

GCE



Revised GCE

# Government and Politics

## Student Course Companion

A2 2: Political Ideas

For first teaching from September 2016  
For first award of AS Level in Summer 2017  
For first award of A Level in Summer 2018





## A2 Government and Politics Course Companion

### Unit A2 2: Political Ideas

*“Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

#### What is this unit about?

This unit looks at three political ideologies- Liberalism, Conservatism and Socialism. An ideology is a set of ideas that seeks to explain the political world **as it is** and to put forward a vision of the **ideal** political world.

The three ideologies covered by this unit are not necessarily aligned with particular political parties. However, the ideas contained in these ideologies have influenced parties and governments over the years.

The study of each of the ideologies is supported by looking at a key text that puts forward ideas that are central to the ideology.

At the end of this unit you should not only understand these writers' ideas but be able to appreciate how they might explain and view the world today.

In studying this unit you will draw upon the knowledge and understanding of politics you have gained from the study of the two AS Units and, if you have already studied it, the A2 1 Unit on Comparative Politics.

## **What are the main areas I need to study?**

You need to:

- study the central ideas of the ideologies of liberalism, conservatism and socialism;
- identify the key themes of each ideology;
- understand the main criticisms of each ideology;
- develop your understanding of each ideology by studying, in depth, a prescribed text, namely John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (Liberalism), Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Conservatism) and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto* (Socialism);
- understand the central themes and arguments put forward in each book; and
- identify the criticisms made of each text.

## **Liberalism and On Liberty**

### **Essential knowledge and understanding:**

- How do liberals view freedom, human reason, individual liberty and the threats to it, the role of the state and social equality/inequality?
- What are classical and modern liberalism?
- How do liberal ideas differ from those of conservatism and socialism?
- What are the main arguments in Mill's *On Liberty*?
- How have liberal ideas and Mill been criticised?

## **Conservatism and Reflections on the Revolution in France**

### **Essential knowledge and understanding:**

- How do conservatives view human nature, custom and tradition, change, authority, individual liberty, the role of the state and social equality/inequality?
- What are libertarian and one-nation conservatism?
- How do the ideas of conservatives differ from those of liberals and socialists?
- What are the main arguments of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*?
- How have conservative ideas and Burke been criticised?

## Socialism and the Communist Manifesto

### Essential knowledge and understanding:

- How do socialists view human nature, individual liberty, the role of the state, social inequality/equality and the nature of capitalism?
- What are reformist and revolutionary socialism?
- How do the ideas of socialists differ from those of liberals and socialists?
- What are the main arguments of Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto?
- How have socialist ideas and Marx and Engels been criticised?

### How will I be assessed?

The exam lasts 1 hour 30 minutes.

There are five questions worth 5, 10, 20, 5 and 35 marks, making a total of 75 marks.

There are two sections in the paper:

#### Section A: Texts

This section will focus on **one** of the three texts.

It will consist of three questions worth 5, 10 and 20 marks.

You have to read a Source and use it in your answer to the questions.

Question 1 will require the definition of a term used in the Source.

Question 2 will require the explanation of an idea contained in the Source.

Question 3 will require the explanation of the criticisms made of some aspect of the text.

#### Section B: Ideologies

This will consist of two questions worth 5 and 35 marks. There will be a choice of one from two options in the 35 marks question.

Question 4 will require definition of a term used in political debate.

Question 5 will require explanation and evaluation of a political ideology, in the form of an extended essay answer. There will be choice of two questions.

### Pay attention to the following instructions when answering each question:

#### Section A: Texts

##### Q1: 5 marks

- The command phrase is “what is meant by”.
- The question requires definition of a term used in the Source.
- The Source will not provide an explanation of this term.
- A short paragraph answer is enough to achieve full marks.
- A relevant example should be included.
- QWC is **not** being assessed; about 4 minutes should be spent on this answer.

### **Q2: 10 marks**

- The command phrase is “identify and explain”.
- The question requires explanation of some aspect of the Source.
- The Source provides information that should be included in an answer along with own knowledge.
- QWC is **not** being assessed; approximately 12 minutes should be spent answering this question.

### **Q3: 20 marks**

- The command word is “explain”.
- The question requires explanation of some aspect of the Source or criticism of an argument put forward in the Source.
- The Source provides information which should be included in an answer.
- A balanced answer is not required but examples and evidence are.
- QWC **is** being assessed; approximately 24 minutes should be spent in answering this question.

## **Section B: Ideologies**

### **Q4: 5 marks**

- The command phrase is “what is meant by”.
- The question requires definition of a term.
- A short paragraph answer is enough to achieve full marks.
- Relevant supporting evidence is required
- QWC is **not** being assessed; approximately 4 minutes should be spent on this answer.

### **Q5: 35 marks**

- The command word is “evaluate”.
- This question requires an extended essay answer.
- Answers should be balanced: they should provide argument and evidence for both sides.
- Relevant evidence and examples should be included throughout.
- You have a choice of one question from two options so take time to make the correct choice.
- QWC **is** being assessed; approximately 45 minutes should be spent answering this question.

## **How can I make the most of my ability?**

Government and politics affect the lives of everybody. To develop real understanding you need to relate what you study in class to national and international political events and issues that are reported in the media. Following the tips below will help to develop your interest and understanding of the content of this unit.

**Watch the news!** Political ideas and issues feature every day on TV, radio and in the papers. While politicians may sometimes be criticised for speaking in ‘sound bites’ and for spending too much time criticising their opponents, their policies still tend to have their roots in political ideologies. Studying political ideologies will help you to appreciate some of the influences on politicians and their thinking. Paying attention to the news will not only increase your understanding but give you examples you can use in exams.

**Surf the net!** There is a great deal of valuable information about political ideas on the internet but you need to be selective in how you use websites. The BBC and Guardian politics sites are very helpful and simply keying ‘political ideologies’ or a related term into their search engines can help you access illuminating discussions, debates and examples. Wikipedia also contains a lot of relevant material on political ideologies and has excellent links.

**Read!** There is a wide range of reading material on political ideas. As well as the set texts you are studying, you should try and read some of the excellent books on political ideology. However, be selective and don’t think that you have to read every book from cover to cover. You should concentrate on the chapters on Liberalism, Conservatism and Socialism. There are also several good political magazines and journals which have relevant information and articles. Reading around what you discuss in class is an excellent way of broadening and deepening your understanding.

**But there’s so much information!** True, but you should already be familiar with some of the key ideas and concepts from your study of the AS units and, if you have already studied it, Unit A2 1 on Comparative Politics. To manage this information you should:

- Organise your notes. Use headings such as ‘Liberalism and the role of the state’ or ‘Socialism and human reason’ to organise your work.
- Be clear on the key issues. Keep them in your mind throughout your study of this unit.
- Understand fully what the examiners expect you to be able to do. Familiarise yourself with the specimen questions and mark schemes that CCEA has produced.
- Write practice answers to the different types of question and check them against your notes. Make sure you practice using examples to illustrate your points and arguments.

**Examination technique:** Exams can be stressful but by being well prepared and confident of how you are going to approach the paper, you can minimise the stress and make sure you give of your best on the day. Following the advice below will help.

- Make sure that you thoroughly revise all aspects of the unit content and have a good understanding of the key issues associated with each ideology. Do not avoid studying one of the ideologies or try to 'spot' questions.
- The time spent on the question should reflect the mark allocation. A 20 mark question should take about 24 minutes and a 35 mark question about 45 minutes.
- Only do what the question asks you to do - there are no marks for including information that the question doesn't ask for.
- Make sure you use the Item in answering the questions in Section A.
- This unit is about political ideas but also about how these ideas apply to real political systems. So be sure to include real examples and provide evidence to support your arguments.
- The exam is not just a test of your knowledge and understanding. It assesses how well you interpret questions and select relevant information. It examines how effectively you can analyse and evaluate and how clearly you can communicate your ideas.
- Remember! To score highly, you must answer the questions directly. Read and re-read the questions and make sure you know exactly what they are asking before you start writing. Think carefully about the command words and what they require you to do, for example, explain, criticise and evaluate.

## Glossary

The following is a list of key terms that you should know and be able to use correctly.

**Authority:** This is the claim to the legitimate exercise of power. Political leaders have authority when those who are ruled accept this willingly and support those who govern them. Authority can take several different forms.

**Capitalism:** An economic and social system based on the private ownership of the means of production, the profit motive and the price mechanism. Marx believed that capitalism would collapse to be replaced by socialism and, eventually, communism.

**Communism:** Marxists view communism as a stage of historical development that inevitably arises from the growth of society's productive capacity. This development eventually results in such an abundance of material wealth that the distribution of goods and services can be based on need. Marxist theory views socialism as a transitional stage on the road to communism.

**Conservatism:** A political ideology that believes in the conservation of established institutions and opposes radical social change. Conservatives see the promotion of social order and stability as the primary goal of any political system.

**Custom and tradition:** The conservative belief in the importance of cultural values passed down through the centuries rather than radical change.

**Exploitation:** In Marx's view, the working class are exploited by the bourgeoisie who own the means of production or capital. This occurs because the capitalist class pays the workers less than the value of their production. The capitalists take this surplus value of labour in the form of profit.

**Harm principle:** The view expressed by Mill and others that society only has a right to control an individual's behaviour in order to prevent the individual from harming others. If the individual's behaviour only affects himself or herself, then society has no right to interfere.

**Human nature:** This refers to the set of characteristics that human beings share in respect of ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Different ideologies and political thinkers take different views on human nature, for example, on human beings' capacity for rational thought and action.

**Human reason (rationality):** The idea that human beings left to their own devices will act in ways which maximise their own welfare.

**Ideology:** This is a set of ideas that explains the political world as it is and puts forward a view of what the world should be like. Within any one ideology such as liberalism, conservatism or socialism, there may be a number of different schools of thought with different emphases.

**Liberalism:** A political ideology that is committed to maximising individual freedom. Liberals believe in the supreme importance of the human individual and see the extension of human liberty as the primary goal of any political system.

**Liberty:** This refers to the nature of individual freedom. Different political ideologies and thinkers take different views of liberty and how it can be achieved.

**Political leadership:** The ability to influence public decision-making. In some conservative ideologies, this may be viewed as the preserve of a ruling class who are brought up to exercise authority.

**Social inequality:** This refers to the existence of inequalities of wealth, power and status in society. Different ideologies and political thinkers explain these inequalities in different ways and take different views on their importance.

**Social order:** A stable system of institutions, social, political and economic relations, culture and values which is capable of avoiding major conflicts and divisions.

**Social progress:** The idea that people can change their society towards an ideal. This belief tends to be shared by liberals and socialists, though their notions of the ideal differ. However, conservatives such as Burke tend to believe that attempts at radical change only make the situation worse. They would argue that any social change should be gradual and come about naturally over time.

**Socialism:** A political ideology that emphasises the collective ownership of the means of production and gives equality a high priority. Socialists see the achievement of economic and social equality as the primary goal of any political system.

**State:** This refers to the collection of institutions that has the authority to make and implement the rules that govern a society. It includes the government, the legislature, the civil service or state bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police and the armed forces. The role of the state, ie what it does and what it should do, is viewed differently by different political ideologies and thinkers.

**Tyranny of the majority:** This is a liberal criticism of the potential in democratic systems for the majority to put their own interests first and thereby oppress individuals who dissent from the majority view.

## Revision checklist

As a final check before the exam, make sure you can do the following:

You should be able to:	✓	Notes
<b>Demonstrate knowledge and understanding</b> of key political terms and concepts (see the glossary).		
<b>Explain</b> the main features of each of the political ideologies you have studied: liberalism, conservatism and socialism.		
<b>Analyse, compare and contrast</b> how these ideologies are set out by key political thinkers in the set texts you have read.		
<b>Consider</b> how these ideologies would interpret the modern world.		
<b>Criticise and evaluate</b> these ideologies with reference to relevant evidence and arguments.		

