected for two years. The House of Representatives is more concerned with domes_____ and loc_____ issues.

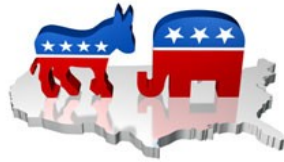
In 2008, US citizens elected _____ as the 44th President of the United States. This was a historic event as it marked the first time a non-_____ has held the highest of_____ in American politics. President Obama's candidacy and election victory received intense worldwide m_____ coverage.

State and Local Government

The USA, as its name implies, has a federal system. Each of the 50 states has its own g_____ headed by a S_____ G_____, like a P_____ on a smaller scale, and its own legislature split into two h_____, Sen_____ and House of R_____s as well as a State S_____ C_____. American states have more power than Scottish councils or even the Scottish Government. For example they decide on state tax__ and policies on l_w: the penalty for m_____r varies from state to state, some have the death penalty, some do not.

At a more local level there are cities and counties which elect their own m_____rs and c_____ils. Many posts in the US are elected, eg the local head of _____ (in the UK this would be the Chief Constable) is appointed by the local authority police board. This means that officials in the USA are very concerned about pub_____ op_____.

US Parties and Elections



The two main parties are the R_____ and the D_____. It is important to realise that these only operate as national parties at election times. Comparisons with the two big UK parties can be misleading as our parties operate all the time as national parties. The Democrats tend to be supported by poorer people, ethnic m_____, and c____y dwellers. The R_____ draw more support from r_____l areas, longer established and better off families. However local issues can have a big effect and sway the way people v_____ in an area.

Candidates, especially for President, have to secure the nom_____ of the party through a complicated system of primaries, caucuses and then conven_____. In practice to succeed in American politics you need a lot of m____y. Presidential candidates spend m_____s of d_____ on their c_____gns. Presentation and personality are often more important than policies. Looking g_____ and competent on TV is seen as essential. (This did not used to be the case in the UK but is increasingly so.)

The 2008 Presidential campaign was also notable for being the first election fought completely in the dig_____ age. The Obama campaign was very successful at increasing the role of the in_____t - including Facebook. YouTube & Blogs for o_____e campaigning. They were designed to encourage support, and for Obama to reach all the v_____s across the country via the web. Obama gained nearly 170,000 MySpace friends and more than 11 million views on YouTube compared to only 40,000 MySpace friends and 450,000 YouTube views for his opponent S_____tor McCain. Newspaper websites were reporting huge demand for information in the run up to the el_____n.

To vote in the USA you must be registered. This has been an issue for minorities who are less likely to r_____ than the w_____ majority.

Voter turnout in many elections is not particularly high, usually below 60%. This improved in the 2008 election when around 62% of el_____e voters turned out to vote. It was predicted that due the historical significance of the 2008 election there would be a huge voter t_____, but this did not happen.

Immigration

Each year from 2005 to 2008, over one million legal immigrants were allowed into the USA. Millions of _____ immigrants have made their way into the USA over the years, particularly Hispanics who have managed to make their way across the Mexican border, despite the efforts of the US authorities to prevent this.

Pros and cons of immigration for the USA

Immigration is good for America

Throughout its history the USA has been the destination for a steady flow of immigrants from all over the world - making the USA the diverse country it is today.

Some states (like California and Texas) rely on the cheap labour that immigrant workers provide - especially in tourism and agriculture.

Immigrants often suffered war, persecution or religious/political persecution in their own countries and only want a better life for themselves and their families.

Most economists consider the benefits of immigration to the USA outweigh the costs.

Immigration drains America's resources

Immigrants have brought with them a host of problems - cultural differences and language barriers, etc. that are not easily resolved and sometimes lead to hostilities.

There are not enough jobs for Americans and more immigration means that there is more competition for what jobs there are available.

America should 'close the immigration gates' to protect the levels of prosperity that most American citizens enjoy. Some immigrants do not have the skills needed to find jobs and rely on welfare at the expense of American taxpayers.

Illegal immigration costs American taxpayers millions on border patrol - this money could be better spent elsewhere.

Key Issue 1:

To what extent do Congress and the Supreme Court limit the power of the President?

In the USA's f_____ system of government, power is divided between the central (Federal) Government and the _____ states. The power of the Federal govt. is b_____ced against the rights of the state govts. All powers not given to the Federal govt by the US Con_____n are reserved to the states.

The Constitution defines the powers and duties of the E_____ve (President), L_____e (Congress) and J_____y (Supreme Court). This is referred to as the S_____n of P_____rs.

A new law must be passed by both the Senate and the House of R_____ves and finally signed by the President. The President can use his v___ to prevent this, as George Bush did in 2006 to stop a bill to fund stem cell re_____.h. He opposed this on m_____l and religious grounds, **as did many of his supporters.**

There are also c_____ and b_____ by both Congress and the Supreme Court on the powers of the President. Congress can overturn a Presidential veto if it has two-thirds support in both Houses. Also, the President draws up the bud_____ each year but Congress has to vote through the m____y. The President can make for_____ treaties but again two-thirds of the Senate must ag_____.

Meanwhile, the n___ members of the Supreme Court can declare a law or the actions of a President to be unconstitutional. They can also change the way existing laws are applied by redefining what they mean. Supreme Court Judges are appointed for life by the _____t. Bush appointed two Supreme Court judges during his period of office (one had died and the other retired). This is a significant power because the President can choose a judge who reflects his own o_____ok, and that judge cannot later be s_____ by another President. However, the choice of judges must be rati_____ (i.e. confirmed) by the Senate.

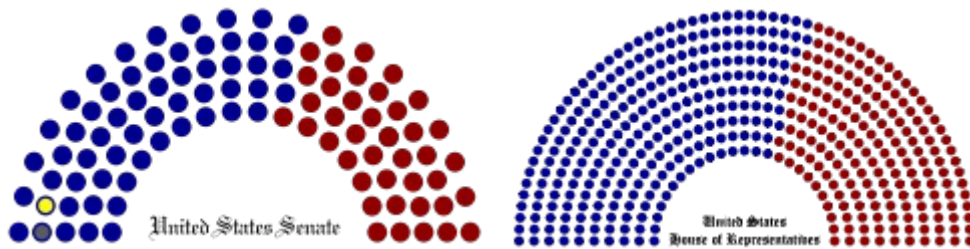
The election system also checks the power of the President as he or she can only be elected for two t____s x 4 years). The election system also means the make up of Congress can c_____e which in turn affects how much support the President can count on. The House of Representatives is elected every t___ years and although Senators are each elected for s___ years, one-t_____ of the Senate is elected every t___ years. This means the President can be elected along with a friendly Congress dominated by his own party, but two years later at the 'm_____ elections' may end up facing a Congress which is dominated by the _____ing party, which in turn makes the President's job a lot more _____.

Bill Clinton, a Democrat, was described as the 'defensive President' who faced a hostile _____-dominated Congress. In contrast, George Bush, was called the 'Imperial President' because his own Republican party d_____ both the House (of Reps) and the Senate – at least up until the 2006 mid-term elections when the Republicans l_____ c_____ of both Houses. This greatly weakened Bush who became a 'lame-_____' President.

The powers of the President increased after the 9/11 attacks when George Bush pushed through legislation including the USA PATRIOT Act which gave the Ex_____ the power to detain anyone whom s/he has reasonable grounds to suspect is a t_____.t. There was also the introduction of Guantanamo _____ to detain suspected foreign terrorists. Since then, there has been ongoing debate as to the extent to which these moves go against the US _____. In 2006 the Supreme Court introduced limits on these powers and restated its right to preserve c_____ liberties (freedoms) even in _____.

Congress and Barack Obama

The broad support for Democrat President Barack Obama was also reflected in the make-up of C_____ after the 200_ elections. The diagrams below show the House of Reps and The _____ with Democrats in blue. There are 535 in total, being 100 Senators and 435 Members of the House of Reps. After the 2008 elections there was roughly a 60/40 split: 57 Democrat and 41 Republican Senators (and 2 independents) while in the House of Reps there were 253 Democrats and 178 Republicans. These figures are likely to change at the 2010 mid-term elections and Obama may see more R_____s in Congress as a result.



Although President Obama has had a D_____ majority in both houses since he took up office after the 2008 elections, it would be wrong to think Congress has given him an e____ time. This is because the USA has so many huge problems to face at present. In foreign policy the war in Afghanistan (& Iraq) is unp_____ with many Americans. Possibly even more difficult are the problems the US economy is facing due to the world r_____n which has cost millions of ____ in the US, as it has in other countries. Finally, Barack Obama was elected on a platform (manifesto) to overhaul _____ care in the USA. All three issues are huge and difficult for the President to secure the a_____ of Congress for his policies.

1. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the President has continued the policy of sending a huge and expensive US military presence to continue the 'war on t_____' in the part of the world where many of the I_____c fundamentalists are based or controlled from. It has proved d_____ to pers____ Congress to agree the huge costs both in money and US lives this has involved ... but agreement has been forthcoming.
2. Early in his Presidency, Obama steered through an \$800 billion 'e_____c stimulus package' to keep the US economy going amid the turmoil across the world, and to try to prevent unemployment in the USA rising r____y. This was followed by further massive spending commitments by the US govt. Such levels of govt. spending can only be supported by higher taxes and govt. borrowing Something which is very unpopular in the USA where generally citizens want 'smaller' less intrusive govt than people are prepared to accept in E_____e. Congress held long and heated debates over supporting Obama's economic plans but eventually both houses voted in support amidst many R_____n claims the policy is a disaster.
3. Another major issue has been Obama's call for Congress to pass legislation reforming health c_____ in the US, a key campaign fro him. He wants to expand health insurance to cover the uninsured, to restrict prem____ increases, and to allow people to retain their coverage when they leave or change jobs. His proposal was to spend \$900 billion over 10 years and include a government insurance plan, also known as the public option, to compete with the private insurance sector as a main component to lowering costs and improving quality of health care. It would also make it illegal for insurers to

drop sick people or deny them coverage for pre-existing con_____, and require every American to carry health coverage. This led to often bitter debate in Congress and the proposals were w_____d down to some extent but in March 2010 the health care bill was passed and s_____d into law by President Obama.