

Politics Project



Welcome to your politics project. The transition week by week guide we set will have prepared you very well for Year 12 politics. If you have not done that then you need to. This project will give you a great background in American politics which is what we study in Year 13.

A level Politics Project

Your task is to create a guide to American politics. Your guide needs to include sections on the following:

1. The history of America
2. The constitution
3. The president
4. Congress
5. The Supreme Court
6. Pressure groups
7. Key definitions

1. The history of America

- Watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMPQc6ZITD0>
- Read the information at the end of this task

Use both to create a timeline detailing the history of America

2. Give a brief overview of the US constitution

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMoymqXB4Cs>

- i) Outline what Articles 1-7 of the constitution contains
- ii) Outline the powers and requirements of the:
 - Legislative branch (article 1)
 - Executive branch (article 2)
 - Judicial branch (article 3)
- iii) Give a list of Amendments 1-27 to the US Constitution.

3. The President

- i) List all of the presidents since 1789 and vice presidents since 1945. State the years they were in power and the party they represented
- ii) Explain the process of electing the US President – look at the different stages
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRu_JcarCDY
- iii) Outline the result of the last 3 presidential election results (2008,2012 and 2016)
How many (a) electoral college votes (b) popular vote did each candidate achieve?
- iv) Give a list of Cabinet members (Trump's cabinet).
- v) List all of the offices/departments that make up the Executive Office of the President:- Who is the a) White House Chief of Staff b) White House Press Secretary c) National Security Advisor.

4. Congress

- i) The current party (Democrats and Republicans) balance in Congress:
 - i) House of Representatives: How many republicans and democrats?
 - ii) Senate: How many republicans and democrats (and independents)?
- ii) Outline the amount of the following in the 116th Congress. (2019-2021)

- i. Women
- ii. African Americans
- iii. Hispanics
- iv. Native Americans

iii) Who holds the following leadership positions in Congress:

- i. Speaker of the House of Representatives
- ii. House and Senate majority and minority leaders
- iii. President pro-tempore
- iv. House and Senate majority and minority whips

iv) List of select committees in Congress

5. The Supreme Court

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTLZrmjuKwc>

- i) List of the 9 Supreme Court Justices
- ii) The last 4 'Chief Justices' of the US Supreme Court and the terms they served for
- iii) Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's appointments to the Supreme Court 2008-present.

6. Pressure groups

i) A brief profile of the following US pressure groups:

- i. National Rifle Association
- ii. EMILYS List
- iii. American Civil Liberties Union

7. Key definitions

Provide a definition of the following terms:

- i. Divided government
- ii. Earmarking and Logrolling
- iii. Invisible primaries
- iv. Gerrymandering
- v. Partisanship
- vi. Pork barrel
- vii. Affirmative Action
- viii. Executive Orders
- ix. Executive Agreements
- x. Iron Triangles

The history of the USA

The United States had been occupied by Native Americans since prehistoric times, and European white settlers from 1492. The strip of land along the eastern coast of America became the original 13 British colonies. By the 1770s the 13 colonies had grown to contain over 2.5million people.

The 13 Colonies

1. Connecticut
2. Delaware
3. Georgia
4. Maryland
5. Massachusetts
6. New Hampshire
7. New Jersey
8. New York
9. North Carolina
10. Pennsylvania
11. Rhode Island
12. South Carolina
13. Virginia

The 13 original British colonies were along the eastern seaboard of America from Maine in the north to Georgia in the South. Some were created through commercial interests and some were from religious groups. All had written charters setting out their form of government and the rights of colonists. Democracy was limited. Each colony had a governor, a legislature and a judiciary but women and black people were excluded from voting.

The colonies were ruled from Britain by the King and Parliament, but the relationship between Britain and the colonies became strained. The British Parliament passed The Stamp Act of 1765 which meant that the people living in the colonies had to pay a tax which would pay for British troops being stationed in North America. Britain thought that having troops stationed there benefited the people living in the colonies more than people living in Britain and thought it was only fair that they should pay the expense. The colonists disagreed. From the point of view of the British, the Americans existed to benefit Britain economically. The colonists had to pay tax to Britain but had no representation in the British Parliament. This caused resentment. Bostonian patriot James Otis declared 'taxation without representation is tyranny'. As Britain tried to tighten its grip of colonial affairs revolution became inevitable.

The Boston Tea Party

The Boston Tea Party in 1773 was a protest by the colonists against the taxes. The colonists boarded a British ship and threw its cargo (which was tea) into the Boston Harbour. The British tried to punish the colonists by closing the harbour until the company had been paid

the value of the tea. This caused outrage in the colonies, and the colonists called the First Continental Congress.

The First Continental Congress

The First Continental Congress was a meeting of representatives from the colonies. They published a list of grievances and petitioned the King to change his mind. The appeal to the King had no effect, and so a second meeting was called in 1775, the Second Continental Congress. Before the Second Continental Congress could meet, the War of Independence (American Revolution) had broken out with the Battle of Lexington and Concord. The War of Independence began in April 1775.

Battle of Lexington and Concord

On April 18, 1775, Thomas Gage, the leading British general, planned to seize weapons and ammunition at Concord, Massachusetts, and to kill the leaders of the American Revolution. The next day, April 19, revolutionary forces quickly gathered a 77 man militia, known as the Minutemen, at Lexington. After a stand-off, a shot was fired, and it came to be known as the Shot Heard 'Round the World. In the battle, the British defeated the revolutionaries. They then advanced to North Bridge in Concord and were met by 300 to 400 colonists, who drove the British back to Boston and forced the British to retreat without seizing the weapons and ammunition they had wanted. The American Revolutionary War had begun.

The Second Continental Congress

After the fighting at Lexington and Concord a meeting was called in Philadelphia on 10th May 1775 to assemble delegates to the Second Continental Congress. Those present included Sam Adams, Patrick Henry, John Hancock, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington. Some wanted to declare America independent immediately; some wanted to avoid war at all costs. So Congress did both! They sent a document called the Olive Branch Petition to King George III to see if their differences could be settled once and for all, but also created an army and appointed George Washington as commander-in-chief (just in case!). King George III refused to even read the document, and so Britain and America were officially at war.

The Declaration of Independence

On 4 July 1776, the colonies issued the Declaration of Independence, declaring themselves 'free and independent state'. The liberties that the colonists were fighting to protect were based on a 'higher law' embodying 'natural rights' ordained by God and essential to progress of human society. Thomas Jefferson's glowing words in the opening sentence of the Declaration of Independence became the touchstone of American ambition and democracy.

The declaration of independence

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness".

Victory and Independence

In 1783 the British and American signed a peace treaty ending the war, and recognising the independence of the settlers living in the colonies. The colonists originally set up a confederacy through the Articles of Confederation (1781) but this posed problems as there was a lack of a strong central government. It was not until 7 years later in 1788 that the constitution was written and approved, and another year after that the United States (still just 13 small ex-colonies) elected their first president, General George Washington in 1789. The War of Independence had been fought by the Americans to establish the right to govern themselves – the constitution is a result of that fight and is extremely important to Americans.

The geography of America...



The USA is a huge country. The entire UK would fit into the state of **Oregon**. Coast to coast is over 3,000 miles and includes four different times zones. The USA is also a very **diverse** country. Florida has a **tropical** landscape. Alaska is very cold and some of it is frozen wasteland. **Kansas** contains flat prairies. **Wyoming** and **Colorado** contain the **rockies**. Deserts are found in **Arizona**. **Maine** and **New Hampshire** are made up of some dense forests. It is diverse in landscape, climate, economy and people. Within America, people think of themselves as African-Americans, Irish-Americans, Polish-Americans, Japanese-Americans or even Native-Americans. American society is sometimes referred to as the 'melting pot'.

The Americans, therefore, need symbols of national unity. The flag is important. Many American families raise and lower the American flag outside their homes. All public buildings in the USA display the flag. On 4 July in Washington DC, even the city's buses have a flag. Each day begins in American classrooms with children standing to face the flag and reciting the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

The American Pledge of Allegiance

'I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all'.

The size of America brings with it the need for **decentralisation**. In 1787, America gained its independence from British rule. The **Founding Fathers** set up a federal system of government to reflect the identity of the different states. There are ideological differences between states. The 'conservative' South – the 'Bible Belt' stretches from Texas to Virginia. The 'liberal' Northeast includes **Massachusetts** and **Rhode Island**. The west coast is also fairly liberal especially in the Californian cities of **Los Angeles** and **San Francisco**. Californian Democrats are very different to Texan Democrats. South Carolina Republicans are very different to Massachusetts Republicans.

There are four different time zones in the USA – **Pacific, Mountain, Central** and **Eastern**. America is a **federal** country. This means that it is made up of 50 different states. Each state can have their own laws and rules. For example, states can have different laws to do with law and order, justice and road laws. The different states have their own clear identities.

The capital of America is **Washington DC**. Important cities include **New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco**, and **Chicago**.