

## Prime Ministers and Presidents

### USA and the UK

The president of America is frequently referred to as the world's most powerful person. However, the federal structure of America has put restraints on the power of the president that do not occur in Great Britain, lead by a Prime Minister. The powers of Congress and the Supreme Court are used as a balance to the power a president might accrue in his time in office. The Constitution of America ties the president down as to what he can and cannot do. This codified document can only be changed by the Supreme Court. Such a constraint does not exist in Britain though the input of the European Court on formulating some British legislation is difficult to assess but does not come into the same league as the power that the Supreme Court of America has.

The general powers exercised by a British Prime Minister include:

- the power to appoint, reshuffle or dismiss cabinet ministers
- the power to create new peers to the House of Lords
- the power to give out honours
- the power to appoint top civil servants, ambassadors, bishops and judges
- the power to determine government business and Cabinet discussions/agendas
- the power to withhold information from the Houses of Parliament if deemed necessary
- the power to use the media via a lobby system
- the power to terminate the life of a government and call a general election

The Prime Minister clearly has an abundance of powers at his disposal. Sir Richard Crossman wrote that :

(The PM) is now the apex not only of a highly centralised political machine but also of a highly centralised and vastly more powerful administrative machine.

Crossman  
Diaries

The PM's position as leader of the majority party in the House of Commons together with his position as head of government, thus combining legislative and executive powers, amounts to an 'immense accretion of power.'

gather together

Many of the PM's powers derive from the prerogative powers of the Monarch. These extensive powers are wielded independently of Parliament and effectively give every PM the power of a Head of State. These powers include the right to appoint ministers, to dissolve Parliament and so set the timing for a general election, to be in charge of the armed forces and the security services, to negotiate treaties and other diplomatic agreements and to summon and chair Cabinet meetings. The proponents of Prime Ministerial government postulate that the Cabinet is effectively the tool of the PM and that, in practice, government policy has long ceased to be decided at Cabinet meetings. PM's use Cabinet Committees (the PM chairs several of these), bilateral meetings with individual ministers, the No. 10 Policy Unit, the Cabinet Office, Think Tanks and 'kitchen cabinets' of personal aides and advisers, to shape policy and present it to the Cabinet. The Cabinet as a collective body, it has been argued, has been reduced to a clearing house and ratifier of decisions already taken.

IPPR

Unlike their ministerial colleagues, the PM is not tied up with a particular department and is ultimately responsible for co-ordinating government policy across the board. The PM's potential impact on policy-making is therefore enormous and a pro-active PM like Mrs. Thatcher intervened extensively in departments and left her personal imprint on an array of policies from local government, education to privatisation.

This suggests that the PM can act like a virtual autocrat. However, this is not so as there are constraints on his power. Though a PM's power in the Cabinet is great, he cannot get himself into a situation whereby he is seen to surround himself with 'nodding donkeys'. The party he leads will not tolerate this and every five years (maximum) the PM and the party have to present themselves to the country who will vote on their record of government. A PM who is seen to be going against the British tradition of democratic government whereby the party is all-inclusive at Westminster will lose out when the party abandons its support for him. Mrs. Thatcher lost the support of both her Cabinet and the Conservative Party when she was seen as being too over-bearing and out of touch. A PM who loses support from his own party is doomed to failure even if he does have the power to reward loyalty. Tony Blair led a party with a Parliamentary majority second to none. On paper, it

would appear that his power as PM was unassailable. However, all he needed to do to sow the seeds of his own political downfall is to lose the support of those Labour MP's at Westminster. In this sense, the party have the power not the PM. Divisions in Labour between Blair and Brown supporters may have contributed greatly to the end of the Labour Government(?)

[Many in the Labour Party were concerned about Tony Blair's apparent desire to make decisions by himself or with a small non-elected clique thus by-passing both the Cabinet and Westminster] A former Cabinet colleague, Mo Mowlam, has made these accusations and has also stated her belief that Cabinet meetings are a farce as they are no more than sessions whereby Blair is agreed to.

During the fight against terrorism, President Bush has held frequent meetings with Cabinet colleagues, and those who air a belief that an American attack on Iraq - without an agreement from the UN Security Council - is fraught with danger, are seemingly allowed to do so. Colin Powell was reported as voicing his concerns and the media have reported this accordingly. The President has his views while others close to him express theirs. Congress has also had an input with the Senate approving a \$34.4 billion rise in defence spending to assist in the president's campaign against terrorism. The House of Commons, on the other hand, frequently complained that it was side-lined by not having a full debate about the issue. Therefore, the ability and opportunity for politicians to voice opposition to the PM's policies regarding this foreign policy issue are very limited. Blair was accused of developing presidential powers.

However, the powers of the president of America are limited by Article II of the Constitution. There are many things the president can do but there are also many things that he cannot do. The House of Commons at Westminster does not formulate policy; it discusses proposed legislation and votes on them. Congress, however, has been given very real powers by the Constitution, the likes of which are not seen in Great Britain. The Senate can remove the president from office - the president cannot remove a Senator; the Senate ratifies the president's Cabinet; all financial issues have to start in the House of Representatives and Congress can reject a president's proposed budget. These clearly limit the power of a president.

## The French Government

Although the Greeks might claim that democracy originates from the ancient city state of Athens, the French could plausibly argue that modern democracy emanates from the French Revolution of 1789 - although the course of democracy in France has hardly run smooth since then.

Indeed, unlike the American political system and the British political system which essentially have existed in their current form for centuries, the current French political system is a much more recent construct dating from 1958 and today's Fifth Republic - which centralises substantial power in the President - is a response to the political weaknesses of the pre-Second World War Third Republic and post-war Fourth Republic.

The Fifth Republic came about following a political crisis over France's colonial war in Algeria, when Charles de Gaulle took power under a new constitution which gave the President new executive powers compared to the Fourth Republic, making the post uniquely powerful in European politics.

In the French political system, the relationship between the President and the Prime Minister - the first- and second-highest authorities respectively - is critical. It is not always the case that these two individuals come from the same political party or part of the political spectrum and, when they are of different political persuasion (as was the case in 1986, 1993 and 1997), the two figures must practice a process of "cohabitation".

## THE PRESIDENCY

[Candidates for the Presidency must obtain 500 sponsoring signatures of elected officials from at least 30 departments or overseas territories. The post is directly elected in a two-stage voting system.] A candidate who receives more than 50% of the vote in the first round is elected. However, if no candidate receives 50%, there is a second round which is a run-off between the two candidates who secured the most votes in the first round.

The term is five years, a reduction from the previous seven years.

The Presidency is easily the most powerful position in the French political system. Duties include heading the armed forces, appointment of the Prime Minister, power to dismiss the National Assembly, chairing the Council of Ministers (equivalent to

the Cabinet in Britain), appointing the members of the highest appellate court and the Constitutional Court, chairing the Higher Council of the Judiciary, negotiating all foreign treaties, and the power to call referenda, but all domestic decisions must be approved by the Prime Minister. The official residence of the President is the Elysée Palace.

Since 1873, the President has been barred from appearing in person before the National Assembly or the Senate in order to ensure that the executive and the legislature are kept separate. → separation of powers

Nicolas Sarkozy, from the ruling, conservative UMP, won a decisive victory in the second round of the Presidential election in May 2007. He gained 53% of the vote, finishing six points ahead of his Socialist rival, Ségolène Royal.

### The powers of the president:

- The president promulgates laws.
  - The president has a very limited form of suspensive veto: when presented with a law, he or she can request another reading of it by Parliament, but only once per law.
  - The president may also refer the law for review to the Constitutional Council prior to promulgation.
- The president may dissolve the French National Assembly
- The president may refer treaties or certain types of laws to popular referendum, within certain conditions, among them the agreement of the Prime minister or the parliament.
- The president is the Commander-in-Chief (CINC) of the armies.
- The president may order the use of nuclear weapons.
- The president names the Prime minister but he cannot dismiss him. He names and dismisses the other ministers, with the agreement of the Prime minister.
- The president names most officials (with the assent of the cabinet).
- The president names certain members of the Constitutional Council.
- The president receives foreign ambassadors.
- The president may grant a pardon (but not an amnesty) to convicted criminals; the president can also lessen or suppress criminal sentences. This was of crucial importance when France still operated the death penalty: criminals sentenced to death would generally request that the president commute their sentence to life imprisonment.

(All decisions of the president must be countersigned by the Prime minister, except dissolving the French National Assembly.)

### THE EXECUTIVE

The head of the government is the Prime Minister who is nominated by the majority party or coalition in the National Assembly and appointed by the President for an indefinite term.

The Prime Minister recommends Ministers to the President, sets out Ministers' duties and responsibilities, and manages the daily affairs of government. He issues decrees and is responsible for national defence.

The current Prime Minister is Francois Fillon of the UMP.

The Council of Ministers – typically consisting of around 15 individuals – is headed by the Prime Minister but chaired by the President. It is customary for the President, in consultation with the Prime Minister, to select elected representatives from the National Assembly for ministerial posts, but this is not a set rule. For example, there has been Raymond Barre, Prime Minister (1976-81), who prior to that appointment was a university economics lecturer, while Thierry Breton, Minister for Economy, Finance and Industry (2005-07) was a business man.

### Questions:

1. Who is the most powerful, the UK PM or the US President?
2. What Powers does the French President have that the British PM does not?

Head of State but not head of government.

PM head of state.

Constitutionally entrenched

**Answer TWO questions, ONE from Section A and ONE from Section B.**

**Section B starts on page 14.**

**It is advised that you divide your time equally between both questions.**

## **SECTION A**

**Answer EITHER Question 1 OR Question 2.**

### **1 Parliament**

**Study the following passage and answer the questions that follow.**

#### **Select Committees**

There is a House of Commons select committee for each government department, examining three aspects: spending, policies and administration. These departmental select committees have a minimum of 11 members, who decide upon a line of inquiry and then gather written and oral evidence. Findings are reported to the Commons, printed, and published on the Parliament website. The government then usually has 60 days to reply to the committee's recommendations.

Following the adoption by the House of Commons of recommendations from the Reform of the House of Commons Committee:

- Departmental select committee chairs are elected by their fellow MPs
- A backbench business committee has been established with the ability to schedule business in the Commons chamber and in Westminster Hall on days, or parts of days, set aside for non-government business.

#### **Legislative committees**

Both Houses of Parliament refer legislation to committees for detailed discussion and approval. These committees are part of the process of making laws. They scrutinise proposed laws and may consider amendments to improve the legislation. Amendments approved in legislative committees must be approved by the whole House.

Source: adapted from [www.parliament.gov.uk](http://www.parliament.gov.uk), October, 2010.

- 1 (a) With reference to the source, why are legislative committees needed? (5)
- (b) With reference to the source and your own knowledge, explain the ways in which backbench MPs can call government to account. (10)
- (c) Assess the main factors which limit the effectiveness of Parliament (25)

**(Total for Question 1 = 40 marks)**





Isabell Long

1 a) Legislative committees are needed in order for legislation to be scrutinised by members of Parliament and of the committees. They provide government with a ~~very~~ specialist view on the legislation it wishes to pass, <sup>an example in the source</sup> recommending ~~for example~~ amendments; they are the members are often experts. Often, Parliament does not have much time for debating issues, so committees ~~present~~ have more time to reflect and scrutinise, taking pressure off.

3 points, 3 marks!!

get on with it!

b) Backbench MPs can call government to account in many ways, for example through Select Committees (either reading reports or being on one), Prime Minister's and Minister's Questions, and letter writing. NO NEED FOR INTRO TO (B) Q'S.

Select Committees are not reserved for big issues - they can debate and judge on the effectiveness of smaller issues too. Each Committee produces a report, freely accessible, that all MPs have access to to mount arguments with to call the government to account after every Committee meeting. Committees to deal with specific issues ~~don't~~ regarding the backbench MP's job are looked at in their personal Select Committee - their membership (all of them) is 11+ members, selected from all the interested MPs - this ensures there is a balance.

Prime Minister's but also Minister's questions is a good way that sometimes under-represented MPs can voice their concerns, particularly if they are a member of the opposition - they can ask oral questions and Ministers have a duty to respond, as with written questions. All letters and committee recommendations have to be replied to within a certain number of days.



what Parliament's  
job is  
representation  
scrutiny  
legislation

c) Factors limiting Parliament's success can be many - from the House of Lords to opposition and back bench MPs not toeing the line, and public support or lack of it, and sovereignty.

NO X

The main factor that limits Parliament's legislation-making power is all the scrutiny that goes on before bills are passed, most of which happens in the House of Lords. As of 2010, Nick Clegg wants to reform the House of Lords - <sup>some would argue that</sup> ~~maybe~~ the Coalition see it as far too much of an obstacle to passing legislation such as the recent Welfare Bill.

Sovereignty, national and on an EU level, is a big factor influencing the power of Parliament - take the Human Rights Act - the UK Parliament can no longer decide what violates people's human rights, it has to rely on what the European Union say. It is for this reason that there has been recent talk of the UK inventing its own Bill of Rights, similar to the US's and not dissimilar to the citizen's rights section of a Constitution, if we had one, so that more power would be ~~gained~~ taken back. However some may argue that it is good to spread our reach as the government has enough to do, and we are part of Europe so why not abide by their rules and take some national responsibility away.

Memorable

Public support, or the lack of it, may limit the effectiveness of Parliament: if the current government has plenty of support, they might be able to be easily & effective, whereas if they do not, the opposing party will have ~~some~~ much more ammunition with which to shout, for example in Prime Minister's Question Time and in votes which are important as if not enough MPs ~~for~~ from the whole House agree, the Bill isn't taken to its next stage.

vague



Isabell Long

c) (cont)

The whips are an important aspect of the power of Parliament: take the example of if some backbench MPs split off from the main party for a particular vote ~~because~~ because they were so profoundly against it — it is the job of the Party whips to make those MPs toe the line — this is especially important at times of ~~the~~ elections. — ATQD

Not everything is bad though — Parliament's scrutinisation methods have largely worked ~~until~~ up until now, and continue to do so — take the Select Committees dealing with the phone hacking scandal, some of it directly involving ministers.

Overall, Parliament's ~~from~~ ~~for~~ functioning is greatly limited, but they seem to do a good job despite the open scrutinisation, dropping in and out of favour with the public, poor majorities of Party representation in the Commons, and stressful issues to deal with that may cause rampant debate between MPs.

really quite vague throughout.

$$K = \frac{3}{8}$$

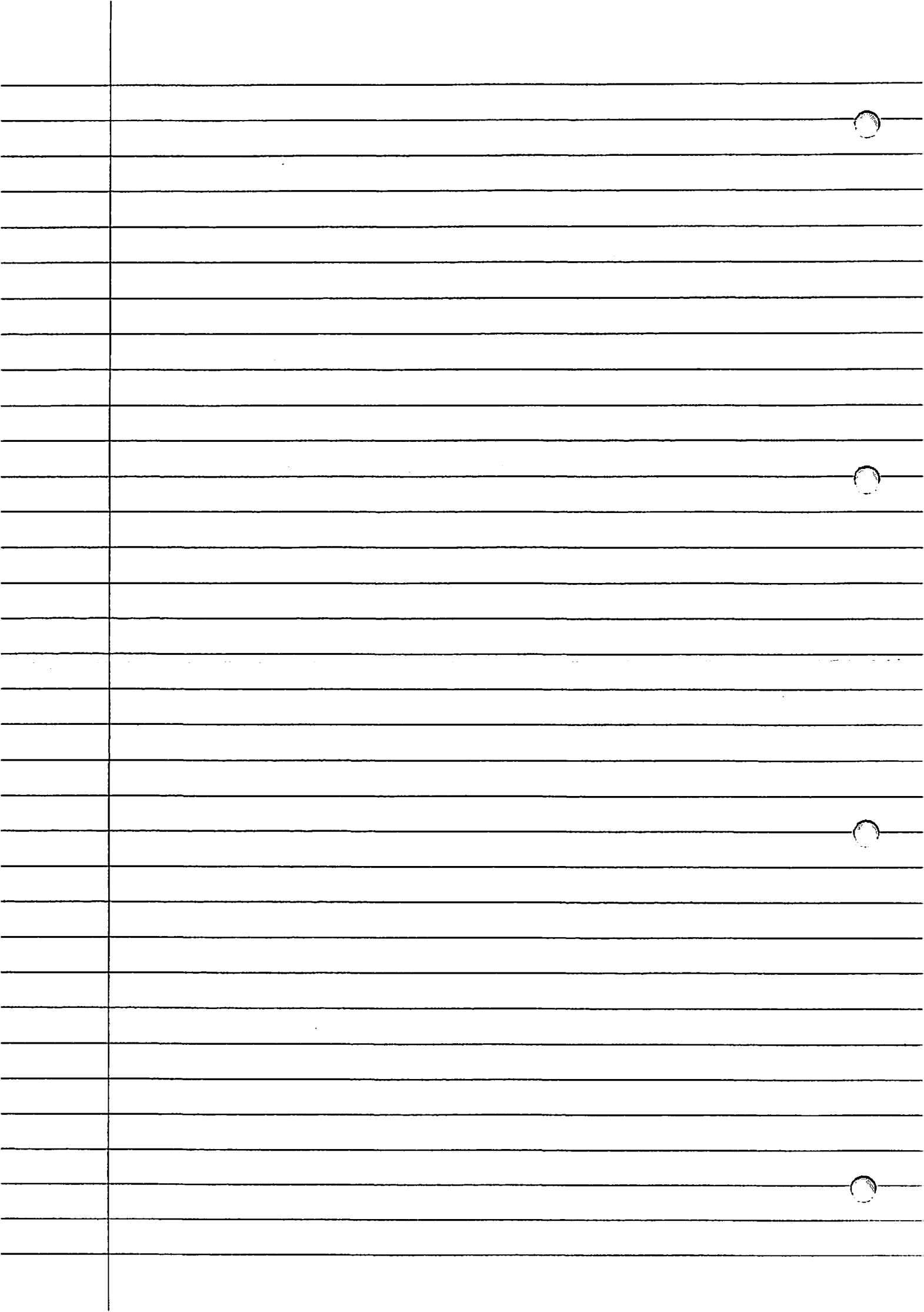
$$A = \frac{2}{9}$$

$$C = \frac{2}{9} \quad \frac{1}{25}$$

Things not included:

- media
- collective Cabinet Responsibility
- secrecy
- transparency
- quotations
- civil service
- powerful PM / Exec.
- party elections

conclusion:  
depends upon...  
- safe seats  
- majority





# AS Government and Politics mark-sheet.

Name: Isabel date: March 12

Question / topic areas covered: Belize

Personal pride in your essay, please circle your mark out of 10:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The skills you demonstrated (for 25 / 40 mark questions)

Effective writing	1	2	3	4	5	Ineffective writing
Effective planning / coherent structure of longer questions						Poor structure suggesting lack of full understanding
Marks gained from line one of essay						Ineffective start
Sufficient content						Insufficient content
All relevant political debates addressed						No political debates included
Key examples / data utilised						No examples / data utilised
Effective use of academic writers and quotations						No use of writers or quotations
All key debates related back to question						Debates not applied to the question
All theories/studies/ideologies evaluated						No evaluation
Clear explanation of key ideas						Poor interpretation
Examples are used to show similarities / differences between the UK and other systems						No drawing of connections, similarities and differences
Relevant political terms used						No use of political terms
Conclusion flows from arguments in essay						No conclusion
Comprehensive use of items (Unit 2)						No use of items
Good use of paragraphs						No use of paragraphs
Evaluative links/ flow between paragraphs						No evaluative flow between paragraphs
Good spelling using sophisticated terminology						Lots of spelling errors
Good punctuation and grammar						Poor punctuation and grammar

Your overall performance:

2 things: ① know more  
② AT&D

Your actions:

Pick up to three areas from the skills box to the left and identify what you will do to improve your work below:

What you will do differently in planning / writing your next essay?	Do you need guidance from your teacher on how to achieve this?
IMPORTANT: WHEN YOU SUBMIT YOUR NEXT ESSAY HIGHLIGHT THE IMPROVEMENTS MADE SO YOUR TEACHER CAN SEE YOU HAVE ADDRESSED YOUR TARGETS	
<u>AT&amp;D</u>	Y N
<u>More examples, knowledge</u>	Y N
<u>Conclusions</u>	Y N

Your marks:

Grade boundaries

A = 23

B = 20

C = 18

D = 15

E = 13

question	Assessment Objective marks			totals
	Knowledge	Analysis	Clarity	
(a)	/5			3 / 5
(b)	/7	/3		5 / 10
(c)	/8	/9	/8	7 / 25
Paper 2 essay	/20	/12	/8	/40
Total: 15 / 40				

You are working BELOW AT ABOVE your target grade

①