

A-Level Politics at Fortismere: an outline

The Politics course explores UK Politics in Year 12 and Political Ideology and Global Politics throughout Year 13

YEAR 12 – UNIT 1: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE UK

DEMOCRACY: We discover what democracy is and the history of how Britain has become more democratic over time – from Magna Carta to the enfranchisement of women. We also ask how participation and interest in politics can be strengthened such as through votes at 16.

POLITICAL PARTIES: We study the history and emergence of the major parties in the UK: exploring how they have evolved and changed beliefs across the past 150 years. We analyse history and impact of the Atlee, Thatcher and Blair governments on British society before scrutinising the policies of Labour, the Conservatives, Lib-Dems and smaller parties today. We also ask what factions exist within the current parties and how each party is similar or different.

ELECTIONS: We look at different electoral systems, the link between elections and democracy, and we consider Britain's systems - their advantages and disadvantages.

VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND THE MEDIA: We look at the theories and examples of how the media – including social media – influence public opinion and the outcome of elections.

YEAR 12 – UNIT 2: UK GOVERNMENT

THE CONSTITUTION: We look at what constitutions (sets of rules about how a country works) are and how they differ around the world. We look at the historical evolution of the British constitution and whether it needs to be reformed today. We will look at what power Westminster has compared to devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales. Students will examine what powers Britain transferred to Brussels upon joining the EU as well as the process of Brexit.

PARLIAMENT: We look what powers Parliament possesses and how it works. We examine the role of the Commons and Lords in shaping legislation (laws) as well as reforms to each chamber intended to make them more democratic and representative of modern Britain.

THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET: We study the role and responsibilities of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. the powers and constraints upon the Prime Minister and the manner of leadership that the Prime Minister can provide: is a PM first amongst equals or does he have far more power than his cabinet ministers and so act like an elected dictator?

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS: We look at the relationship between different bodies that wield power in the UK: Parliament, the Prime Minister and the Court system (judiciary). There is a detailed examination of how the legal system works. We examine the impact of EU law upon the UK and how European decisions affect British policy making.

YEAR 13 – UNIT 1: CORE POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

We look at the three major political ideologies (belief systems) shaping the politics and history of the modern world. This involves examining the ideas of key political philosophers such as Karl Marx, John Stewart Mill and Edmund Burke in depth as well as the political movements, politicians and events that have put their ideas in to action: from the French and American revolutions of the C18th to nineteenth century social reforms and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989-90. The course explores over 200 years of history.

LIBERALISM – The belief that individual liberty (freedom) matters and should be maximised.

CONSERVATISM – The belief that tradition matters and should be defended. Any change to society should be gradual and minimal. Order matters more than abstract concepts like liberty.

SOCIALISM – The belief that equal societies are fairer and better than unequal ones.

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YEAR 13 – UNIT 2: OTHER IDEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

We will study **one of the following** ideologies:

FEMINISM – Sees society as having been created and shaped by men. Feminists wish to challenge this male domination and bring about gender equality and gender awareness.

ANARCHISM – The belief in a stateless society and opposition to hierarchies of power.

NATIONALISM – The belief in the importance of the nation as the ultimate decision making body. We ask should countries look after their own interests first?

MULTICULTURALISM – The belief that a society with more than one culture is better than one with a mono (single) culture. We ask is a society with more than one culture desirable?

ECOLOGISM – Politics of the earth. How has environmental destruction challenged the classic approaches of capitalism and socialism to running the economy and society? Is our current society sustainable or will it suffer ecological collapse?

YEAR 13 – UNIT 3: GLOBAL POLITICS

THEORIES OF GLOBAL POLITICS – We look at different theories about how and why states (countries) behave the way that they do (for example when choosing whether to go to war or not). We ask is there anarchy (a lack of government) worldwide or does trade and the existence of international (supranational) institutions like the UN, EU and WTO act to constrain the behaviour of states? We will ask whether war is inevitable or can be avoided? We ask whether it will ever be possible to establish a world government.

SOVEREIGNTY AND GLOBALISATION – We examine where power really lies in the modern world. Is power mainly in the hands of individual states (countries) and international organisations such as the UN or normal people due to the rise of the internet, non-governmental organisations and multinational companies that operate across borders. We discuss what globalisation means and how it has changed the world.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – We look at how the United Nations, UN Security Council and NATO work, especially to maintain global security by preventing conflict. We will also explore the World Trade Organisation (WTO), G8/20 and International Monetary Fund (IMF) shape the global economy. We examine how institutions try to alleviate poverty through international development and aid.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT – We analyse the origins and development of international law and institutions such as the International Criminal Court. We look at environmental that go beyond borders such as climate change and ask whether it is ever possible to fix them in a world without a global government.

POWER AND DEVELOPMENTS – We look at how the structure of the international stage has changed over time: from a system of multiple great powers during the nineteenth century, to just two superpowers during the Cold War and unchallenged American dominance in the period that followed. We ask which forms of power are most influential – military, economic or cultural? We also examine the nature of war and the rise of terrorism.

REGIONALISM AND THE EU – We ask why regions (areas) of the world are host to varying degrees of cooperation or conflict: from Africa to the Middle East and Europe. The history, formation and workings of the European Union are examined at length.

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FAQ – Frequently asked questions:

1. Define what the word ‘politics’ means? (what is politics?)

Politics = The study of how society is or should be run and how power* is conducted or carried out.

** Power is the ability to get people to get others to act as you wish – either willingly or through coercion and force*

2. What is the school subject of ‘Politics’ about? In other words, what kinds of things do we learn about in this A-Level?

- **Political ideas:** *eg.* What should an ideal society look like? Is an ideal society possible or even desirable?
- **Political institutions (bodies)** – *eg.* What is parliament? How does it work? How many members does it have? What committees does it have? What do those committees do? Are these committees accountable? Etc.
- **Political processes and roles** – How is power exercised in practice? For example, what powers does the PM have and what limits exist to PM power? How is a law actually made step by step?

3. **Misconceptions?** What do people often incorrectly think that studying Politics is about?:

- **Just sitting around talking about what is in the news** – you must follow the news but in class we will take current stories and see how they are good examples of how things like electoral systems, Parliament or the law work.
- **Debate and discussion of our own opinions only** – instead we learn about the different ideas that have been had about politics
- **Being spoon-fed for an exam** – You must be genuinely interested in what politicians do today, what political parties believe and finding out about how the government works.

DEMANDS ON STUDENTS:

Politics is a demanding course. Resultantly, students are expected to meet extremely high expectations. You will be:

1. **Regularly set independent research to deadlines (every week)**
2. **Expected to engage proactively with the subject – you must read around the subject and follow the news. Without doing this it is very hard to get a C grade.**
3. **Set regular essay writing and examination practice**

For those of you that are hardworking and interested this will not seem arduous and it will help you to get the best possible grade; whereas if you are not that interested in current affairs or politics then you will end up spending a large amount of time doing something you do not enjoy.