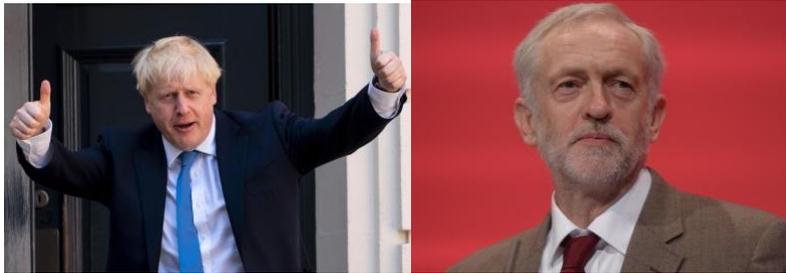


# SHREWSBURY SIXTH FORM COLLEGE



## A LEVEL POLITICS PRE-ENROLMENT 2020

***\*Course Outline***

***\*Taster Lessons***



*D. Charlton SSFC SCG 2020*

## A LEVEL POLITICS COURSE CONTENT

### **Component 1. UK Politics and Core Political Ideas**

**-Democracy and Participation:** Struggles to extend the right to vote, advantages and disadvantages of Representative and direct democracy, methods and influence of pressure groups, protection of rights and liberties historically and currently.

**-Parties:** Functions, funding, ideals, policies success and failure of main and minor parties, If the UK has a two or multi-party system.

**-Electoral Systems:** Pros and cons of the First Past the Post system used in general elections and alternatives used in other elections. The use and positive and negative features of referendums held in the UK and the case for and against holding them.

**-Voting Behaviour and the Media:** The study of selected general elections, assessment of factors affecting voting behaviour and turnout such as class, region, ethnicity, age, gender, issues, party leaders, campaigns, mass media and polls.

**-Political philosophies/Ideas:** An examination and assessment of the core ideas, principles and leading thinkers in relation to Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism/Marxism and different ideals, strategies within these philosophies.

### **Component 2. UK Government and Non-Core Political Ideas**

**-The Constitution:** The "unwritten" British Constitution and its sources, constitutional change, arguments around reform, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish devolved powers.

**-Parliament:** powers and functions of Commons and Lords, law making processes, Is Parliament representative? Methods of holding government to account, how far backbench MPs will/can be independent of party.

**-Executive:** PM powers/limitations, do we have PM or Cabinet government? Cabinet secrecy/discipline, responsibility of Ministers to Parliament, study of several PMs

**-The Judiciary:** role, powers, membership of the judiciary and the Supreme Court, if the judiciary is independent and neutral.

**-The EU:** impact on UK government, principles of the EU and implications of leaving.

**-Sovereignty:** where power lies in the UK system.

**-Feminism:** patriarchy, equality and difference feminism, ethnicity, social class and feminism, liberal, socialist, radical, post-modern feminism. Leading feminist thinkers.

### **Component 3. US and Comparative Government and Politics**

**-The US Constitution, Federalism:** Separation of powers, checks and balances; pros/cons of amendment processes, federalism (national-state division of power).

**-Congress:** roles/powers of the House of Representatives and Senate, influences on members, the law making process, relationship between Congress and President, effectiveness of checks on the President. How representative is Congress?

**-The Presidency:** Presidential powers and checks upon them in relation to domestic and foreign policy, relationship with Congress and the courts, the structure of the executive branch, importance of the Executive Office of the President and Cabinet,

**-The Supreme Court:** Roles and powers, approaches to interpretation of the Constitution, arguments around the appointment process. Is the court political? Too powerful? Has it protected rights? Civil rights and liberties in the US.

**-Elections:** The impact of incumbency (tendency toward re-election), an assessment of the process for nominating Presidential candidates and Electoral College system for electing the President, Issues around campaign finance and money in elections..

**-Parties and Interest groups;** Republican and Democrat ideals, divisions, structure, organisation, support based on class, region, ethnicity, gender, age, religion. Interest group methods, influence, impact on democracy, study of selected interest groups.

**-Comparative Politics:** Theories on how to approach comparing different political systems, a comparison of the UK and US in terms of constitutions, executives, legislatures, Judiciary and parties.

## **A LEVEL POLITICS ASSESSMENT**

\*Each of the three components is assessed by a two hour examination worth one third of total marks in each case.

### **\*For component 1**

You complete three questions:

- One question worth 30 marks from a choice of two on UK Politics, using a source and your own knowledge to assess an argument.
  - One essay question worth 30 marks from a choice of two on UK Politics, without the help of a source.
  - One essay question without source material from a choice of two on political ideas (conservatism, liberalism, socialism), worth 24 marks.
- 84 marks total.

### **\*For component 2**

You complete three questions:

- One question worth 30 marks from a choice of two on UK Government, using a source and your own knowledge to assess an argument.
  - One essay question worth 30 marks from a choice of two on UK Government, without the help of a source.
  - One essay question without source material from a choice of two on feminism, worth 24 marks.
- 84 marks total.

### **\*For component 3**

You complete four questions:

- One short answer question from a choice of two comparing the UK and US political systems worth 12 marks.
  - One compulsory short answer question worth 12 marks.
  - Two essay questions from a choice of three on the Government and Politics of the USA, worth 30 marks each.
- 84 marks total.

## **Nature of Teaching and Learning**

We encourage students to become involved in the subject and their own learning through source work in groups and class discussion and debate. Students are encouraged to express their opinions and take a critical approach to the political systems and ideas studied. Individual political opinions are seen as equally valid and welcome in class discussion. Students can express any political opinion except for racist, sexist or homophobic comments as such views are offensive and show a lack of concern and respect for others. You will be asked to complete a number of written assignments during the course (some at home but most under exam conditions). Politics is closely connected with current affairs and students are encouraged to take notice of current political developments and discuss them. We seek to realise the potential of all students, there are no specific entrance requirements to study the subject and no student is ever required to leave the course simply because they are struggling with the subject matter. Small group and one to one help is always available in such cases.

## **SAMPLE LESSONS**

### **1. CORE POLITICAL IDEAS**

#### **A Marxist/Socialist View of Human Nature**

-Human beings are not naturally competitive, but social creatures who cannot survive without cooperating with each other.

-We are not naturally selfish, competitive and greedy. Human nature is not fixed and varies according to different social and historical circumstances, but the essence of human nature is cooperative and social, not individualistic and self-seeking.

-The exploitation (through employers taking as much profit as possible from the labour of workers) and inequality of capitalism (which is based on individual accumulation of wealth and competition) is not natural and does not exist because it reflects human nature.

-In fact it prevents the vast majority of humans from realizing their potential because of their class position and is *not* in their interests or nature, given only a small number benefit from it.

#### **A Conservative View of Human Nature**

-Human nature is fundamentally flawed, driven by natural, basic instincts and emotions, in particular self-interest, and not cooperation or reason.

-Individuals primarily think of themselves and seek to further their own interests as individuals, not as part of society.

-They also vary considerably in their talents, abilities and effort so inequality, and therefore the individualism and competition of capitalism are natural; a product of natural selfishness and differences in ability and effort.

-Any attempt at creating a socialist society based on equality and common ownership of wealth is doomed as it runs directly against human nature and natural inequality and offers little or no incentive to work and create wealth.

#### **Task**

**Which view of human nature and inequality do you personally agree with and why?**

## 2. U.S GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

### **The Constitution and Role of the Supreme Court**

-In the US the constitution, found in a single source, is the absolute authority in terms of the rules of government and the rights of the citizen.

-No law passed by the US Congress (equivalent of Parliament) or state governments can violate the constitution. Nine Justices of the Supreme Court, appointed by the President subject to the approval of the Senate, interpret/apply the constitution and are supposed to apply the constitution without bias.

-The Constitution could obviously not cover every eventuality and was written over 230 years ago. To amend it a difficult procedure is followed involving a majority of two thirds in both chambers of Congress and the agreement of three quarters of states (38 of 50). There have been only 27 amendments in over 230 years.

-The constitution is therefore dated and often vague and there are many disputes on how it should be applied to particular situations, so the court decide what the constitution says and what government can and cannot do, striking down laws which conflict with it.

### **Example Case; the Death Penalty**

Extracts from the US Constitution;

**The 8<sup>th</sup> amendment forbids “cruel and unusual punishments”**

**The 5<sup>th</sup> amendment states; “no person shall be “deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law”**

**The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment states; “No state shall deny to any person within its jurisdiction equal protection of the laws”**

**You must interpret and apply these extracts to the case below, you should not use your own moral values, but only the constitution and you should quote from the above amendments in justifying your decision.**

**You are the Supreme Court. Texas is planning to execute (by lethal injection) a citizen accused and convicted of murder by state courts.**

**-The convicted persons defence team** are claiming the death penalty violates the constitution, in that by definition it is cruel, and it is unusual in the modern western world. They also argue it is unequally applied given some are executed and others not for similar crimes, and you are more likely to be executed if you are poor or from a minority community, because of the cost of a good defence and the prejudices of juries/judges, with obviously no possibility of redressing an injustice. This, they argue, is. They also argue the process involves suffering, particularly with new mixes for lethal injections which can involve prolonged suffering, and so is cruel and unusual.

**-The Attorney General for Texas** is claiming the 5<sup>th</sup> amendment clearly indicates those who wrote the constitution accepted the death penalty would and could be used (and therefore was not cruel and unusual), as long as “due process of law” has been observed. It would be wrong to substitute our own opinion on what is and is not cruel and unusual now, for the constitution’s original intention, and that is not the job of a court in any case. Furthermore the death penalty is not “unusual” in that many US states use it and this is the appropriate measure of unusual, rather than the modern western world, while lethal injection minimises some inevitable suffering.

**write your decision and the reasoning for it. You should use/quote the relevant phrases in the constitution and the arguments put forward by legal counsel above to support your view. Remember you are supposed to be interpreting the constitution and, in theory, not bring your own moral values into your reasoning. Add to your answer if you believe this is possible.**