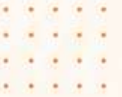




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AP Comparative Government and Politics

Complete Book



Concepts • Country Cases • Revision Notes • Practice Questions



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Chapter One: Introduction to Comparative Government and Politics: A Conceptual Approach

The vocabulary, methods, and comparisons that make the country cases understandable

Comparative government and politics studies how political systems work by placing countries beside one another. Instead of learning isolated facts, students ask the same questions across different cases: Who holds power? Why do citizens accept that power? How are leaders selected? How are public demands turned into policy? Why are some regimes stable while others change suddenly?

Comparison helps students see that similar institutions can produce different results. Russia, Mexico, and Nigeria are formally federal states, but the real distribution of power is not the same in each. Britain, China, and Iran are unitary states, yet they differ sharply in citizen participation, rule of law, media freedom, and the relationship between religion and government. The European Union adds another important case because it shares authority with member states without being a sovereign state itself.

This chapter supplies the common language used throughout the book. It introduces the methods of political science, defines the central concepts, distinguishes democratic and authoritarian regimes, and explains legitimacy, sovereignty, federalism, democratization, stability, political change, and development. Once these ideas are clear, the later country chapters become much easier to compare.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- The meaning and purpose of comparative politics
- How political scientists use evidence, variables, and comparison
- State, nation, regime, government, sovereignty, power, authority, and legitimacy
- Democratic, authoritarian, and hybrid regimes
- Democratization, democratic consolidation, and democratic backsliding
- Sources and transfer of political power
- Federal, unitary, and supranational arrangements
- Political legitimacy, state capacity, stability, and political change
- The seven cases used in this book and the main questions for comparison

THE BIG PICTURE

Politics is not only about leaders and elections. It is a system of rules, institutions, ideas, and relationships that determines who governs, how authority is used, how citizens participate, and how conflict is managed. Comparative politics turns these questions into a disciplined study by using common concepts and evidence across different cases.

What Is Comparative Government and Politics?

Politics concerns the struggle over public decisions. It includes competition for power, the distribution of resources, the making of laws, and the settlement of conflict. Government refers more narrowly to the institutions and officeholders that make and enforce binding decisions. Comparative politics studies these activities within countries and compares them across countries.

The word comparative is important. A description of one country tells us what happened there. A comparison helps us decide whether the same pattern appears elsewhere and why. It can reveal common causes, important differences, and the limits of broad claims.

Government, Politics, and Comparative Politics

Term	Simple Meaning	Typical Question
Politics	The process through which groups compete, cooperate, and make collective decisions.	Who gets what, when, and how?

Term	Simple Meaning	Typical Question
Government	The institutions and officials authorised to make and enforce public decisions.	Which bodies make laws and carry them out?
Comparative government	The comparison of formal institutions such as executives, legislatures, courts, and bureaucracies.	How do parliamentary and presidential systems differ?
Comparative politics	The broader comparison of institutions, behaviour, culture, participation, policy, and political change.	Why do similar institutions produce different outcomes?

Why Political Scientists Compare

- Description: establish accurate knowledge about institutions, behaviour, and policy.
- Classification: place cases into useful categories such as democratic, authoritarian, federal, or unitary.
- Explanation: identify why political outcomes differ.
- Generalization: test whether a pattern found in one case also appears in others.
- Prediction: estimate how a political system may respond to elections, protest, economic crisis, or social change.
- Evaluation: judge whether evidence supports a claim without turning personal preference into a factual conclusion.

A COMPARISON IS MORE THAN A LIST

- A weak comparison gives facts about Country A and then facts about Country B.
- A strong comparison uses the same standard for both countries and identifies a meaningful similarity or difference.
- The explanation must show why the similarity or difference matters for power, participation, policy, legitimacy, or stability.

The Comparative Method

Political scientists cannot usually place entire countries in a laboratory. They study real societies where many factors operate at the same time. For this reason, comparison must be careful. Researchers define concepts, select cases, identify variables, gather evidence, and consider rival explanations.

Element	Meaning	Example
Research question	The problem the study seeks to answer.	Why is executive power more constrained in Britain than in Russia?
Concept	A general political idea that must be clearly defined.	Legitimacy, federalism, political participation
Variable	A factor that can vary across cases or over time.	Level of media freedom or voter turnout
Independent variable	A possible cause or influence.	Electoral rules
Dependent variable	The outcome the researcher seeks to explain.	Number of political parties represented
Case	The country, institution, election, movement, or period being studied.	Mexico after 2000
Evidence	Information used to support or challenge a claim.	Election data, constitutions, speeches, surveys
Inference	A reasoned conclusion drawn from evidence.	Competitive elections increased executive accountability

Correlation and Causation

Correlation means that two variables appear to move together. Causation means that a change in one variable produces or helps produce a change in another. Correlation is useful, but it does not by itself prove causation. Countries with higher income may often have more stable democratic institutions, but income is not the only possible cause. Education, historical experience, inequality, state capacity, external pressure, and political leadership may also matter.

AVOID THE CAUSATION TRAP

- Ask whether the supposed cause came before the outcome.
- Look for a clear mechanism linking cause and effect.
- Consider whether a third factor explains both variables.
- Check whether the pattern appears in several cases or only one.
- Use cautious language when evidence supports an association but not certainty.

Empirical and Normative Statements

An empirical statement can be tested with evidence. A normative statement expresses a value judgment about what should happen. Both can be important in political discussion, but they must not be confused.

Type	Example	How to Handle It
Empirical	Nigeria has a federal constitution.	Check the constitution and the actual distribution of authority.
Empirical	Turnout fell between two elections.	Use official or credible electoral data.
Normative	Federalism is the fairest system.	Identify the value being used: fairness, efficiency, unity, or local autonomy.
Normative	Governments should restrict harmful speech.	Recognise the tension between security and civil liberty.

Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence

Quantitative evidence is numerical: election results, survey percentages, GDP per capita, inequality measures, or numbers of women in a legislature. Qualitative evidence is expressed mainly in words: constitutions, court decisions, party manifestos, speeches, interviews, newspaper reports, and scholarly interpretations. Strong comparative work often uses both.

Source or Indicator	What It Measures	Important Limitation
Human Development Index	Health, education, and income combined into one development measure.	National averages can hide regional and group inequalities.
GDP per capita	Average economic output or income per person.	It does not show how income is distributed.
GDP growth rate	The pace at which an economy expands or contracts.	Growth can be temporary or dependent on one commodity.
Gini coefficient	The degree of income inequality.	Different data methods can make comparisons difficult.
Freedom assessments	Political rights and civil liberties.	Scoring involves judgments and should be read with its method.
Corruption perceptions	How public-sector corruption is perceived.	Perception is not the same as a complete count of corruption.
Fragility indexes	Pressures on state institutions and social stability.	A single rank can oversimplify a complex political system.
Public-opinion surveys	Citizens attitudes, trust, and policy preferences.	Question wording, sampling, and fear can affect responses.

HOW TO READ POLITICAL DATA

- Read the title, dates, units, and source before examining the values.
- Identify the largest, smallest, rising, falling, and unusual values.
- Distinguish an absolute number from a percentage or rate.
- State the pattern before offering an explanation.
- Do not claim that the data proves more than it actually shows.

Core Political Concepts

The country chapters repeatedly use a small group of foundational concepts. Students must understand the differences among them because AP questions often test whether a term is applied precisely.

Power, Authority, Legitimacy, and Sovereignty

Concept	Meaning	Key Distinction
Power	The ability to make others act in a way they might not otherwise choose.	Power can rely on persuasion, rewards, law, pressure, or force.
Authority	Power recognised as rightful within a political system.	Authority is accepted as having a valid basis.
Legitimacy	The broad belief that a ruler, institution, or regime has the right to govern.	Legitimacy reduces the need for constant coercion.
Sovereignty	The state's supreme legal authority over its territory and independence from outside control.	Internal sovereignty concerns control at home; external sovereignty concerns recognition abroad.

Power and authority are related but not identical. A military group may seize power during a coup, but its authority and legitimacy may remain weak. A government may possess legal authority but lack the practical power to enforce laws in all regions. A state may be internationally sovereign while domestic armed groups challenge its control.

A USEFUL CHAIN

Power becomes more durable when it is recognised as authority. Authority becomes more stable when citizens view it as legitimate. Legitimacy supports sovereignty because the state can govern with greater cooperation and less dependence on force.

Political System, State, Regime, and Government

Term	Meaning	How Long It Usually Lasts
Political system	The complete set of institutions, rules, ideas, relationships, and processes through which public decisions are made.	Long-term, though it can evolve
State	A political organisation with a permanent population, defined territory, governing institutions, sovereignty, and international recognition.	Usually very durable
Regime	The fundamental rules governing access to power and the way power is exercised.	Usually outlasts individual governments
Government	The institutions and current officeholders that make and enforce binding decisions.	Changes through elections, appointments, succession, coups, or revolution

A change of government does not always mean a change of regime. When one British prime minister replaces another after an election, the democratic regime continues. When a revolution replaces the basic rules of political authority, the regime changes. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 changed both the government and the regime by replacing the monarchy with an Islamic republic.

Nation, Nation-State, and Nationalism

A nation is a community whose members believe they share an identity. The identity may be based on language, religion, ethnicity, historical experience, political ideals, or a combination of these. A nation-state exists where the boundaries of the state largely match the boundaries of a nation. In practice, many states contain several nations or important minority identities.

Nationalism is the belief that a nation should possess political unity, self-government, or special loyalty from its members. Nationalism can strengthen a state by creating solidarity. It can also produce separatism, exclusion, or conflict when national groups disagree about territory and authority.

Concept	Illustration
Multinational state	The United Kingdom contains English, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish identities.

Concept	Illustration
Nation without a fully sovereign state	Some ethnic or national communities seek greater autonomy or independence within existing states.
State-building	Leaders create institutions and a common political identity across a territory.
Nationalism as support	Shared identity can increase willingness to obey laws and defend the state.
Nationalism as challenge	Separatist or ethnic movements may contest central authority.

State Capacity and State Autonomy

State capacity is the ability of public institutions to implement decisions. A capable state can collect taxes, maintain order, provide services, enforce contracts, gather information, and apply policy throughout its territory. State autonomy is the ability of state institutions to act independently of powerful private interests, social groups, foreign actors, or criminal organisations.

High or Low	State Capacity	State Autonomy
High	Policies are implemented consistently; taxes and laws reach most of the territory.	Officials can pursue public goals even when powerful groups resist.
Low	Laws exist on paper but are unevenly enforced; services and security are weak.	Business elites, armed groups, party networks, foreign powers, or religious institutions strongly constrain decisions.

CAPACITY IS NOT THE SAME AS DEMOCRACY

An authoritarian state may have strong administrative capacity, while a democracy may struggle to enforce policy. Capacity concerns what the state can do. Regime type concerns how political power is gained, limited, and used.

Political Culture and Political Socialization

Political culture is the collection of public attitudes, values, symbols, and expectations concerning politics. It includes beliefs about authority, citizenship, equality, religion, participation, and the proper role of government. Political socialization is the process through which people develop these beliefs.

Agent of Socialization	Possible Influence
Family	Early attitudes toward authority, identity, religion, and party loyalty
School	Civic knowledge, national history, and ideas about citizenship
Religious institutions	Moral values and views about the relationship between religion and state
Media	Issue awareness, political framing, and trust or distrust in institutions
Peer groups and workplaces	Shared interests, class identity, and collective action
Government	National symbols, official education, public ceremonies, and propaganda
Social movements	New language and values concerning rights, identity, and reform

Social Cleavages and Civil Society

A social cleavage is a politically important division within society. Common cleavages include class, religion, ethnicity, region, language, generation, rural-urban location, and gender. A cleavage becomes politically important when organisations or parties mobilise people around it.

Civil society consists of voluntary organisations that operate between the private individual and the state. Examples include trade unions, professional associations, charities, religious groups, independent media, human-rights organisations, business groups, and social movements. Civil society can support democracy by organising interests and monitoring power. In other circumstances, organisations may deepen division or be restricted by the state.

CROSS-CUTTING AND REINFORCING CLEAVAGES

- Cross-cutting cleavages divide people in different ways. They can reduce conflict because opponents on one issue may be allies on another.
- Reinforcing cleavages place the same groups on opposite sides of several divisions. They can intensify political conflict and make compromise harder.

Democratic, Authoritarian, and Hybrid Regimes

Regimes are often placed on a spectrum rather than divided into two perfect categories. Democratic regimes combine meaningful competition, political participation, civil liberties, rule of law, and accountable institutions. Authoritarian regimes restrict competition and concentrate power. Hybrid regimes contain elections and some democratic institutions, but the competition is unfair or important freedoms are limited.

Democracy

Democracy means rule in which citizens can influence who governs and can hold leaders accountable. Elections are necessary, but elections alone are not enough. A functioning democracy also requires meaningful choice, protection of rights, access to information, and institutions that limit arbitrary power.

Democratic Feature	What It Means in Practice
Free and fair elections	Opposition parties can compete, votes are counted honestly, and winners may take office.
Universal adult suffrage	Adult citizens can vote without arbitrary exclusion.
Rule of law	Officials and citizens are subject to public laws rather than personal decisions.
Civil liberties	Speech, association, religion, protest, and media activity receive meaningful protection.
Accountability	Leaders can be questioned, investigated, removed, or defeated.
Transparency	Citizens can obtain information about decisions and public spending.
Independent institutions	Courts, legislatures, election bodies, and auditors can limit executive power.
Political participation	Citizens can organise, vote, contact officials, join groups, and protest peacefully.

Authoritarianism

Authoritarian regimes concentrate power in a leader, ruling party, military institution, religious authority, or small elite. They restrict political competition and often limit the media, civil society, protest, and opposition organisation. Some authoritarian systems hold elections, but the ruling group controls resources, rules, information, or coercion strongly enough to prevent genuinely equal competition.

Type	Main Source of Control	Typical Features
One-party regime	A ruling party dominates political recruitment and organisation.	Opposition parties are banned, marginalised, or unable to win national power.
Military regime	Senior officers or a military council control the state.	Power may follow a coup and be justified as restoring order.
Theocracy	Religious authorities and religious law form the highest basis of political rule.	Elected institutions may exist but remain subject to clerical oversight.
Personalist regime	Power centres on one leader and a network of loyalists.	Institutions are weak and succession is uncertain.
Totalitarian regime	The state seeks extensive control over politics, society, information, and ideology.	Mass mobilisation, official ideology, and organised coercion are central.
Hybrid or illiberal regime	Elections coexist with serious restrictions on competition and rights.	Opposition exists, but the playing field is heavily tilted toward incumbents.

Democracy and Authoritarianism Compared

Dimension	More Democratic	More Authoritarian
Elections	Competitive, uncertain, and administered impartially	Controlled, manipulated, or noncompetitive
Rule of law	Law constrains rulers and protects citizens	Rulers apply law selectively or place themselves above it
Media	Independent criticism and diverse information	Censorship, ownership control, or intimidation restricts criticism

Dimension	More Democratic	More Authoritarian
Legislature and courts	Real ability to check the executive	Institutions usually follow executive or ruling-party direction
Civil society	Independent groups organise openly	Groups are restricted, monitored, or absorbed into the regime
Opposition	May campaign and potentially take power	Opposition is banned, harassed, fragmented, or prevented from winning
Participation	Broad and voluntary	Limited, managed, or compulsory
Use of coercion	Legally limited and publicly accountable	Security forces face weak independent oversight

DO NOT TREAT REGIME TYPES AS PERFECT BOXES

Countries can move toward or away from democracy. A constitution may describe democratic rights that are weak in practice. Elections may be competitive at the local level but controlled nationally. Always compare formal rules with actual political behaviour.

Political Rights, Civil Liberties, and the Rule of Law

Political rights concern participation in government: voting, standing for office, organising parties, and influencing policy. Civil liberties protect individuals and groups from arbitrary state interference. The rule of law requires public, predictable, and equally applied laws. These concepts overlap but are not identical. A state may permit voting while restricting speech, or guarantee rights in law while failing to enforce them.

Democratization

Democratization is the transition from authoritarian rule toward democratic competition, participation, rights, and accountability. It is usually a process rather than a single event. An election may begin democratization, but democratic institutions must survive later elections, economic crises, and leadership changes.

Stage	Main Development
Liberalization	The regime relaxes censorship, permits some opposition, or releases political prisoners.
Transition	Old rules are replaced or negotiated; competitive elections and new institutions are introduced.
Consolidation	Democratic rules become widely accepted and survive repeated transfers of power.
Deepening	Rights, participation, transparency, and institutional accountability become stronger.
Backsliding	Elected leaders weaken courts, media, opposition rights, or electoral fairness without immediately ending elections.

Conditions That Can Support Democratization

- Competitive political organisations and an opposition able to coordinate.
- Independent courts and election authorities.
- A professional bureaucracy and security forces subject to civilian law.
- Civil society organisations capable of monitoring government.
- Economic and social groups willing to negotiate rather than destroy rivals.
- Electoral rules that allow minorities and new parties to gain representation.
- International incentives, pressure, or membership requirements that reward democratic reform.
- Public trust that losing an election will not lead to permanent exclusion or violence.

Why Democratization Can Stall or Reverse

Obstacle	How It Weakens Democracy
Corruption	Public office is used for private gain, weakening equality and trust.

Obstacle	How It Weakens Democracy
Weak rule of law	Leaders and powerful groups can ignore legal limits.
Economic crisis	Citizens may lose confidence in institutions and support anti-system alternatives.
Severe inequality	Political influence becomes concentrated and policy appears unresponsive.
Polarisation	Opponents are treated as enemies rather than legitimate competitors.
Security threats	Governments use emergency measures to restrict rights and oversight.
Controlled media	Citizens cannot evaluate alternatives with reliable information.
Military intervention	Armed forces replace or intimidate civilian institutions.
Executive aggrandisement	An elected leader gradually weakens checks without a sudden coup.

DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

A democracy is consolidated when political actors expect disputes to be settled through democratic rules, elections can remove leaders, civil liberties are protected, and the system is unlikely to return to authoritarianism without a major shock.

Sources and Transfer of Political Power

Political systems must answer two questions: where does authority come from, and how does it pass from one set of leaders to another? Different regimes combine constitutions, elections, tradition, religion, parties, military force, ideology, economic performance, and popular support in different ways.

Sources of Power and Authority

Source	How It Supports Rule	Possible Weakness
Constitution	Defines offices, powers, rights, and procedures.	Written rules may be ignored or selectively enforced.
Popular support	Citizens accept leaders because they approve of elections, identity, or performance.	Support can fall during crisis or scandal.
Political party	Organises leaders, members, patronage, and policy.	Factional conflict or declining membership can weaken control.
Religion	Provides moral authority, identity, and a sacred basis for law.	Religious diversity or secular opposition may challenge it.
Military	Controls organised force and may defend or dominate the regime.	Military power can threaten civilian rule.
Legislature	Represents citizens, makes law, and authorises government action.	It may become weak, fragmented, or subordinate.
Tradition	Citizens accept inherited practices, symbols, or institutions.	Tradition may lose influence during social change.
Charismatic leadership	Personal appeal creates loyalty and mobilisation.	Succession becomes difficult when authority depends on one person.
Performance	Economic growth, security, welfare, or national achievement strengthens acceptance.	Failure can quickly weaken legitimacy.

Government Change and Regime Change

Type of Change	What Changes	Example of the Process
Election	Officeholders change according to existing rules.	A governing party loses and an opposition party takes office.
Appointment	A leader or institution selects an officeholder.	A prime minister appoints cabinet ministers.
Succession	Power passes according to constitutional, party, hereditary, or informal rules.	A monarch dies or a party selects a new leader.
Vote of no confidence	A parliamentary government loses legislative support.	A new government forms or an election follows.
Coup d'etat	A small group, often within the military or state, seizes power suddenly.	Civilian leaders are removed outside constitutional rules.
Revolution	Large-scale mobilisation replaces basic institutions and rules.	A monarchy or existing regime is overthrown.
Reform from above	Rulers change rules to preserve or modernise the system.	Power is devolved or competitive elections are introduced.
Regime collapse	State institutions lose control or consent and a new order emerges.	War, economic breakdown, or mass protest destroys existing authority.

THE KEY DIFFERENCE

- A government change replaces current leaders while the basic rules remain.
- A regime change replaces the basic rules concerning access to power and the exercise of authority.
- A state collapse is even deeper: public institutions may lose the capacity to govern territory and population.

Coercion, Consent, and Policy

Every government uses some coercion because laws can be enforced through penalties. The central question is how much coercion is required and how it is controlled. Democratic regimes rely more heavily on legal authority, public consent, elections, and accountability. Authoritarian regimes often rely more heavily on censorship, surveillance, patronage, and security institutions. In both types, long-term stability is easier when citizens believe institutions are legitimate and policies are effective.

Internal and External Forces

Actor or Force	Possible Effect on Government
Political parties	Recruit leaders, organise competition, mobilise support, or monopolise access to power.
Military and security services	Defend the state, enforce order, or intervene in politics.
Bureaucracy	Implements policy and supplies expertise; can also resist or delay change.
Courts	Enforce constitutional limits or legitimise executive decisions.
Business and labour	Pressure government over taxation, regulation, wages, and economic policy.
Social movements	Place new demands on the political agenda through protest and organisation.
Religious institutions	Support authority, provide welfare, or mobilise opposition.
Foreign governments	Offer aid, sanctions, security support, or diplomatic pressure.
International organisations	Create rules, incentives, monitoring, and policy conditions.
Global markets	Reward or punish policy through investment, trade, and capital movement.

Federal, Unitary, and Supranational Arrangements

Territorial organisation concerns where political authority is located. In a federal system, the constitution divides power between national and regional governments. In a unitary system, ultimate legal authority rests with the national government, even when local bodies receive important responsibilities. Supranational arrangements allow member states to share or delegate authority to common institutions.

Federal and Unitary Systems

Feature	Federal System	Unitary System
Legal basis	Regional powers are constitutionally protected.	Regional powers are granted by the national government.
Distribution of authority	National and regional governments each possess areas of authority.	National institutions remain legally supreme.
Policy variation	More variation among states, provinces, or regions.	Policies can be more uniform across the country.
Local representation	Regional governments can represent territorial, ethnic, or linguistic interests.	National institutions may act more quickly and consistently.
Risk	Conflict, duplication, inequality, and unclear responsibility.	Overcentralisation and weak response to local needs.
Course examples	Mexico, Nigeria, and Russia	China, Iran, and the United Kingdom

Formal classification does not reveal the entire reality. Russia is constitutionally federal, but national executive power strongly shapes regional government. The United Kingdom is legally unitary, but devolution has given Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland important institutions. A system may therefore become more centralised or decentralised over time without changing its formal label.

Why States Choose Federalism

- To govern a large territory more effectively.
- To protect regional, ethnic, linguistic, or religious diversity.
- To unite previously separate political units while preserving autonomy.
- To allow policy experimentation and local adaptation.
- To reduce conflict by sharing authority.
- To create additional checks on central power.

Why States Choose Unitary Government

- To create uniform laws and services.
- To make national policy more coordinated and efficient.
- To protect national unity and prevent separatism.
- To concentrate scarce administrative resources.
- To strengthen central direction during war, revolution, or rapid development.

Devolution

Devolution is the transfer of authority from a central government to regional or local institutions. It differs from federalism because the central state remains legally able to change the arrangement. Devolution can increase participation, adapt policy to local needs, and strengthen legitimacy. It can also create regional inequality, conflicting laws, competition for resources, and stronger separatist identities.

THE EUROPEAN UNION IS NOT A FEDERAL STATE

The European Union is a supranational organisation created by treaties among sovereign member states. Its institutions can make binding rules in agreed areas, but the EU does not possess all the characteristics of a sovereign state. Member states retain their own constitutions, armed forces, taxation systems, national identities, and the legal ability to leave the organisation.

Shared Sovereignty and Supranationalism

Supranationalism occurs when states authorise common institutions to make decisions that can bind member governments. States accept limits on independent action because common rules may increase trade, bargaining power, security, or policy coordination. This creates a continuing tension between national sovereignty and collective problem-solving.

Political Legitimacy, Stability, and State Performance

A government can force obedience for a period, but durable rule usually requires legitimacy. Legitimacy is not the same as popularity. Citizens may dislike a policy while accepting the government's right to make it. A regime becomes vulnerable when people reject both its decisions and its right to govern.

Sources of Legitimacy

Source	Why Citizens May Accept Rule
Traditional legitimacy	Authority is accepted because it follows long-standing customs or inherited institutions.
Charismatic legitimacy	Citizens follow a leader because of perceived courage, vision, or personal qualities.
Rational-legal legitimacy	Authority rests on impersonal laws, offices, and procedures.
Electoral legitimacy	Leaders gain office through accepted competition and voting.
Performance legitimacy	The regime delivers growth, security, public services, or national achievement.
Ideological legitimacy	Citizens accept a set of political beliefs such as socialism, nationalism, or religious government.
National identity	The state is associated with independence, unity, and collective pride.
International recognition	Foreign recognition and membership in international organisations strengthen state standing.

How Governments Maintain Legitimacy

- Provide security and effective public services.
- Resolve conflict through accepted institutions rather than arbitrary force.
- Transfer power peacefully according to established rules.
- Reduce corruption and punish abuse of office.
- Create channels for participation and political efficacy.
- Use national symbols, public ceremonies, education, and historical narratives.
- Allow regional autonomy or representation where diversity requires it.
- Adapt policies when public demands or social conditions change.

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is the belief that citizens can understand politics and influence government. Internal efficacy concerns a person's confidence in his or her own political ability. External efficacy concerns the belief that institutions will respond. High efficacy can support participation and legitimacy. Low efficacy can produce withdrawal, protest, cynicism, or support for anti-system movements.

Legitimacy and State Capacity

Combination	Likely Political Condition
High legitimacy + high capacity	The state can implement policy and citizens generally accept its authority.
High legitimacy + low capacity	Citizens accept the regime but become frustrated by weak services or enforcement.
Low legitimacy + high capacity	The state can enforce decisions but may depend heavily on surveillance or coercion.
Low legitimacy + low capacity	The regime faces serious risk of disorder, territorial loss, corruption, or collapse.

Political Stability

Political stability means that institutions continue to function, authority remains broadly effective, and conflict does not destroy the regime or state. Stability does not mean the absence of disagreement or protest. Democratic systems may be stable because they allow conflict to be expressed and settled. Authoritarian systems may appear stable while suppressing opposition, yet hidden conflict can make sudden change more likely.

Factor That Can Support Stability	Factor That Can Threaten Stability
Accepted rules for leadership succession	Uncertain or personalised succession
Professional and effective public institutions	Corruption and weak service delivery
Inclusive political participation	Exclusion of important social groups
Economic opportunity and manageable inequality	Severe recession, inflation, or unemployment
Peaceful management of ethnic and regional demands	Separatism, discrimination, or communal violence
Security forces under clear legal control	Military intervention or uncontrolled armed groups
Reliable information and public trust	Censorship, disinformation, and loss of credibility
Adaptation and reform	Rigid institutions unable to respond to change

Corruption and Clientelism

Corruption is the misuse of public authority for private benefit. It includes bribery, embezzlement, favouritism, and the sale of public decisions. Clientelism is an exchange in which political leaders provide jobs, benefits, protection, or resources to individuals or groups in return for political support. Patron-client networks can mobilise citizens and distribute resources, but they often weaken equal treatment, programmatic policy, and trust in institutions.

STABILITY IS NOT ALWAYS DEMOCRATIC

A regime may remain stable because citizens accept it, because institutions perform well, because opposition is divided, or because coercion is effective. AP comparisons should identify the mechanism of stability rather than assuming stability proves democracy or legitimacy.

Political and Economic Change

Political systems are shaped by economic development, social change, technology, migration, international pressure, and global markets. Change may be gradual, negotiated, or revolutionary. It may strengthen institutions or create new tensions.

Political Development

Political development refers to changes that make institutions more capable, responsive, accountable, or inclusive. It can include stronger rule of law, wider participation, professional administration, peaceful succession, and the ability to manage social conflict. Development is not a single path and does not automatically lead to democracy.

Economic Systems

System	Main Characteristic	Political Importance
Market economy	Private actors make most decisions about production and exchange.	Creates private economic power and pressure for predictable law.
Command economy	The state directs production, prices, and investment.	Gives officials strong control but may reduce flexibility and innovation.
Mixed economy	Markets operate alongside regulation, state ownership, and welfare provision.	Most contemporary states combine market and public elements.
Rentier economy	Government receives large external income from resources such as oil or gas.	The state may depend less on taxation and use revenue to support patronage or welfare.
Informal economy	Work and exchange occur outside full regulation and taxation.	Can provide livelihoods but weaken revenue, labour protection, and data accuracy.

Development Indicators

No single indicator fully measures development. GDP per capita shows average output, the Gini coefficient shows inequality, and the Human Development Index combines income, education, and health. Political analysis should consider who benefits, regional differences, environmental costs, and whether public institutions can convert resources into services.

Globalization

Globalization is the growing movement of goods, capital, people, information, technology, and ideas across borders. It can increase investment and access to markets, but it can also expose countries to financial shocks, economic competition, cultural tension, and pressure from multinational companies or international institutions.

Area	Possible Opportunity	Possible Challenge
Trade	Larger markets and lower-cost goods	Job displacement and dependence on external demand
Investment	Capital, technology, and infrastructure	Foreign influence and rapid capital withdrawal
Migration	Labour, remittances, and cultural exchange	Brain drain, identity disputes, and integration pressures
Information	Faster communication and public mobilisation	Disinformation, surveillance, and censorship battles
International rules	Cooperation on shared problems	Reduced national policy freedom
Civil society	Transnational advocacy and knowledge	Foreign funding controversies and state restrictions

Public Policy

Public policy is a course of government action or inaction. Policies may concern taxation, welfare, education, health, energy, security, rights, trade, or the environment. Political institutions shape who can place an issue on the agenda, who writes the policy, who implements it, and who can block or review it.

POLICY QUESTIONS TO ASK IN EVERY COUNTRY CHAPTER

- Who sets the agenda?
- Which institution formally makes the decision?
- Which actors influence the decision?
- Does the bureaucracy have the capacity to implement it?
- Who receives the benefits and who bears the costs?
- How does the policy affect legitimacy, participation, and stability?

The Cases Used in This Book

The official AP Comparative Government and Politics course centres on six countries: China, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, and the United Kingdom. This book uses those six cases and adds the European Union as a separate chapter because it provides an important example of supranational governance and shared authority.

Case	Basic Political Character	High-Value Conceptual Questions
Britain	Parliamentary democracy; constitutional monarchy; unitary state with devolution	How can an uncoded constitution constrain power? How does parliament produce and control the executive?
European Union	Supranational organisation of sovereign member states	How can authority be shared above the state? What is the balance between integration and national sovereignty?
Russia	Formally federal and semi-presidential; strongly centralised authoritarian rule	How can formal democratic institutions coexist with concentrated executive power?
China	Unitary one-party communist state	How does the Communist Party combine ideological, organisational, economic, and coercive control?
Mexico	Federal presidential democracy with a history of dominant-party rule	How did electoral competition develop, and why do corruption and security remain major challenges?
Iran	Unitary Islamic republic combining elected and unelected religious institutions	How does a theocracy manage elections, popular participation, and clerical supervision?
Nigeria	Federal presidential democracy shaped by regional, ethnic, religious, and resource divisions	How does federalism manage diversity, and how do oil, corruption, and security affect state capacity?

A Common Comparison Framework

Question	What to Look For
Where is sovereignty located?	National state, regional units, religious authority, ruling party, or shared institutions
What type of regime operates?	Democratic, authoritarian, hybrid, one-party, theocratic, or another form
How is the executive selected?	Election, parliamentary majority, party appointment, religious selection, or succession
How is executive power limited?	Legislature, courts, party rules, constitution, federalism, media, or civil society
How are citizens represented?	Parties, elections, legislatures, social movements, corporatist organisations, or informal networks
How are interests organised?	Pluralism, corporatism, state control, patron-client relations, or repression
How is legitimacy maintained?	Elections, tradition, religion, ideology, nationalism, performance, or coercion
What threatens stability?	Economic crisis, corruption, succession, ethnic conflict, separatism, protest, or foreign pressure
How capable is the state?	Taxation, law enforcement, service delivery, information, and territorial control
How does change occur?	Election, reform, devolution, protest, revolution, coup, or external influence

COUNTRY COMPARISON FORMULA

Concept + Country A evidence + Country B evidence + a direct statement of similarity or difference + the political consequence of that similarity or difference.

The Chapter on One Page

INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

- Comparative politics uses common concepts and evidence to study political systems across countries.
- Empirical claims can be tested; normative claims express values about what should happen.
- Correlation is an association; causation requires a convincing mechanism and control of rival explanations.
- The state is a sovereign political organisation; the regime is the set of basic rules; the government consists of current institutions and officeholders.
- Power is the ability to influence behaviour; authority is recognised power; legitimacy is belief in the right to rule; sovereignty is supreme legal authority.
- Democracy requires more than elections: competition, participation, civil liberties, rule of law, accountability, and transparency matter.
- Authoritarian regimes restrict competition and concentrate power; hybrid regimes combine elections with serious unfairness or limits on rights.
- Democratization can advance, stall, consolidate, or reverse.
- Federal systems constitutionally divide authority; unitary systems place ultimate authority at the national level; supranational institutions exercise treaty-based shared powers.
- Legitimacy, capacity, and stability are related but distinct.
- Political and economic change is shaped by development, inequality, globalization, technology, identity, and institutions.
- Good AP comparisons use the same concept and standard across cases.

Facts and Distinctions to Remember

1. Government change is not automatically regime change.
2. A state may be sovereign but still have low capacity in parts of its territory.
3. Authority is power viewed as rightful; legitimacy is the broader acceptance of that right.
4. A nation is a community of identity; a state is a sovereign political organisation.
5. Elections are necessary for electoral democracy but are not sufficient for liberal democracy.
6. Rule of law means government by public law rather than arbitrary personal decision.
7. Political rights concern participation; civil liberties protect freedom from arbitrary interference.
8. Hybrid regimes retain some democratic institutions while heavily limiting fair competition.
9. Democratic consolidation means democratic rules have become durable and widely accepted.
10. Federalism protects regional authority constitutionally; devolution transfers authority within a unitary state.
11. Legitimacy can come from elections, law, tradition, religion, ideology, identity, charisma, or performance.
12. High stability does not necessarily mean high democracy or high legitimacy.
13. State capacity concerns implementation; state autonomy concerns independence from powerful interests.
14. Cross-cutting cleavages may reduce conflict; reinforcing cleavages may intensify it.
15. Clientelism exchanges targeted benefits for political support.
16. GDP per capita does not show distribution; the Gini coefficient focuses on inequality.
17. Correlation does not prove causation.
18. The EU is a supranational organisation, not a sovereign country.

Key Terms

Term	Quick Definition
Authority	Power recognised as rightful
Authoritarian regime	A regime that restricts competition and concentrates power
Civil liberties	Freedoms protected from arbitrary government interference
Civil society	Voluntary organisations between the individual and the state
Clientelism	Exchange of targeted benefits for political support

Term	Quick Definition
Correlation	An association between variables
Coup d'etat	A sudden seizure of power by a small organised group
Democratic consolidation	The process by which democracy becomes durable
Democratization	Transition from authoritarian rule toward democracy
Devolution	Transfer of authority from a central government to regional bodies
Federal state	A state with constitutionally divided national and regional authority
Government	Institutions and officeholders making binding decisions
Hybrid regime	A regime mixing elections with serious authoritarian restrictions
Legitimacy	Belief that a ruler or regime has the right to govern
Nation	A community sharing identity and political aspirations
Political efficacy	Belief that citizens can understand and influence politics
Political system	Institutions, rules, ideas, and processes of public decision-making
Power	Ability to influence behaviour or outcomes
Regime	Fundamental rules governing access to and exercise of power
Rule of law	Government under public and equally applied laws
Social cleavage	A politically important division in society
Sovereignty	Supreme legal authority over territory and population
State	Sovereign political organisation governing a territory and population
State capacity	Ability of institutions to implement decisions
Unitary state	A state in which ultimate legal authority rests nationally

Practice

Multiple-Choice Questions

- Which statement best distinguishes a regime from a government?
 - A regime consists only of elected officials.
 - A regime contains the basic rules of political power, while a government consists of current institutions and officeholders.
 - A government is more permanent than a state.
 - A regime exists only in authoritarian systems.
- Which example is a normative statement?
 - Nigeria has a federal constitution.
 - China is governed by one dominant ruling party.
 - Governments should provide equal access to education.
 - Britain has a parliamentary system.
- A researcher finds that countries with higher GDP per capita often have higher democracy scores. This finding demonstrates:
 - causation with certainty
 - correlation but not necessarily causation
 - a normative judgment
 - a controlled experiment
- Which feature most clearly supports the rule of law?
 - The executive can suspend any law without review.
 - Officials are subject to public and predictable laws.
 - The ruling party controls all media.
 - Courts follow informal instructions from military leaders.
- Which statement best describes legitimacy?

- (A) The ability to use physical force
 - (B) The legal territory of a state
 - (C) The belief that political authority has a right to rule
 - (D) The amount of tax collected by government
- 6.** Which change most clearly represents regime change?
- (A) A prime minister replaces one cabinet minister.
 - (B) An opposition party wins an election under existing rules.
 - (C) A revolution replaces a monarchy with a republic.
 - (D) A president appoints a new judge.
- 7.** Which arrangement is characteristic of a federal system?
- (A) Regional authority is constitutionally protected.
 - (B) All local powers can be removed by ordinary executive order.
 - (C) Only the national government possesses legal authority.
 - (D) Member states may leave at any time without legal process.
- 8.** The transfer of authority from the British Parliament to the Scottish Parliament is best described as:
- (A) federalism
 - (B) devolution
 - (C) a coup
 - (D) judicial review
- 9.** Which condition is most closely associated with democratic consolidation?
- (A) The military regularly removes elected leaders.
 - (B) Opposition parties accept elections as the legitimate path to power.
 - (C) The executive closes independent media.
 - (D) Political succession depends entirely on one leader.
- 10.** A state that can pass laws but cannot enforce them in much of its territory has low:
- (A) national identity
 - (B) state capacity
 - (C) external sovereignty
 - (D) political socialization
- 11.** Which organisation is part of civil society?
- (A) A cabinet ministry
 - (B) An independent trade union
 - (C) A national supreme court
 - (D) A military command
- 12.** A hybrid regime is most likely to have:
- (A) no political institutions at all
 - (B) competitive elections with no restrictions on media
 - (C) elections combined with serious limits on opposition and civil liberties
 - (D) complete equality among all branches of government
- 13.** Which factor can provide performance legitimacy?
- (A) Successful economic growth and public services
 - (B) The absence of any public policy
 - (C) Elimination of all state institutions
 - (D) Refusal to enforce laws
- 14.** Which indicator is most directly used to examine income inequality?
- (A) GDP growth rate
 - (B) Gini coefficient
 - (C) Human Development Index alone
 - (D) Voter turnout
- 15.** The European Union is best classified as:
- (A) a sovereign federal country

- (B) a military regime
- (C) a supranational organisation created by member-state treaties
- (D) a unitary nation-state

ANSWER KEY

1-B · 2-C · 3-B · 4-B · 5-C · 6-C · 7-A · 8-B · 9-B · 10-B · 11-B · 12-C · 13-A · 14-B · 15-C

Concept Application Questions

1. Define political legitimacy. Describe one way a democratic government can strengthen legitimacy. Explain one way corruption can weaken legitimacy.
2. Define state capacity. Describe one policy area that requires high state capacity. Explain one consequence of low state capacity for regime stability.
3. Define democratization. Describe one institutional reform that can support democratization. Explain one reason democratization may reverse.
4. Define devolution. Describe one reason a unitary state may devolve power. Explain one possible political cost of devolution.

Country Comparison Questions

1. Identify one formal similarity in the territorial organisation of Russia and Mexico. Describe one difference in how federalism operates in practice. Explain one consequence of that difference for regional autonomy.
2. Identify one difference between the basis of political authority in Britain and Iran. Describe one institution that reflects the difference. Explain one consequence for executive power.
3. Identify one similarity between authoritarian rule in China and Russia. Describe one difference in the role of political parties. Explain one consequence for leadership succession.
4. Identify one challenge to state capacity in Mexico and Nigeria. Describe how the challenge appears in each country. Explain one reason its political effect may differ.

Data Analysis Practice

Imagine a table gives the following data for four countries: GDP per capita, Gini coefficient, voter turnout, and a political-rights score. Complete the following tasks:

- Identify the country with the highest economic output per person.
- Describe the pattern between inequality and voter turnout.
- State whether the data proves that inequality causes low turnout.
- Provide one additional variable that could help explain differences in participation.
- Explain one limitation of comparing national averages.

Argument Essay Questions

1. Develop an argument that the most important source of political legitimacy is either democratic procedure or government performance.
2. Develop an argument about whether federalism is more likely to strengthen or weaken political stability in diverse states.
3. Develop an argument about whether economic development generally promotes democratization.
4. Develop an argument about whether a strong state is necessary for a successful democracy.
5. Develop an argument about whether globalization reduces the sovereignty of states.

Model Concept Application Response

QUESTION

Define political legitimacy. Describe one way a government can maintain legitimacy. Explain one way low legitimacy can threaten political stability.

Political legitimacy is the belief among citizens that a government or regime has the right to rule. A government can maintain legitimacy by organising elections that are viewed as fair and by accepting peaceful transfers of power. These procedures allow citizens to choose leaders and demonstrate that political authority follows accepted rules. Low legitimacy can threaten stability because citizens may reject government decisions, join mass protests, support anti-system movements, or refuse to cooperate with public institutions. The government may then rely more heavily on coercion, which can deepen opposition and increase the risk of crisis.

Why This Response Works

- It gives a precise definition rather than an example alone.
- It describes a clear process that can maintain legitimacy.
- It explains a causal chain from low legitimacy to instability.
- It uses political vocabulary accurately and avoids unnecessary background.

Final Revision Checklist

- Know why comparison is used and how it differs from simple description.
- Distinguish empirical claims from normative claims.
- Distinguish correlation from causation.
- Know the uses and limits of GDP per capita, HDI, Gini, freedom, corruption, and fragility indicators.
- Define political system, state, regime, government, nation, and nation-state.
- Distinguish power, authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty.
- Explain state capacity and state autonomy.
- Know the main features of democratic, authoritarian, and hybrid regimes.
- Distinguish political rights, civil liberties, and rule of law.
- Know the stages and possible reversal of democratization.
- Distinguish government change, regime change, and state collapse.
- Know the major sources of power and authority.
- Compare federal, unitary, devolved, and supranational arrangements.
- Explain how governments build and lose legitimacy.
- Distinguish legitimacy, capacity, and stability.
- Know political efficacy, political culture, social cleavages, civil society, corruption, and clientelism.
- Explain how development and globalization affect political systems.
- Use one common standard when comparing two countries.
- Remember that the official AP cases are Britain, Russia, China, Mexico, Iran, and Nigeria; the EU is an additional case in this book.

Chapter Two: Government and Politics in Britain

Parliamentary sovereignty, responsible government, devolution, and democratic competition in the United Kingdom

Britain is one of the oldest continuous parliamentary democracies, yet its political system does not rest on one written constitutional document. Its institutions developed gradually through statutes, conventions, court decisions, political conflict, and adaptation. The result is a system that combines ancient symbols with modern democratic government.

The official state is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In political discussion, “Britain” is often used as a convenient name for the country, although Great Britain technically includes England, Scotland, and Wales but not Northern Ireland. This chapter uses “Britain” in the familiar course title while explaining the institutions of the United Kingdom as a whole.

The central feature of the system is a fusion of executive and legislative power. The prime minister and most ministers sit in Parliament, normally lead the largest party in the House of Commons, and depend on the confidence of that House. This creates strong governments when one party has a secure majority, but it also makes party discipline, elections, parliamentary scrutiny, and public opinion important limits on executive power.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Historical foundations of the British political system
- The uncodified constitution and parliamentary sovereignty
- The constitutional monarchy and the Crown
- The House of Commons and the House of Lords
- The prime minister, Cabinet, and civil service
- Courts, rights, and judicial review
- Devolution to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland
- Political parties, elections, participation, and public policy
- Current institutional developments and AP comparison points

THE BIG PICTURE

Britain is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. Legal sovereignty belongs to Parliament, political leadership belongs to a government responsible to the House of Commons, and territorial authority is devolved unevenly within a formally unitary state. The system is flexible and adaptable, but this flexibility also creates continuing debates about executive dominance, electoral fairness, devolution, rights, and constitutional reform.

Historical Foundations of the British Political System

British government developed through gradual change rather than a single revolution or constitutional convention. Important turning points limited royal power, expanded Parliament, widened voting rights, strengthened responsible government, and transferred authority to devolved institutions. The political system therefore reflects both continuity and reform.

Date	Development	Political Importance
1215	Magna Carta	Established the principle that the monarch is subject to law, although its original protections were narrow.
1688–1689	Glorious Revolution and Bill of Rights	Confirmed parliamentary limits on the monarchy and strengthened the principle of government under law.

Date	Development	Political Importance
1707	Acts of Union	Created the Kingdom of Great Britain by uniting the English and Scottish Parliaments.
1832, 1867, 1884	Reform Acts	Expanded the electorate and redistributed representation as industrial society grew.
1911 and 1949	Parliament Acts	Reduced the House of Lords from a vetoing chamber to a delaying and revising chamber.
1918 and 1928	Representation of the People Acts	Extended mass suffrage and created equal voting rights for adult women and men.
1945 onward	Welfare-state development	Expanded government responsibility for health, social security, education, and economic management.
1998–1999	Devolution reforms	Created or restored legislatures in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
2005–2009	Constitutional Reform Act and Supreme Court	Separated the highest court from the House of Lords and strengthened institutional separation.
2016–2020	EU referendum and withdrawal	Returned powers from the European Union and reopened debates about sovereignty and the territorial union.
2026	End of hereditary membership in the Lords	Removed the remaining hereditary peers, leaving life peers and bishops as the main categories of Lords membership.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

- Continuity: the monarchy, Parliament, common law, political conventions, and gradual reform remain central.
- Change: universal suffrage, party government, welfare provision, judicial independence, devolution, and rights protection transformed the system.
- Key idea: Britain modernised old institutions instead of replacing them completely.

The British Constitution

The United Kingdom has a constitution, but it is not codified in one superior document. It is better described as partly written and wholly uncoded. Constitutional rules come from several sources and do not all have the same legal status. This allows reform through ordinary political processes, but it also means that constitutional boundaries may depend heavily on convention and political restraint.

Sources of the Constitution

Source	Meaning	Examples
Statute law	Acts passed by Parliament.	Bill of Rights 1689; Parliament Acts; Human Rights Act 1998; Scotland Act 1998.
Common law	Rules developed through judicial decisions.	Principles concerning due process, prerogative powers, and government legality.
Constitutional conventions	Political rules followed because they are accepted as binding, although courts do not normally enforce them as law.	The monarch appoints as prime minister the person able to command Commons confidence; ministers accept collective responsibility.
Authoritative works	Respected texts that describe constitutional practice.	Erskine May on parliamentary procedure; works by constitutional scholars.
Treaties and international commitments	Agreements that shape policy and rights when incorporated or respected domestically.	European Convention on Human Rights; international obligations approved through domestic processes.
Royal prerogative	Historic powers of the Crown now exercised mainly by ministers.	Treaty-making, passports, senior appointments, and some foreign-affairs powers, subject to law and political accountability.

Core Constitutional Principles

Principle	Simple Meaning	Practical Effect
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Principle	Simple Meaning	Practical Effect
Parliamentary sovereignty	Parliament is the supreme legal authority and can make or repeal any law.	Courts generally cannot strike down an Act of Parliament.
Rule of law	Public authorities and private citizens are subject to law.	Government action must have legal authority and can be challenged in court.
Constitutional monarchy	The monarch is head of state but does not govern politically.	The Crown acts mainly on ministerial advice and according to convention.
Responsible government	The executive must retain the confidence of the House of Commons.	A government that loses confidence may resign or seek an election.
Fusion of powers	Executive leaders are drawn from Parliament rather than institutionally separated from it.	The government can dominate legislation when it controls a Commons majority.
Conventions and restraint	Many powers are limited by accepted practice rather than legal prohibition.	Political actors are expected not to use every legal power to its maximum extent.
Devolution	Parliament has transferred decision-making authority to territorial institutions.	Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland govern many domestic matters.

PARLIAMENTARY SOVEREIGNTY IS LEGAL, NOT UNLIMITED POLITICAL POWER

- Parliament can legally change constitutional rules through an Act.
- In practice, elections, party competition, public opinion, devolved politics, international commitments, rights expectations, and courts constrain what a government can successfully do.
- A proposal may be legally possible but politically costly or difficult to implement.

Advantages and Criticisms of an Uncodified Constitution

Possible Advantages	Possible Criticisms
Flexibility allows institutions to adapt without a difficult amendment process.	A government with a Commons majority may change important rules too easily.
Gradual development can preserve stability and political continuity.	Citizens may find constitutional rules unclear or difficult to locate.
Conventions can respond to circumstances that written rules did not predict.	Conventions depend on self-restraint and may weaken when political conflict becomes intense.
Parliament can respond quickly to crisis or reform demands.	Rights and institutional checks may be less legally protected than in systems with entrenched constitutions.

The Constitutional Monarchy

The monarch is the formal head of state, while the prime minister is the head of government. The distinction separates national representation from daily partisan leadership. King Charles III is the current monarch, but the Crown remains politically impartial and normally acts on the advice of elected ministers.

Formal or Ceremonial Function	How It Operates in Practice
Appoints the prime minister	Convention requires appointment of the person most able to command House of Commons confidence.
Opens Parliament and delivers the King's Speech	The speech is written by the government and presents its legislative programme.
Grants Royal Assent	Assent is required for a bill to become law but is granted by convention.
Appoints ministers and senior officials	Appointments are normally made on the advice of the prime minister or other authorised bodies.
Represents the state	The monarch performs ceremonial, diplomatic, charitable, and national-unity functions.
Meets the prime minister	Private audiences allow the monarch to be informed and to advise, encourage, and warn without public political intervention.

WHY THE MONARCHY SURVIVES

- It provides continuity above party competition.
- Its political powers are controlled by convention and ministerial responsibility.
- It separates symbolic leadership from government leadership.
- Critics nevertheless question inherited office, public expense, transparency, and the place of monarchy in a democratic society.

Parliament: The Legislature

The UK Parliament consists of the Crown, the House of Commons, and the House of Lords. In normal political practice, the Commons is the decisive chamber because it is elected, controls confidence and supply, and determines which party forms the government. The Lords revises legislation and provides scrutiny but cannot permanently block most Commons bills.

House of Commons and House of Lords Compared

Feature	House of Commons	House of Lords
Membership	650 elected Members of Parliament (MPs).	Membership is not fixed; it consists mainly of appointed life peers and 26 Church of England bishops.
Selection	MPs are elected from single-member constituencies using first past the post.	Most members are appointed for life; remaining hereditary membership ended in 2026.
Democratic legitimacy	Direct electoral mandate.	Indirect legitimacy based on expertise, experience, revision, and scrutiny.
Government formation	The government must command Commons confidence.	Does not determine which party forms the government.
Financial power	Controls taxation and public spending; money bills begin here.	Cannot amend money bills and may delay them for only one month.
Legislative power	Can ultimately override the Lords under the Parliament Acts for most public bills.	Can revise and normally delay most bills for up to about one year.
Scrutiny	Questions, debates, select committees, opposition days, and votes.	Detailed legislative revision, specialist debate, committees, and questioning of ministers.
Party control	Usually strong because whips enforce government and opposition discipline.	Often less disciplined; crossbenchers and life tenure can increase independence.

How a Bill Becomes an Act

Stage	Main Purpose
Policy preparation	Departments may use consultation, green papers, white papers, and draft bills.
First reading	Formal introduction of the bill.
Second reading	Debate on the bill's main principles.
Committee stage	Detailed line-by-line examination and amendments.
Report stage	The whole chamber considers further amendments.
Third reading	Final debate and vote in that chamber.
Other House	The bill passes through similar stages in the other chamber.
Consideration of amendments	The two Houses agree on identical text, sometimes through "ping-pong".
Royal Assent	The monarch formally approves the bill, which becomes an Act of Parliament.

WHY GOVERNMENT BILLS USUALLY PASS

- The government normally controls the Commons timetable.
- A majority government has enough MPs to win votes.
- Party whips organise attendance and voting.
- Ministers can use confidence arguments to maintain party unity.
- The House of Lords can revise and delay but normally cannot defeat a determined Commons majority permanently.

Parliamentary Scrutiny

Parliament does more than pass laws. It examines government policy, spending, administration, and ministerial conduct. The effectiveness of scrutiny depends on the size of the government majority, party unity, committee independence, media attention, and the political importance of the issue.

Instrument	How It Checks Government	Main Limitation
Prime Minister's Questions	MPs question the prime minister publicly each sitting Wednesday.	The session is highly partisan and answers may be brief or evasive.
Departmental Question Time	Ministers answer oral and written questions about departmental work.	Government controls much information and may give limited answers.
Select committees	Cross-party MPs investigate departments, spending, and policy implementation.	Committees expose problems but usually cannot force government to accept recommendations.
Opposition days and debates	Opposition parties choose topics and challenge government policy.	Many motions are politically important but not legally binding.
Votes and rebellions	Government MPs can threaten defeat if they oppose policy.	Strong party discipline makes large rebellions uncommon.
House of Lords revision	Peers propose amendments and require the Commons to reconsider.	The Commons can normally prevail in the end.
Independent watchdogs	Auditors, commissioners, and ombudsman institutions investigate conduct and administration.	Their influence often depends on publicity and political response.

The Executive: Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Government

The executive is not separate from Parliament in the manner of a presidential system. The prime minister and senior ministers are normally MPs or members of the House of Lords. They lead the government while remaining accountable to Parliament. The executive therefore sits inside the legislature and usually controls it through the governing party.

The Prime Minister

The prime minister is the central political leader of the United Kingdom. Voters do not elect the prime minister directly. They elect MPs, and the monarch appoints the person able to command the confidence of the House of Commons. Usually this is the leader of the party with the most Commons seats.

Source of Prime-Ministerial Power	Why It Matters
Party leadership	The prime minister usually controls the governing party and its parliamentary majority.
Appointment power	The prime minister selects and dismisses ministers and shapes the Cabinet.
Control of government priorities	Number 10 coordinates the legislative programme, public communication, and major policy choices.
Patronage and promotion	Political careers often depend on prime-ministerial confidence.
Public visibility	The prime minister is the main national spokesperson and election campaign leader.

Source of Prime-Ministerial Power	Why It Matters
Foreign and security leadership	The prime minister is central to diplomacy, defence decisions, and crisis management.
Dissolution advice	The prime minister can request an early election under the restored dissolution system.

Limits on the Prime Minister

Limit	How It Constrains Leadership
House of Commons confidence	A government unable to maintain majority support cannot govern effectively.
Cabinet and senior ministers	Major resignations or internal opposition can weaken authority.
Governing party	Backbench rebellions and leadership rules can remove a prime minister between elections.
Public opinion and elections	Unpopular policies reduce electoral support and party confidence.
Courts and law	Executive action must have legal authority and can be reviewed.
Devolved governments	Territorial institutions control important policy areas and can resist UK-wide initiatives.
Media and civil society	Investigative reporting, protests, and organised interests shape political costs.
Economic and international conditions	Markets, fiscal limits, security commitments, and global events restrict policy choice.

A CURRENT EXAMPLE OF PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

- Keir Starmer became prime minister after Labour won the 2024 general election.
- Andy Burnham became Labour leader and prime minister on 20 July 2026 after returning to the House of Commons and winning the party leadership.
- No new general election was required because the government continued to command a Commons majority.
- The example shows that British voters elect MPs, not a prime minister directly.

Cabinet and Collective Responsibility

The Cabinet contains the most senior ministers. It approves major policy, coordinates departments, manages political conflict, and presents the government as a united body. In practice, detailed decisions may be made in Cabinet committees, departments, bilateral meetings, or the prime minister's office.

Principle	Meaning
Collective ministerial responsibility	Ministers must publicly support agreed government policy or resign.
Individual ministerial responsibility	A minister is accountable to Parliament for the work and conduct of the department.
Cabinet confidentiality	Private disagreement is protected so that public decisions appear united.
Ministerial accountability	Ministers answer questions, defend policy, correct errors, and may resign for serious failure or misconduct.

The Civil Service

The permanent civil service advises ministers and carries out government policy. Civil servants are expected to serve governments of different parties with integrity, honesty, objectivity, and impartiality. Senior officials provide continuity and administrative expertise, while elected ministers decide political priorities and remain accountable for policy.

MINISTER AND CIVIL SERVANT COMPARED

- Minister: politically appointed, usually partisan, makes policy choices, answers to Parliament, and normally changes when government changes.
- Civil servant: permanent and politically impartial, provides evidence and advice, manages implementation, and serves successive governments.
- Potential tension: ministers want rapid political delivery, while officials may emphasise legality, evidence, cost, and administrative feasibility.

Courts, Rights, and the Rule of Law

The judiciary is independent from the political executive. The UK Supreme Court, established in 2009, is the final court of appeal for civil cases across the United Kingdom and for criminal cases from England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It decides major legal and constitutional questions, but parliamentary sovereignty limits its power over Acts of Parliament.

Judicial Power	What Courts Can Do	Important Limit
Judicial review of executive action	Determine whether ministers and public bodies acted lawfully, fairly, and within their powers.	Courts review legality, not whether a policy is politically wise.
Statutory interpretation	Interpret the meaning and application of Acts of Parliament.	Courts must respect clear legislative language.
Human Rights Act review	Interpret legislation consistently with protected rights where possible and issue a declaration of incompatibility where it is not.	A declaration does not automatically invalidate an Act of Parliament.
Devolution cases	Decide whether devolved institutions acted within their legal powers.	The legal framework itself was created by Parliament.
Common-law development	Develop legal principles through precedent.	Parliament can change common law through legislation.

Rights Protection

Rights protection comes from common law, statutes, the Human Rights Act 1998, the European Convention on Human Rights, and political expectations. The United Kingdom does not have an entrenched constitutional bill of rights that allows courts to strike down Acts of Parliament. Rights therefore depend on a combination of legal interpretation, parliamentary responsibility, public pressure, and political accountability.

COURT POWER IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

- United Kingdom: courts can review executive action but normally cannot cancel an Act of Parliament.
- United States: courts can invalidate legislation that violates the codified constitution.
- Iran: judicial institutions operate alongside unelected religious bodies that review law and political eligibility.
- AP comparison: always connect judicial power to the larger constitutional structure.

Devolution and the Territorial State

The United Kingdom is legally a unitary state because Parliament remains sovereign. However, since the late 1990s, important powers have been devolved to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Devolution created a system that resembles federalism in some respects but remains constitutionally different because the legal authority of the devolved institutions comes from Acts of Parliament.

Territory	Institution	Important Powers	Electoral or Governing Feature
Scotland	Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government	Health, education, justice, housing, environment, transport, and significant tax powers.	129 MSPs elected through the Additional Member System.

Territory	Institution	Important Powers	Electoral or Governing Feature
Wales	Senedd Cymru and Welsh Government	Health, education, local government, transport, environment, and other domestic matters.	Since 2026, 96 members are elected through a closed-list proportional system.
Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive	Health, education, justice, agriculture, local affairs, and other devolved matters.	90 MLAs elected by STV; mandatory power-sharing reflects communal divisions.
England	UK Parliament, UK Government, local authorities, and devolved mayoral institutions	Many England-only domestic matters are decided at Westminster; local and regional powers vary.	England has no separate national parliament, creating an asymmetrical union.

Devolved and Reserved Powers

Commonly Devolved	Commonly Reserved to the UK Level
Health services	Defence and national security
Education and training	Foreign affairs
Housing and local government	Immigration and nationality
Environment and agriculture	The constitution and the Crown
Culture and many transport matters	Most macroeconomic and monetary policy
Justice and policing in Scotland and Northern Ireland	Major aspects of trade and international relations

DEVOLUTION IS NOT THE SAME AS FEDERALISM

- Federalism constitutionally divides sovereignty between national and regional governments.
- British devolution transfers powers from a sovereign Parliament to territorial institutions.
- The devolved institutions possess strong political legitimacy, so removing their powers may be legally possible but politically extremely difficult.
- The arrangement is asymmetrical because each territory has different institutions, powers, history, and party competition.

Northern Ireland and Power-Sharing

Northern Ireland has a distinctive system created by the 1998 Belfast or Good Friday Agreement. The Assembly is elected by proportional representation, and the Executive is designed to include major parties from unionist and nationalist communities. Some decisions require cross-community support. These rules seek inclusion and peace, but deep disagreement can suspend or weaken the institutions.

National Identity and the Future of the Union

The United Kingdom contains overlapping British, English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Northern Irish, regional, religious, and ethnic identities. Scottish independence, Northern Ireland's constitutional future, England's unequal regional development, and post-Brexit relations keep the territorial constitution politically important.

Political Parties and the Party System

Britain was traditionally described as a two-party system dominated by Labour and the Conservatives. First past the post still gives the two largest parties an advantage in Commons seats, but the country now has a multiparty electorate. Liberal Democrats, nationalist parties, Greens, Reform UK, and Northern Irish parties can influence elections, coalition possibilities, and territorial politics.

Party or Group	General Position and Support	Political Importance
Labour Party	Centre-left; linked historically to organised labour and public services.	Formed the majority government after the 2024 election and remained the governing party in July 2026.

Party or Group	General Position and Support	Political Importance
Conservative Party	Centre-right; supports markets, national sovereignty, security, and unionism, with internal ideological factions.	Main opposition party after the 2024 election.
Liberal Democrats	Liberal, pro-civil liberties, pro-devolution, and generally pro-European.	Often benefits from local concentration and tactical voting; became the third-largest Commons party after 2024.
Scottish National Party	Centre-left Scottish nationalism and independence.	Dominant force in Scottish nationalist politics and a key challenge to the union.
Reform UK	Right-populist, strongly Eurosceptic, restrictive on immigration, and critical of established parties.	Can win substantial votes while receiving fewer seats under FPTP unless support is geographically concentrated.
Green parties	Environmentalism, social progressivism, and electoral reform.	Influence issue agendas and can win where support is concentrated.
Northern Irish parties	Organised mainly around unionist, nationalist, and cross-community positions.	Their competition reflects Northern Ireland's distinctive constitutional and communal politics.
Plaid Cymru	Welsh nationalism and social-democratic policies.	Promotes Welsh autonomy and national identity.

First Past the Post

The House of Commons is elected from single-member constituencies. Each voter chooses one candidate, and the candidate with the most votes wins even without a majority. The system is simple and usually produces clear constituency representatives, but national seat totals may differ greatly from national vote shares.

Likely Effect of FPTP	Explanation
Single-party government	A party can win a Commons majority without receiving a majority of the national vote.
Seat bonus for large parties	Labour and Conservatives can convert geographically efficient votes into many seats.
Penalty for dispersed parties	A party may win millions of votes but few seats if it finishes second across many constituencies.
Regional advantage	Nationalist and regional parties can win seats when support is concentrated.
Tactical voting	Voters may support a less-preferred candidate to defeat another party.
Safe seats	Some constituencies are dominated by one party, reducing local competitiveness.
Strong constituency link	Each area has one identifiable MP responsible for representing all constituents.

CURRENT COMMONS SNAPSHOT — 28 JULY 2026

- The House of Commons has 650 seats.
- Labour holds 403 seats and forms a majority government with a working majority of 166.
- The Conservatives hold 117 seats and the Liberal Democrats 71.
- The remaining seats are divided among independents, nationalist parties, Reform UK, Greens, Northern Irish parties, smaller groups, the Speaker, and one vacancy.
- Seat totals can change between elections because of resignations, suspensions, defections, and by-elections.

Party Discipline and Whips

Party whips organise parliamentary voting, communicate party expectations, and maintain attendance. Strong discipline helps the government pass legislation, but it can reduce the independence of ordinary MPs. Backbench revolts become important when the governing majority is small or when an issue divides the party deeply.

General Elections and Government Formation

1. The prime minister requests dissolution and an election is held under legal election rules.
2. Voters elect one MP in each of 650 constituencies using first past the post.
3. The party able to command Commons confidence forms the government.
4. A clear majority normally produces single-party government.
5. A hung Parliament may produce a coalition, a minority government, or a confidence-and-supply agreement.
6. The monarch's role is formal and guided by the requirement to appoint a leader who can command confidence.

BRITAIN USES MORE THAN ONE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

- House of Commons: first past the post.
- Scottish Parliament: Additional Member System.
- Northern Ireland Assembly: Single Transferable Vote.
- Senedd Cymru: closed-list proportional representation from 2026.
- Different systems produce different levels of proportionality, party competition, and coalition government.

Political Participation, Civil Society, and Political Culture

Citizens participate through elections, parties, campaigns, pressure groups, petitions, demonstrations, trade unions, professional organisations, charities, social movements, and media debate. Participation is generally open and protected, but it varies by age, education, income, region, and political trust.

Form of Participation	Example	Political Effect
Voting	General, local, devolved, mayoral, and referendum voting.	Selects representatives and gives governments democratic legitimacy.
Party activity	Membership, canvassing, donations, leadership elections, and candidate selection.	Shapes party programmes and political careers.
Pressure groups	Trade unions, business associations, professional bodies, environmental and rights organisations.	Provide information, organise interests, lobby government, and influence public debate.
Protest and social movements	Marches, strikes, online mobilisation, and civil-disobedience campaigns.	Increase the political cost of ignoring an issue.
Petitions and consultations	Parliamentary petitions and government consultations.	Place issues on the agenda but do not guarantee policy change.
Media participation	Journalism, commentary, broadcast interviews, and social media.	Frames issues, exposes misconduct, and influences public opinion.
Contacting representatives	Constituency surgeries, letters, email, and organised local campaigns.	Connects individual concerns to MPs and local government.

Referendums

Referendums are not a routine constitutional requirement, but governments have used them for major constitutional questions. Important examples include membership of the European Community in 1975, the alternative-vote proposal in 2011, Scottish independence in 2014, and European Union membership in 2016. Referendums can provide direct legitimacy, but they may simplify complex issues and create conflict between popular mandates and parliamentary responsibility.

Political Culture and Social Cleavages

Feature or Cleavage	Political Significance
Pragmatism and gradualism	Reform often occurs through compromise and adaptation rather than complete constitutional replacement.
Class	Class identities weakened but still influence attitudes toward taxation, welfare, public services, and parties.

Feature or Cleavage	Political Significance
Region and nation	England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have different party systems and constitutional preferences.
Age and education	Generational and educational differences affect views on Europe, social values, climate, and parties.
Urban–rural and regional inequality	Economic geography shapes political dissatisfaction and party competition.
Religion and community in Northern Ireland	Unionist and nationalist identities remain central to representation and power-sharing.
Immigration and multiculturalism	Diversity enriches society but also produces debates over identity, integration, citizenship, and public services.
Declining deference	Citizens are less likely to accept elite authority without scrutiny, increasing demands for transparency and accountability.

The Media

Britain has a competitive media environment that includes public-service broadcasting, commercial television, newspapers, digital platforms, and social media. The media can expose wrongdoing and inform citizens, but ownership concentration, partisan reporting, misinformation, and algorithm-driven communication raise concerns about fairness and trust.

Public Policy, Political Economy, and Change

British politics combines market capitalism with a large welfare state. Governments disagree about taxation, public ownership, regulation, labour rights, welfare, and public spending, but major institutions such as the National Health Service have broad public importance. Economic policy has changed repeatedly as governments responded to industrial decline, inflation, globalisation, financial crisis, austerity, regional inequality, and new technology.

Period or Approach	Main Development	Political Consequence
Post-1945 settlement	Welfare expansion, nationalisation, economic management, and creation of the NHS.	Built performance legitimacy around social citizenship and public services.
Thatcher era after 1979	Privatisation, deregulation, limits on trade unions, and stronger market competition.	Changed the economy and weakened older class and industrial structures.
New Labour after 1997	Accepted much of the market economy while increasing public-service spending and introducing constitutional reforms.	Combined economic moderation with social and institutional change.
Post-2008 period	Financial crisis, austerity, slow productivity growth, and pressure on services.	Increased regional and generational dissatisfaction.
Brexit era	Withdrawal from EU institutions and changes in trade, regulation, immigration, and territorial politics.	Strengthened formal parliamentary sovereignty but created new economic and political tensions.
Current challenges	Cost of living, housing, health-service capacity, climate transition, migration, defence, and regional growth.	Tests government performance, trust, and the capacity of the state.

THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE AS A POLITICAL INSTITUTION

- The NHS is a public-service system and a major symbol of post-war social citizenship.
- Governments are judged on waiting times, staffing, access, funding, and quality.
- Its popularity limits how far governments can move toward a fully private model.
- Health is devolved, so policy differs across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Britain and the European Union

The United Kingdom joined the European Communities in 1973, voted to leave the European Union in 2016, and formally left in 2020. Brexit restored independent national control in areas previously

governed through EU law, but it did not remove economic interdependence. Trade, Northern Ireland, regulation, migration, and cooperation remain major issues. The European Union is examined separately in Chapter Three.

Legitimacy, Stability, and Contemporary Challenges

British democracy is stable because elections are competitive, governments change peacefully, courts are independent, civil society is active, and political authority is broadly accepted. Stability does not mean the absence of conflict. Trust can decline when citizens believe institutions are unrepresentative, government is ineffective, or political rules benefit insiders.

Challenge	Why It Matters
Executive dominance	A government with a large majority can control Parliament and change major rules with limited formal restraint.
Electoral disproportionality	Seat totals may not closely reflect national vote shares, raising questions about representation.
House of Lords legitimacy	Appointment brings expertise but lacks direct democratic election and creates concerns about size and patronage.
Territorial pressure	Scottish independence and Northern Ireland’s constitutional debate challenge the unity of the state.
Low trust and political scandal	Perceived dishonesty weakens confidence in parties, ministers, and democratic procedures.
Regional and social inequality	Unequal opportunity and public services can reduce performance legitimacy.
Rights and constitutional uncertainty	Debates continue over the Human Rights Act, judicial power, protest rules, and executive prerogative.
Party-system fragmentation	FPTP can produce large majorities even as voters divide among many parties.
Policy capacity	Complex problems require coordination across departments, devolved governments, local authorities, and private actors.

A BALANCED JUDGMENT

Britain combines democratic legitimacy and institutional stability with a highly flexible constitution. The same flexibility that permits gradual reform can also allow a strong executive to dominate. The system works best when political actors respect conventions, Parliament scrutinises effectively, courts enforce legality, parties remain competitive, and governments maintain public trust.

Britain in Comparative Perspective

Concept	Britain	Useful Comparison
Regime type	Liberal parliamentary democracy.	Russia and China restrict meaningful national competition; Iran combines elections with religious oversight.
Executive–legislative relation	Fusion of powers; government emerges from Parliament.	Mexico and Nigeria use presidential systems with separately elected executives.
Territorial organisation	Unitary state with extensive asymmetrical devolution.	Russia, Mexico, and Nigeria are formally federal.
Constitution	Uncodified and flexible; parliamentary sovereignty.	Most course countries possess codified constitutions.
Judiciary	Independent courts review executive legality but do not normally strike down Acts of Parliament.	Constitutional courts elsewhere may possess formal invalidation power, although actual independence varies.
Electoral system	FPTP for the Commons, with other systems in devolved elections.	Mexico uses mixed legislative elections; Nigeria uses plurality presidential and legislative elections.
Party system	Multiparty electorate shaped by FPTP and regional parties.	China has one-party rule; Russia has dominant-party authoritarianism; Iran restricts candidate eligibility.

Concept	Britain	Useful Comparison
Legitimacy	Elections, constitutional continuity, rights, and government performance.	All regimes seek legitimacy, but the balance of democratic procedure, ideology, religion, nationalism, and performance differs.

Key Terms

Term	Meaning
Constitutional monarchy	A system in which a monarch is head of state but political power is exercised through constitutional government.
Parliamentary sovereignty	The principle that Parliament is the supreme legal authority.
Uncodified constitution	A constitution not contained in one superior written document.
Convention	A politically binding practice that is not normally enforced by courts.
Responsible government	An executive that must maintain the confidence of the elected legislature.
Fusion of powers	A system in which executive leaders are members of the legislature.
Collective responsibility	The rule that ministers publicly support agreed government policy or resign.
Backbencher	An MP or peer who is not a government minister or leading opposition spokesperson.
Whip	A party official who organises parliamentary discipline and voting.
First past the post	A single-member plurality system in which the candidate with the most votes wins.
Hung Parliament	A House of Commons in which no party has an overall majority.
Devolution	Transfer of decision-making authority from the centre to territorial institutions.
Reserved power	A policy area retained by the UK Parliament and Government.
Sewel Convention	The expectation that the UK Parliament will not normally legislate on devolved matters without consent.
Judicial review	Court examination of whether public authorities acted lawfully.
Declaration of incompatibility	of A judicial statement that legislation conflicts with protected rights without automatically invalidating the Act.
Royal prerogative	Historic Crown powers now mainly exercised by ministers.
Select committee	A cross-party parliamentary group that investigates government and policy.
Power-sharing	An arrangement in which rival communities or parties share executive authority.
Crossbencher	A House of Lords member who does not belong to a political party group.

THE CHAPTER ON ONE PAGE

- State: the United Kingdom is a unitary state with extensive asymmetrical devolution.
- Regime: liberal parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.
- Constitution: uncodified, flexible, and centred on parliamentary sovereignty and rule of law.
- Executive: the prime minister and Cabinet emerge from Parliament and depend on Commons confidence.
- Legislature: the elected Commons dominates; the appointed Lords revises and scrutinises.
- Judiciary: independent courts review executive legality but normally cannot strike down Acts of Parliament.
- Elections: first past the post elects MPs; devolved institutions use more proportional systems.
- Parties: Labour and Conservatives remain central, but Britain has a multiparty electorate and regional party systems.
- Participation: elections, parties, pressure groups, protest, media, and referendums.
- Challenges: executive dominance, electoral disproportionality, Lords reform, devolution, trust, inequality, and post-Brexit governance.

Facts to Remember

1. The official country is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
2. The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy.
3. The constitution is partly written but not codified in one document.
4. Parliamentary sovereignty makes Parliament the supreme legal authority.
5. The monarch is head of state; the prime minister is head of government.
6. The government must maintain the confidence of the House of Commons.
7. There are 650 elected MPs in the House of Commons.
8. Commons elections use first past the post in single-member constituencies.
9. The House of Lords mainly contains appointed life peers and 26 bishops; hereditary membership ended in 2026.
10. The Lords can normally delay most Commons bills for about one year and money bills for one month.
11. The prime minister selects ministers and leads the Cabinet, government programme, and governing party.
12. Collective responsibility requires ministers to defend agreed policy publicly or resign.
13. The permanent civil service is expected to be politically impartial.
14. The UK Supreme Court began work in 2009.
15. Courts can review executive action but normally cannot invalidate Acts of Parliament.
16. Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland possess devolved legislatures and governments.
17. Devolution is not identical to federalism because Parliament remains legally sovereign.
18. Northern Ireland uses STV and mandatory power-sharing.
19. Different parts of the UK use different electoral systems.
20. Brexit restored powers from the EU but did not remove economic or political interdependence.

Multiple-Choice Practice

1. Which principle makes the UK Parliament the supreme legal authority?
(A) Judicial supremacy
(B) Parliamentary sovereignty
(C) Federalism
(D) Separation of powers
2. The British constitution is best described as:
(A) entirely unwritten
(B) codified and entrenched
(C) partly written and uncoded
(D) based only on judicial decisions
3. The prime minister normally remains in office because the prime minister:
(A) is directly elected by the public
(B) commands the confidence of the House of Commons
(C) serves a fixed presidential term
(D) is chosen by the Supreme Court
4. Which institution determines which party forms the national government?
(A) House of Lords
(B) Supreme Court
(C) House of Commons
(D) Scottish Parliament
5. First past the post is most likely to produce:
(A) exact proportionality between votes and seats
(B) single-member constituencies and seat bonuses for large parties
(C) mandatory coalition government
(D) direct election of the prime minister
6. Which statement about the House of Lords is accurate in 2026?

- (A) It is entirely elected.
 - (B) It can permanently veto all Commons bills.
 - (C) Hereditary membership has ended, and the chamber mainly contains life peers and bishops.
 - (D) It chooses the prime minister.
7. Collective ministerial responsibility requires ministers to:
- (A) vote against all government legislation
 - (B) publicly support agreed policy or resign
 - (C) remain politically neutral
 - (D) serve for life
8. Which is a power of British courts?
- (A) Automatically invalidate any Act of Parliament
 - (B) Remove the monarch
 - (C) Review whether executive action is lawful
 - (D) Appoint Cabinet ministers
9. Devolution differs from federalism because:
- (A) devolved institutions have no political importance
 - (B) Parliament remains legally sovereign
 - (C) federal states have no regional governments
 - (D) devolution always produces independence
10. Which electoral system is used for the Northern Ireland Assembly?
- (A) First past the post
 - (B) Single Transferable Vote
 - (C) Two-round majority
 - (D) Electoral college
11. Which source of the constitution is not normally enforceable as law?
- (A) Statute
 - (B) Convention
 - (C) Court judgment
 - (D) Act of Parliament
12. A hung Parliament occurs when:
- (A) the monarch refuses Royal Assent
 - (B) no party has an overall Commons majority
 - (C) the Supreme Court closes Parliament
 - (D) the House of Lords is equally divided
13. Which institution is most directly responsible for detailed cross-party scrutiny of government departments?
- (A) Select committees
 - (B) Royal Household
 - (C) Party conferences alone
 - (D) Devolved courts
14. Which arrangement best illustrates fusion of powers?
- (A) The prime minister and ministers sit in Parliament.
 - (B) Judges are elected separately.
 - (C) The monarch controls taxation.
 - (D) Scotland conducts foreign policy independently.
15. Which development most clearly increased territorial autonomy within the UK?
- (A) The Parliament Act 1911
 - (B) The creation of devolved legislatures after 1998
 - (C) The Life Peerages Act 1958
 - (D) The introduction of PMQs

Answer Key and Brief Explanations

Question	Answer	Reason
1	B	Parliamentary sovereignty gives Parliament supreme legal authority.
2	C	The constitution is written in many sources but not codified in one superior document.
3	B	The prime minister must command Commons confidence.
4	C	Government formation depends on the elected House of Commons.
5	B	FPTP uses single-member constituencies and often rewards large or geographically concentrated parties.
6	C	The 2026 reform ended hereditary membership; life peers and bishops remain.
7	B	Cabinet unity requires public support for agreed policy or resignation.
8	C	Courts can review whether ministers and public bodies acted lawfully.
9	B	Devolved powers come from Acts of a legally sovereign Parliament.
10	B	Northern Ireland elects MLAs through STV.
11	B	Conventions are politically binding but generally not legal rules enforced by courts.
12	B	A hung Parliament has no single party with a Commons majority.
13	A	Select committees conduct sustained, cross-party departmental scrutiny.
14	A	Executive leaders are also legislators in a parliamentary system.
15	B	Devolution transferred substantial domestic authority to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Concept Application Questions

1. Define parliamentary sovereignty. Describe one way it strengthens government flexibility. Explain one way political forces can still constrain Parliament.
2. Define collective ministerial responsibility. Describe one action a minister may take when unable to support government policy. Explain one way the principle strengthens executive leadership.
3. Define devolution. Describe one devolved institution in the United Kingdom. Explain one reason devolution can both strengthen and challenge the union.
4. Define first past the post. Describe one effect on small parties. Explain one reason a regionally concentrated party may perform better than a nationally dispersed party.

Country Comparison Questions

1. Identify one difference between executive selection in Britain and Mexico. Describe one consequence of the difference for executive–legislative relations.
2. Identify one difference between territorial organisation in Britain and Nigeria. Describe one similarity in the political importance of regional identity.
3. Identify one difference between judicial power in Britain and Iran. Explain one consequence for limits on political authority.
4. Identify one similarity between political parties in Britain and Mexico. Describe one difference in how electoral systems convert votes into legislative seats.

Data Analysis Practice

Imagine a table shows national vote share and Commons seat share for Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Reform UK, Greens, and the Scottish National Party. Complete the following tasks:

- Identify the party with the largest positive difference between seat share and vote share.
- Identify one party whose seat share is much lower than its vote share.
- Describe how geographic concentration can affect results under first past the post.
- Explain why the data does not by itself prove that voters prefer a two-party system.
- Identify one additional measure that would help evaluate electoral competitiveness.

Argument Essay Questions

1. Develop an argument about whether parliamentary systems provide more effective executive leadership than presidential systems.
2. Develop an argument about whether an uncodified constitution strengthens or weakens democratic accountability.
3. Develop an argument about whether first past the post is more likely to promote stability or fair representation.
4. Develop an argument about whether devolution strengthens the legitimacy of a unitary state.
5. Develop an argument about whether the House of Lords should remain appointed or become elected.

Model Concept Application Response

Parliamentary sovereignty is the principle that the UK Parliament is the supreme legal authority and may make or repeal any law. It gives government flexibility because a parliamentary majority can change ordinary and constitutional rules without meeting a special amendment threshold. However, Parliament is politically constrained by elections, public opinion, courts enforcing legality, devolved institutions, party unity, and the cost of violating accepted conventions. Therefore, legal sovereignty does not mean that a government can exercise unlimited practical power without political consequences.

Why This Response Works

- It gives a direct definition of the concept.
- It identifies a clear institutional advantage: constitutional flexibility.
- It distinguishes legal authority from practical political power.
- It explains several mechanisms of constraint rather than merely listing them.
- It uses Britain-specific evidence and comparative political vocabulary.

Final Revision Checklist

- Know the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom.
- Explain why the British constitution is uncodified rather than unwritten.
- Identify the main sources of the constitution.
- Define parliamentary sovereignty, rule of law, convention, and responsible government.
- Distinguish head of state from head of government.
- Know the political role and limits of the monarchy.
- Compare the Commons and Lords in selection, legitimacy, and power.
- Know the stages through which a bill becomes an Act.
- Explain how Parliament scrutinises government.
- Explain the sources and limits of prime-ministerial power.
- Define collective and individual ministerial responsibility.
- Distinguish ministers from permanent civil servants.
- Explain the role and limits of the UK Supreme Court.
- Explain rights protection under parliamentary sovereignty.
- Distinguish devolution from federalism.
- Know the main institutions and electoral systems of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
- Explain the special importance of power-sharing in Northern Ireland.
- Know how first past the post works and its main political effects.
- Identify the major British parties and the importance of regional parties.
- Explain the roles of pressure groups, media, referendums, and civil society.
- Connect public services and economic performance with legitimacy.
- Be ready to compare Britain with presidential, federal, authoritarian, and religious-regime cases.

Source Note

The chapter's institutional descriptions and the current snapshot were checked against official materials from College Board AP Central, UK Parliament, GOV.UK, the Electoral Commission, the UK

Supreme Court, the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Royal Household. Current office-holder and parliamentary figures are dated 28 July 2026; they may change before the next edition.

Chapter Three: The European Union

Supranational authority, shared sovereignty, common institutions, and political integration in Europe

The European Union is neither a single country nor a traditional international organisation. It is a political and economic union in which member states have agreed through treaties to exercise some powers jointly. In certain policy areas, EU institutions can make rules that are binding across all member countries. In other areas, national governments retain control and cooperate only when they choose to agree.

The EU developed from post-war cooperation among six Western European states into a union of 27 members. Its central achievements include a large single market, common rules, freedom of movement, a directly elected Parliament, and a shared currency used by most member states. Yet integration remains incomplete. National governments still control most taxation, welfare, defence, education, and constitutional arrangements.

The most important question is therefore not whether Europe has become one state. It has not. The key question is how authority is divided among national governments, citizens, courts, and EU institutions. This chapter explains that unusual system in simple comparative terms.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- The meaning of European integration and supranationalism
- The historical development of the European Union
- Membership, enlargement, and differentiated integration
- The main EU institutions and how they are selected
- The process through which EU laws are made
- EU law, the Court of Justice, and national sovereignty
- The single market, euro, Schengen area, and major policies
- Elections, political groups, participation, and democratic legitimacy
- Brexit and the continuing debate over integration
- Contemporary challenges and comparative-government connections

THE BIG PICTURE

The European Union is a system of shared rule. Member states remain sovereign countries, but they have transferred or pooled authority in selected areas. The EU combines supranational institutions, which can act above national governments, with intergovernmental institutions, in which national leaders negotiate with one another. Its strength comes from law, economic interdependence, and common institutions; its main weakness is the continuing tension between common European action and national democratic control.

Understanding the European Union

The EU must be understood as a special form of political organisation. It has treaties, laws, a court, a parliament, a central bank, a budget, and a civil service. However, it does not possess all the powers of a national government. Member states retain their own constitutions, armies, police systems, education systems, taxation structures, political parties, and international identities.

Supranationalism and Intergovernmentalism

Concept	Meaning	EU Example
Supranationalism	Member states give an institution authority to make or enforce decisions above the national level.	The European Commission proposes laws; the Court of Justice interprets EU law; agreed EU rules bind member states.

Concept	Meaning	EU Example
Intergovernmentalism	National governments cooperate but keep control over major decisions.	Heads of government negotiate in the European Council; unanimity is often required in foreign policy and treaty change.
Pooled sovereignty	States exercise authority jointly because collective action may be more effective than separate action.	Common trade rules and the single market increase the bargaining power of all members.
Delegated authority	Governments assign specific tasks to an institution with defined powers.	The European Central Bank manages monetary policy for the euro area.
Multi-level governance	Policy is shaped at local, regional, national, and European levels.	Environmental, agricultural, trade, and regional-development policies involve several levels at once.

THE EU IS NOT A FEDERAL STATE

- A federal state has a constitution that permanently divides sovereignty between national and regional governments.
- The EU is based on treaties made by sovereign states. Its powers are limited to areas granted by those treaties.
- Member states remain independent countries and may leave the Union under the treaty withdrawal procedure.
- However, the EU resembles a federation in areas where common laws, courts, currency, and institutions are strong.

Why States Integrate

Reason	Explanation
Peace and security	Economic interdependence and common institutions were intended to make another major European war less likely.
Economic benefits	A larger market reduces barriers to trade, investment, work, and movement.
Global influence	European states can negotiate more effectively in trade, climate policy, and regulation when acting together.
Shared problems	Migration, environmental damage, organised crime, energy, and cross-border business cannot be managed by one state alone.
Democratic consolidation	Membership requirements have encouraged stable institutions, rights, and rule-of-law reforms in applicant states.
Regional support	Common funds can assist agriculture, infrastructure, poorer regions, research, and economic transition.

Historical Development of European Integration

European integration did not begin with a plan to create a complete European government. It developed step by step. Cooperation in one area created pressure for cooperation in other areas. New treaties expanded both membership and policy responsibilities.

Date	Development	Political Importance
1950	Schuman Declaration	Proposed joint management of French and West German coal and steel as a foundation for peace.
1951–1952	European Coal and Steel Community	Six states placed important war industries under common management.
1957–1958	Treaties of Rome	Created the European Economic Community and Euratom, expanding economic cooperation.
1973	First enlargement	The United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark joined the European Communities.
1979	First direct European Parliament elections	Citizens began electing European representatives directly.
1985	Schengen Agreement	Participating states began removing internal border controls.

Date	Development	Political Importance
1986–1987	Single European Act	Accelerated the creation of the single market and expanded majority voting.
1992–1993	Maastricht Treaty	Created the European Union, EU citizenship, and the path toward monetary union.
1999 and 2002	Introduction of the euro	The common currency began electronically and later circulated as notes and coins.
2004	Large eastern enlargement	Ten states joined, extending the Union into Central and Eastern Europe.
2007	Bulgaria and Romania join	Membership expanded further into south-eastern Europe.
2009	Lisbon Treaty enters into force	Strengthened Parliament, changed voting rules, and created more permanent leadership positions.
2013	Croatia joins	Croatia became the newest member state.
2016	United Kingdom votes to leave	The referendum challenged the assumption that integration would always deepen.
2020	United Kingdom leaves the EU	Membership fell from 28 to 27 states.
2025	Bulgaria and Romania fully enter Schengen	Internal land-border controls with other Schengen countries were removed.
2026	Bulgaria adopts the euro	The euro area expands to 21 EU member states.

A SIMPLE INTEGRATION CHAIN

- Coal and steel cooperation → wider economic cooperation
- Customs union → single market
- Single market → common regulation and stronger institutions
- Economic integration → monetary union for participating states
- Enlargement → more diversity and greater decision-making complexity

Important Treaties

Treaty	Main Contribution
Treaty of Paris	Established the European Coal and Steel Community.
Treaties of Rome	Created the European Economic Community and Euratom.
Single European Act	Set the objective of completing the single market and expanded qualified-majority voting.
Maastricht Treaty	Created the European Union, introduced EU citizenship, and prepared economic and monetary union.
Amsterdam Treaty	Expanded cooperation in justice, internal affairs, employment, and foreign policy.
Nice Treaty	Changed institutional rules before major enlargement.
Lisbon Treaty	Strengthened Parliament, clarified EU competences, expanded majority voting, and introduced the citizens' initiative and permanent European Council presidency.

Membership, Enlargement, and Differentiated Integration

The EU currently has 27 member states. Membership requires a European state to meet political, economic, and legal conditions and to accept the body of EU law. Accession is deliberately slow because a new member must be capable of applying common rules and because every existing member must agree to enlargement.

The Copenhagen Criteria

Requirement	What It Means
Political institutions	Stable democracy, rule of law, human rights, and protection of minorities.

Requirement	What It Means
Market economy	A functioning economy able to compete within the EU market.
Ability to accept membership obligations	Capacity to apply EU law, follow common policies, and support the Union's objectives.
Administrative and judicial capacity	Public institutions and courts capable of implementing and enforcing the common rules.

The Accession Process

1. A European state applies for membership.
2. EU institutions assess whether the state can become a candidate.
3. Negotiations examine many areas of law and public policy.
4. The applicant changes domestic law and institutions to apply EU rules.
5. An accession treaty must be agreed and ratified by the applicant and all member states.
6. The state becomes a member on the date fixed by the treaty.

ENLARGEMENT: BENEFITS AND DIFFICULTIES

- Benefits: expands peace, trade, investment, democratic rules, mobility, and the Union's international influence.
- Difficulties: increases economic differences, budget pressures, migration concerns, language diversity, and the number of governments required for agreement.
- Political tension: some governments support rapid enlargement for security reasons, while others demand deeper reform before adding more members.

Not Every Member Participates in Every Policy

European integration is differentiated. All members belong to the Union and accept its treaties, but participation in some arrangements varies. This allows cooperation to deepen without requiring every state to move at the same speed.

Area	Current Position	Political Meaning
European Union	27 member states.	The basic political and legal union.
Euro area	21 EU states use the euro as their official currency.	Monetary policy is centralised through the European Central Bank.
Schengen area	29 countries: 25 EU states and 4 non-EU states.	Most internal border checks are removed among participating countries.
Defence and foreign policy	All states cooperate, but national governments retain strong control.	Integration is weaker where sovereignty and security are most sensitive.
National opt-outs and special arrangements	Certain states retain exceptions in selected policy areas.	The EU permits flexibility but becomes more complex.

Treaty Principles and the Division of Powers

The EU may act only where member states have granted it authority through treaties. This is the principle of conferral. The treaties also guide whether action should occur at European or national level and how far EU action may go.

Principle	Meaning
Conferral	The EU possesses only the powers that member states have granted through treaties.
Subsidiarity	In areas that are not exclusively European, action should occur at EU level only when objectives cannot be achieved sufficiently by member states acting alone.
Proportionality	EU action should not go beyond what is necessary to achieve treaty objectives.
Rule of law	EU institutions and member states must act under treaties and law, with independent courts interpreting legal obligations.

Principle	Meaning
Loyal cooperation	Member states and EU institutions must assist one another in carrying out treaty obligations.

Types of EU Competence

Type	Meaning	Examples
Exclusive competence	Only the EU may legislate in the area, although member states implement the rules.	Customs union, common commercial policy, competition rules for the single market, monetary policy for euro-area states.
Shared competence	Both the EU and member states may legislate, but national action is limited where common EU rules exist.	Single market, environment, agriculture, transport, energy, consumer protection.
Supporting or coordinating competence	The EU supports national action but does not replace national control.	Education, culture, tourism, public health support, industry.
Primarily national competence	Member states retain the main authority.	Most taxation, welfare design, policing structures, education systems, and constitutional arrangements.

A USEFUL TEST

When studying any EU policy, ask three questions: Who has legal competence? Which institution proposes or decides? Does the decision require majority voting or agreement by every government?

The Institutions of the European Union

EU power is deliberately divided among institutions representing different sources of legitimacy. The Parliament represents citizens. The Council of the European Union and European Council represent national governments. The Commission represents the common European interest. The Court of Justice protects EU law. This creates checks and balances, but it also makes decision-making difficult to understand.

Institution	Composition or Selection	Main Role
European Council	Heads of state or government, its permanent president, and the Commission president.	Sets broad political direction and resolves major questions; normally does not pass ordinary legislation.
Council of the European Union	One national minister from each member state, meeting in policy-specific formations.	Represents governments; shares legislative and budgetary power with Parliament.
European Commission	A college of 27 Commissioners, one from each member state, approved through the EU appointment process.	Proposes most legislation, enforces EU law, administers policies and budget, and represents the EU in important external areas.
European Parliament	720 members directly elected every five years through proportional systems.	Shares legislative and budgetary authority, supervises the Commission, and represents EU citizens.
Court of Justice of the European Union	Independent judges appointed by member governments under treaty rules.	Interprets EU law and ensures common application across member states.
European Central Bank	Independent central bank led by its governing bodies and national central-bank governors.	Manages the euro and monetary policy, with price stability as its central responsibility.
European Court of Auditors	One member from each EU state.	Checks whether EU revenue and spending are lawful and properly managed.

The European Council

The European Council brings together the most powerful national political leaders. It sets the Union's overall priorities, negotiates difficult compromises, responds to crises, and makes important appointments. Its influence is greatest when treaty change, enlargement, war, economic crisis, migration, or major budget questions require agreement among national governments.

DO NOT CONFUSE THE THREE COUNCILS

- European Council: national heads of state or government; sets broad direction.
- Council of the European Union: national ministers; jointly makes EU laws with Parliament.
- Council of Europe: a separate international organisation concerned with human rights; it is not an EU institution.

The Council of the European Union

The Council changes composition according to the subject. Finance ministers meet for economic matters, agriculture ministers for farming policy, and so on. Each government therefore speaks through the minister responsible for the policy under discussion. The rotating presidency, held by a member state for six months, organises much of the Council's work, except in foreign affairs.

Voting Method	When It Is Used	Meaning
Qualified majority	The main method for ordinary EU legislation.	At least 55% of member states, currently 15 of 27, representing at least 65% of the EU population must support the proposal.
Unanimity	Sensitive matters such as many tax, treaty, enlargement, and foreign-policy decisions.	Every participating government must agree; one government can block the decision.
Simple majority	Mainly procedural matters.	A majority of member states decides.

The European Commission

The Commission is the closest EU institution to an executive and administrative body. It normally has the right to initiate legislation, supervises implementation, manages programmes, negotiates in areas such as trade, and may take legal action when a member state fails to apply EU law. Commissioners are expected to serve the Union rather than act as national delegates.

Commission Function	Example
Legislative initiative	Drafts proposals for new common rules.
Guardian of the treaties	Investigates possible violations and may bring a case before the Court of Justice.
Policy administration	Manages programmes, competition policy, common funds, and implementation.
Budget execution	Administers the EU budget under parliamentary and auditing oversight.
External representation	Negotiates trade matters and represents the EU in areas of common competence.
Regulatory leadership	Develops detailed standards in fields such as markets, digital policy, environment, and consumer protection.

The European Parliament

The European Parliament is the only directly elected EU institution. Its 720 members are elected every five years. Elections are organised nationally using proportional representation, but members usually sit in Europe-wide political groups rather than in national delegations. The Parliament cannot normally introduce legislation on its own, yet its law-making, budgetary, appointment, and oversight powers have increased greatly since the early Communities.

Parliamentary Power	How It Is Used
Legislative power	Amends, approves, or rejects legislation jointly with the Council under the ordinary legislative procedure.
Budgetary power	Shares authority over the EU budget with the Council.
Commission approval	Elects or approves key Commission leadership and votes on the Commission as a body.
Oversight	Questions Commissioners, holds hearings, creates committees of inquiry, and may pass a motion of censure.

Parliamentary Power	How It Is Used
Representation	Provides direct electoral participation and channels ideological conflict through political groups.
Petitions and public access	Receives citizen petitions and offers a forum for public debate on EU policy.

The Court of Justice of the European Union

The Court of Justice ensures that EU law is interpreted consistently. National courts may ask it for a preliminary ruling when a case raises a question of EU law. The Court may also decide actions brought by institutions, governments, companies, or individuals under treaty rules. Its decisions helped establish the practical authority of EU law inside national legal systems.

Legal Principle	Meaning
Primacy	Where valid EU law conflicts with national law in an area of EU competence, EU law takes priority in application.
Direct effect	Certain clear EU rules may create rights that individuals can rely on before national courts.
Uniform interpretation	EU law should have the same meaning across all member states.
Preliminary ruling	A national court asks the EU court to clarify the meaning or validity of EU law.
Infringement procedure	A member state may face legal proceedings for failing to fulfil EU obligations.

WHY THE COURT MATTERS

The EU has no single European police force that routinely compels every state to obey. Its authority depends heavily on national courts, administrations, and governments applying common law. The Court of Justice creates consistency by giving authoritative legal interpretations.

How European Union Laws Are Made

Most EU legislation is adopted through the ordinary legislative procedure. The Commission proposes a law, and the Parliament and Council must agree on the same text. This arrangement balances citizen representation with national-government representation.

Stage	Main Action
1. Agenda and consultation	A problem is identified and the Commission gathers evidence, consults interests, and prepares a proposal.
2. Commission proposal	The Commission formally submits draft legislation.
3. Parliament position	Parliamentary committees and the full Parliament examine, amend, and vote.
4. Council position	National ministers and officials negotiate and vote.
5. Agreement	The Parliament and Council must approve a common text, sometimes after further readings and conciliation.
6. Publication and implementation	The act is published, becomes law, and is implemented by EU and national authorities.
7. Enforcement and review	The Commission, courts, Parliament, national administrations, and stakeholders monitor application.

ORDINARY LEGISLATIVE PROCEDURE IN ONE LINE

Commission proposes → Parliament represents citizens → Council represents governments → both must agree → member states and EU bodies implement the law.

Types of EU Legal Acts

Legal Act	Effect
Regulation	Binding in its entirety and directly applicable across the EU.
Directive	Sets a required result but leaves national authorities to choose the form and method of implementation.
Decision	Binding on those to whom it is addressed, such as a state, company, or individual.
Recommendation	Expresses a preferred course of action but is not legally binding.
Opinion	States an institutional view without creating a binding legal duty.

Lobbying and Interest Representation

Because EU rules affect a very large market, many interests try to influence policy. Businesses, trade unions, environmental organisations, regional governments, professional associations, consumer groups, and civil-society networks provide information and advocate particular outcomes. Access is often greatest during the Commission's consultation and drafting stage and during committee work in Parliament and Council negotiations.

WHY INTEREST GROUPS MATTER

- EU institutions need specialised information across many technical policy areas.
- Organised interests can represent affected groups and improve policy knowledge.
- Wealthy and well-organised actors may gain greater access than diffuse public interests.
- Transparency rules and registers attempt to make influence more visible.

The Single Market and Economic Integration

The single market is the economic centre of European integration. It aims to remove internal barriers and create common rules so that economic activity can take place across national borders. Common standards reduce the need for different products and business practices in each member state.

The Four Freedoms

Freedom	Meaning	Political Importance
Goods	Products may move across member states without internal customs duties.	Creates a large market and requires common product and competition rules.
Services	Businesses and professionals may provide services across borders under common rules.	Encourages competition but creates regulatory debates.
Capital	Money and investment may move across member states.	Supports investment and financial integration while increasing exposure to financial shocks.
People	EU citizens may move, reside, study, and work in other member states subject to treaty rules.	Creates opportunities but also produces debate about labour markets, welfare, and national identity.

Major Economic Policies

Policy	Purpose
Competition policy	Prevents cartels, abuse of market power, and certain forms of state aid that distort competition.
Common commercial policy	Allows the EU to negotiate trade agreements and apply a common external trade policy.
Common Agricultural Policy	Supports agricultural production, rural areas, and food-related objectives.
Cohesion policy	Uses funds to reduce regional inequality and support infrastructure, skills, and development.
Consumer protection	Creates shared standards for products, contracts, safety, privacy, and market conduct.

Policy	Purpose
Environmental and climate policy	Sets common requirements because pollution and climate effects cross national borders.
Research and regional investment	Supports cooperation, innovation, education exchange, and economic transition.

The Euro and Monetary Union

The euro is the common currency of 21 EU member states as of July 2026. The European Central Bank in Frankfurt manages monetary policy for the euro area and aims to maintain price stability. National governments continue to control most taxation and spending, which means monetary policy is centralised while fiscal policy remains largely national.

Advantage of the Euro	Possible Difficulty
Removes currency-conversion costs inside the euro area.	A single interest-rate policy may not fit every national economy.
Makes prices easier to compare.	Member states cannot devalue a national currency during economic difficulty.
Reduces exchange-rate uncertainty.	Financial problems in one state can affect the whole currency area.
Strengthens the international role of the European economy.	Common monetary policy requires coordination of national budgets and banking rules.
Symbolises deeper integration.	Decisions by an independent central bank may appear distant from voters.

MONETARY POLICY AND FISCAL POLICY

- Monetary policy: interest rates and money conditions; managed centrally for the euro area by the European Central Bank.
- Fiscal policy: taxation, spending, and national budgets; still mainly controlled by member-state governments.
- Central tension: one currency connects different economies that retain separate political and fiscal systems.

Freedom of Movement, Schengen, and Migration

Freedom of movement is an EU citizenship right, while Schengen is an arrangement that removes routine internal border controls among participating countries. The two ideas overlap but are not identical. Some non-EU countries belong to Schengen, and not every EU state participates fully.

Concept	Meaning
EU free movement	Rights of EU citizens to move, live, study, and work across member states under common rules.
Schengen area	A zone of 29 countries without routine internal border checks, supported by common external-border and visa rules.
External border	The boundary between the Schengen area and non-participating countries, where common control standards apply.
Asylum policy	Rules concerning protection claims by people fleeing persecution or serious danger.
Migration policy	Management of legal migration, irregular entry, returns, integration, labour needs, and border security.

WHY MIGRATION IS POLITICALLY DIFFICULT

- Benefits and costs are distributed unevenly among countries, regions, and social groups.
- Border states may carry greater responsibility for initial arrivals.
- Governments disagree over burden-sharing, enforcement, humanitarian protection, and labour needs.
- National identity and sovereignty make compromise politically sensitive.
- Internal free movement depends on effective cooperation at the common external border.

Democracy, Elections, and Political Participation

The EU receives democratic authority both directly and indirectly. Citizens directly elect the European Parliament. National governments are elected domestically and then participate in the European Council and Council. National parliaments ratify treaties and monitor some European decisions. The system therefore combines several democratic channels rather than relying on one European government elected in a single contest.

European Parliament Elections

Feature	Explanation
Election cycle	Elections take place every five years.
Representation	Seats are distributed among states by degressive proportionality: larger states have more seats, but smaller states receive more seats relative to population.
Electoral system	Every member state uses proportional representation, although national rules differ.
Political groups	MEPs organise mainly by ideology across countries rather than only by nationality.
Second-order character	Many voters use European elections to judge national governments or support smaller parties.
Accountability role	The Parliament helps select and supervise the Commission and shares law-making authority.

Other Forms of Participation

Method	How It Works
National elections	Voters choose the governments that represent their state in the Council and European Council.
European Citizens' Initiative	One million citizens from the required spread of member states may invite the Commission to consider proposing legislation.
Petitions to Parliament	Citizens and residents may petition on matters within EU activity that affect them.
Civil-society organisations	Groups lobby, campaign, provide expertise, and mobilise support across borders.
National and European courts	Individuals may rely on applicable EU rights and legal rules.
Referendums	Some states use referendums on treaties, membership, or major integration questions.
Public consultation	The Commission and other institutions seek comments while preparing policy.

The Democratic Deficit Debate

Argument That the EU Is Democratic	Argument That a Democratic Deficit Exists
The Parliament is directly elected and possesses substantial legislative and budgetary power.	The Commission has a central agenda-setting role but is not directly elected by all voters.
National ministers in the Council come from elected governments.	Council negotiations may be complex and difficult for citizens to follow.
Treaties are ratified by democratic states according to national procedures.	Citizens may not clearly know which institution is responsible for a decision.

Argument That the EU Is Democratic	Argument That a Democratic Deficit Exists
Courts protect law and rights against arbitrary action.	Legal and technocratic decision-making can appear distant from ordinary political competition.
European elections allow ideological competition across the Union.	European elections often have weaker public attention than national elections.
Multiple institutions prevent excessive concentration of power.	The division of authority can make accountability unclear.

A BALANCED JUDGMENT

The EU is not undemocratic, but its democracy is indirect, divided, and difficult to understand. It contains elected institutions and governments, yet citizens often struggle to identify responsibility. The central challenge is less the absence of elections than the distance and complexity separating voters from European decisions.

Political Conflict within the European Union

European politics is shaped by both traditional left–right conflict and a second division over integration. Parties disagree about markets, welfare, climate, migration, and regulation, but they also disagree about whether authority should move toward European institutions or remain with national governments.

Political Position	General View
Federalist or strongly integrationist	Supports stronger common institutions and wider European authority.
Moderate integrationist	Supports the Union and practical cooperation but accepts important national limits.
Eurosceptic reformist	Accepts membership while seeking fewer common powers or major institutional change.
Hard Eurosceptic	Opposes membership or supports withdrawal from important EU arrangements.
National-populist	Often links opposition to integration with national sovereignty, migration control, and cultural identity.
Green and transnational	Often supports strong European action on climate, rights, and cross-border problems.

Theories of Integration

Theory	Main Idea
Functionalism	States begin with practical cooperation in limited areas where common action produces clear benefits.
Neofunctionalism	Integration in one sector creates pressure for integration in connected sectors, a process called spillover.
Intergovernmentalism	National governments remain the decisive actors and integrate only when domestic interests support agreement.
Federalism	Integration should move toward a constitutional division of authority between European and national levels.
Multi-level governance	No single level controls the system; decisions emerge through interaction among European, national, regional, and local actors.

Brexit: Withdrawal from the European Union

The United Kingdom’s withdrawal demonstrated that European integration is reversible. In the 2016 referendum, a majority voted to leave. The UK formally left the EU on 31 January 2020, followed by a new relationship based on agreements rather than membership.

Cause or Argument	Explanation
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Cause or Argument	Explanation
Sovereignty	Leave supporters argued that laws and policy should be controlled by UK institutions.
Migration and borders	Free movement became a major issue in public debate.
Economic regulation	Critics argued that common rules limited independent policy; supporters stressed market access and investment.
Party conflict	Long-running divisions inside major parties increased pressure for a referendum.
Political distrust	Some voters used the referendum to reject political and economic elites.
National identity	Different understandings of British and European identity shaped attitudes.
Regional division	Voting patterns differed strongly across nations, regions, age groups, and education levels.

Effects of Brexit

Area	Effect
Legal authority	EU law no longer has the same general domestic position in the United Kingdom.
Trade	New arrangements replaced automatic participation in the single market and customs union.
Migration	EU free movement ceased to operate in the UK in its previous form.
Northern Ireland	Avoiding a hard border on the island required special trade and regulatory arrangements.
British territorial politics	Different referendum outcomes in Scotland and Northern Ireland intensified constitutional debate.
EU politics	The Union lost a major member but preserved the legal possibility of voluntary withdrawal.
Sovereignty debate	Formal national control increased in some areas, while economic interdependence continued to restrict complete autonomy.

BREXIT AND COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT

Brexit shows that sovereignty is not simply possessed or lost. Governments choose between legal autonomy and the benefits of common rules. Leaving a supranational organisation may increase formal independence while reducing influence over rules that still affect national trade and security.

External Relations and Common Action

The EU acts internationally through trade policy, development assistance, diplomacy, sanctions, enlargement, and regulatory influence. It is especially powerful where member states have granted common authority, such as trade. It is less unified in defence and foreign policy, where national governments retain strong control and unanimity is often required.

Area	EU Strength	Main Limitation
Trade	Large single market gives the EU major negotiating power.	Agreement among members is needed on sensitive trade choices.
Regulation	Companies often follow EU standards to gain access to the market.	External influence depends on economic size and effective enforcement.
Diplomacy and sanctions	Common positions can increase influence.	Different national interests may delay or weaken agreement.
Defence	Cooperation, funding, and coordination have expanded.	Armies and most defence decisions remain national; NATO remains central for many members.
Enlargement	Membership incentives encourage institutional and legal reform.	Long negotiations and political vetoes may frustrate applicants.
Development and humanitarian action	Common funding creates substantial international capacity.	Programmes must balance humanitarian, strategic, and national priorities.

Contemporary Challenges

The EU's future depends on whether common institutions can respond to problems while maintaining national consent and democratic legitimacy. The Union often becomes stronger during crisis, but crisis also exposes disagreements among governments and citizens.

Challenge	Why It Matters
Security and war in Europe	Requires defence cooperation, sanctions, energy security, financial support, and strategic unity.
Enlargement	New members may strengthen security and democracy but require institutional, budgetary, and voting reforms.
Migration and asylum	Member states disagree over border control, humanitarian obligations, relocation, and responsibility.
Rule of law	The Union must decide how to respond when national institutions are accused of weakening judicial independence or democratic checks.
Economic competitiveness	Europe faces pressure from technological change, energy costs, ageing populations, and global competition.
Climate transition	Common action is necessary, but costs and benefits differ across regions, industries, and households.
Digital regulation	The EU seeks common standards for data, platforms, artificial intelligence, competition, and consumer protection.
Fiscal solidarity	Member states disagree over shared borrowing, budget transfers, debt rules, and responsibility for economic adjustment.
Democratic legitimacy	Citizens demand effective common action while also protecting national control and accountability.
Nationalist and populist politics	Parties critical of integration can influence national governments and European decision-making.

THE CENTRAL TENSION

Many problems demand more European cooperation, but greater cooperation requires member states and citizens to accept more common authority. The EU must therefore produce effective results without appearing to remove decisions from democratic national control.

Legitimacy, Stability, and Comparative Perspective

The EU draws legitimacy from peace, prosperity, rights, law, elections, national consent, and policy performance. It is stable because treaties create predictable rules and because member states gain major benefits from cooperation. Yet legitimacy can weaken when citizens experience economic hardship, perceive unequal treatment, or believe that decisions are remote and unaccountable.

Source of Legitimacy	Possible Weakness
Peace and reconciliation	Younger generations may treat peace as normal rather than as an achievement of integration.
Economic performance	Growth and benefits are uneven among states, regions, and social groups.
Rule of law and rights	Disputes arise over who should judge national constitutional practices.
Direct elections	Parliamentary elections do not create one clearly identifiable European government.
National government consent	Domestic governments may blame the EU for decisions they helped make.
Common problem-solving	Slow compromise can make the Union appear ineffective during emergencies.
European identity	National identities remain stronger for many citizens.

The EU in Comparative Perspective

Concept	European Union	Useful Comparison
Political system	A treaty-based supranational and intergovernmental union, not a sovereign state.	Course countries possess national sovereignty and complete constitutional systems.
Executive leadership	Divided among the Commission, European Council, Council, and national governments.	Britain has a prime minister leading a parliamentary executive; Mexico and Nigeria have presidents.
Legislature	Parliament and Council jointly make most laws.	National legislatures normally represent citizens or territories within one state.
Judiciary	The Court of Justice ensures common interpretation of EU law.	National supreme or constitutional courts interpret a country's own constitutional order.
Territorial authority	Member states grant defined powers by treaty and retain broad national authority.	Federal states constitutionally divide power between national and regional governments.
Citizenship	EU citizenship adds rights to national citizenship but does not replace it.	National citizenship is normally the primary political membership.
Sovereignty	Pooled or delegated in selected areas.	National governments generally claim final authority within their territory.
Exit	A member state may withdraw under treaty procedures.	Regions of a state normally lack an automatic constitutional right to leave.

A BALANCED JUDGMENT

The European Union is strongest as a legal and economic order and weaker as a unified political state. It can make binding rules and shape a vast market, but it depends on member governments for taxation, security, administration, and public consent. Its survival rests on a continuing bargain: states accept common limits because cooperation produces benefits they cannot easily secure alone.

Key Terms

Term	Meaning
European integration	The process through which European states develop common institutions, rules, and policies.
Supranationalism	Authority exercised by an institution above the national level in powers granted by states.
Intergovernmentalism	Cooperation controlled mainly by negotiations among national governments.
Pooled sovereignty	Joint exercise of authority by states through common rules and institutions.
Conferral	The rule that the EU may act only in powers granted by treaty.
Subsidiarity	The principle that decisions should be made at the lowest effective level.
Proportionality	The rule that EU action should not exceed what is necessary.
Acquis	The body of EU rights, obligations, law, and policy that members must accept.
Single market	An integrated market based on free movement and common rules.
Four freedoms	Free movement of goods, services, capital, and people.
Euro area	The EU member states that use the euro.
Schengen area	Countries participating in an area without routine internal border checks.
European Council	The institution of national heads of state or government that sets broad political direction.
Council of the European Union	National ministers who share legislative and budgetary authority with Parliament.
European Commission	The institution that proposes most laws, administers policy, and enforces EU obligations.
European Parliament	The directly elected EU institution that shares legislative and budgetary power.
Qualified majority voting	Council voting based on support from a required share of states and population.
Unanimity	A decision rule requiring every participating government to agree.
Regulation	An EU legal act binding and directly applicable in all member states.

Term	Meaning
Directive	An EU act requiring a result while allowing national choice over implementation.
Primacy	The priority of valid EU law over conflicting national law in areas of EU competence.
Direct effect	The capacity of certain EU rules to create rights enforceable in national courts.
Democratic deficit	The claim that EU decision-making is too distant, complex, or weakly accountable to voters.
Euroscepticism	Opposition to some or all aspects of European integration.
Brexit	The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.
Spillover	The idea that integration in one policy area creates pressure for integration in related areas.

THE CHAPTER ON ONE PAGE

- Nature: the EU is a treaty-based political and economic union, not a sovereign state.
- Membership: 27 states; enlargement requires democracy, rule of law, a market economy, and capacity to apply EU law.
- Power: authority is divided among European institutions and national governments.
- European Council: sets broad direction; Council of the EU: represents national ministers.
- Commission: proposes most laws, administers policy, and enforces treaty obligations.
- Parliament: 720 directly elected MEPs; shares law-making and budgetary power.
- Court: interprets EU law and promotes uniform application.
- Law-making: Commission proposes; Parliament and Council agree.
- Economy: single market based on four freedoms; 21 members use the euro.
- Borders: Schengen has 29 countries, including 25 EU states and 4 non-EU states.
- Legitimacy: based on elections, national consent, law, peace, rights, and performance.
- Main tension: effective common action versus national sovereignty and democratic control.

Facts to Remember

1. The European Union currently has 27 member states.
2. Six founding states created the European Coal and Steel Community in the early 1950s.
3. The Treaties of Rome created the European Economic Community.
4. The Maastricht Treaty created the European Union and prepared monetary union.
5. The Lisbon Treaty strengthened Parliament and reformed institutional procedures.
6. The EU is based on treaties voluntarily accepted by member states.
7. The European Council sets broad political direction but normally does not pass ordinary legislation.
8. The Council of the European Union represents national governments through ministers.
9. The European Commission normally initiates EU legislation and enforces EU law.
10. The European Parliament has 720 directly elected members.
11. Most legislation requires agreement between Parliament and the Council.
12. Qualified majority normally requires 55% of states representing 65% of the EU population.
13. The Court of Justice provides authoritative interpretations of EU law.
14. Regulations are directly applicable; directives require national implementation.
15. The single market is based on movement of goods, services, capital, and people.
16. The euro is used by 21 EU states as of July 2026.
17. The European Central Bank manages monetary policy for the euro area.
18. The Schengen area contains 29 countries, of which 25 are EU members.
19. EU citizenship supplements rather than replaces national citizenship.
20. The United Kingdom formally left the EU in 2020.
21. Foreign and defence policy remains more intergovernmental than trade and market policy.
22. The democratic deficit debate concerns distance, complexity, and unclear accountability.
23. Member states retain most taxation, welfare, education, policing, and constitutional powers.

24. The EU combines supranational and intergovernmental decision-making.

Practice

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which statement best describes the European Union?
 - (A) A unitary state
 - (B) A military alliance only
 - (C) A treaty-based political and economic union with supranational and intergovernmental features
 - (D) A federation with no national governments
2. Which institution normally proposes new EU legislation?
 - (A) European Commission
 - (B) European Court of Auditors
 - (C) European Council alone
 - (D) National supreme courts
3. The European Parliament primarily represents:
 - (A) national judges
 - (B) EU citizens
 - (C) only national executives
 - (D) central banks
4. The Council of the European Union is composed of:
 - (A) national ministers
 - (B) elected judges
 - (C) regional governors only
 - (D) commissioners selected by Parliament alone
5. Which body sets the EU's broad political direction?
 - (A) European Council
 - (B) Court of Auditors
 - (C) European Central Bank
 - (D) Committee of the Regions
6. Under the ordinary legislative procedure, most laws require agreement between:
 - (A) the Commission and Court only
 - (B) Parliament and the Council
 - (C) national courts and the ECB
 - (D) the European Council and Council of Europe
7. A regulation is best described as:
 - (A) non-binding advice
 - (B) binding and directly applicable
 - (C) a national constitutional amendment
 - (D) a treaty requiring a referendum in every state
8. A directive:
 - (A) sets a result but allows national choice over implementation
 - (B) is never legally binding
 - (C) applies only to non-EU states
 - (D) is issued only by the ECB
9. The principle of subsidiarity means that:
 - (A) all decisions must be centralised
 - (B) decisions should be taken at the lowest effective level
 - (C) national law always overrides EU law
 - (D) every state must use the euro
10. Which institution manages monetary policy for euro-area countries?
 - (A) European Parliament
 - (B) European Central Bank

- (C) European Council
(D) Court of Justice
11. The single market is associated with free movement of:
(A) goods, services, capital, and people
(B) armies, constitutions, taxes, and elections
(C) judges, monarchs, borders, and treaties
(D) only agricultural products
12. Qualified majority voting in the Council normally combines:
(A) judicial and legislative majorities
(B) a state threshold and a population threshold
(C) national referendums and presidential approval
(D) unanimity and direct election
13. Which statement about the Schengen area is correct?
(A) It is identical to the EU.
(B) It includes EU and some non-EU states.
(C) Every EU state uses the euro because of Schengen.
(D) It is the EU legislature.
14. Brexit refers to:
(A) the creation of the euro
(B) the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU
(C) the Lisbon Treaty
(D) the enlargement of Schengen
15. The democratic deficit argument mainly claims that EU decision-making is:
(A) too military
(B) too local
(C) distant, complex, or weakly accountable
(D) controlled only by voters
16. Which policy area is most strongly supranational?
(A) Common trade policy
(B) National education systems
(C) National constitutional design
(D) Local policing structure
17. Which institution gives authoritative interpretations of EU law?
(A) Court of Justice of the European Union
(B) Council of Europe
(C) National cabinet alone
(D) European Court of Auditors
18. Which theory argues that integration in one area encourages integration in connected areas?
(A) Neofunctionalism
(B) Isolationism
(C) Presidentialism
(D) Patrimonialism

Answer Key and Brief Explanations

Question	Answer	Reason
1	C	The EU combines common institutions with continuing national sovereignty.
2	A	The Commission normally has the power to initiate legislation.
3	B	MEPs are directly elected to represent citizens.
4	A	The Council consists of national ministers meeting by policy area.
5	A	Heads of state or government in the European Council set broad direction.
6	B	Parliament and Council jointly adopt most EU laws.

Question	Answer	Reason
7	B	Regulations are binding and directly applicable.
8	A	Directives set required outcomes and are transposed into national law.
9	B	Subsidiarity favours the lowest level capable of acting effectively.
10	B	The ECB manages the euro and euro-area monetary policy.
11	A	The four freedoms are goods, services, capital, and people.
12	B	Qualified majority combines state and population thresholds.
13	B	Schengen includes 25 EU and 4 associated non-EU countries.
14	B	Brexit is the UK withdrawal from the EU.
15	C	The debate focuses on distance, complexity, and unclear accountability.
16	A	Trade policy is an area of strong common EU competence.
17	A	The Court of Justice interprets EU law.
18	A	Neofunctionalism explains integration through spillover.

Concept Application Questions

1. Define supranationalism. Describe one EU institution that exercises supranational authority. Explain one reason member states accept this authority.
2. Define pooled sovereignty. Describe one policy area in which EU members pool authority. Explain one possible cost of pooling sovereignty.
3. Define subsidiarity. Describe one policy area that remains mainly national. Explain how subsidiarity may increase legitimacy.
4. Define democratic deficit. Describe one institution that provides democratic representation. Explain one reason accountability may still remain unclear.
5. Define qualified majority voting. Describe its state and population requirements. Explain one reason it is more efficient than unanimity.

Comparative Questions

1. Identify one difference between the European Union and a federal state such as Nigeria or Mexico. Explain one consequence for sovereignty.
2. Identify one similarity between the European Parliament and the British House of Commons. Describe one major difference in government formation.
3. Identify one difference between the European Commission and the British Cabinet. Explain one consequence for democratic accountability.
4. Compare the role of the Court of Justice with the role of a national supreme or constitutional court.
5. Compare EU pooled sovereignty with national executive authority in one AP course country.

Data Analysis Practice

Imagine a table shows the 27 EU member states, their populations, the number of European Parliament seats, and whether they use the euro and belong to Schengen. Complete the following tasks:

- Identify one state that belongs to the EU but does not use the euro.
- Describe the relationship between population and Parliament seats.
- Explain why smaller states receive more seats per citizen than the largest states.
- Identify one reason euro-area membership and EU membership are not identical.
- Explain why the table demonstrates differentiated integration.

Argument Essay Questions

1. Develop an argument about whether supranational institutions strengthen or weaken national democracy.
2. Develop an argument about whether the European Union should use qualified majority voting in more policy areas.
3. Develop an argument about whether the European Parliament provides sufficient democratic legitimacy for EU law-making.

4. Develop an argument about whether economic integration naturally produces political integration.
5. Develop an argument about whether enlargement strengthens or weakens the European Union.
6. Develop an argument about whether Brexit increased meaningful British sovereignty.

Model Concept Application Response

Supranationalism is a system in which states give a common institution authority to make or enforce decisions above the national level. The European Court of Justice demonstrates supranational authority because it gives binding interpretations of EU law that national courts must apply within areas of EU competence. Member states accept this authority because a common market cannot operate reliably if each country interprets the same rules differently. The cost is that national institutions cannot always choose a separate legal approach after common rules have been agreed.

Why This Response Works

- It defines the concept directly.
- It names a specific EU institution.
- It explains the practical reason for common authority.
- It includes both a benefit and a sovereignty cost.
- It connects institutional design with policy effectiveness.

Final Revision Checklist

- Explain why the EU is neither a state nor a normal international organisation.
- Define supranationalism, intergovernmentalism, pooled sovereignty, and multi-level governance.
- Know the major stages from the ECSC to the Lisbon Treaty and Brexit.
- Explain the Copenhagen criteria and accession process.
- Distinguish EU, euro-area, and Schengen membership.
- Define conferral, subsidiarity, and proportionality.
- Know the composition and role of the European Council.
- Distinguish the European Council from the Council of the European Union.
- Know the Commission's powers of initiative, administration, and enforcement.
- Know how the European Parliament is elected and what powers it exercises.
- Explain the role of the Court of Justice and the principles of primacy and direct effect.
- Explain the ordinary legislative procedure.
- Distinguish regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations, and opinions.
- Know the four freedoms of the single market.
- Explain the difference between monetary and fiscal policy in the euro area.
- Know the role of the European Central Bank.
- Explain free movement and the Schengen area.
- Identify forms of citizen participation and interest-group influence.
- Explain the democratic deficit debate in balanced terms.
- Know the main arguments for and against further integration.
- Explain causes and consequences of Brexit.
- Be ready to compare the EU with parliamentary, presidential, federal, unitary, democratic, and authoritarian systems.

Source Note

Institutional facts and the July 2026 snapshot were checked against official EU and College Board sources. Membership, euro-area, and Schengen figures may change in later editions.

Chapter Four: Government and Politics in Russia

A powerful presidency, managed elections, centralized federalism, and the legacy of Soviet rule

Russia is formally a federal, semi-presidential republic under the Constitution of 1993. Citizens elect a president and a national legislature, political parties compete for seats, and the Constitution lists civil rights and a division of powers. In practice, however, political authority is concentrated around the president, the presidential administration, the security services, and a loyal governing elite.

The Russian Federation emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The difficult transition of the 1990s produced economic insecurity, powerful business oligarchs, conflict between the president and parliament, and public disappointment with democratic reform. Under Vladimir Putin, the state restored order and recentralized power, but it also reduced meaningful electoral competition, weakened independent institutions, and restricted opposition activity.

For AP Comparative Government, Russia is important because its formal constitution and its actual political practice are not the same. The country has elections, federalism, courts, parties, and a parliament, but these institutions normally operate within limits established by the executive. Understanding this difference is the key to the chapter.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Historical foundations: tsarist rule, the Soviet system, the collapse of the USSR, and the Putin era
- The Constitution of 1993 and Russia's semi-presidential system
- The presidency, prime minister, government, presidential administration, and security elite
- The State Duma, Federation Council, judiciary, and law-making process
- Federalism, regional government, governors, and centralization
- Presidential and legislative elections, dominant-party politics, and opposition groups
- Political culture, civil society, media, protest, and civil liberties
- Oil and gas, oligarchs, state capitalism, sanctions, and economic development
- Key terms, revision notes, multiple-choice questions, and AP-style free-response practice

THE BIG PICTURE

Russia has the institutions of a constitutional republic, but power is distributed very unevenly. The president dominates the executive, influences the legislature and courts, controls appointments, and relies on security institutions and a dominant party. Elections provide public participation and legitimacy, but rules, media access, candidate registration, and state resources strongly favor the governing system. Russia is therefore best understood as a highly centralized and increasingly personalist authoritarian regime operating through formally democratic institutions.

Historical Foundations of the Russian Political System

Russia's present system cannot be understood without its long history of centralized authority. Tsarist rulers governed a vast empire with a strong bureaucracy and weak representative institutions. The Soviet Union replaced the monarchy but preserved central control through a one-party state. The post-Soviet period introduced elections and private property, yet it did not create a stable liberal democracy.

Period	Main Political Features	Importance for Contemporary Russia
Tsarist Empire	Autocratic monarchy, centralized bureaucracy, limited political rights, and a large multiethnic empire.	Created traditions of strong executive rule and weak limits on central authority.

Period	Main Political Features	Importance for Contemporary Russia
Revolution and Early Soviet Rule	The Bolsheviks took power in 1917 and created a one-party communist state.	Political opposition was eliminated and the Communist Party became the centre of authority.
Stalinist Period	Rapid industrialization, collectivization, terror, censorship, and extreme personal rule.	Strengthened state control and the political role of security institutions.
Late Soviet Period	A powerful party-state, planned economy, social welfare, and declining economic performance.	Created expectations of order and state responsibility, but also bureaucratic weakness.
Gorbachev Reforms	Perestroika and glasnost loosened control and allowed public criticism.	Reform weakened the party-state and encouraged national and democratic movements.
Yeltsin Era	Market transition, privatization, elections, oligarchic wealth, regional autonomy, and political conflict.	Created the 1993 Constitution but also public disappointment with disorder and inequality.
Putin Era	Centralization, dominant-party government, stronger security institutions, controlled media, and renewed great-power nationalism.	Restored state capacity while narrowing political competition and civil liberties.

From the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation

Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet leader in 1985 and attempted to reform the system. Perestroika aimed to restructure the economy, while glasnost allowed greater openness and public debate. These policies weakened Communist Party control and revealed economic problems, corruption, historical abuses, and national tensions.

In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and the Russian Federation became an independent state. Boris Yeltsin became Russia's first president. His government introduced rapid market reforms, often called shock therapy. State enterprises were privatized, prices were freed, and economic planning was reduced. The reforms created new private wealth, but they also produced inflation, unemployment, inequality, and a sharp fall in living standards for many citizens.

WHY THE 1990S MATTER

- Many Russians associated the first post-Soviet decade with instability rather than democratic success.
- Privatization allowed a small group of business owners, known as oligarchs, to gain enormous economic and political influence.
- Regional leaders acquired greater independence because the central government was weak.
- The conflict between President Yeltsin and parliament led to violence in 1993 and encouraged the creation of a very strong presidency.
- The experience increased public demand for order, economic security, and effective central government.

The 1993 Constitutional Crisis

In 1993, President Yeltsin and the existing parliament fought over the direction of reform and the division of authority. Yeltsin attempted to dissolve parliament, while parliamentary leaders tried to remove him. The confrontation ended after military forces attacked the parliament building. A new Constitution was approved later that year.

The Constitution created a directly elected president with extensive powers. It also established a bicameral legislature, federalism, a Constitutional Court, and a list of civil liberties. The document remains the formal basis of the Russian system, but the strong presidency created in 1993 later made further centralization easier.

The Rise of Vladimir Putin

Date	Development	Political Importance
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Date	Development	Political Importance
1999	Boris Yeltsin resigned and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin became acting president.	Transferred authority to a younger leader associated with order and the security services.
2000	Putin won the presidential election.	Beginning of sustained recentralization and the building of a loyal governing coalition.
2000s	Federal power over regions, media, business elites, and political parties increased.	Reduced the independence of alternative centres of power.
2008-2012	Dmitry Medvedev served as president while Putin served as prime minister.	Formal constitutional term limits were observed, but Putin remained the leading political figure.
2012	Putin returned to the presidency after the presidential term had been increased to six years.	Large protests were followed by stronger restrictions on opposition and civil society.
2014	Russia annexed Crimea, an action not recognized by most of the international community.	Nationalist support increased and relations with Western states deteriorated.
2020	Constitutional amendments changed institutions and reset previous presidential terms for term-limit purposes.	Allowed Putin to seek additional presidential terms.
2022	Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.	War, sanctions, mobilization, and security concerns reshaped domestic politics and the economy.
2024	Putin won another presidential election and began a new six-year term in May.	Confirmed continuity of the presidential system and elite leadership.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The Soviet Communist Party no longer governs Russia, private property exists, and citizens vote in multiparty elections. Yet centralized authority, powerful security institutions, limited independent media, and weak institutional checks show important continuities with earlier Russian and Soviet political traditions.

The Constitutional Framework and Regime Type

The Constitution describes Russia as a democratic, federal, law-based state with a republican form of government. It provides for separation of powers, judicial review, federalism, elections, and civil rights. These formal rules matter, but they do not fully describe how the system works in practice.

Russia as a Semi-Presidential System

Feature	Constitutional Design	Russian Practice
Head of state	A directly elected president serves a six-year term.	The president is the central political authority and controls the main direction of policy.
Head of government	A prime minister manages the government and civil administration.	The prime minister is normally subordinate to the president and does not lead an independent political majority.
Legislature	The State Duma approves the prime minister and passes laws.	The dominant party usually supports presidential initiatives.
Cabinet responsibility	The government is accountable within a dual executive system.	The president has greater influence over appointments, security, foreign policy, and strategic ministries.
Elections	Citizens elect the president and State Duma.	Competition exists, but serious challengers face unequal access, legal barriers, and state pressure.

A SUPER-PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM

Russia is constitutionally semi-presidential because it has both a president and a prime minister. In practice, the relationship is highly unequal. The president controls the most important appointments, security bodies, foreign policy, strategic direction, and the political agenda. For this reason, scholars often describe Russia as super-presidential.

How the Regime Is Classified

Term	Meaning	Application to Russia
Managed democracy	Elections and democratic institutions exist, but political competition is organized and limited by those in power.	Election rules, media access, party registration, and state resources favor the governing elite.
Competitive authoritarianism	Opposition groups can exist and elections occur, but the playing field is seriously unequal.	This is the central classification used in the AP framework.
Illiberal democracy	Elections occur, but civil liberties, institutional checks, and independent media are weak.	Formal voting does not produce full liberal-democratic accountability.
Personalist authoritarianism	Power becomes increasingly concentrated around one leader and a loyal elite.	The long presidency of Vladimir Putin and the dependence of major institutions on the executive fit this pattern.
Electoral authoritarianism	Elections help the regime measure support, mobilize citizens, and claim legitimacy without allowing realistic alternation in power.	Voting is politically important even though the governing system strongly controls competition.

Rule of Law and Rule by Law

Concept	Meaning	Russian Example
Rule of law	Government officials are limited by stable and independently enforced laws.	The Constitution formally provides rights, courts, and legal procedures.
Rule by law	Political leaders use laws and courts as instruments to govern, regulate, and punish opponents.	Laws on extremism, foreign agents, public assembly, and media may be applied selectively.
Selective enforcement	The same law is not applied equally to all political actors.	Pro-government organizations often operate more freely than independent opposition groups.
Legal constitutionalism	Institutions genuinely restrain political power.	This remains limited because courts rarely block major executive decisions.

Sources of Legitimacy and Regime Stability

No government survives through coercion alone. The Russian system also seeks consent and public acceptance. Its legitimacy has come from economic performance, order, nationalism, elections, state identity, military power, and the promise that a strong central authority protects Russia from internal disorder and external pressure.

Source of Legitimacy	How It Works	Possible Weakness
Order and stability	The government contrasts present stability with the economic and political disorder of the 1990s.	Younger citizens have no direct memory of the 1990s, while prolonged repression can reduce voluntary support.
Economic performance	Rising incomes and state spending during periods of high energy prices increased support.	Growth depends heavily on resources, sanctions, investment, technology, and war-related costs.
Nationalism	The government presents itself as defender of Russian sovereignty, history, and great-power status.	Military losses, prolonged conflict, or diplomatic isolation may create costs.
Elections	Voting gives citizens a controlled form of participation and allows leaders to claim a popular mandate.	Unequal competition and reported irregularities can weaken credibility.
Traditional identity	The state promotes patriotism, family values, and cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church.	Russia is socially diverse, and state identity may not represent every community equally.
Security	The leadership claims that a strong state is necessary to defeat terrorism, separatism, and foreign threats.	Security arguments can justify permanent restrictions and reduce institutional accountability.
Patronage	Public jobs, contracts, business opportunities, and regional resources reward loyal elites.	Patronage encourages corruption and makes the system dependent on continuing revenue.

PERFORMANCE LEGITIMACY

Performance legitimacy means that citizens accept a government because it delivers order, growth, welfare, security, or national strength. Russia has often relied more heavily on performance and nationalism than on open political competition or strong constitutional limits.

Federalism and the Centralization of Power

Russia is one of the world's largest and most diverse federal states. Its federal subjects include republics, oblasts, krais, federal cities, an autonomous oblast, and autonomous districts. Republics are associated with particular non-Russian nationalities and may have their own constitutions and official languages. Other regions have different titles, but all are represented in the federal system.

Formal Federalism

Institution or Principle	Formal Role
Federal subjects	Regional units possess governments, legislatures, budgets, and responsibilities for local administration.
Republics	Regions linked to particular ethnic groups may recognize additional official languages and cultural institutions.
Federation Council	Represents regional authorities in the upper chamber of parliament.
Governors or regional heads	Lead regional executives and implement both regional and federal policy.
Division of powers	The Constitution assigns some powers to the centre, some jointly, and leaves others to regions.

How the Centre Controls the Regions

Method	Effect on Regional Autonomy
Federal districts and presidential envoys	Allow the presidency to supervise implementation across groups of regions.
Control over governors	Candidate rules, political pressure, and removal powers increase dependence on the Kremlin.
Fiscal centralization	Many regions rely on transfers from the federal budget and therefore have limited independent capacity.
National party organization	United Russia connects governors and regional elites to the central political system.
Uniform legal standards	Federal laws and courts reduce variation among regional systems.
Security institutions	Federal security and law-enforcement bodies operate throughout the country.
Asymmetric bargaining	Some leaders, especially in strategically sensitive areas, receive autonomy in return for loyalty and stability.

FEDERAL IN LAW, CENTRALIZED IN PRACTICE

Russia retains federal institutions, regional governments, and territorial diversity. However, financial dependence, presidential envoys, control over governors, party organization, and security institutions have greatly reduced regional independence since the 1990s.

Chechnya and Asymmetric Federalism

Chechnya illustrates asymmetric federalism. After two major wars, the federal government supported a strong local leadership that provides loyalty and suppresses separatism. In return, the regional government exercises unusual control over local political and security affairs. This arrangement strengthens short-term stability but weakens uniform legal accountability.

The Executive Branch

Russia has a dual executive, but the president is clearly dominant. The current president is Vladimir Putin, who won the March 2024 election and began a new six-year term on 7 May 2024. The current prime minister is Mikhail Mishustin, who first took office in January 2020.

The President

Presidential Power	Description
Head of state	Represents the Russian Federation and acts as guarantor of the Constitution.
Policy direction	Defines the main directions of domestic and foreign policy.
Appointments	Nominates or appoints the prime minister, key ministers, senior officials, judges, prosecutors, and security leaders under constitutional procedures.
Commander-in-chief	Directs the armed forces and plays the leading role in defence and national security.
Decrees and orders	May issue binding executive acts when they do not conflict with the Constitution or federal law.
Legislation	May introduce bills, sign or veto laws, and influence the legislative agenda.
Parliamentary powers	May dissolve the State Duma under specified constitutional conditions.
Emergency powers	Exercises extensive authority during emergencies and security crises.
Foreign policy	Conducts diplomacy, negotiates treaties, and shapes relations with other states.
Institutional coordination	Ensures interaction among branches and chairs major consultative and security bodies.

The Prime Minister and Government

The prime minister is the head of government. The office coordinates ministries, manages the budget and economy, oversees public administration, and implements policy. The State Duma approves the president’s nominee for prime minister, but the president remains politically stronger and may shape the composition and direction of the government.

Area	Prime Minister and Government	Presidential Influence
Economic policy	Prepare the budget, manage ministries, and implement economic programmes.	The president sets broad priorities and controls strategic appointments.
Civil administration	Direct the work of most federal executive bodies.	Several powerful bodies concerned with security and foreign affairs are closely linked to the president.
Legislation	Introduce bills and provide official opinions on proposed laws.	The president can initiate legislation and normally dominates the wider agenda.
Accountability	Submit reports to the State Duma and can face a vote of no confidence.	The president has decisive influence over whether the government remains in office.
Political base	Usually lacks an independent electoral mandate or separate party leadership.	The president is directly elected and is the main source of executive legitimacy.

THE DUAL EXECUTIVE IS UNEQUAL

In some semi-presidential systems, a president and prime minister may represent rival political majorities. Russia has rarely experienced genuine cohabitation. The prime minister normally manages policy under the general leadership of the president rather than acting as an independent political rival.

The Presidential Executive Office

The Presidential Executive Office, often called the presidential administration, supports the president and monitors implementation of presidential decisions. It prepares draft laws, decrees, speeches, appointments, policy analysis, and political coordination. Although it is not an elected institution, it is one of the most important centres of political management.

The Security Council and the Siloviki

The Security Council advises the president on defence, intelligence, internal security, and strategic policy. The term siloviki refers to officials with backgrounds in the military, police, intelligence, and security services. Their influence reflects the importance of security institutions within the governing elite.

Actor	Political Role
Security Council	Brings senior officials together to discuss national-security and strategic questions.
Federal Security Service (FSB)	Handles domestic security, counterintelligence, and major investigations.
Military leadership	Implements defence policy and provides expertise on war and security.
National Guard and police	Maintain public order and respond to protest and internal threats.
Siloviki networks	Provide personnel, information, and political support to the presidency.

The Federal Assembly: Russia’s Legislature

The Federal Assembly is bicameral. The State Duma is the lower chamber and is directly elected. The Federation Council is the upper chamber and represents regional authorities. Parliament passes laws, approves budgets, ratifies treaties, and participates in appointments, but it rarely acts as an independent check on the president.

Feature	State Duma	Federation Council
Position	Lower chamber	Upper chamber
Composition	450 elected deputies	Regional representatives, former presidents who choose life membership, and limited presidential appointees
Selection	225 single-member district seats and 225 proportional representation seats	Regional executive and legislative authorities select representatives; the president may appoint additional senators
Main powers	Passes laws, approves the prime minister, considers confidence, and begins impeachment procedures	Reviews legislation, approves certain appointments, authorizes some uses of armed forces, and represents regional interests
Political importance	Main public legislative arena but dominated by pro-government parties	Less visible and generally supportive of the executive

The State Duma Electoral System

Component	Rule
Total seats	450
Single-member districts	225 deputies are elected from geographic constituencies by plurality.
Party-list seats	225 deputies are elected through nationwide proportional representation.
Threshold	A party normally needs at least 5 percent of the party-list vote to receive proportional seats.
Term	Deputies serve five-year terms.
Political effect	The mixed system gives large and well-organized parties advantages in both district and party-list contests.

The 2021 State Duma Election

Party or Group	Seats Won in 2021	Political Position
United Russia	324	Dominant pro-presidential party; held a constitutional supermajority.
Communist Party (CPRF)	57	Largest parliamentary opposition party; left-nationalist and economically statist.
A Just Russia - For Truth	27	Pro-welfare and nationalist; generally part of the systemic opposition.

Party or Group	Seats Won in 2021	Political Position
Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR)	21	Nationalist party; historically critical in style but usually loyal on major issues.
New People	13	Newer party presenting a moderate, business-oriented image.
Independent deputies	5	Deputies elected outside the five main party lists.

How a Federal Law Is Made

1. A bill may be introduced by authorized institutions, including the president, government, legislators, regional bodies, and certain courts within their fields.
2. The State Duma considers the bill through readings and committee work.
3. If approved, the bill goes to the Federation Council.
4. The Federation Council approves the bill or allows it to proceed under constitutional procedures.
5. The president signs and publishes the law or returns it with a veto.
6. A presidential veto can be overridden only by a high legislative majority.

IS THE DUMA A RUBBER STAMP?

The Duma is not completely powerless. Deputies amend technical legislation, question ministers, represent interests, and debate policy. Yet United Russia's dominance, executive control of the agenda, restricted opposition, and party discipline mean that parliament rarely defeats major presidential initiatives. It is best described as a limited legislature rather than an equal branch.

The Judiciary and the Legal System

Russia has a civil-law legal system with a Constitutional Court, a Supreme Court, federal courts, regional courts, and specialized lower courts. The Constitution formally provides judicial independence and judicial review. In practice, courts are strongly influenced by the executive, senior court administrators, prosecutors, and security agencies.

Institution	Formal Function	Practical Limitation
Constitutional Court	Reviews whether laws and government acts comply with the Constitution.	Rarely blocks central political decisions and has become more dependent on the executive.
Supreme Court	Highest court for civil, criminal, administrative, and economic cases.	Leadership and appointments are closely connected with federal political authority.
Lower courts	Decide ordinary disputes and criminal cases.	Conviction rates are high and judges often rely heavily on prosecutors and investigators.
Prosecutor General	Supervises legality and leads the prosecution system.	The office is a powerful instrument of state enforcement.
Investigative Committee	Conducts major criminal investigations.	High-profile cases may have political significance.
Legal profession	Lawyers defend clients and provide legal representation.	Lawyers in sensitive cases may face pressure, surveillance, or professional risk.

JUDICIAL REVIEW WITHOUT STRONG JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE

Russian courts possess formal legal authority, including constitutional review. However, judicial review has not become an effective limit on the governing branches. The system demonstrates the difference between possessing a constitutional power and being politically able to use it independently.

Elections and Electoral Management

Elections remain important in Russia. They provide information about public support, mobilize citizens, distribute offices, renew elite networks, and allow leaders to claim a national mandate. At the

same time, candidate access, media coverage, campaign rules, administrative resources, and legal enforcement limit genuine competition.

Presidential Elections

Rule	Description
Electoral method	Direct nationwide election.
Winning requirement	A candidate must receive an absolute majority. If no candidate wins a majority, the top two compete in a second round.
Term	Six years.
Term limits	The Constitution limits consecutive service, but the 2020 amendments reset previous presidential terms for the incumbent.
2024 result	Official results gave Vladimir Putin 87.28 percent of the vote.
Main AP point	Majoritarian rules create the appearance of a strong national mandate, but competition is highly managed.

How Electoral Competition Is Limited

Mechanism	Political Effect
Candidate requirements registration	Signatures, documentation, and legal rules can exclude challengers.
Control of national television	The incumbent and government receive far greater positive exposure.
Administrative resources	Officials, public institutions, and state-linked employers may encourage turnout and support.
Legal pressure	Opposition figures and organizations may face criminal, administrative, or extremism cases.
Restrictions on observers and NGOs	Independent monitoring and public reporting become more difficult.
Electronic and multi-day voting	These methods can increase access, but critics argue that they reduce transparency and independent observation.
Unequal campaign finance and organization	The governing system has far greater access to money, media, officials, and nationwide networks.

Political Parties and the Dominant-Party System

Russia has several legal political parties, but they do not compete on an equal field. United Russia is the dominant party and connects the presidency with legislators, governors, officials, and regional elites. It is less an ideological mass party than a broad organization of officeholders and supporters of the executive.

Party Type	Examples	Role in the System
Dominant party	United Russia	Supports the president, controls the Duma, coordinates regional elites, and turns executive priorities into law.
Systemic opposition	CPRF, LDPR, A Just Russia - For Truth, New People	Compete in elections and criticize selected policies but usually operate within accepted limits.
Non-systemic opposition	Independent movements, unregistered parties, anti-corruption networks, and exiled groups	Challenge the governing system more directly and face much greater legal and political pressure.
Personal networks	Officials, business leaders, governors, and security elites	Informal loyalty and access may matter as much as formal party membership.

Why United Russia Dominates

- It is closely associated with the president and the state administration.
- It has strong organization in regions and access to governors and local officials.
- It receives favourable national media coverage.

- The mixed electoral system rewards its ability to win single-member districts.
- Opposition parties are divided and face legal and financial disadvantages.
- Public employees and state-linked institutions provide organizational networks.
- The party presents itself as the vehicle of stability, patriotism, and government performance.

DOMINANT PARTY IS NOT THE SAME AS ONE-PARTY RULE

China permits only the Communist Party to control national power. Russia legally permits several parties and holds multiparty elections, but one party dominates because of its connection to the presidency, state institutions, media, and electoral rules. This is a dominant-party system rather than a formal one-party state.

Case Study: Alexei Navalny and Non-Systemic Opposition

Alexei Navalny became a major opposition figure through anti-corruption investigations, online communication, election strategy, and public protest. Authorities prevented him from competing freely, prosecuted his organizations, and classified his political network as extremist. Navalny died in prison in February 2024. The case shows both the potential of digital opposition and the risks faced by political actors who challenge the governing system outside approved institutional limits.

Political Participation and Civil Society

Russian citizens participate through voting, political parties, public organizations, local campaigns, online discussion, petitions, approved demonstrations, and informal networks. However, independent participation has become increasingly difficult because the state regulates assembly, organization, funding, and speech.

Form of Participation	Opportunity	Restriction
Voting	Citizens vote in national, regional, and local elections.	Candidate choice and competition are limited.
Political parties	Several registered parties nominate candidates.	Registration and campaigning strongly favor established parties.
Public protest	The Constitution formally protects assembly.	Permits, policing, fines, arrests, and criminal penalties discourage unsanctioned protest.
Civil-society organizations	Groups work on welfare, culture, environment, and community issues.	Organizations involved in rights or politics may face foreign-agent or undesirable-organization rules.
Digital activism	Social media and messaging services allow rapid communication.	Blocking, surveillance, censorship, and criminal cases limit online dissent.
State-sponsored participation	Public chambers, youth movements, and officially supported organizations provide access.	They often channel participation toward goals accepted by the state.

Media and Information Control

Area	Main Pattern
National television	State-controlled or state-aligned television remains the most important source of political information for many citizens.
Print and radio	Independent outlets have declined, moved abroad, closed, or faced legal restrictions.
Internet	The online sphere is more diverse than television, but websites and platforms may be blocked or restricted.
Foreign-agent law	Individuals and organizations labelled foreign agents face reporting, labelling, financial, and professional burdens.
Undesirable organizations	Cooperation with listed foreign or international organizations can produce legal penalties.
War-related censorship	Laws adopted after 2022 created severe penalties for information that contradicts official accounts of the armed forces.

WHY MEDIA CONTROL MATTERS

In electoral authoritarian systems, leaders do not need to prevent every critical opinion. It may be enough to dominate the information seen by most citizens, discredit opponents, restrict their organization, and make independent reporting costly. Control of national television is therefore a major political resource.

Political Culture and Social Cleavages

Russian political culture is diverse. Many citizens value national strength, social stability, welfare protection, and respect for Russia as a great power. Others support stronger rights, freer elections, local autonomy, and closer ties with Europe. Attitudes vary by age, region, education, income, religion, and access to information.

Cleavage	Political Importance
Ethnic Russians and minority nationalities	Ethnic Russians form a large majority, while republics and minority communities seek cultural recognition and sometimes greater autonomy.
Orthodox Christian and Muslim communities	The Russian Orthodox Church supports state identity, while large Muslim populations are concentrated in several regions.
Moscow and regions	The capital has greater wealth and political attention, while many regions depend on federal transfers.
Urban and rural populations	Large cities often provide more space for independent organization, while rural areas may rely more heavily on state institutions.
Generational differences	Younger citizens use digital media more heavily and may have different views of the Soviet past and political authority.
Class and economic position	State employees, pensioners, private entrepreneurs, industrial workers, and wealthy elites experience policy differently.
Centre and periphery	Remote regions may demand resources and autonomy while the centre seeks uniform control.
War and foreign-policy attitudes	Patriotism, security concerns, military service, casualties, and sanctions shape political attitudes.

The Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church is not formally part of the state, but it has a privileged public role. It supports patriotic education, traditional values, historical continuity, and cooperation with national leaders. In return, it receives access, recognition, and protection. This relationship strengthens conservative legitimacy but can reduce the separation between religion and political authority.

Political Economy: Markets, Oligarchs, and State Capitalism

Russia moved from a planned economy to a market economy after 1991. The transition created private ownership and entrepreneurship, but it also concentrated wealth and strategic assets in the hands of oligarchs. Under Putin, the state did not abolish capitalism. Instead, it brought major business leaders under political control and strengthened state influence over energy, defence, banking, transport, and other strategic sectors.

Economic Phase	Main Features	Political Effect
Shock therapy in the 1990s	Rapid price liberalization, privatization, inflation, and weak regulation.	Created oligarchic wealth and weakened public trust in market reform.
Recovery in the 2000s	High oil and gas prices, rising incomes, tax reform, and greater state capacity.	Improved performance legitimacy and allowed the centre to discipline regional and business elites.
State capitalism	Private markets continue, but strategic companies and major contracts are closely connected to the state.	Economic access depends heavily on political loyalty and official networks.

Economic Phase	Main Features	Political Effect
Sanctions adaptation	Restrictions after 2014 and especially after 2022 encouraged import substitution and new trade patterns.	The state gained a larger economic role while businesses faced technology, finance, and market constraints.
War-oriented spending	Defence production and security expenditure became more important.	Supports selected industries and employment but creates inflationary, budgetary, and long-term development pressures.

Oil, Gas, and the Rentier-State Problem

Resource Effect	Political Consequence
Large export revenue	Provides money for budgets, pensions, public salaries, security, and patronage.
Reduced dependence on taxation	The state may feel less pressure to answer directly to citizens for revenue.
Price volatility	Falling energy prices can weaken growth, budgets, and public confidence.
Strategic companies	State influence over major energy firms strengthens executive control.
Regional concentration	Resource-producing regions are important but remain tied to federal revenue-sharing rules.
Foreign-policy leverage	Energy exports can create international influence, but dependence on external buyers also creates vulnerability.
Corruption risk	Large resource rents encourage competition for access to contracts and official favour.

RUSSIA AS A RENTIER STATE

A rentier state receives a significant share of government revenue from natural-resource exports. Oil and gas have supported Russian state capacity and patronage, but resource dependence can discourage diversification, increase corruption, and weaken tax-based accountability.

Oligarchs and Political Control

During the 1990s, a small number of business owners gained control over major firms and media outlets. Under Putin, oligarchs were generally allowed to retain wealth if they accepted the authority of the state and avoided independent political activity. Those who challenged the executive could lose assets, face prosecution, or leave the country. The result is not the disappearance of oligarchs but their political subordination.

Major Economic and Social Challenges

Challenge	Importance
Economic diversification	Dependence on resources and state contracts limits innovation and private competition.
Demographic pressure	Low birth rates, aging, emigration, health problems, and war losses affect the labour force.
Regional inequality	Moscow and resource-rich areas are much wealthier than many other regions.
Corruption	Informal payments and political connections weaken efficiency and trust.
Sanctions and technology	Restricted access to finance, advanced technology, and some markets creates long-term costs.
Military expenditure	War-related spending can increase short-term production but reduce resources for civilian development.
Human capital	Emigration of skilled workers and limits on academic and international exchange can reduce innovation.

Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics

Foreign policy is closely connected to domestic legitimacy. The government presents Russia as a sovereign great power resisting Western pressure and defending its security interests. Military action,

diplomacy, nuclear capability, energy exports, and influence in former Soviet territories all support this image.

Foreign-Policy Theme	Domestic Political Effect
Great-power status	Strengthens nationalism and presents the president as defender of national dignity.
Conflict with Western states	Allows leaders to explain sanctions and criticism as external hostility.
War in Ukraine	Encourages patriotic mobilization but also creates casualties, economic costs, censorship, and security pressures.
Nuclear and military power	Supports claims that Russia must have strong centralized leadership.
Former Soviet region	Policies toward neighbouring states are linked to security, identity, and influence.
Sanctions	Increase economic pressure but also justify self-reliance and tighter state management.
Information policy	Foreign threats are used to support control over media, NGOs, and political opposition.

EXTERNAL THREATS AND INTERNAL CONTROL

Authoritarian regimes may use external conflict to increase unity, discredit critics, and expand security powers. This can produce a rally-around-the-flag effect. However, long wars and economic costs can also reduce legitimacy over time.

Contemporary Political Challenges

Challenge	Why It Matters
Leadership succession	A system concentrated around one leader may struggle to transfer authority without elite conflict.
Elite unity	Officials, security leaders, governors, and business groups must continue to accept the same centre of authority.
War and security	Military demands affect budgets, society, foreign relations, and repression.
Economic adaptation	The state must manage sanctions, technology limits, labour shortages, and resource dependence.
Regional management	The centre must balance uniform control with the needs of diverse and distant territories.
Public participation	Restricting opposition may strengthen short-term control but removes channels for feedback and peaceful change.
Information credibility	Heavy propaganda can mobilize support but may reduce the government's access to accurate public information.
Demographic change	Aging, migration, emigration, and population decline affect economic and military capacity.

Russia in Comparative Perspective

Feature	Russia	Useful Comparison
Regime type	Competitive or electoral authoritarian system with strong personalist features.	China is a one-party authoritarian state; the United Kingdom is a liberal democracy.
Executive	Semi-presidential on paper, but president dominates.	The UK prime minister depends on parliament; Mexico and Nigeria use presidential systems.
Federalism	Formal federalism with strong central control.	Mexico and Nigeria are also federal, but their regional political competition is more meaningful.
Legislature	Bicameral parliament dominated by pro-government forces.	The British House of Commons can remove the government; the Chinese legislature operates under party leadership.
Party system	Dominant-party multiparty system.	China has one-party rule; the UK has competitive alternation among parties.
Judiciary	Formal judicial review but weak independence in political cases.	UK courts are more independent; Chinese courts are formally subordinate to the Communist Party.
Political economy	State capitalism and resource dependence.	Nigeria and Iran also display rentier-state features; China relies more heavily on manufacturing.

Feature	Russia	Useful Comparison
Civil society	Legal organizations exist, but independent political groups face severe restrictions.	Civil society is freer in the UK and Mexico and more tightly controlled in China and Iran.

A BALANCED JUDGMENT

Russia is not simply a return to the Soviet Union. It has private property, markets, a written constitution, multiparty elections, and social spaces that did not exist under communist rule. Yet the concentration of executive power, dominant-party government, weak judicial independence, media control, and repression of genuine opposition make it an authoritarian rather than a liberal-democratic system.

Key Terms

Term	Meaning
Semi-presidential system	A system with both a directly elected president and a prime minister responsible for government administration.
Super-presidentialism	A form of government in which the president possesses unusually extensive formal and informal power.
Managed democracy	A system with elections and democratic institutions that are controlled to protect the governing elite.
Competitive authoritarianism	A regime in which elections occur but the governing side has major unfair advantages.
Illiberal democracy	A system with elections but weak civil liberties and limited checks on government.
Personalist authoritarianism	A regime in which power is increasingly centred on one leader.
Rule by law	The use of law as an instrument of political control rather than an independent limit on government.
Federalism	A constitutional division of authority between national and regional governments.
Asymmetric federalism	A federal arrangement in which different regions possess different degrees of power or autonomy.
Federal subject	A constituent territorial unit of the Russian Federation.
Federal district	A larger administrative grouping supervised by a presidential envoy.
State Duma	The directly elected lower chamber of the Federal Assembly.
Federation Council	The upper chamber representing regional authorities and including presidential appointees.
Dual executive	An executive divided between a president and a prime minister.
Presidential Executive Office	The institution that supports the president, prepares decisions, and monitors implementation.
Siloviki	Officials with backgrounds in military, police, intelligence, or security institutions.
Dominant-party system	A multiparty system in which one party consistently controls government and enjoys major advantages.
Systemic opposition	Legal opposition parties that compete but remain within limits accepted by the regime.
Non-systemic opposition	Groups that challenge the governing system outside officially accepted political boundaries.
Oligarch	A very wealthy business figure with significant economic and political influence.
State capitalism	A market economy in which the state controls or strongly influences strategic sectors and major firms.
Rentier state	A state that receives a large share of revenue from natural-resource exports.
Shock therapy	Rapid transition from a planned economy to market pricing, privatization, and reduced state controls.
Foreign agent	A legal designation imposing restrictions and reporting duties on individuals or organizations considered under foreign influence.
Performance legitimacy	Public acceptance based on economic delivery, security, order, or policy results.
Nationalism	Political emphasis on the nation's sovereignty, identity, history, and power.
Rally-around-the-flag effect	A temporary rise in support for leaders during international conflict or crisis.

THE CHAPTER ON ONE PAGE

- **FOUNDATIONS:** Tsarist autocracy and Soviet one-party rule created traditions of central authority. The unstable 1990s weakened public confidence in democratic and market reform.
- **REGIME:** The Constitution creates a federal semi-presidential republic, but actual power is concentrated in a super-presidential and competitive-authoritarian system.
- **EXECUTIVE:** The president dominates the prime minister, government, security bodies, foreign policy, and strategic appointments.
- **LEGISLATURE:** The Federal Assembly is bicameral. The Duma has 450 elected deputies, while the Federation Council represents regional authorities. Both normally support the executive.
- **FEDERALISM:** Regions possess formal governments and powers, but fiscal control, governors, federal districts, and the dominant party strengthen the centre.
- **ELECTIONS:** Presidential elections use an absolute-majority system. Duma elections combine 225 district seats and 225 party-list seats. Competition is unequal.
- **PARTIES:** United Russia is dominant. Systemic opposition parties compete within accepted limits, while non-systemic opposition faces stronger pressure.
- **LAW:** Courts possess judicial-review powers but rarely limit the executive. Rule by law is more important than rule of law in political cases.
- **SOCIETY:** Independent media, protest, NGOs, and online activism face extensive legal and administrative controls.
- **ECONOMY:** Russia combines private markets with state capitalism. Oil and gas support state power but create rentier-state dependence.
- **LEGITIMACY:** The system relies on order, performance, nationalism, elections, security, traditional identity, and patronage.
- **CURRENT CHALLENGES:** War, sanctions, succession, elite unity, economic diversification, demography, and regional inequality.

Facts to Remember

1. Russia's current Constitution was adopted in 1993 after conflict between President Yeltsin and parliament.
2. Russia is formally a federal, semi-presidential republic.
3. The AP framework describes Russia as a competitive authoritarian regime or illiberal democracy.
4. The president is directly elected for a six-year term.
5. A presidential candidate must win an absolute majority, with a runoff if necessary.
6. Vladimir Putin won the March 2024 presidential election and began a new term on 7 May 2024.
7. The official 2024 result gave Putin 87.28 percent of the vote.
8. The prime minister is head of government but is politically subordinate to the president.
9. Mikhail Mishustin has served as prime minister since January 2020.
10. The Presidential Executive Office prepares decisions and monitors implementation.
11. The Security Council and siloviki are important parts of the governing elite.
12. The Federal Assembly consists of the State Duma and the Federation Council.
13. The State Duma has 450 seats and uses a mixed electoral system.
14. Half of Duma deputies are elected in single-member districts and half through party lists.
15. The normal proportional-representation threshold is 5 percent.
16. United Russia won 324 seats in the 2021 Duma election.
17. The Federation Council represents regional authorities and includes limited presidential appointees.
18. Russia is federal in constitutional design but highly centralized in practice.
19. Presidential envoys supervise federal districts.
20. Judges are formally independent, but courts rarely limit the executive in major political cases.
21. United Russia is a dominant party, not the only legal party.
22. Systemic opposition parties are legal but do not provide realistic national alternation in power.
23. The state controls or influences national television and restricts independent media.

24. Foreign-agent and undesirable-organization laws limit NGOs, media, and political activism.
25. Oil and gas revenue supports the budget, patronage, and state capacity.
26. Russia combines markets with state capitalism and strong control over strategic sectors.
27. Resource dependence creates rentier-state problems, including corruption and weak diversification.
28. The 2020 constitutional amendments reset prior presidential terms for term-limit purposes.
29. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 increased sanctions, censorship, security power, and military spending.
30. The central comparative question is the difference between formal institutions and actual political power.

Practice

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Russia is formally classified as which type of political system?
 - (A) Parliamentary monarchy
 - (B) Semi-presidential federal republic
 - (C) One-party unitary state
 - (D) Military government
2. Which feature best explains why Russia is described as super-presidential?
 - (A) The prime minister controls foreign policy
 - (B) The president dominates major institutions and appointments
 - (C) The Federation Council elects the president
 - (D) Governors may veto federal laws
3. The term managed democracy refers to a system in which:
 - (A) elections are completely absent
 - (B) democratic institutions exist but are controlled to protect incumbents
 - (C) judges directly manage political parties
 - (D) regional governments appoint all national officials
4. Which institution is the lower chamber of the Federal Assembly?
 - (A) Security Council
 - (B) State Duma
 - (C) Constitutional Court
 - (D) Public Chamber
5. How many seats are in the State Duma?
 - (A) 225
 - (B) 300
 - (C) 450
 - (D) 600
6. The State Duma electoral system combines:
 - (A) appointment and inheritance
 - (B) single-member districts and proportional representation
 - (C) two appointed chambers
 - (D) only nationwide proportional representation
7. Which party is dominant in Russia?
 - (A) Communist Party of China
 - (B) United Russia
 - (C) Labour Party
 - (D) Institutional Revolutionary Party
8. Systemic opposition parties are best described as parties that:
 - (A) are illegal
 - (B) operate within limits accepted by the regime
 - (C) control the presidency
 - (D) reject elections completely

9. Which statement best describes the Federation Council?
- (A) It is directly elected entirely by national party lists.
 - (B) It is the upper chamber representing regional authorities.
 - (C) It selects all governors through national elections.
 - (D) It controls the Communist Party.
10. The term siloviki refers to:
- (A) local elected mayors
 - (B) officials from security and military backgrounds
 - (C) independent journalists
 - (D) private farmers
11. Rule by law means that:
- (A) courts always defeat the executive
 - (B) laws are used as tools of political control
 - (C) all citizens write laws directly
 - (D) regional law always overrides federal law
12. Which development most weakened trust in liberal economic reform during the 1990s?
- (A) Equal distribution of privatized wealth
 - (B) Shock therapy, inflation, and oligarchic concentration
 - (C) Complete abolition of markets
 - (D) Rapid entry into the European Union
13. Russia is considered a rentier state mainly because of revenue from:
- (A) tourism and remittances
 - (B) oil and gas exports
 - (C) agricultural taxation
 - (D) foreign aid
14. Which institution supports the president by preparing decrees, appointments, and policy analysis?
- (A) Presidential Executive Office
 - (B) Supreme Court of the United Kingdom
 - (C) European Commission
 - (D) Central Bank of Nigeria
15. Which statement best describes Russian federalism?
- (A) Regions are fully sovereign.
 - (B) Federalism exists formally, but power is highly centralized.
 - (C) Russia is constitutionally unitary.
 - (D) The president has no influence over governors.
16. A presidential candidate in Russia must normally:
- (A) win only a plurality with no runoff
 - (B) win an absolute majority or face a runoff
 - (C) be selected by the Federation Council
 - (D) be leader of United Russia
17. Why does the mixed Duma electoral system favor United Russia?
- (A) It has no access to party-list seats.
 - (B) It can combine nationwide organization with strength in local districts.
 - (C) It prevents large parties from contesting districts.
 - (D) It reserves half the seats for opposition parties.
18. Which factor is a source of performance legitimacy in Russia?
- (A) Complete judicial independence
 - (B) Delivery of order, security, and economic benefits
 - (C) Regular transfer of power between rival parties
 - (D) Elimination of natural resources
19. Which statement best distinguishes Russia from China?
- (A) Russia holds multiparty elections, while China is a one-party state.

- (B) Russia has no executive.
 (C) China is a federal semi-presidential republic.
 (D) China has a directly elected president.
 20. Which is a major limitation on Russian civil society?
 (A) No laws regulate organizations.
 (B) Foreign-agent and undesirable-organization rules
 (C) All protests are automatically approved.
 (D) National television is completely independent.

Answer Key and Brief Explanations

Question	Answer	Brief Explanation
1	B	Russia formally combines an elected president, a prime minister, and federal institutions.
2	B	Presidential power extends across appointments, security, policy direction, and institutions.
3	B	Managed democracy keeps democratic forms while limiting meaningful competition.
4	B	The State Duma is the lower chamber of parliament.
5	C	The Duma contains 450 seats.
6	B	Half the seats are district-based and half are party-list seats.
7	B	United Russia is the pro-presidential dominant party.
8	B	Systemic opposition competes without seriously challenging the basic regime.
9	B	The Federation Council is the upper chamber and represents regional authorities.
10	B	Siloviki are elites connected with security, intelligence, police, and military institutions.
11	B	Rule by law means that law is used to govern and control rather than independently limit rulers.
12	B	Economic hardship and unequal privatization damaged public trust.
13	B	Oil and gas exports provide major state revenue.
14	A	The Presidential Executive Office provides administrative and political support to the president.
15	B	Regional institutions exist, but the centre controls finance, governors, law, and security.
16	B	An absolute majority is required; otherwise, a second round is held.
17	B	A large nationwide party can succeed in both party lists and local constituencies.
18	B	Performance legitimacy comes from delivering valued outcomes.
19	A	Russia legally permits multiparty elections; China reserves governing power for the Communist Party.
20	B	These legal designations impose severe restrictions on independent groups and individuals.

Concept Application Questions

1. Define competitive authoritarianism. Describe one feature of Russian elections that demonstrates the concept. Explain one way elections still benefit the regime.
2. Define rule by law. Describe one Russian legal mechanism that affects opposition or civil society. Explain how it strengthens executive power.
3. Define dominant-party system. Describe one institutional advantage enjoyed by United Russia. Explain one consequence for the State Duma.
4. Define performance legitimacy. Describe one source of Russian performance legitimacy. Explain one condition that could weaken it.
5. Define asymmetric federalism. Describe one Russian example. Explain one reason the central government may accept unequal regional arrangements.

Comparative Questions

1. Compare the relationship between executive and legislature in Russia and the United Kingdom.
2. Compare Russia's dominant-party system with China's one-party system.
3. Compare federalism in Russia with federalism in Mexico or Nigeria.

4. Compare the role of natural resources in Russia and one other rentier-state course country.
5. Compare judicial independence in Russia and the United Kingdom.

Data Analysis Practice

Imagine a table shows annual oil prices, federal energy revenue, economic growth, social spending, and presidential approval in Russia over fifteen years. Complete the following tasks:

- Identify one period in which oil prices and government revenue move in the same direction.
- Describe the relationship between energy revenue and social spending.
- Explain how resource revenue may contribute to performance legitimacy.
- Identify one reason approval might remain high even when growth slows.
- Explain one risk of using resource revenue to maintain regime stability.

Argument Essay Questions

1. Develop an argument about whether elections strengthen authoritarian stability in Russia.
2. Develop an argument about whether Russian federalism meaningfully limits central authority.
3. Develop an argument about whether United Russia is more important as a political party or as an organization of state elites.
4. Develop an argument about whether natural-resource wealth strengthens or weakens political accountability.
5. Develop an argument about whether the prime minister provides an effective check on the Russian president.
6. Develop an argument about whether legal institutions can be politically important even when judicial independence is weak.

Model Concept Application Response

Competitive authoritarianism is a regime type in which elections and opposition parties exist, but the governing side uses state power to create an unfair political field. Russia demonstrates this concept because opposition candidates may face registration barriers, limited national media access, legal pressure, and weaker organization, while United Russia and the incumbent president benefit from state-linked resources and television coverage. Elections still help the regime because they mobilize citizens, identify areas of weak support, renew elite positions, and allow leaders to claim a popular mandate.

Why This Response Works

- It defines the concept directly.
- It gives several specific Russian examples.
- It explains that elections remain useful even when competition is unfair.
- It connects institutions with legitimacy and regime stability.
- It avoids the incorrect claim that elections are politically meaningless.

Final Revision Checklist

- Know the effects of tsarist rule, Soviet government, Gorbachev's reforms, and the 1990s transition.
- Explain why the 1993 Constitution created a strong presidency.
- Define semi-presidentialism and explain why Russia is often called super-presidential.
- Distinguish managed democracy, competitive authoritarianism, illiberal democracy, and personalist authoritarianism.
- Explain rule of law and rule by law.
- Know the major sources of legitimacy: order, performance, nationalism, elections, security, identity, and patronage.
- Explain formal federalism and practical centralization.
- Know the roles of governors, federal districts, presidential envoys, and fiscal transfers.
- Explain the special importance of Chechnya as an example of asymmetric federalism.
- Know the president's constitutional powers.
- Explain the subordinate role of the prime minister and government.

- Know the role of the Presidential Executive Office, Security Council, and siloviki.
- Distinguish the State Duma and Federation Council.
- Know the Duma's 225 district and 225 party-list seats.
- Know the 5 percent threshold and five-year Duma term.
- Explain why the legislature normally supports the executive.
- Know the formal structure and practical limits of the judiciary.
- Explain presidential and Duma election rules.
- Know why elections remain useful to an authoritarian regime.
- Distinguish United Russia, systemic opposition, and non-systemic opposition.
- Explain why United Russia is dominant but Russia is not a one-party state.
- Know the restrictions affecting protest, media, NGOs, and digital activism.
- Identify major ethnic, religious, regional, generational, and class cleavages.
- Explain shock therapy, oligarchs, state capitalism, and the rentier state.
- Connect oil and gas revenue with patronage, legitimacy, corruption, and economic vulnerability.
- Explain how foreign conflict can strengthen and weaken domestic legitimacy.
- Be ready to compare Russia with the United Kingdom, China, Mexico, Nigeria, and Iran.

Source Note

Institutional facts were checked against the College Board course framework and official Russian institutional sources. Current officeholder, election, and conflict information should be updated in later editions.

PART TWO: COUNTRY CASES · COMMUNIST AND POST-COMMUNIST REGIMES · CHAPTER 5

Chapter Five: Government and Politics in China

One-party rule, Party-state institutions, controlled participation, and market reform under political centralization

The People's Republic of China is a unitary authoritarian state led by the Communist Party of China (CPC). The Constitution establishes the National People's Congress, the president, the State Council, courts, procuratorates, and local governments. Yet the most important decisions are made through Communist Party institutions that stand above and operate through the state.

China's political system combines continuity and adaptation. The CPC has ruled since 1949, but the country has moved from Maoist revolutionary politics and a command economy to market reform, global trade, advanced technology, and state-guided capitalism. Economic change has been extensive; competitive national politics and alternation of governing parties have not developed.

For AP Comparative Government, the central question is how the Party preserves political control while managing a large, unequal, rapidly changing society. The answer lies in organization, cadre appointments, policy performance, nationalism, censorship, consultation, selective participation, and the capacity to adjust economic policy without surrendering one-party rule.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Historical foundations: imperial collapse, revolution, Maoist rule, reform, and the contemporary era
- China's constitutional order, unitary state, and authoritarian regime type
- The Communist Party: leadership bodies, democratic centralism, party cells, cadres, and discipline
- The president, State Council, National People's Congress, courts, procuratorates, and military
- Central-local relations, provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and special administrative regions
- Elections, consultative institutions, minor parties, mass organizations, petitions, and protest
- Media, censorship, digital control, civil society, and informal political participation
- Market reform, state-owned enterprises, Five-Year Plans, inequality, hukou, and demographic change
- Key terms, revision notes, multiple-choice questions, and AP-style free-response practice

THE BIG PICTURE

China is not governed only by its formal state institutions. It is governed by a Party-state: Communist Party committees guide ministries, legislatures, courts, universities, state-owned firms, local governments, and the armed forces. State institutions administer and implement policy, but the CPC sets the broad direction, controls senior appointments, and prevents independent political organizations from competing for national power.

Historical Foundations of the Chinese Political System

China's political development was shaped by imperial centralization, foreign pressure, civil war, communist revolution, and rapid modernization. The modern state inherited a strong tradition of centralized administration, but the twentieth century transformed the source of authority from monarchy to revolutionary party rule.

Period	Main Political Features	Importance for Contemporary China
Late Imperial China	Centralized monarchy, examination-based bureaucracy, Confucian political culture, and local elite administration.	Contributed traditions of state unity, bureaucratic government, education, and respect for central order.
1911 Revolution and Republic	The Qing dynasty fell, but the republic remained weak and divided by warlords and competing movements.	Created a continuing concern with national unity, sovereignty, and state weakness.
Nationalist-Communist Conflict	The Nationalist Party and Communist Party competed for control amid invasion and civil war.	Strengthened the CPC's revolutionary identity, military organization, and rural support.
Maoist Era, 1949-1976	One-party rule, land reform, collectivization, central planning, mass campaigns, and personal leadership.	Established the Party-state and the CPC's monopoly of political authority.
Reform Era after 1978	Market incentives, opening to foreign investment, decentralization, and rapid growth under continued CPC rule.	Showed that economic liberalization could occur without political democratization.
Post-1989 Consolidation	Political control tightened after the Tiananmen protests while economic reform continued.	Reinforced the Party's rejection of competitive national politics.
Contemporary Era	Greater central coordination, anti-corruption campaigns, technological governance, national security priorities, and stronger Party leadership.	Has increased leadership centralization while retaining market institutions and development planning.

The Communist Victory of 1949

The Communist Party defeated the Nationalist government after a long civil war and established the People's Republic of China in 1949. Mao Zedong and the CPC claimed legitimacy from revolution, resistance to foreign domination, land redistribution, and the promise to restore national unity. The new government nationalized major industries, reorganized the countryside, and eliminated independent political competition.

The Party penetrated society through work units, rural communes, schools, mass organizations, neighborhood committees, and propaganda. The state and Party became closely connected, but the Party remained the senior institution. This pattern continues: state offices have formal legal responsibilities, while Party committees provide political leadership.

Maoist Rule and Mass Campaigns

Development	Main Features	Political Consequences
Land reform	Land was taken from landlords and redistributed before later collectivization.	Built rural support but involved violence and class-based political campaigns.
Collectivization	Agriculture was organized into cooperatives and then people's communes.	Expanded state control over production and rural life.
Great Leap Forward	Rapid industrial and agricultural mobilization attempted to accelerate development.	Economic failure and famine weakened policy credibility and caused enormous human suffering.
Cultural Revolution	Mao mobilized young people and attacked officials, experts, schools, and established institutions.	Produced disorder, persecution, factional conflict, and deep distrust of uncontrolled mass politics.
Personal leadership	Mao's authority often stood above regular institutions and collective decision-making.	Created a lasting concern within the Party about succession, factional struggle, and excessive personal rule.

WHY THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION MATTERS

- It demonstrated the dangers of weak institutions and political campaigns driven by personal authority.
- After Mao's death, leaders placed greater value on regular procedures, economic expertise, and collective leadership.
- The Party continued to defend its monopoly of power, but it reduced class struggle and emphasized modernization.
- Contemporary centralization is therefore different from Maoist mass mobilization, even though political authority remains concentrated.

Deng Xiaoping and Reform without Democratization

After 1978, Deng Xiaoping led a major change in economic policy. Rural communes were dismantled, farmers gained greater control over production, private and collective businesses expanded, foreign investment entered special economic zones, and market prices became more important. The reforms did not remove the Communist Party from power. Instead, the Party presented economic growth as evidence that it could modernize China.

The reform period produced rapid development, urbanization, a larger middle class, regional inequality, corruption, and new demands. The leadership allowed experimentation in economic policy but resisted organizations that could challenge one-party rule. This approach is sometimes summarized as economic reform under political control.

Date	Development	Political Importance
1978	Reform and opening became the central policy direction.	Shifted legitimacy toward modernization and economic performance.
1980s	Rural reform, township enterprises, and special economic zones expanded.	Local experimentation became an important method of policy change.
1989	The state suppressed the Tiananmen Square protest movement.	Demonstrated that the CPC would not accept a national political challenge.
1992	Market reform accelerated after Deng's southern tour.	Reaffirmed economic opening while maintaining Party leadership.
2001	China joined the World Trade Organization.	Deepened integration into global production and trade.
2012	Xi Jinping became general secretary of the CPC Central Committee.	Beginning of stronger central leadership, discipline, and Party supervision.

Date	Development	Political Importance
2018	The Constitution was amended and the presidential two-term limit was removed.	Reduced a formal constraint on continued presidential service and emphasized CPC leadership.
2023	A new five-year state leadership term began under the 14th National People's Congress.	Continued leadership continuity and institutional reorganization.
2026	The 15th Five-Year Plan for 2026-2030 began.	Placed innovation, high-quality growth, security, social welfare, and green development at the centre of policy.

The Constitutional Framework and Regime Type

The Constitution describes China as a socialist state and states that leadership by the Communist Party of China is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It also declares that state power belongs to the people and is exercised through the National People's Congress and local people's congresses. In practice, the Party determines the political direction within which these state institutions operate.

Formal Constitutional Principle	Practical Operation
People exercise power through people's congresses.	Candidates and elections operate within a political system controlled by the CPC; national governing power does not alternate between competing parties.
The National People's Congress is the highest state organ of power.	Major decisions are normally settled through Party leadership before formal state approval.
Citizens possess rights of speech, assembly, religion, and participation.	Rights are limited by laws concerning state security, public order, Party leadership, and approved organization.
Courts exercise adjudicatory power.	Courts are subject to Party leadership and are not an independent check on the governing system.
China has autonomous ethnic regions and special administrative regions.	The central government retains sovereignty and can increase supervision when national unity or security is involved.
The state practices democratic centralism.	Discussion and consultation may occur within authorized institutions, but lower bodies must follow decisions made by higher leadership.

China as a One-Party Authoritarian Regime

China is authoritarian because national rulers are not selected through free and competitive elections among independent parties, civil liberties are restricted, the media is controlled, and opposition organizations cannot legally replace the CPC. It is a one-party regime because the Communist Party maintains a constitutional and practical monopoly over national political leadership.

This does not mean that every policy is decided by one person or that no consultation occurs. Policy may involve ministries, experts, local governments, Party committees, businesses, mass organizations, public comments, pilot programmes, and internal debate. The defining point is that participation occurs inside a system whose leadership monopoly is not open to electoral challenge.

AUTHORITARIAN DOES NOT MEAN INSTITUTION-FREE

China has a large bureaucracy, legislatures, courts, policy procedures, consultation, local experimentation, and rules for appointments. These institutions help the regime govern. The system is authoritarian because political competition, rights, information, and organization remain controlled—not because institutions are absent.

Democratic Centralism

Democratic centralism is the organizing principle of both the Party and the state. It combines internal discussion with obedience to the final decision. Lower organizations are subordinate to higher organizations, minorities are subordinate to majorities, and the entire Party is subordinate to the National Party Congress and Central Committee.

Democratic Element	Centralist Element
Meetings, consultation, internal reports, and limited elections occur within approved bodies.	Once a higher body makes a decision, lower bodies and members are expected to implement it.
Local officials may test policies and communicate implementation problems.	The centre controls appointments, national priorities, discipline, and final political authority.
Congress delegates formally elect Party committees.	Candidate selection and leadership decisions are closely managed by higher Party bodies.
Public comments may be invited on selected draft laws or policies.	Citizens cannot use the process to organize an independent national opposition.

Sources of Legitimacy and Regime Stability

The CPC does not rely on competitive elections for national legitimacy. Instead, it combines historical, ideological, performance-based, nationalist, and procedural claims. These sources can reinforce one another but may also create pressure when economic growth slows or public expectations rise.

Source	How It Supports the Regime	Possible Weakness
Revolutionary legitimacy	The CPC claims credit for national unification, independence, and the creation of the People's Republic.	The revolutionary generation is now distant from younger citizens.
Performance legitimacy	Growth, infrastructure, poverty reduction, public services, and order demonstrate governing capacity.	Slower growth, unemployment, inequality, housing problems, or environmental damage may weaken satisfaction.
Nationalism	The Party presents itself as defender of sovereignty, unity, security, and national rejuvenation.	Foreign conflict or unmet nationalist expectations can increase political risk.
Ideology	Socialism with Chinese characteristics provides an official framework for Party leadership and national development.	Market inequality and private wealth may appear inconsistent with socialist equality.
Consultation and responsiveness	Petitions, surveys, local experiments, online feedback, and policy adjustment can respond to problems.	Responsiveness is selective and does not permit independent opposition.
Control and organization	Censorship, surveillance, discipline, and Party networks raise the cost of collective challenge.	Heavy control can reduce trust, conceal policy failures, and create resentment.
Anti-corruption	Punishment of officials can show that the Party is correcting abuse and protecting public interest.	Selective enforcement or elite conflict may create questions about fairness and institutional independence.

PERFORMANCE LEGITIMACY

Performance legitimacy is support based on what a government delivers rather than on competitive electoral choice. In China, economic growth, stability, infrastructure, poverty reduction, technology, public health, and national strength have been important. The weakness of this source is that rising expectations can make citizens less tolerant of unemployment, corruption, unequal services, or policy mistakes.

The Communist Party of China

The Communist Party is the central political institution. It sets broad policy, controls senior appointments, supervises discipline, leads the armed forces, and maintains organizations inside state agencies, local governments, universities, communities, and many enterprises. State institutions are therefore not separate rivals to the Party; they are major channels through which Party decisions are carried out.

Party Body	Main Role	Political Importance
National Party Congress	Meets normally every five years and formally elects the Central Committee.	Approves leadership transitions, constitutional changes, and broad political direction.
Central Committee	Large national leadership body elected by the Party Congress.	Formally elects the Politburo, its Standing Committee, and the general secretary.

Party Body	Main Role	Political Importance
Politburo	Senior body that handles major policy and political questions.	Links top leaders with major policy portfolios and territorial responsibilities.
Politburo Standing Committee	Smallest and most powerful collective leadership body.	Coordinates the highest-level decisions of Party and state.
General Secretary	Top Party leader and chair of major central commissions.	The most important political office; Xi Jinping holds this post as well as the presidency and chairmanship of the Central Military Commission.
Secretariat	Manages daily Party work and implementation.	Connects central decisions with Party departments and organizations.
Central Commission for Discipline Inspection	Investigates Party discipline and corruption.	Supports anti-corruption and leadership control over cadres.
Central departments and commissions	Manage organization, propaganda, united front, policy coordination, foreign affairs, finance, cybersecurity, and other areas.	Allow the Party to guide the state across nearly every policy field.
Local Party committees	Lead provinces, cities, counties, townships, and organizations.	The local Party secretary is usually more powerful than the corresponding government executive.

The General Secretary and Leadership Centralization

The general secretary leads the CPC Central Committee and usually holds the most important positions in the political system. As of July 2026, Xi Jinping serves as general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, president of the People’s Republic of China, and chairman of the Central Military Commission. Holding these three offices unites Party, state, and military leadership.

The office has become more centralized through leading commissions, anti-corruption enforcement, ideological campaigns, personnel control, and direct supervision of strategic policy. The system still contains committees, ministries, local governments, and bureaucratic bargaining, but the political authority of the top leader and central Party leadership has increased.

Cadres and the Nomenklatura System

A cadre is a Party or state official. The CPC controls promotion through an appointment system often called nomenklatura. Organization departments maintain personnel files, evaluate performance, recommend promotions, rotate officials, and supervise appointments to important posts.

Feature	How It Works	Political Effect
Party control of appointments	Senior officials are selected through Party procedures rather than open electoral competition.	Maintains loyalty and national coordination.
Cadre evaluation	Officials are judged on targets such as economic performance, social stability, policy implementation, environment, security, and discipline.	Encourages implementation but may also encourage data manipulation or excessive target pressure.
Rotation	Officials may move between regions, ministries, Party bodies, and state firms.	Builds experience and reduces independent local power bases.
Retirement and promotion norms	Age, rank, experience, political reliability, and performance influence advancement.	Creates career incentives within the Party hierarchy.
Discipline inspection	Party disciplinary bodies investigate misconduct and corruption.	Punishes abuse and reinforces central control over the elite.

Party Cells and Social Penetration

Primary Party organizations exist in government agencies, villages, schools, universities, the armed forces, state enterprises, private companies, social organizations, and residential communities. They communicate policy, recruit members, monitor implementation, organize political education, and connect the leadership to local institutions.

WHY PARTY CELLS MATTER

Party cells allow a single national organization to operate from the top leadership to the local workplace and neighborhood. They are a major reason the CPC possesses greater organizational reach than many authoritarian ruling parties. This network helps the Party collect information, mobilize support, supervise officials, and respond to threats before they become national movements.

Anti-Corruption and Party Discipline

Corruption is a major challenge because officials influence permits, land, state contracts, finance, appointments, and regulation. Anti-corruption campaigns have punished large numbers of officials at high and low levels. They can improve discipline and public confidence, but they also strengthen the central leadership because disciplinary institutions operate under the Party rather than an independent judiciary.

Potential Benefit	Potential Political Concern
Punishes bribery, abuse of office, and misuse of public funds.	Investigations may be selective and occur without fully independent legal review.
Responds to public anger about elite privilege.	Campaigns can weaken rival networks and increase personal loyalty to central leaders.
Improves implementation and bureaucratic discipline.	Officials may become cautious and avoid innovative decisions for fear of investigation.
Demonstrates the Party's ability to correct itself.	Long-term control depends on institutions, transparency, and incentives, not only campaigns.

The State Institutions

China has a complete system of state institutions, but they operate under Communist Party leadership. The Constitution identifies the National People's Congress as the highest state organ of power and the State Council as the highest state administrative organ. The president performs important state functions, while courts, procuratorates, supervisory commissions, and local governments administer law and policy.

The President of the People's Republic of China

Feature	Description
Selection	Elected by the National People's Congress.
Term	Five years, corresponding to the term of the National People's Congress.
Term limit	The constitutional two-term limit for the presidency was removed in 2018.
Formal powers	Promulgates laws, appoints or removes senior state officials according to NPC decisions, receives foreign representatives, and performs state ceremonial and diplomatic functions.
Practical importance	The presidency is most powerful when held by the CPC general secretary and CMC chair, because authority comes from the combined offices.
Current officeholder	Xi Jinping, re-elected president by the 14th National People's Congress in March 2023.

OFFICE VERSUS OFFICEHOLDER

The Chinese presidency by itself does not explain political power. The most important office is CPC general secretary. When one leader simultaneously holds the general secretaryship, presidency, and CMC chairmanship, Party, state, and military authority are concentrated in the same person.

The State Council and the Premier

The State Council is the central government and highest state administrative organ. It manages ministries, commissions, national regulation, economic administration, education, health, public security, environmental policy, and implementation of national plans. The premier leads the State Council and assumes overall responsibility for its work.

Institution or Office	Main Function	Current Position, July 2026
Premier	Leads the State Council, presents the government work report, coordinates administration, and manages economic policy implementation.	Li Qiang
Vice premiers	Assist the premier and supervise major policy areas.	Four vice premiers serve in the current State Council.
State councillors	Handle major portfolios and assist State Council leadership.	Serve below vice premiers but above ministers in rank.
Ministries and commissions	Administer specialized policy areas and issue regulations.	Operate under State Council and Party leadership.
Executive meetings	Review regulations, major administrative measures, and policy implementation.	A key channel for coordinating government work.
Government work report	Annual statement of achievements, targets, and policy tasks presented to the NPC.	The 2026 report began implementation of the 15th Five-Year Plan.

The National People's Congress

The National People's Congress (NPC) is the national legislature and constitutionally the highest state organ of power. It normally meets in a full session once each year. Its Standing Committee works throughout the year, enacts many laws, interprets laws, supervises state bodies, and handles appointments when the full NPC is not in session.

Feature	National People's Congress	NPC Standing Committee
Membership	Nearly 3,000 deputies elected indirectly from provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, special administrative regions, and the armed forces.	A smaller permanent body elected by the NPC.
Meeting pattern	Annual plenary session, usually during the "two sessions."	Meets regularly throughout the year.
Main work	Amends the Constitution, elects state leaders, approves major plans and budgets, and enacts basic laws.	Enacts and amends many laws, interprets laws, supervises state organs, and makes appointments.
Political role	Provides representation, consultation, policy review, and formal approval.	Provides continuity and detailed legislative work between annual sessions.
Practical limit	Does not function as an opposition-controlled legislature capable of removing CPC leadership through elections.	Works within policy boundaries established by the Party leadership.

How a National Law Is Made

1. A need for legislation is identified by Party leaders, the State Council, the NPC, the NPC Standing Committee, courts, procuratorates, or other authorized institutions.
2. Relevant departments, experts, and legal offices prepare a draft. Pilot programmes and local experience may influence the text.
3. The draft may be circulated for consultation, expert review, and public comments when the leadership chooses to use these methods.
4. The NPC or, more commonly, the NPC Standing Committee considers the bill through readings, committees, and revision.
5. The legislature votes on the bill. The president then promulgates the law.
6. The State Council, ministries, courts, procuratorates, local governments, and Party organizations implement the law under central supervision.

RUBBER STAMP IS TOO SIMPLE

The NPC rarely rejects a central leadership proposal, so it is not an independent legislature in the liberal-democratic sense. Yet it is not completely inactive. Deputies and committees revise drafts, collect technical information, communicate local concerns, supervise implementation, and improve legal detail. The better AP description is a subordinate but functional legislature.

The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference

The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) is a political advisory institution. It includes CPC members, representatives of eight legally recognized minor parties, mass organizations, occupational sectors, ethnic groups, and prominent individuals. It discusses policy and submits proposals but does not compete with the CPC for governing power.

The annual NPC and CPPCC meetings are called the “two sessions.” They provide national visibility, consultation, reports, appointments, and approval of budgets and development plans. In 2026, the fourth sessions of the 14th NPC and 14th CPPCC considered the 15th Five-Year Plan for 2026-2030.

The Central Military Commission and the People’s Liberation Army

The People’s Liberation Army is under Party leadership. The Central Military Commission (CMC) directs the armed forces, and the CPC’s principle is that the Party commands the gun. The chair of the CMC is therefore one of the most important positions in the system.

Institution	Main Role	AP Significance
Central Military Commission	Exercises unified command over the armed forces.	Ensures that military loyalty is directed to the CPC leadership.
People’s Liberation Army	Provides national defense and supports national security objectives.	It is a Party-led military rather than a politically neutral institution independent of the governing party.
People’s Armed Police	Supports internal security, counterterrorism, emergency response, and protection of important facilities.	Connects coercive capacity with domestic stability.
Militia and reserve forces	Provide additional local and reserve capacity.	Extend national defense organization into society.

Courts, Procuratorates, and Supervision

China’s legal system has expanded greatly since the reform era. Courts handle criminal, civil, administrative, commercial, intellectual-property, and other cases. Procuratorates supervise prosecutions and legal enforcement. The legal system provides rules for markets and administration, but it is not independent from Communist Party leadership.

Institution	Formal Role	Practical Position
Supreme People’s Court	Highest judicial organ; guides lower courts and decides important cases.	Works within CPC political leadership and national policy priorities.
Local people’s courts	Hear criminal, civil, administrative, and commercial cases.	Judges may face influence from local authorities, Party committees, policy priorities, and institutional incentives.
Supreme People’s Procuratorate	Highest procuratorial organ; supervises prosecution and legality.	Part of the Party-state’s legal and enforcement structure.
Local procuratorates	Approve arrests, conduct public prosecutions, and supervise legal processes.	Coordinate closely with public security and courts.
Public security organs	Police, investigation, public order, and administrative security.	Major instruments of everyday state authority and social control.
National Commission of Supervision	Supervises public officials and investigates duty-related violations and corruption.	Works together with Party discipline institutions, especially the CCDI.

Institution	Formal Role	Practical Position
Political-legal committees	Coordinate courts, procuratorates, police, justice agencies, and security policy.	Illustrate direct Party leadership over legal and coercive institutions.

Rule by Law and Socialist Rule of Law

Law is essential for contracts, administration, economic regulation, punishment, and policy implementation. The leadership promotes law-based governance and professional legal institutions. At the same time, law remains subordinate to CPC leadership. Courts cannot declare the Party unconstitutional or use judicial review to remove the governing leadership.

RULE OF LAW VERSUS RULE BY LAW

Rule of law means that public power is limited by law and independent institutions can enforce those limits. Rule by law means that leaders use law as a tool to govern, regulate, and punish while retaining ultimate political control. China has extensive legal institutions, but the Party remains above independent judicial challenge.

The National Supervisory System

The supervisory commissions were created to extend anti-corruption and disciplinary oversight across public employees, not only Communist Party members. The National Commission of Supervision stands at the top of this system. It shares offices and personnel with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, joining state supervision with Party discipline.

Purpose	Strength	Concern
Investigate corruption and abuse by public officials.	Creates a nationwide system with broad jurisdiction.	The supervisory process is not independent from the political leadership.
Coordinate Party discipline and state law.	Reduces gaps between Party members and non-Party public employees.	Broad investigatory powers can limit procedural protections.
Support clean government and implementation.	Reinforces central capacity to discipline local officials.	Can strengthen leadership control over cadres as well as combat corruption.

Central-Local Relations

China is a unitary state, not a federation. Provinces and local governments possess important administrative and economic responsibilities, but their authority comes from the central state and can be changed by national law and Party decisions. The centre controls senior appointments, national policy, the armed forces, and final political authority.

Territorial Unit	Examples or Number	Political Position
Provinces	Major territorial governments across the country.	Administer policy under central and provincial Party leadership.
Autonomous regions	Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, and Ningxia.	Formally provide ethnic autonomy, but national security and Party leadership remain central.
Municipalities directly under the centre	Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing.	Provincial-level cities with direct central status.
Special administrative regions	Hong Kong and Macao.	Operate under “one country, two systems,” with separate legal and economic institutions but Chinese sovereignty.
Prefectures, counties, townships, and villages	Multiple subnational levels.	Implement policy through local Party and government structures.
Economic and development zones	Special zones and local pilot areas.	Allow experimentation with investment, trade, technology, and regulation.

Decentralized Administration under Centralized Politics

Local governments manage schools, health services, land use, infrastructure, business regulation, welfare, environmental enforcement, and much economic policy. During the reform era, they were encouraged to experiment and compete for investment. This decentralization helped growth, but it also created local debt, uneven enforcement, land dependence, corruption, and regional inequality.

Political control remains centralized because Party organization departments appoint or influence senior local officials, central inspection teams monitor implementation, national targets shape cadre promotion, and local governments cannot claim constitutional sovereignty against the centre.

Centralizing Mechanism	Effect on Local Government
Appointment of provincial and senior local leaders	Creates career dependence on higher Party authorities.
Cadre evaluation and performance targets	Encourages local officials to meet national economic, security, social, and environmental goals.
Fiscal transfers and national programmes	Give the centre leverage over local spending and policy priorities.
Central inspection and discipline teams	Investigate corruption, disobedience, and implementation failures.
National laws, regulations, and plans	Set common rules for local administration.
Digital reporting and data systems	Increase the centre’s ability to monitor local conditions and officials.
Party committees at every level	Ensure political leadership alongside government administration.

Policy Experimentation

China often uses pilot programmes. A local government tests a policy, central leaders evaluate the results, and successful practices may be expanded nationally. Special economic zones were an early example. Later experiments have involved social policy, environmental markets, digital government, free-trade zones, and urban reform.

EXPERIMENTATION UNDER HIERARCHY
Local experimentation does not make China federal. The centre permits experimentation, selects successful models, and can end a pilot. This method gives the regime flexibility while preserving unitary political control.

Elections and Political Participation

China does not hold competitive national elections in which independent parties can replace the Communist Party. Participation occurs through a combination of indirect elections, village-level voting, Party membership, consultation, mass organizations, petitions, public comments, digital feedback, approved associations, and protest over specific issues.

The People’s Congress Electoral System

Level	Method	Political Meaning
County and township people’s congresses	Deputies are directly elected by voters from approved candidate lists.	Provides limited local electoral participation within Party-managed boundaries.
Higher-level people’s congresses	Deputies are elected indirectly by the congress at the level below.	Creates a hierarchical system rather than direct national election.
National People’s Congress	Deputies are elected by provincial-level congresses, special administrative regions, and the armed forces.	The national legislature is indirectly selected and does not determine whether the CPC remains in power.

Level	Method	Political Meaning
State leadership	The NPC elects the president and other senior state officials through managed nomination and voting.	Formalizes leadership decisions developed through Party processes.

Village Committees

Village committees are grassroots self-governing bodies whose members may be directly elected. They handle local public affairs and services. Village elections can produce competition among local candidates, but villages are not autonomous governments, and Party branches remain politically influential.

LOCAL ELECTIONS DO NOT EQUAL NATIONAL DEMOCRATIZATION

Direct elections at village or lower congress level can improve information, accountability, and participation. They do not create a pathway for an independent opposition party to win national power. Always separate local electoral mechanisms from regime-level competition.

The Minor Parties and the United Front

China officially recognizes eight minor political parties in addition to the CPC. They participate in consultation through the united-front system and the CPPCC. They do not compete to remove the Communist Party or form an alternative government. The CPC describes this arrangement as multiparty cooperation under Communist Party leadership.

Institution	Participation Offered	Political Limit
Eight minor parties	Policy advice, professional representation, consultation, and participation in selected offices.	They accept CPC leadership and do not compete for national control.
CPPCC	Discussion, proposals, representation of sectors and social groups.	Advisory rather than a sovereign legislature or opposition chamber.
Mass organizations	Women, youth, workers, professionals, and other groups communicate with the state.	They are linked to Party leadership rather than fully independent interest groups.
Business associations	Provide information and advocate on regulation and markets.	Operate within political limits and may contain Party organizations.
Public consultation	Citizens and experts may comment on selected draft laws and policies.	The leadership decides the scope and does not permit organized electoral opposition.

Petitions, Protest, and Responsiveness

Citizens may use petitions, complaint offices, online platforms, courts, media reports, local contacts, and collective protest to demand solutions. Many protests focus on wages, land, housing, pollution, local corruption, pensions, or services rather than openly calling for regime change.

The state may respond differently depending on the issue. Officials may negotiate, compensate, discipline local cadres, censor discussion, deploy police, or arrest organizers. The regime is generally more tolerant of isolated, local, issue-based claims than of coordinated national organizations that connect many grievances.

Type of Claim	Likely Political Treatment
Local service complaint	May be addressed through petitions, mediation, or administrative correction.
Labor or wage dispute	May receive negotiation or legal handling, but independent national unions are not permitted.
Environmental complaint	Can influence local enforcement or project decisions when it remains issue-specific.
Anti-corruption allegation	May be investigated if it aligns with disciplinary priorities.
Independent national organization	Faces registration barriers, surveillance, censorship, and possible prosecution.

Type of Claim	Likely Political Treatment
Challenge to CPC rule or territorial unity	Treated as a major political and national security issue.

Civil Society, Media, and Digital Governance

China has charities, professional groups, community organizations, religious institutions, environmental groups, foundations, and online communities. Many provide useful services and policy information. Civil society remains politically restricted because organizations must register, accept supervision, avoid prohibited political activity, and operate within the Party-state's legal framework.

Media and Censorship

Area	Main Pattern
Television and major news media	State-owned or Party-supervised outlets communicate official priorities and approved political narratives.
Commercial media	May report social problems and consumer issues but remain subject to censorship and political directives.
Internet platforms	Provide enormous space for information, commerce, entertainment, and public discussion, while companies must enforce content rules.
Great Firewall	Technical and legal controls restrict access to many foreign websites, platforms, and information sources.
Content removal	Posts involving sensitive political organization, leadership criticism, collective action, or security issues may be blocked or deleted.
Real-name and platform regulation	Increase accountability and the state's ability to identify users and manage online communication.
Propaganda and guidance of public opinion	Official media and digital campaigns promote Party policy, patriotism, and preferred interpretations of events.

DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM

Digital authoritarianism uses surveillance, platform regulation, data, censorship, and online propaganda to strengthen political control. It does not mean that every online message is read by a government official. Control is produced through automated filters, company compliance, targeted monitoring, legal penalties, and uncertainty about what may be punished.

A Common Misconception: Social Credit

China does not operate one single nationwide score that assigns every citizen a universal political rating. The term social credit covers multiple systems involving regulatory compliance, court judgments, financial credit, corporate records, and sector-specific blacklists or redlists. These systems can strengthen enforcement and data sharing, but they should not be described as one simple score controlling every part of life.

Mass Organizations

Organization	Constituency	Role
All-China Federation of Trade Unions	Workers	Represents workers within the Party-state framework; independent national unions are not permitted.
Communist Youth League	Young people	Political education, recruitment, service, and leadership development.
All-China Women's Federation	Women	Advocacy, services, policy communication, and implementation of official programmes.

Organization	Constituency	Role
Residents' and villagers' committees	Urban neighborhoods and rural villages	Local services, mediation, information, mobilization, and community governance.
Industry and professional associations	Businesses and professions	Provide expertise and communicate sector interests under regulation and Party oversight.

Political Culture and Social Cleavages

China contains major differences between coast and interior, cities and countryside, wealthy and poor citizens, migrants and local residents, generations, ethnic groups, and regions. Rapid growth has improved living standards but also created inequality and different political expectations.

Cleavage	Political Importance
Urban-rural	Cities generally have higher incomes, stronger services, and more opportunities; rural areas have experienced migration, aging, and uneven development.
Hukou status	Household registration has historically affected access to education, health care, housing, and welfare in the place where a person lives.
Coastal-interior	Coastal regions benefited earlier from trade and foreign investment, while inland policy has required transfers and development programmes.
Class and wealth	Private entrepreneurs, professionals, workers, migrants, farmers, and state-sector employees have different interests and resources.
Generation	Older citizens remember Maoist scarcity and reform-era growth; younger citizens face education competition, housing costs, and employment pressure.
Ethnicity	China recognizes 56 ethnic groups; policy combines formal autonomy and cultural recognition with strong national integration and security control.
Religion	Recognized religious communities operate through registered institutions, while unregistered or politically sensitive activity may face restriction.
Gender	Women's education and employment have expanded, but gaps remain in leadership, wages, care work, and workplace equality.
Hong Kong and mainland	Different legal and political traditions under "one country, two systems" have produced debates over autonomy, national security, and identity.
National identity and Taiwan	The CPC treats national unity and eventual unification as core legitimacy and sovereignty issues.

The Hukou System

Hukou is household registration. It traditionally classified people by place and, historically, rural or urban status. Migrant workers could live and work in cities without receiving the same access to local schools, health care, housing, or social benefits as registered urban residents. Reform has gradually reduced restrictions, especially in smaller cities.

In May 2026, the State Council issued guidelines to expand basic public services according to actual residence rather than only local registration. The reform shows both the continuing importance of hukou and the government's attempt to reduce unequal treatment of migrants.

Political Effect of Hukou	Explanation
Controls migration and service eligibility	Local registration affects how governments plan services and benefits.
Creates unequal citizenship in practice	Migrants may contribute to urban economies while receiving fewer local benefits.
Supports rapid industrialization	A large migrant labor force supplied factories, construction, logistics, and services.
Produces social pressure	Education, housing, health, and family separation generate demands for reform.
Encourages gradual policy change	The government has eased restrictions and expanded residence-based services without abolishing all local differences.

Ethnic Policy and Territorial Unity

China is officially a unified multiethnic state. Autonomous regions, prefectures, and counties provide formal recognition and some cultural and administrative arrangements. The central leadership, however, gives priority to territorial integrity, national security, standard education, development, and Party control.

HIGH-SENSITIVITY ISSUES

Questions involving Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan combine identity, sovereignty, rights, national security, foreign policy, and regime legitimacy. In AP responses, explain the institutional and political stakes rather than using only moral labels or unsupported claims.

Nationalism

Nationalism is a major source of unity and legitimacy. The official narrative emphasizes recovery from foreign domination, economic revival, technological achievement, military strength, territorial integrity, and national rejuvenation. Nationalism can strengthen support for the state, but it can also limit diplomatic flexibility when public expectations become intense.

Political Economy: Reform, Markets, and State Direction

China's economy combines markets with extensive state direction. Private firms, foreign investment, competition, and consumer markets are important. At the same time, the state owns major enterprises, controls land and finance, guides industrial policy, sets development plans, and uses Party organizations to influence economic institutions.

From Command Economy to Socialist Market Economy

Reform	Main Change	Political Importance
Household Responsibility System	Farm households received contracts and could keep or sell output after obligations.	Raised agricultural incentives and weakened the commune system.
Township and Village Enterprises	Local collective and semi-private firms expanded outside central planning.	Created rural industry and local government revenue.
Special Economic Zones	Selected coastal areas offered flexible rules, foreign investment, and export production.	Allowed controlled experimentation before wider reform.
Price and enterprise reform	Markets became more important and state firms gained managerial autonomy.	Increased efficiency but also produced layoffs and inequality.
Private sector growth	Entrepreneurs expanded in manufacturing, services, technology, and trade.	Created wealth and jobs while remaining subject to Party-state regulation.
WTO membership	China entered global trade rules and production networks.	Accelerated exports, investment, urbanization, and international economic influence.
New industrial policy	The state supports strategic technology, advanced manufacturing, energy, infrastructure, and supply-chain security.	Shows continued state leadership within a market economy.

State-Owned Enterprises and State Capitalism

State-owned enterprises (SOEs) remain important in energy, banking, telecommunications, transport, defense, construction, and other strategic sectors. Private firms contribute greatly to employment and innovation, but the Party-state controls access to finance, licenses, land, data, and regulation.

Feature	Market Element	State Element
Ownership	Private domestic and foreign firms operate for profit.	The state owns major firms and strategic assets.

Feature	Market Element	State Element
Prices	Many goods and services use market prices.	The government regulates important sectors and can intervene during crises.
Finance	Firms compete for investment and credit.	Large state banks and regulators direct capital toward national priorities.
Planning	Businesses respond to consumer demand and competition.	Five-Year Plans and industrial policies guide technology, infrastructure, and regional development.
Labor	Workers move between sectors and cities.	Labor organization is regulated and independent national unions are prohibited.
Corporate governance	Managers and shareholders pursue business goals.	Party committees operate in state firms and many private firms, especially on political and strategic matters.

Five-Year Plans

Five-Year Plans express national priorities rather than setting every factory's output as under a classic command economy. The Party develops strategic recommendations, the State Council prepares the plan, and the National People's Congress reviews and approves it. Ministries and local governments then translate national objectives into programmes, budgets, regulation, and projects.

The 15th Five-Year Plan covers 2026-2030. Official priorities include high-quality development, scientific and technological self-reliance, further reform, improved living standards, green development, cultural development, and stronger national security. The plan reflects the combination of economic modernization and political centralization.

15th Plan Priority	Political Meaning
High-quality development	Growth should rely more on productivity, innovation, consumption, and efficient investment.
Technology and self-reliance	Strategic sectors are connected to security and international competition.
Further reform	Market and administrative changes continue under firm Party leadership.
Public welfare	Employment, education, health, aging, childcare, and housing support performance legitimacy.
Green transition	Pollution control and carbon targets respond to public concern and global commitments.
National security	Economic, technological, food, energy, data, and supply-chain policy are treated as security issues.

Economic and Social Challenges

Challenge	Why It Matters Politically
Slower economic growth	The Party must maintain performance legitimacy with lower growth than in earlier reform decades.
Youth and graduate employment	Education expectations are high, and weak job opportunities can produce dissatisfaction.
Property and local government debt	Housing and land finance connect household wealth, banks, developers, and local budgets.
Aging population and low birth rates	Increase pension, health, and care costs while reducing future labor-force growth.
Regional and household inequality	Unequal opportunity can weaken claims of shared development.
Environmental pressure	Air, water, soil, and carbon problems affect health and public trust.
Technology restrictions and external competition	Encourage self-reliance but may raise costs and limit access to advanced inputs.
Private-sector confidence	Entrepreneurs need stable rules, while the state seeks political control and national-policy alignment.
Food and energy security	Large population and import dependence make supply stability a national priority.

Challenge	Why It Matters Politically
Corruption and implementation gaps	Local officials may distort policy, data, land decisions, or public spending.

THE DEVELOPMENT BARGAIN

A useful AP idea is the development bargain: citizens receive rising living standards, order, national strength, and improved services while the Party retains political control. The bargain is not a written contract and does not explain every citizen's opinion, but it helps connect economic performance with authoritarian legitimacy.

Contemporary Political Challenges

China's leadership must maintain one-party control while managing slower growth, technological competition, demographic change, unequal services, environmental demands, local debt, public expectations, and international tension. Strong central authority can mobilize resources quickly, but it can also reduce open criticism and make policy correction more dependent on information reaching the top.

Challenge	Government Response	Political Trade-Off
Economic rebalancing	Promote consumption, services, innovation, and high-value manufacturing.	Reducing dependence on property and investment may slow short-term growth.
Technology competition	Support domestic research, semiconductors, AI, digital infrastructure, and industrial policy.	State direction may mobilize resources but can reduce market efficiency or increase external tension.
Population aging	Expand elderly care, health systems, childcare support, and birth-friendly policies.	Benefits require large and sustained public spending.
Hukou inequality	Ease registration and extend services according to residence.	Local governments must finance services for larger populations.
Environmental goals	Pollution controls, renewable energy, carbon targets, and green industry.	Energy security and industrial growth may conflict with environmental targets.
Corruption	Discipline campaigns, supervision, audits, and cadre control.	Central enforcement can punish abuse but may not create independent accountability.
Information control	Censorship, platform regulation, propaganda, and surveillance.	Control limits collective opposition but can hide problems and weaken policy feedback.
National unity	Security laws, integration policies, patriotic education, and territorial claims.	Strong control may intensify identity conflict and international criticism.

China in Comparative Perspective

Dimension	China	Russia	United Kingdom
Regime type	One-party authoritarian	Competitive authoritarian / personalist authoritarian	Liberal parliamentary democracy
Territorial system	Unitary with autonomous and special regions	Formally federal but highly centralized	Unitary with devolution
Top political office	CPC general secretary	President	Prime minister
National elections	No competitive election for governing power	Multiparty elections with highly unequal competition	Free, competitive elections
Legislature	Subordinate but functional NPC	Federal Assembly dominated by executive	Parliament can remove government
Ruling organization	Communist Party monopoly	Dominant party plus personal networks	Alternation among competing parties
Judiciary	Under Party leadership	Formally separate but politically constrained	Independent courts
Economy	State-guided market economy	Resource-based state capitalism	Market economy with regulatory welfare state

CHINA AND RUSSIA: DO NOT CONFUSE THEM

- China is a formal one-party state; Russia legally permits national opposition parties.
- China's most important institution is the Communist Party; Russia's system is centered on the presidency and executive network.
- China is constitutionally unitary; Russia is constitutionally federal.
- China does not directly elect its president; Russia formally elects its president by nationwide vote.
- Both restrict civil society, media, judicial independence, and political competition, but they use different institutional arrangements.

Key Terms

Term	Meaning
Communist Party of China (CPC)	The ruling party that controls national political leadership.
Party-state	A system in which ruling-party organizations guide and penetrate state institutions.
One-party authoritarianism	A regime in which one party monopolizes national political power and restricts competition and civil liberties.
Democratic centralism	Internal discussion followed by mandatory obedience to decisions of higher bodies.
General secretary	Top leader of the CPC and the most important political office.
Politburo Standing Committee	The small top collective leadership body of the CPC.
Cadre	A Party or state official within the governing hierarchy.
Nomenklatura	Party-controlled system for selecting and appointing officials to important posts.
Party cell	Primary CPC organization within a workplace, community, school, government body, or enterprise.
Central Commission for Discipline Inspection	Top CPC body for discipline and anti-corruption investigation.
National People's Congress	China's national legislature and formally the highest state organ of power.
NPC Standing Committee	Permanent legislative body working between annual NPC sessions.
State Council	China's central government and highest state administrative organ.
Premier	Head of the State Council and government administration.
Central Military Commission	Top Party-state body commanding the armed forces.
CPPCC	National political advisory body representing parties, sectors, and social groups under CPC leadership.
United front	System for incorporating minor parties and social elites into cooperation under CPC leadership.
Mass organization	Party-linked organization representing a major social group such as workers, youth, or women.
Hukou	Household registration system affecting residence status and access to local public services.
Special economic zone	Area using flexible rules to encourage investment, exports, and market experimentation.
State-owned enterprise	Firm owned or controlled by the state, often in a strategic sector.
Socialist market economy	Official term for markets and private activity operating under socialist state and Party leadership.
Five-Year Plan	National development blueprint setting strategic priorities and targets.
Performance legitimacy	Support based on economic, social, security, or administrative results.
Great Firewall	Legal and technical system restricting access to selected foreign internet content and platforms.
Digital authoritarianism	Use of digital technology, data, surveillance, censorship, and platform control to support authoritarian rule.
Rule by law	Use of legal institutions as governing tools without independent legal limits on the ruling leadership.
Policy experimentation	Testing policies locally before wider adoption by the central government.
One country, two systems	Framework under which Hong Kong and Macao retain distinct systems under Chinese sovereignty.
Two sessions	Annual meetings of the NPC and CPPCC National Committee.

Facts to Remember

1. The People's Republic of China was established in 1949 after the Communist victory in the civil war.
2. China is a unitary one-party authoritarian state.
3. The Constitution states that CPC leadership is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics.
4. The most important political office is general secretary of the CPC Central Committee.
5. As of July 2026, Xi Jinping is general secretary, president, and chairman of the Central Military Commission.
6. Li Qiang is premier and leads the State Council.
7. The Politburo Standing Committee is the top small collective leadership body of the Party.
8. Democratic centralism permits discussion but requires obedience to final decisions of higher bodies.
9. The CPC controls senior appointments through the cadre and nomenklatura system.
10. Party cells operate inside government bodies, communities, schools, enterprises, and social organizations.
11. The CCDI is the top Party discipline body and works closely with the National Commission of Supervision.
12. The National People's Congress is formally the highest state organ of power.
13. The NPC normally meets in full session once each year and has a permanent Standing Committee.
14. The NPC has nearly 3,000 deputies and is indirectly selected.
15. The president is elected by the NPC for a five-year term.
16. The presidential two-term limit was removed from the Constitution in 2018.
17. The State Council is the central government and highest state administrative organ.
18. The premier, vice premiers, state councillors, ministers, and other officials make up State Council leadership.
19. The Party commands the People's Liberation Army through the Central Military Commission.
20. The CPPCC is advisory and does not compete with the CPC for national power.
21. Eight minor parties participate under the united-front system and accept CPC leadership.
22. China does not hold competitive national elections for control of government.
23. Lower-level people's congress elections are direct; higher congresses are elected indirectly.
24. Village committees may be directly elected but do not create national party competition.
25. China is unitary, although local governments have major administrative and economic responsibilities.
26. Policy experimentation allows local pilots under central authorization and supervision.
27. Hukou is the household registration system and has shaped access to local public services.
28. The Great Firewall and platform regulation support information control.
29. China does not have one universal social-credit score for every citizen.
30. The economy combines markets, private firms, state-owned enterprises, planning, and Party leadership.
31. Deng-era reform expanded markets without ending Communist Party rule.
32. Special economic zones were important laboratories for reform and foreign investment.
33. The 15th Five-Year Plan covers 2026-2030.
34. Performance legitimacy connects growth, stability, services, and national strength with political support.
35. Major current challenges include slower growth, youth employment, property and local debt, aging, inequality, environment, and technology competition.
36. China differs from Russia because China is a formal one-party unitary state, while Russia is formally multiparty and federal.

Practice

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which institution is the most important source of political leadership in China?
(A) Supreme People's Court

- (B) Communist Party of China
 - (C) Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
 - (D) National Commission of Supervision
2. China is best classified as which type of regime?
- (A) Federal parliamentary democracy
 - (B) One-party authoritarian state
 - (C) Military junta
 - (D) Competitive presidential democracy
3. Democratic centralism means that:
- (A) local governments are sovereign
 - (B) discussion may occur, but lower bodies obey final decisions of higher bodies
 - (C) all laws require a national referendum
 - (D) courts may overrule the Communist Party
4. Which office is normally the most politically powerful in China?
- (A) CPC general secretary
 - (B) vice president
 - (C) chief justice
 - (D) mayor of Beijing
5. The National People's Congress is formally:
- (A) the highest state organ of power
 - (B) an independent opposition chamber
 - (C) the ruling Communist Party's disciplinary commission
 - (D) a directly elected presidency
6. Which body works as the permanent legislature between full NPC sessions?
- (A) State Council
 - (B) NPC Standing Committee
 - (C) Central Military Commission
 - (D) CPPCC
7. The premier is the head of which institution?
- (A) State Council
 - (B) Supreme People's Court
 - (C) Politburo Standing Committee
 - (D) People's Liberation Army
8. The nomenklatura system is used primarily to:
- (A) appoint and promote important officials
 - (B) register foreign voters
 - (C) organize independent unions
 - (D) elect judges by popular vote
9. Which statement best describes the Chinese judiciary?
- (A) It is fully independent from Party leadership.
 - (B) It has extensive legal functions but is politically subordinate to the CPC.
 - (C) It appoints the general secretary.
 - (D) It can legally ban the Communist Party.
10. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference primarily performs which function?
- (A) Judicial review
 - (B) Political consultation and advice
 - (C) Competitive executive election
 - (D) Military command
11. Which statement best describes China's territorial system?
- (A) It is constitutionally federal.
 - (B) It is unitary with important local administration.
 - (C) Provinces possess a constitutional right to secede.
 - (D) Local leaders are independent of Party appointment.

12. The hukou system is most closely related to:
 (A) household registration and access to local services
 (B) military recruitment only
 (C) election of NPC deputies
 (D) regulation of foreign embassies
13. Which reform is most closely associated with Deng Xiaoping?
 (A) Restoration of hereditary monarchy
 (B) Market reform and opening to foreign investment
 (C) Abolition of the Communist Party
 (D) Creation of competitive national elections
14. A special economic zone is designed mainly to:
 (A) prevent all foreign trade
 (B) experiment with investment, exports, and flexible economic policies
 (C) create an independent political party
 (D) replace local government with military rule
15. Why are village elections not evidence of full national democratization?
 (A) Villagers never vote.
 (B) They do not allow independent parties to replace the CPC nationally.
 (C) They elect the president directly.
 (D) They control the armed forces.
16. Which organization commands the People's Liberation Army?
 (A) CPPCC
 (B) Central Military Commission
 (C) Supreme People's Procuratorate
 (D) Ministry of Commerce
17. Performance legitimacy refers to support based mainly on:
 (A) hereditary right
 (B) government delivery of growth, services, order, or national strength
 (C) judicial independence
 (D) foreign election monitoring
18. Which feature best illustrates China's Party-state system?
 (A) Party committees operate within government agencies and enterprises.
 (B) The military elects opposition parties.
 (C) Provinces can ignore national law.
 (D) The prime minister is selected by Parliament after competitive elections.
19. Which statement about social credit in China is most accurate?
 (A) Every citizen receives one universal political score.
 (B) It consists of multiple regulatory, financial, court, and compliance systems rather than one universal score.
 (C) It is the same as hukou.
 (D) It is administered by the CPPCC only.
20. Which statement best distinguishes China from Russia?
 (A) China is a formal one-party state; Russia legally permits several national parties.
 (B) China is federal; Russia is unitary.
 (C) China directly elects its president; Russia does not.
 (D) Russia has no legislature.

Answer Key and Brief Explanations

Q	Answer	Brief Explanation
1	B	The CPC controls national political leadership and guides the state.
2	B	The CPC monopolizes power and restricts competition and civil liberties.
3	B	Internal discussion is followed by obedience to higher-level decisions.

Q	Answer	Brief Explanation
4	A	The general secretary leads the ruling Party and is the central political office.
5	A	The Constitution identifies the NPC as the highest state organ of power.
6	B	The Standing Committee performs legislative work throughout the year.
7	A	The premier leads the State Council, China's central government.
8	A	The nomenklatura system gives the Party control over key appointments.
9	B	Courts perform major legal functions but remain under Party leadership.
10	B	The CPPCC is a consultative and advisory institution.
11	B	China is unitary, although local governments administer major responsibilities.
12	A	Hukou links household registration with residence and services.
13	B	Deng led reform and opening without political democratization.
14	B	SEZs served as controlled laboratories for investment and market reform.
15	B	Local voting does not permit national alternation of governing parties.
16	B	The CMC directs the armed forces under Party leadership.
17	B	Performance legitimacy depends on successful policy results.
18	A	Party organizations operating inside state and social institutions define the Party-state.
19	B	Social credit is fragmented across multiple systems, not one universal citizen score.
20	A	China is a one-party state; Russia formally allows multiparty elections.

Concept Application Questions

1. Define democratic centralism and explain one way it shapes decision-making in China.
2. Define performance legitimacy and explain one Chinese policy that may strengthen it.
3. Explain how the nomenklatura system helps the CPC maintain political control.
4. Explain why the National People's Congress is both subordinate and politically useful.
5. Explain one way local policy experimentation can improve authoritarian governance.
6. Explain how hukou creates a political or social cleavage.
7. Explain one way digital technology strengthens regime stability and one way it may create risk.
8. Explain why anti-corruption campaigns can increase both public support and leadership centralization.

Comparative Questions

1. Compare the role of the ruling party in China with the role of United Russia in Russia.
2. Compare the relationship between executive and legislature in China and the United Kingdom.
3. Compare central-local relations in unitary China with federal Russia or Mexico.
4. Compare judicial independence in China and the United Kingdom.
5. Compare sources of legitimacy in China and Iran.
6. Compare political participation in China and Russia.
7. Compare state capitalism in China with resource-based state capitalism in Russia.
8. Compare the use of nationalism in China and one other AP course country.

Data Analysis Practice

HYPOTHETICAL DATA SET

- Urban household income rises steadily from 2010 to 2020, but the rate of growth slows after 2021.
- Youth unemployment increases during the same later period.
- Government spending on vocational training and technology industries rises.
- Online discussion of employment becomes more heavily moderated during economic stress.

- Describe one trend in the hypothetical data.

- Identify one policy response shown in the data.
- Explain how slower income growth could affect performance legitimacy.
- Explain why the government might expand training and industrial policy.
- Explain one political reason for stronger moderation of online discussion during economic stress.
- Identify one additional indicator that would help evaluate regime stability.

Argument Essay Questions

1. Develop an argument about whether economic performance is the most important source of legitimacy in China.
2. Develop an argument about whether local policy experimentation meaningfully decentralizes political power in China.
3. Develop an argument about whether consultation can strengthen an authoritarian regime.
4. Develop an argument about whether digital technology is more likely to strengthen or weaken political control in China.

Model Concept Application Response

QUESTION

Explain how the nomenklatura system contributes to regime stability in China.

The nomenklatura system is the Communist Party's control over appointments to important Party, state, local-government, military, university, and state-enterprise positions. It contributes to regime stability because officials depend on the Party for promotion and career advancement. This gives cadres an incentive to implement central policy, maintain social stability, and demonstrate political loyalty. The system also allows higher Party authorities to rotate officials and prevent local leaders from building independent political bases. However, it can weaken accountability to citizens because promotion depends more on the Party hierarchy than on competitive elections.

Why This Response Works

- It defines the concept directly.
- It explains a clear causal mechanism between appointments and loyalty.
- It uses specific Chinese institutions and political behavior.
- It identifies both a stabilizing effect and a limitation.
- It avoids incorrectly describing China as a system of competitive national elections.

Final Revision Checklist

- Know the historical importance of 1949, Maoist campaigns, the reform era, 1989, and the contemporary period.
- Explain why economic reform did not produce national political democratization.
- Define one-party authoritarianism, Party-state, and democratic centralism.
- Distinguish the CPC from the state institutions it leads.
- Know the National Party Congress, Central Committee, Politburo, Standing Committee, Secretariat, and general secretary.
- Explain the cadre and nomenklatura systems.
- Explain the importance of Party cells in government, society, and the economy.
- Know the roles of the CCDI and National Commission of Supervision.
- Know why the general secretary is more important than the presidency alone.
- Know the roles of the president, premier, and State Council.
- Distinguish the NPC from the NPC Standing Committee.
- Explain why the NPC is subordinate but still functional.
- Know the purpose of the CPPCC and the eight minor parties.
- Explain why the People's Liberation Army is a Party-led military.

- Know the courts, procuratorates, public security organs, and political-legal committees.
- Explain rule by law and the limits of judicial independence.
- Explain why China is unitary even though local governments have major responsibilities.
- Know provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and special administrative regions.
- Explain policy experimentation and central supervision of local officials.
- Know which elections are direct and which are indirect.
- Explain why village elections do not create national democratic competition.
- Know the permitted channels of participation: Party, consultation, mass organizations, petitions, local elections, and issue-based protest.
- Explain the Great Firewall, platform regulation, censorship, and digital authoritarianism.
- Avoid the false claim that every Chinese citizen has one universal social-credit score.
- Explain the urban-rural, hukou, regional, class, ethnic, generational, and gender cleavages.
- Know the difference between a command economy and China's socialist market economy.
- Explain household responsibility, special economic zones, private firms, SOEs, and state capitalism.
- Know how Five-Year Plans connect Party priorities with government implementation.
- Know that the current 15th Five-Year Plan covers 2026-2030.
- Connect economic performance, nationalism, consultation, ideology, control, and anti-corruption with legitimacy.
- Be ready to compare China with Russia, the United Kingdom, Iran, Mexico, and Nigeria.

Source Note

This chapter follows the required concepts and country-case expectations of the AP Comparative Government and Politics Course and Exam Description. Institutional descriptions were checked against the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the National People's Congress, the State Council, and official materials on the 2026 "two sessions" and the 15th Five-Year Plan. Current leadership references are accurate to July 2026. The chapter uses simple AP-level explanations and avoids treating formal constitutional language as identical to political practice.

Chapter Six: Government and Politics in Mexico

Federal presidential government, competitive elections, party-system change, and the continuing struggle over state capacity

Mexico is a federal presidential republic with competitive national elections, a written constitution, a bicameral legislature, state governments, political parties, courts, and an independent electoral administration. Its modern political system was shaped by the Mexican Revolution, seven decades of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), market-oriented economic reform, democratization, and the rise of the National Regeneration Movement (Morena).

The country is democratic, but democracy does not remove every older pattern of power. Clientelism, patronage, corporatist organizations, corruption, regional inequality, organized crime, and weak law enforcement continue to affect political life. At the same time, elections have produced genuine changes of governing party, an active civil society, and strong public debate.

For AP Comparative Government, Mexico is especially useful because it shows how a dominant-party system can become competitive without losing all of its former institutions and habits. Students should connect formal rules with actual political practice: a strong presidency with constitutional limits, federalism with heavy fiscal centralization, elections with unequal local conditions, and economic integration with continuing social inequality.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Historical foundations: revolution, the PRI system, economic crisis, democratization, and the rise of Morena
- The Constitution of 1917, federalism, presidentialism, and the sexenio
- The presidency, Congress, judiciary, electoral institutions, and state governments
- Political parties, corporatism, clientelism, civil society, and participation
- Economic reform, oil, trade integration, welfare policy, and the informal economy
- Security, corruption, inequality, indigenous politics, migration, and contemporary institutional change
- Key terms, facts to remember, MCQs, data analysis, comparison, and argument practice

Mexico at a Glance

Feature	Institutional Snapshot
Regime type	Federal presidential democracy
Constitution	Constitution of 1917, frequently amended
Executive	President elected nationally for one six-year term
Legislature	Bicameral Congress: Chamber of Deputies and Senate
Territorial system	31 states and Mexico City; municipalities are the basic local level
Electoral administration	National Electoral Institute (INE) and Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF)
Major parties	Morena, PAN, PRI, MC, PVEM, PT; PRD lost national registration after 2024
Economic model	Mixed market economy integrated with North America
Current president	Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, term 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2030
Central AP question	How democratic competition interacts with concentrated power and uneven state capacity

Historical Foundations of the Mexican Political System

Mexico cannot be understood only through its present Constitution. Its institutions grew from revolution, state building, one-party dominance, economic crisis, and negotiated political opening. Modern politics contains both democratic competition and institutions created during the long PRI era.

The Mexican Revolution and the Constitution of 1917

The Mexican Revolution began in 1910 against the long rule of Porfirio Diaz. It included liberal reformers, peasant armies, regional military leaders, workers, landless communities, and rival revolutionary factions. The conflict destroyed the old dictatorship but also produced years of violence and political fragmentation.

The Constitution of 1917 created a federal republic and included unusually strong social provisions for its time. Article 27 gave the nation authority over land and subsoil resources and supported agrarian reform. Article 123 established labor rights. The Constitution also limited the political influence of the Catholic Church and strengthened the revolutionary state.

CONSTITUTIONAL LEGACY

The Constitution combined liberal political institutions with social and nationalist goals. It remains the legal foundation of the system, but it has been amended many times as governments changed economic policy, electoral rules, human-rights protections, and the judiciary.

The Formation of the PRI System

After the revolution, political leaders needed a way to prevent repeated military struggles over presidential succession. In 1929, the ruling elite created a national party that later became the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI. The party brought regional leaders, labor unions, peasant organizations, officials, and business interests into a national political structure.

The PRI did not eliminate elections, Congress, courts, states, or opposition parties. Instead, it dominated them. Presidents controlled access to public office and resources, governors managed local political machines, unions and peasant organizations received benefits in exchange for support, and opposition parties faced unequal conditions. This system is often described as a hegemonic-party regime rather than a fully totalitarian system.

Corporatism, Clientelism, and Presidential Succession

Corporatism organized major social groups into officially recognized sectors linked to the governing party. Labor, peasants, and popular organizations gained channels to the state, but their leaders were expected to mobilize support and limit independent opposition. Clientelism operated at the individual and local level: political support was exchanged for jobs, services, permits, food, land access, or other benefits.

Presidents served one six-year term and selected or strongly influenced the choice of their successor. This informal practice was known as the *dedazo*, meaning the presidential pointing of a finger. The no-reelection rule prevented one president from remaining in office, but it did not prevent the ruling party from remaining in power.

A USEFUL DISTINCTION

- Corporatism links organized sectors to the state through recognized leaders.
- Clientelism exchanges targeted benefits for political support.
- Patronage distributes public jobs or resources to supporters.
- These practices can overlap, but they are not identical.

Economic Crisis and Political Opening

For several decades, the government promoted import-substitution industrialization. The state protected domestic producers, expanded public enterprises, controlled key industries, and used oil revenue to finance development. Growth helped the PRI claim performance legitimacy.

The debt crisis of 1982 changed this model. Falling oil prices, heavy borrowing, inflation, and capital flight forced the government to reduce spending, privatize state companies, lower trade barriers, and seek closer integration with the United States and Canada. These reforms weakened some corporatist relationships and produced new social winners and losers.

Political competition also increased. Electoral reforms expanded proportional representation, public financing, and opposition access. The 1988 presidential election was highly disputed and damaged the regime's legitimacy. In the 1990s, a more autonomous electoral institution was developed, opposition parties won more state governments, and the PRI lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies in 1997.

Democratic Alternation after 2000

In 2000, Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) won the presidency. This was the first presidential victory by an opposition party in more than seventy years and marked a major democratic transition. The PAN retained the presidency in 2006, the PRI returned in 2012, Morena won in 2018, and Morena won again in 2024.

Alternation demonstrated that the presidency could change hands through elections. However, democratization did not automatically create strong policing, equal justice, effective local government, or an end to corruption. Political competition developed more quickly than state capacity in many regions.

Morena and the Fourth Transformation

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador founded Morena after leaving the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). He won the presidency in 2018 with a promise to fight corruption, reduce elite privilege, strengthen social programs, and carry out a Fourth Transformation of Mexican public life after independence, liberal reform, and revolution.

Morena rapidly replaced the PRI and PRD as the dominant force on the political left. Claudia Sheinbaum, Morena's candidate, won the 2024 presidential election with 59.76 percent of the vote and became Mexico's first woman president. She took office on 1 October 2024 for a term ending on 30 September 2030.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- 1910 - Mexican Revolution begins
- 1917 - Constitution establishes the modern constitutional order
- 1929 - National ruling party created; later becomes the PRI
- 1934-1940 - Lazaro Cardenas expands land reform and nationalizes oil
- 1968 - Tlatelolco massacre exposes coercion beneath regime stability
- 1982 - Debt crisis accelerates market-oriented reform
- 1988 - Disputed presidential election damages PRI legitimacy
- 1994 - NAFTA begins; Zapatista rebellion draws attention to indigenous exclusion
- 1997 - PRI loses its majority in the Chamber of Deputies
- 2000 - PAN candidate Vicente Fox wins the presidency
- 2018 - Morena candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador wins the presidency
- 2024 - Claudia Sheinbaum wins the presidency; judicial reform is adopted
- 2025 - First federal elections are held for many judicial offices

The Constitutional Framework and Regime Type

Mexico is constitutionally a representative, democratic, secular, and federal republic. Sovereignty belongs to the people and is exercised through federal and state institutions. The Constitution divides federal power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

A Federal Presidential Democracy

Mexico is presidential because the president is both head of state and head of government, is elected separately from Congress, appoints the cabinet, and serves a fixed term. It is federal because powers are divided among the national government, states, Mexico City, and municipalities. It is democratic because citizens choose national and local officials through competitive elections.

Formal democratic institutions are strong enough to permit alternation of power, opposition victories, divided government, public criticism, and judicial challenges. Yet democracy operates unevenly. Some local areas have stronger rule of law and more competitive politics than others, while organized crime and political violence can reduce effective citizen choice.

The Sexenio and No Reelection

The president serves one six-year term, called a sexenio, and may never hold the office again. This rule reflects the revolutionary principle of no reelection. It prevents presidential entrenchment, but it also creates a powerful single term in which presidents try to establish a legacy quickly.

The president cannot dissolve Congress, and Congress cannot remove the president through an ordinary vote of no confidence. This separation of origin and survival distinguishes Mexico from parliamentary systems such as the United Kingdom.

AP COMPARISON

Mexico and the United States are federal presidential systems, but Mexico elects the president by a nationwide plurality without an electoral college. Mexico also prohibits presidential reelection completely, while the United States permits two elected terms.

Democratic Consolidation and Majoritarian Pressure

Mexico has experienced repeated national elections and peaceful transfers of power, important signs of democratic consolidation. Nevertheless, a governing coalition with very large congressional majorities can change institutions quickly. This creates a continuing debate between effective majority rule and the protection of independent checks.

The judicial reform adopted in 2024 and implemented through judicial elections beginning in 2025 is an important example. Supporters presented popular election as democratic accountability and a response to corruption. Critics argued that elections could weaken judicial independence, increase party influence, and reduce professional safeguards. AP students should describe both the formal change and the political debate without assuming that either side alone proves the reform’s effects.

Sources of Legitimacy and Political Stability

Mexican governments draw legitimacy from several sources. No single source is sufficient, and the importance of each has changed over time.

Source	How It Supports Legitimacy	Main Limitation
Revolutionary tradition	The state claims continuity with the Revolution and the Constitution of 1917.	The PRI no longer owns this tradition, and citizens judge current performance.
Elections	Competitive elections allow citizens to choose and remove governing parties.	Violence, unequal resources, and local coercion may weaken competition.
Nationalism	Defense of sovereignty, oil, and independence from foreign pressure can unite citizens.	Strong economic dependence on the United States limits policy autonomy.

Source	How It Supports Legitimacy	Main Limitation
Performance	Growth, welfare programs, infrastructure, and public services can build support.	Inequality, insecurity, and uneven services weaken trust.
Social inclusion	Programs for older people, students, workers, and poorer households create visible benefits.	Critics may view benefits as clientelistic when linked to political mobilization.
Rule of law	Constitutional rights and courts can legitimize government decisions.	Impunity and weak enforcement remain major problems.

The Presidency and Executive Power

The presidency remains the most visible national institution. During PRI dominance, scholars described the office as highly powerful because the president controlled the ruling party, influenced candidate selection, managed governors, directed the bureaucracy, and usually commanded Congress. Democratic competition reduced some of these informal powers, but a president with a disciplined legislative majority can again exercise extensive influence.

Election and Current Leadership

The president is elected by direct nationwide plurality. There is no second-round runoff. The candidate with the largest number of votes wins, even without an absolute majority. Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo won the 2024 election with 35,924,519 votes, or 59.76 percent of valid votes counted in the final national result.

The fixed six-year term gives the president time to pursue a national program, but the ban on reelection means the executive cannot ask voters for a second presidential mandate. Succession therefore becomes an important test of party organization and coalition unity.

Formal Powers of the President

- Directs the federal executive administration and appoints cabinet secretaries.
- Proposes legislation and presents the federal budget and revenue plans.
- Promulgates laws and may return legislation through constitutional procedures.
- Conducts foreign policy and represents the state internationally.
- Commands the armed forces under constitutional authority.
- Makes important appointments subject to constitutional rules and, in some cases, Senate approval.
- Issues regulations and administrative measures for implementing laws.
- Uses public communication, party leadership, and national programs to shape the political agenda.

The Cabinet and Federal Bureaucracy

Cabinet secretaries lead major departments such as finance, foreign affairs, interior, education, health, energy, defense, and public security. They are politically responsible to the president rather than to a parliamentary majority. Congress may summon officials, question them, and investigate policy, but it does not form or dismiss the cabinet through confidence votes.

The bureaucracy combines professional agencies with political appointments. Administrative capacity differs across sectors. Tax administration, central banking, electoral management, and some economic agencies are relatively capable, while policing, prosecution, local justice, and municipal administration may be weaker.

Formal Power and Informal Power

Formal Executive Power	Informal or Political Resource
Appointment and administrative authority	Control over party careers and access to governing coalitions
Budget proposal and policy leadership	Use of social programs, public communication, and symbolic leadership

Formal Executive Power	Informal or Political Resource
Foreign-policy authority	Nationalism and the ability to frame disputes as questions of sovereignty
Regulatory and implementation powers	Influence over governors and local political networks
Legislative initiative	Party discipline and coalition majorities in Congress

The Congress of the Union

Federal legislative power belongs to the Congress of the Union, composed of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Bicameralism represents both population and the federal units. Congress makes laws, approves revenue and expenditure, oversees the executive, and participates in constitutional amendments and appointments.

The Chamber of Deputies

The Chamber has 500 members. Three hundred are elected from single-member districts by plurality, and two hundred are elected through proportional-representation lists in five multi-state regions. The mixed electoral system combines territorial representation with broader party proportionality.

Deputies serve three-year terms. Constitutional reforms now permit consecutive legislative reelection under defined conditions, although presidents remain completely barred from reelection. The Chamber has special authority over the federal expenditure budget and reviews public accounts.

The Senate

The Senate has 128 members. In each state and Mexico City, two seats go to the party ticket receiving the most votes and one seat goes to the first-minority ticket. The remaining thirty-two seats are allocated by nationwide proportional representation. Senators serve six-year terms.

The Senate participates in legislation and has important powers over foreign policy, treaties, certain appointments, and federal relations. Because each state receives the same basic territorial representation, the Senate balances the population-based Chamber.

Institution	Size	Electoral Method	Term	Distinctive Role
Chamber of Deputies	500	300 plurality districts + 200 PR lists	3 years	Budget and population-based representation
Senate	128	64 majority + 32 first minority + 32 national PR	6 years	States, treaties, appointments, and federal balance

How a Federal Law Is Made

1. A bill is introduced by constitutionally authorized actors, including the president, legislators, state legislatures, and citizens under legal rules.
2. The bill is assigned to committees in the chamber of origin for study, hearings, negotiation, and amendment.
3. The chamber debates and votes. Ordinary legislation generally requires a majority of those voting.
4. The other chamber considers the bill and may approve, reject, or amend it.
5. After both chambers approve the same text, the measure goes to the president for promulgation or constitutional objection procedures.
6. The law is published in the Official Gazette and implemented by the executive and other authorities.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

An amendment requires a two-thirds vote of the members present in Congress and approval by a majority of state legislatures and the legislature of Mexico City. Large governing coalitions therefore gain exceptional power when they approach or achieve these thresholds.

Party Discipline and Coalition Government

Mexican legislators usually vote with their party because parties control nominations, committee positions, campaign resources, and career opportunities. This makes party discipline an important link between presidential power and congressional outcomes.

The president's party may govern with allied parties. Morena has commonly worked with the Labor Party (PT) and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM). Coalition agreements can produce reliable legislative majorities even when no single party holds every necessary seat.

The Judiciary and the Rule of Law

The federal judiciary interprets the Constitution, resolves disputes, protects rights, and reviews acts of public authority. Its institutions include the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, the Electoral Tribunal, circuit courts, district courts, and specialized judicial bodies.

The Supreme Court and Constitutional Review

The Supreme Court is the highest constitutional court. It hears constitutional controversies between public institutions, actions challenging the constitutionality of laws, and important cases involving rights and federal authority. Constitutional review can limit executive and legislative action, but the effectiveness of courts depends on independence, enforcement, access, and public trust.

Amparo

Amparo is a distinctive legal procedure that protects individuals against unconstitutional or illegal acts of public authority. It can resemble judicial review, an injunction, habeas corpus, or rights protection depending on the case. The amparo tradition is central to Mexican constitutional law.

KEY TERM: AMPARO

A legal action through which a person seeks protection from a governmental act that violates constitutional or legal rights. For AP purposes, connect amparo with individual rights, judicial review, and the rule of law.

The 2024-2025 Judicial Redesign

A constitutional reform adopted in September 2024 changed the selection and administration of the federal judiciary. Beginning in 2025, citizens elected Supreme Court justices and many other federal judges and magistrates. The Supreme Court was reduced to nine members, and new bodies were created for judicial administration and discipline.

The reform is a major contemporary change. Supporters argued that direct election would make judges accountable to the people and disrupt closed professional networks. Opponents warned that campaigns, low-information voting, party influence, and mass replacement of judges could weaken independence and expertise. The long-term effects remain a subject of political and constitutional debate.

EXAM CAUTION

Older AP materials may describe federal judges as appointed rather than popularly elected. That description reflects the pre-2024 system. Current notes should distinguish the older appointment model from the judicial-election system introduced in 2025.

The Rule-of-Law Gap

Mexico has an extensive legal system, but laws are not enforced equally everywhere. Many crimes are not reported, investigated, prosecuted, or punished. Witnesses and journalists may face threats, police forces vary greatly in quality, and local prosecutors may lack resources or independence.

This gap between formal law and practical enforcement is central to comparative analysis. A democratic constitution does not by itself guarantee effective rule of law. State capacity, professional administration, public trust, and protection from criminal capture are also necessary.

Federalism and Subnational Politics

Mexico consists of thirty-one states and Mexico City. States have constitutions, elected governors, legislatures, courts, and administrative responsibilities. Municipal governments provide many local services and are led by elected authorities.

Federal Powers and State Responsibilities

The national government controls major taxation, macroeconomic policy, foreign affairs, defense, national regulation, and large social programs. States manage education, health administration, policing, justice, infrastructure, and development within federal legal and financial frameworks. Municipalities handle local public services such as water, waste, roads, zoning, and public spaces.

Fiscal Centralization

Mexico is politically federal but financially centralized. The federal government raises much of the tax revenue and transfers funds to states and municipalities. This can equalize resources and support national standards, but it also makes subnational governments dependent on federal decisions.

FEDERALISM IN PRACTICE

Formal autonomy does not always equal financial autonomy. A governor may possess constitutional authority but still depend heavily on federal transfers for schools, hospitals, policing, and infrastructure.

Governors and Subnational Authoritarianism

Governors are major political actors. They control state bureaucracies, influence local party organizations, manage public spending, and may shape candidate recruitment. During the democratic transition, some states became competitive earlier than others.

The term subnational authoritarianism describes local areas where national democracy coexists with intimidation, media control, patronage, electoral manipulation, or weak opposition at the state or municipal level. Organized crime can intensify these problems by threatening candidates, officials, journalists, and voters.

Electoral Institutions and Political Participation

Mexico's democratic transition depended heavily on electoral reform. Independent administration, transparent counting, public financing, proportional representation, and electoral courts reduced the ruling party's control over competition.

The National Electoral Institute

The National Electoral Institute (INE) organizes federal elections and performs important national coordination functions. It manages the voter register, election materials, polling administration, official counting systems, party regulation, campaign oversight, and civic education under constitutional and legal rules.

INE’s autonomy became an important democratic safeguard because election administration had previously been controlled by the government. Disputes over its budget, powers, and reform therefore raise larger questions about institutional independence and majority rule.

The Electoral Tribunal

The Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF) resolves electoral disputes and validates major national election outcomes. In August 2024, it confirmed the presidential result, declared the election valid, and recognized Claudia Sheinbaum as president-elect for the 2024-2030 term.

The Mixed Electoral System

Mexico uses different electoral rules for different offices. The president is elected by nationwide plurality. The Chamber of Deputies combines single-member plurality districts with proportional representation. The Senate combines state-level majority, first-minority representation, and national proportional representation.

This design tries to balance governability, territorial representation, and inclusion of smaller parties. Proportional seats help opposition parties enter Congress, while plurality districts maintain a direct geographic link between legislators and voters.

Participation Beyond Voting

- Political-party membership and campaign activity
- Labor, business, professional, indigenous, student, feminist, environmental, and human-rights organizations
- Public demonstrations, strikes, petitions, and social-media campaigns
- Community assemblies and indigenous forms of local decision making
- Journalism, investigative reporting, and election observation
- Independent candidacies under legal requirements
- Referendums, consultations, and recall mechanisms where constitutionally authorized

The Party System

Mexico moved from PRI dominance to a competitive three-party system and then toward a new system centered on Morena. Party labels and coalitions matter, but many politicians have changed parties, and ideological boundaries can be less stable than in some European democracies.

Party	General Orientation	Historical or Current Importance
Morena	National-popular left; social welfare, state activism, anti-neoliberal language	Won the presidency in 2018 and 2024; current governing party
PAN	Centre-right; business, market policy, social conservatism in some regions	First opposition party to win the presidency, in 2000 and 2006
PRI	Historically centrist and corporatist; ideologically flexible	Dominated national politics from 1929 to 2000; returned to presidency in 2012
MC	Centrist or social-liberal; emphasizes a newer political identity	Strong in selected states and urban areas; presents itself as outside older blocs
PVEM	Green label with pragmatic coalition behavior	Frequently joins governing coalitions and gains influence through alliance politics
PT	Left-wing and labor-oriented	Long-term ally of Morena in national coalitions
PRD	Democratic left	Important in the transition era; lost national party registration after the 2024 election

The PRI as a Hegemonic Party

The PRI was more than an election-winning party. It coordinated elite succession, integrated organized groups, distributed patronage, managed governors, and presented itself as the institutional form of the

Revolution. Opposition existed but could not compete on equal terms for much of the twentieth century.

PAN and the Democratic Transition

PAN developed as a major opposition party with support among business groups, middle-class voters, Catholics, and northern states. Its presidential victory in 2000 demonstrated the success of electoral opening, but two PAN administrations struggled with divided government, security policy, and the persistence of older state practices.

Morena and Party-System Realignment

Morena grew rapidly around Lopez Obrador's leadership, grassroots organization, social-policy commitments, and rejection of the PRI-PAN political establishment. Its rise weakened the PRD, attracted former members of several parties, and created a new governing coalition.

A party-system realignment occurs when voter loyalties, party competition, and the main political dividing lines change over a sustained period. Mexico's shift from PRI dominance, to PRI-PAN-PRD competition, to Morena-centered politics is a clear example.

Interest Groups, Corporatism, and Civil Society

Political participation in Mexico includes both traditional state-linked organizations and independent civil society. The relationship between groups and government has become more pluralistic, but corporatist and clientelist patterns remain influential.

Labor and Peasant Organizations

The PRI historically incorporated workers and peasants through major federations and official organizations. Union leaders gained bargaining access, public positions, and benefits, while the government expected labor peace and political support. The Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) is a classic example of corporatist linkage.

Some unions became more autonomous as competition increased. Others retained close relations with parties or government agencies. The teachers' unions illustrate internal diversity: the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) has been a major national organization, while dissident teachers' movements have often used strikes and protest.

Business Interests

Business groups influence taxation, trade, labor rules, energy, investment, infrastructure, and regulation. Economic liberalization strengthened private-sector influence, while governments continued to use consultation and negotiation with major firms. Business is not a single unified actor; exporters, small firms, banks, manufacturers, and state contractors may have different interests.

Social Movements and NGOs

Independent organizations work on elections, corruption, human rights, missing persons, gender violence, environmental protection, indigenous rights, migration, and press freedom. Families searching for disappeared relatives have become a particularly important moral and political force.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) emerged publicly in Chiapas in 1994. It criticized indigenous exclusion, land inequality, and neoliberal economic policy. Although it did not become a conventional national party, it changed public discussion about autonomy, identity, and democratic participation.

Media and Journalists

Mexico has national television networks, newspapers, radio, digital platforms, and independent investigative outlets. Media competition expanded with democratization. However, ownership

concentration, government advertising, lawsuits, criminal threats, and violence against journalists can restrict effective freedom.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND STATE CAPACITY

A large number of organizations does not automatically mean that the state is strong. Civil society may expand precisely because official institutions fail to provide justice, information, security, or welfare.

Political Culture and Social Cleavages

Political culture combines national pride, revolutionary symbols, Catholic and secular traditions, distrust of officials, local community identities, and strong expectations that government should provide social protection. Citizens may support democracy while also expressing frustration with parties, police, courts, and corruption.

Regional Differences

Northern and central industrial regions are closely integrated with the United States through manufacturing and trade. Southern states contain larger rural and indigenous populations and often experience higher poverty and weaker infrastructure. Mexico City has a distinct political culture and has often supported parties of the left.

Urban-Rural and Class Cleavages

Mexico is highly urbanized, but rural communities remain politically important. Urban middle classes may emphasize public security, services, corruption, and economic stability. Rural and poorer voters may give greater importance to land, agricultural support, direct social transfers, local brokers, and access to public services.

Indigenous Peoples and Autonomy

Indigenous communities possess constitutional recognition and may use traditional systems of local governance in some areas. Nevertheless, many communities face poverty, land conflict, language barriers, environmental pressure, and limited access to justice.

Gender and Representation

Electoral reforms requiring gender parity greatly increased women's representation in Congress and local office. Claudia Sheinbaum's inauguration in 2024 marked the first time a woman became president. Formal representation has improved, but gender violence, unequal care work, wage gaps, and femicide remain major public issues.

Political Economy and Development

Mexico is an upper-middle-income, industrial, and export-oriented economy with large differences in productivity and wealth. Its political economy combines private enterprise, foreign investment, state-owned energy companies, social programs, and a large informal sector.

Import-Substitution Industrialization

From the 1940s to the 1970s, the government protected domestic industries from foreign competition and expanded state involvement in the economy. The period produced rapid growth known as the Mexican Miracle, but it also encouraged inefficient firms, inequality, urban concentration, and dependence on state spending.

Oil and Resource Nationalism

President Lázaro Cárdenas nationalized the oil industry in 1938. The state company Pemex became a symbol of sovereignty and an important source of government revenue. Oil wealth strengthened the

state but also created fiscal dependence, debt exposure, and conflict over investment and private participation.

The Debt Crisis and Neoliberal Reform

The 1982 debt crisis ended the older development model. Governments privatized many enterprises, reduced trade protection, restrained public spending, and encouraged foreign investment. Supporters argued that reform would improve efficiency and competitiveness. Critics emphasized unemployment, inequality, weakened labor protection, and reduced state capacity.

NAFTA, USMCA, and North American Integration

The North American Free Trade Agreement began in 1994 and was replaced by the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement in 2020. Trade integration expanded manufacturing, especially vehicles, electronics, machinery, and border-region production. It also made Mexico highly sensitive to United States demand, trade policy, migration politics, and supply-chain decisions.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Mexico gained export industries and investment from North American integration, but dependence is asymmetric. The United States is a much larger economy and has greater power over trade, migration, security cooperation, and financial conditions.

The Informal Economy

A large share of workers earn income outside fully regulated employment. Informal workers may lack stable contracts, pensions, health insurance, legal protection, or reliable taxation. Informality provides livelihoods when formal jobs are limited, but it narrows the tax base and weakens social protection.

Social Policy and Direct Transfers

Mexican governments have used conditional cash transfers, pensions, scholarships, health programs, price support, and infrastructure to reduce poverty and build legitimacy. Recent governments expanded direct transfers and emphasized universal or broad-based social benefits.

Social programs can improve welfare and political inclusion. They can also become politically controversial when governments take personal credit for public benefits or when local brokers influence access. The AP distinction is between a policy's material effect and the political method used to distribute or advertise it.

Security, Corruption, and State Capacity

Public security is one of Mexico's most serious political challenges. Drug-trafficking organizations, extortion networks, fuel theft, kidnapping, arms flows, and local criminal groups operate across jurisdictions. Violence is not evenly distributed, but it can reshape local politics and public trust.

Organized Crime and Political Violence

Criminal organizations may fight over transport routes, ports, border crossings, local markets, and control of municipal authorities. Candidates and officials can be threatened or killed. In affected areas, elections may remain formally competitive while citizens face coercion or limited information.

Militarization of Public Security

Successive governments have relied on the armed forces for internal security because many civilian police institutions are weak or corrupt. The National Guard became a central security institution, and military bodies have also received roles in infrastructure, customs, ports, and public administration.

Supporters argue that the armed forces possess national reach, discipline, and public trust. Critics warn that military involvement can reduce civilian oversight, weaken police development, and create human-

rights risks. This is an example of a policy trade-off between immediate capacity and long-term democratic institutionalization.

Corruption and Impunity

Corruption may involve bribery, procurement, campaign finance, public works, police protection, customs, permits, or misuse of public funds. Impunity means that violations are not effectively investigated or punished. Citizens may therefore distrust institutions even when formal anti-corruption laws exist.

CAUSAL CHAIN

Weak police and prosecution -> low probability of punishment -> greater opportunity for corruption and organized crime -> lower public trust -> reduced cooperation with authorities -> still weaker enforcement.

Migration, Remittances, and Relations with the United States

Mexico's location beside the United States shapes its economy and politics. Migration, remittances, trade, border enforcement, drug trafficking, arms flows, and diplomatic relations connect domestic policy with external pressure.

Migration and Remittances

Millions of people of Mexican origin live in the United States, and remittances sent to families are an important source of household income. Migration can reduce local unemployment and poverty, but it may also separate families and make communities dependent on external earnings.

Transit Migration and Border Policy

Mexico is also a transit and destination country for migrants from Central America and other regions. Cooperation with the United States on border control creates tension between humanitarian obligations, national sovereignty, domestic security, and economic relations.

Asymmetric Interdependence

Mexico and the United States depend on one another, but the dependence is unequal. Mexico relies heavily on the United States for exports, investment, remittances, and security cooperation. The United States also depends on Mexican production, labor, trade routes, and cooperation, but its larger economy gives it greater bargaining power.

Contemporary Political Challenges

Challenge	Why It Matters Politically
Judicial elections	They may increase democratic accountability but may also expose courts to partisan or campaign influence.
Concentration of governing power	Large majorities can implement policy quickly but may weaken institutional checks.
Security and organized crime	Violence limits rights, weakens elections, and tests state authority.
Civilian versus military roles	The government must balance immediate capacity with democratic oversight.
Economic dependence	North American integration creates growth opportunities and external vulnerability.
Regional inequality	Different levels of development produce unequal services and political power.
Water, climate, and urban pressure	Scarcity and environmental stress create conflicts among citizens, firms, and levels of government.
Trust and corruption	Low trust reduces cooperation and weakens legitimacy even after competitive elections.

Mexico in Comparative Perspective

Concept	Mexico	Useful Comparison
Executive system	Presidential; fixed six-year term; no reelection	United Kingdom: parliamentary executive dependent on Commons
Territorial system	Federal but fiscally centralized	China: unitary with extensive local administration
Party development	Hegemonic PRI -> competitive system -> Morena-centered realignment	Russia: dominant-party authoritarianism without full electoral alternation
Electoral management	Independent INE and electoral tribunal	Nigeria: federal elections with greater concerns over administrative capacity
Interest representation	Historic corporatism plus pluralist civil society	Iran: state-controlled channels plus unelected religious institutions
Political economy	Market economy integrated with the United States; strategic state role	China: state-guided market economy under one-party rule
Rule of law	Democratic rights with major enforcement gaps	United Kingdom: stronger institutionalized rule of law and administrative capacity

Key Terms

Term	Meaning in the Mexican Case
Sexenio	The president's single six-year term.
No reelection	The constitutional principle prohibiting a former president from holding the office again.
Hegemonic-party system	A system with elections and opposition in which one party possesses overwhelming and unequal control.
PRI	The Institutional Revolutionary Party, which dominated national politics for most of the twentieth century.
Morena	The National Regeneration Movement, governing nationally since 2018.
Corporatism	State-recognized organizations represent workers, peasants, or other sectors in exchange for political control and support.
Clientelism	Targeted benefits are exchanged for political loyalty or votes.
Patronage	Public jobs or resources are distributed to political supporters.
Dedazo	The former informal practice by which a PRI president selected a preferred successor.
Federalism	Constitutional division of power among the national government, states, and local governments.
Fiscal centralization	Subnational governments depend heavily on revenue collected and transferred by the federation.
INE	The National Electoral Institute, responsible for major election-administration functions.
TEPJF	The Electoral Tribunal that resolves federal electoral disputes and validates national results.
Mixed electoral system	A combination of plurality districts and proportional representation.
First minority	A Senate seat awarded to the party finishing second in each state and Mexico City.
Amparo	A judicial procedure protecting individuals from unconstitutional or illegal government acts.
Subnational authoritarianism	Undemocratic local practices existing within a nationally democratic system.
Import substitution	State-led industrialization that protects domestic production from foreign competition.
Pemex	The state-owned petroleum company and a symbol of resource nationalism.
NAFTA / USMCA	North American trade agreements linking Mexico closely with the United States and Canada.
Informal economy	Economic activity outside full taxation, regulation, and social protection.
Zapatistas / EZLN	An indigenous-based movement that emerged publicly in Chiapas in 1994.

Term	Meaning in the Mexican Case
Party-system realignment	A lasting change in voter loyalties, party competition, and the central political divide.
Impunity	Failure to investigate and punish violations effectively.
Asymmetric interdependence	Mutual dependence in which one side has greater bargaining power.

Facts to Remember

- Mexico is a federal presidential democracy under the Constitution of 1917.
- The president is elected by nationwide plurality for one six-year term and may never be reelected.
- Claudia Sheinbaum began her presidential term on 1 October 2024; it ends on 30 September 2030.
- The PRI created a hegemonic-party system that dominated national politics from 1929 to 2000.
- The PAN won the presidency in 2000 and 2006; the PRI returned in 2012; Morena won in 2018 and 2024.
- The Chamber of Deputies has 500 members: 300 plurality districts and 200 proportional-representation seats.
- The Senate has 128 members: 64 majority, 32 first minority, and 32 national PR seats.
- The mixed electoral system combines territorial representation and proportional inclusion.
- INE administers major election functions; TEPJF resolves electoral disputes and validates national results.
- Corporatism, clientelism, and patronage are related but distinct concepts.
- Mexico is politically federal but financially centralized.
- Amparo protects individuals against unconstitutional or illegal acts of authority.
- The 2024 reform introduced popular election for many federal judicial offices beginning in 2025.
- Pemex and oil nationalism have major symbolic and fiscal importance.
- The 1982 debt crisis accelerated privatization, trade liberalization, and market reform.
- NAFTA began in 1994 and was replaced by USMCA in 2020.
- Mexico's economy is closely integrated with the United States, creating asymmetric interdependence.
- The Zapatista uprising of 1994 highlighted indigenous exclusion and opposition to neoliberal reform.
- Organized crime and impunity reveal a gap between democratic institutions and effective state capacity.
- The central AP theme is democratic competition combined with institutional continuity and uneven rule of law.

Practice

Multiple-Choice Questions

- Which feature most clearly identifies Mexico as a presidential system?
 - The cabinet must retain the confidence of the Senate
 - The president is elected separately for a fixed term
 - The head of state is a hereditary monarch
 - The legislature selects the president after every election
- The term sexenio refers to
 - the six-year presidential term
 - the six proportional regions
 - the six largest political parties
 - the constitutional amendment process
- Which institution is primarily responsible for administering federal elections?
 - Pemex
 - INE
 - CTM
 - the Supreme Court alone

4. Mexico's Chamber of Deputies is elected through
 - A. only nationwide proportional representation
 - B. only single-member plurality districts
 - C. a mixture of plurality districts and proportional representation
 - D. appointment by state governors
5. A first-minority Senate seat is awarded to
 - A. the smallest nationally registered party
 - B. the party finishing second in a state or Mexico City
 - C. an independent candidate chosen by the president
 - D. the party with the most national PR votes
6. Corporatism in the PRI era primarily involved
 - A. judicial review of executive orders
 - B. integration of organized sectors into state-linked political structures
 - C. complete prohibition of labor unions
 - D. direct election of all judges
7. The dedazo was
 - A. a proportional-representation formula
 - B. an indigenous assembly
 - C. the president's informal designation of a preferred successor
 - D. the judicial procedure of amparo
8. Which event most directly marked presidential alternation after PRI dominance?
 - A. The 1917 Constitution
 - B. The 1938 oil nationalization
 - C. Vicente Fox's victory in 2000
 - D. The beginning of NAFTA in 1994
9. Amparo is best described as
 - A. a trade agreement
 - B. a rights-protection action against public authority
 - C. a military command
 - D. a presidential decree
10. Mexico is fiscally centralized because
 - A. states are prohibited from spending money
 - B. the federation collects much revenue and transfers funds to subnational governments
 - C. every municipality prints its own currency
 - D. the Senate controls all local taxes directly
11. Which development is most associated with 1982?
 - A. The debt crisis and acceleration of market reform
 - B. The first PAN presidential victory
 - C. The Zapatista uprising
 - D. The judicial elections
12. A major political effect of proportional representation is that it
 - A. prevents all small parties from entering Congress
 - B. gives opposition parties access to legislative seats beyond district victories
 - C. abolishes party discipline
 - D. converts Mexico into a parliamentary system
13. The rise of Morena is best understood as
 - A. restoration of military government
 - B. a party-system realignment
 - C. elimination of competitive elections
 - D. the end of social programs
14. Which statement best describes the 2024-2025 judicial reform?
 - A. It abolished the federal judiciary

- B. It introduced popular election for many federal judicial offices
 C. It made the president chief justice
 D. It transferred all courts to state governors
15. Asymmetric interdependence with the United States means that
 A. only Mexico benefits from trade
 B. neither country depends on the other
 C. both are connected, but the United States has greater bargaining power
 D. Mexico controls United States migration policy

Answer Key and Brief Explanations

Answer	Explanation
1-B	The president has a separate nationwide electoral mandate and a fixed term.
2-A	Sexenio is the single six-year presidential term.
3-B	INE carries out central federal election-administration functions.
4-C	The Chamber combines 300 plurality districts with 200 PR seats.
5-B	The first-minority seat rewards the runner-up party ticket in each federal unit.
6-B	Corporatism linked officially organized sectors to the governing party and state.
7-C	The dedazo described the former PRI president's influence over succession.
8-C	Fox's election ended more than seventy years of PRI presidential rule.
9-B	Amparo protects persons against unconstitutional or illegal public acts.
10-B	Subnational governments rely heavily on federal revenue transfers.
11-A	The debt crisis weakened the state-led development model and accelerated liberalization.
12-B	PR provides legislative access to parties that may win few plurality districts.
13-B	Morena changed the main party alignments and weakened the earlier three-party system.
14-B	The reform replaced much of the older appointment system with judicial elections.
15-C	The relationship is mutual, but economic size gives the United States greater leverage.

Concept Application Questions

1. Define clientelism and explain one way it can affect political participation in Mexico.
2. Explain how the sexenio both limits and strengthens presidential power.
3. Explain one way proportional representation contributed to democratization.
4. Explain how fiscal centralization affects Mexican federalism.
5. Explain how organized crime can weaken democratic accountability at the local level.
6. Explain one reason judicial elections may increase accountability and one reason they may reduce independence.

Comparative Questions

1. Compare the method of executive selection in Mexico and the United Kingdom.
2. Compare federalism in Mexico with the unitary system of China.
3. Compare Morena's current electoral dominance with United Russia's role in Russia.
4. Compare corporatist interest representation in Mexico with state-linked organizations in China.
5. Compare the role of religion in Mexico and Iran.
6. Compare a challenge to state capacity in Mexico with one in Nigeria.

Data Analysis Practice

Election Year	Winning Candidate and Party	Approximate Vote Share
2000	Vicente Fox - PAN	42.5%

Election Year	Winning Candidate and Party	Approximate Vote Share
2006	Felipe Calderon - PAN	35.9%
2012	Enrique Pena Nieto - PRI	38.2%
2018	Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador - Morena coalition	53.2%
2024	Claudia Sheinbaum - Morena coalition	59.76%

1. Identify one trend in presidential vote shares from 2000 to 2024.
2. Describe one change in the party system shown by the table.
3. Explain how the plurality rule allowed the 2006 winner to take office with well below fifty percent.
4. Explain one reason the 2018 and 2024 results may indicate party-system realignment.
5. State one limitation of using presidential vote share alone to measure democratic quality.

Argument Essay Questions

1. Develop an argument about whether electoral reform was the most important cause of democratization in Mexico.
2. Develop an argument about whether federalism strengthens democratic accountability in Mexico.
3. Develop an argument about whether a large governing-party majority is more likely to improve policy effectiveness or weaken checks and balances.
4. Develop an argument about whether economic integration with the United States strengthens or weakens Mexican political autonomy.
5. Develop an argument about whether state capacity is more important than elections for democratic consolidation.

Model Concept Application Response

QUESTION

Explain how proportional representation contributed to Mexico's democratic transition.

Proportional representation contributed to Mexico's democratic transition by allowing opposition parties to win seats in the Chamber of Deputies even when the PRI continued to win many single-member districts. Opposition representation gave parties access to public debate, legislative resources, oversight, and a national platform. As opposition strength grew, the PRI eventually lost its majority in the Chamber in 1997, reducing presidential control over lawmaking and demonstrating that elections could produce meaningful institutional change. Proportional representation therefore increased political inclusion and helped transform elections from controlled competition into a more genuine route to power.

Why This Response Works

- It identifies the relevant institution: proportional representation.
- It explains a causal link from electoral rules to opposition inclusion.
- It uses a specific Mexican development: the loss of the PRI majority in 1997.
- It connects representation to democratization rather than merely defining the term.
- It avoids claiming that proportional representation alone caused the entire transition.

Final Revision Checklist

- Know the importance of the Revolution and the Constitution of 1917.
- Explain how the PRI built a hegemonic-party regime without abolishing elections.
- Distinguish corporatism, clientelism, patronage, and the dedazo.
- Know the importance of the 1982 debt crisis, 1988 election, 1997 midterm election, and 2000 alternation.
- Explain the rise of Morena and the meaning of party-system realignment.

- Know that Mexico is a federal presidential democracy.
- Define sexenio and explain the absolute ban on presidential reelection.
- Know the current presidential term: 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2030.
- Know the formal powers of the president and the importance of party majorities.
- Distinguish the cabinet from a parliamentary cabinet dependent on confidence.
- Know the composition of the 500-member Chamber of Deputies.
- Know the composition of the 128-member Senate and the first-minority rule.
- Explain how mixed electoral rules combine plurality and PR.
- Know the roles of INE and TEPJF.
- Explain party discipline and coalition government.
- Define amparo and connect it with rights and judicial review.
- Distinguish the pre-2024 judicial appointment system from the elections beginning in 2025.
- Explain the debate over judicial accountability and independence.
- Explain why Mexico is federal but fiscally centralized.
- Define subnational authoritarianism and give a Mexican application.
- Know the roles of PRI, PAN, Morena, MC, PVEM, PT, and the former national role of PRD.
- Explain the political importance of unions, business groups, NGOs, journalists, and the Zapatistas.
- Know the north-south, urban-rural, class, indigenous, and gender cleavages.
- Explain import substitution, the debt crisis, privatization, and market reform.
- Know the importance of Pemex, NAFTA, and USMCA.
- Explain the informal economy and direct social transfers.
- Connect organized crime, impunity, and weak state capacity.
- Explain militarization as a capacity-versus-accountability trade-off.
- Explain migration, remittances, and asymmetric interdependence with the United States.
- Be ready to compare Mexico with the United Kingdom, Russia, China, Iran, and Nigeria.

Source Note

This chapter follows the AP Comparative Government and Politics Course and Exam Description. Current institutional details were checked against Mexico's Constitution, Congress, INE, TEPJF, Presidency, and federal judiciary materials; leadership references are current to July 2026.

Chapter Seven: Government and Politics in Iran

Theocratic authority, elected institutions, factional competition, oil wealth, and continuing pressure for political change

Iran is an Islamic republic whose political system combines elected institutions with powerful unelected religious bodies. Citizens elect a president, a national parliament, local councils, and the Assembly of Experts. However, the Supreme Leader stands above the elected branches, the Guardian Council controls access to national elections and reviews legislation, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has major military, political, and economic influence.

This creates a dual political structure. Republican institutions give citizens a limited role in choosing officials and encourage competition among approved candidates. Theocratic institutions protect the Islamic character of the state and restrict choices that could threaten the ruling system. Many important political conflicts therefore occur within the boundaries of the Islamic Republic rather than between fully independent political parties.

For AP Comparative Government, Iran is especially useful for understanding theocracy, authoritarianism, legitimacy, rentier states, candidate vetting, factional politics, political participation, and the relationship between formal constitutions and actual power. Students should always distinguish the office of the president from the far more powerful office of the Supreme Leader.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Historical foundations: monarchy, the 1979 Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, reform movements, and leadership succession
- The principle of velayat-e faqih and the dual structure of elected and unelected authority
- The Supreme Leader, president, Majles, Guardian Council, Assembly of Experts, Expediency Council, and judiciary
- The Revolutionary Guard, Basij, military power, and para-state economic organizations
- Elections, candidate vetting, political factions, protests, media controls, and civil society
- Oil, the rentier state, sanctions, subsidies, inequality, and economic reform
- Gender, generation, class, religion, ethnicity, and regional cleavages
- Key terms, facts to remember, MCQs, concept application, comparisons, data analysis, and argument practice

Iran at a Glance

Feature	Iran
Official name	Islamic Republic of Iran
Regime type	Authoritarian theocratic republic with limited electoral competition
Constitution	1979 Constitution, substantially amended in 1989
Highest authority	Supreme Leader
Current Supreme Leader	Mojtaba Khamenei, selected in March 2026 after the death of Ali Khamenei
Head of executive government	President Masoud Pezeshkian, elected in 2024
Legislature	Unicameral Islamic Consultative Assembly, or Majles, with 290 members
Key supervisory body	Twelve-member Guardian Council
Territorial structure	Unitary state with elected local councils and centrally appointed provincial governors
Electoral competition	Real competition among approved candidates, but candidate vetting limits choice

Feature	Iran
Political organizations	Loose reformist, moderate, conservative, and principlist factions rather than stable mass parties
Economic pattern	Oil- and gas-producing rentier state with large public and para-state sectors
Major political forces	Clergy, Supreme Leader's office, IRGC, bazaar networks, bonyads, elected officials, and civil society

Historical Foundations of the Iranian Political System

The Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1911

Iran's first major constitutional movement challenged the absolute authority of the Qajar monarchy. Merchants, religious leaders, intellectuals, and urban groups demanded limits on royal power and the creation of a representative assembly. The movement produced a constitution and the Majles, but foreign pressure, royal resistance, and weak institutions prevented stable parliamentary government.

The Constitutional Revolution remains important because it introduced the ideas of constitutionalism, representation, and national sovereignty. Later governments did not erase these ideas, even when they restricted political competition.

The Pahlavi Monarchy

Reza Shah Pahlavi established a highly centralized monarchy in the 1920s. He expanded the state bureaucracy, strengthened the army, promoted secular education, limited some clerical influence, and encouraged a modern national identity. These reforms increased state capacity but were imposed from above and gave citizens little political choice.

His son, Mohammad Reza Shah, ruled after 1941. The monarchy became closely associated with the United States, oil wealth, rapid modernization, political repression, and the secret police known as SAVAK. In 1953, a foreign-supported coup removed Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh after conflict over oil nationalization and royal authority. The coup later became a powerful symbol of foreign intervention.

The White Revolution and Its Contradictions

Beginning in 1963, the shah introduced the White Revolution. It included land reform, expanded education, industrialization, women's suffrage, and rural development. These measures changed Iranian society, but they also disrupted traditional communities, increased migration to cities, widened inequality, and weakened groups such as landlords and parts of the clergy.

Modernization did not create political openness. The monarchy centralized authority, restricted parties, and used oil revenue to reduce dependence on taxation. The state grew stronger, but many citizens felt excluded from political decision-making.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979

The revolution was supported by a broad coalition: religious activists, bazaar merchants, students, workers, nationalists, leftists, and middle-class opponents of dictatorship. They agreed on removing the shah but did not agree on the political system that should replace him.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his supporters gained control after the shah's departure. A referendum created the Islamic Republic, and the new constitution placed ultimate authority in a senior Islamic jurist. Secular and left-wing groups were gradually excluded, while revolutionary institutions became permanent parts of the state.

CAUSES OF THE 1979 REVOLUTION

- Authoritarian rule and the absence of meaningful political competition
- The shah's close relationship with the United States and the memory of the 1953 coup
- Unequal effects of rapid modernization and urbanization
- Religious opposition to secularization and royal power
- Inflation, corruption, inequality, and resentment of the royal elite
- A broad opposition network linking mosques, bazaars, universities, workplaces, and professional groups

The Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988

Iraq invaded Iran in 1980. The long war caused enormous human and economic loss, but it also helped the new regime consolidate power. Wartime mobilization strengthened revolutionary nationalism, the Revolutionary Guard, the Basij militia, and the political authority of religious leaders.

The war became part of the regime's founding story. Sacrifice, martyrdom, independence, and resistance remain important themes in official political culture.

The 1989 Constitutional Changes

After Khomeini's death, the constitution was amended. The office of prime minister was abolished, executive power was concentrated in the presidency, and the qualifications for Supreme Leader were revised. Ali Khamenei became Supreme Leader and remained in office from 1989 until his death in 2026.

Reform, Conservative Reaction, and Protest

The election of Mohammad Khatami as president in 1997 showed strong public demand for political and social reform. Reformists promoted civil society, rule of law, freer media, and greater openness, but unelected bodies blocked many changes.

The disputed 2009 presidential election produced the Green Movement. Large demonstrations challenged the announced result and demanded political accountability. Later protest waves focused on economic hardship, corruption, fuel prices, personal freedom, and state violence. The 2022 Woman, Life, Freedom movement began after the death of Mahsa Amini in police custody and became a wider challenge to compulsory dress rules and political repression.

Leadership Succession in 2026

Ali Khamenei was killed during a major external military attack on 28 February 2026. The Assembly of Experts selected his son, Mojtaba Khamenei, as the third Supreme Leader in March 2026. The transition demonstrated the constitutional importance of the Assembly of Experts, but it also showed the continuing influence of the Revolutionary Guard and established power networks.

CURRENT-EVENTS CAUTION

AP questions usually test the powers and relationships of institutions rather than the name of the current officeholder. Older textbooks identify Ali Khamenei as Supreme Leader. Updated notes should recognize Mojtaba Khamenei as the current leader while keeping the constitutional role itself at the center of study.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- 1905-1911 — Constitutional Revolution and creation of the Majles
- 1925 — Reza Shah establishes the Pahlavi dynasty
- 1953 — Coup removes Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh
- 1963 — White Revolution begins
- 1979 — Islamic Revolution; monarchy replaced by the Islamic Republic
- 1980-1988 — Iran-Iraq War
- 1989 — Khomeini dies; constitution amended; Ali Khamenei becomes Supreme Leader
- 1997 — Reformist Mohammad Khatami elected president
- 2009 — Disputed presidential election and Green Movement
- 2015 — Nuclear agreement known as the JCPOA
- 2018 — United States withdraws from the JCPOA and restores broad sanctions
- 2022 — Woman, Life, Freedom protests
- 2024 — Parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections; Masoud Pezeshkian elected president
- 2026 — Death of Ali Khamenei and selection of Mojtaba Khamenei as Supreme Leader

The Constitutional Framework and Regime Type

An Islamic Republic

Iran's official name combines two different ideas. The word republic suggests elections, popular participation, a constitution, and public institutions. The word Islamic means that political authority and law must remain consistent with the state's interpretation of Shia Islam.

The constitution recognizes elected institutions, but it also places them under the supervision of religious authorities. The result is not a liberal democracy. It is an authoritarian theocratic system with limited electoral competition.

Velayat-e Faqih

Velayat-e faqih means guardianship, or rule, of the Islamic jurist. Khomeini argued that a qualified Islamic legal scholar should guide the state during the absence of the hidden Twelfth Imam. In the constitution, this principle provides the basis for the Supreme Leader's authority.

KEY TERM: VELAYAT-E FAQIH

The constitutional principle that a senior Islamic jurist should supervise the political system and protect its Islamic character. It is the central idea behind the authority of the Supreme Leader.

Dual Sovereignty

Iran has two sources of claimed authority. Popular sovereignty appears through elections and representative institutions. Religious sovereignty appears through the Supreme Leader, Guardian Council, and other bodies that claim responsibility for protecting Islamic principles.

These two sources can cooperate, but they can also conflict. A president may receive millions of votes and still be unable to change policies controlled by the Supreme Leader or blocked by the Guardian Council.

Republican Institutions	Theocratic and Supervisory Institutions
President elected by popular vote	Supreme Leader selected by the Assembly of Experts
Majles elected by citizens	Guardian Council vets candidates and reviews legislation
Local councils elected in cities and villages	Judiciary leadership appointed by the Supreme Leader

Republican Institutions	Theocratic and Supervisory Institutions
Assembly of Experts elected by citizens	Candidates for the Assembly are themselves vetted by the Guardian Council
Public debate among approved factions	IRGC and state security organizations protect the ruling system

Authoritarianism with Controlled Competition

Elections in Iran are not meaningless. Voters have sometimes chosen candidates preferred by reformists or moderates, and elected institutions can influence budgets, social policy, administration, and public debate. However, competition is controlled because candidates are screened, opposition organizations face restrictions, and the most powerful offices are not directly elected by the public.

A useful description is competitive authoritarian theocracy: competition exists, but the field is heavily restricted and unelected authorities can override elected officials.

Sources of Legitimacy and Political Stability

Legitimacy means public acceptance of the state's right to rule. Iran's leaders rely on several overlapping sources of legitimacy.

Source	How It Supports the System	Main Limitation
Religion	The state claims to protect Shia Islam and Islamic law.	Not all citizens accept clerical political rule or the official interpretation of religion.
Revolution	The regime presents itself as the defender of independence and the 1979 Revolution.	Younger generations did not experience the revolution and may feel less attached to it.
Nationalism	Leaders emphasize sovereignty, resistance to foreign domination, and national pride.	Economic hardship and foreign conflict can also create dissatisfaction.
Elections	Voting gives citizens some choice and helps factions compete peacefully.	Candidate vetting and low turnout weaken electoral legitimacy.
Performance	The state provides education, health services, infrastructure, subsidies, and security.	Inflation, unemployment, corruption, sanctions, and inequality damage performance legitimacy.
Coercion	Security bodies deter organized challenges and suppress protests.	Coercion can create fear without creating genuine consent.

The 2024 parliamentary turnout of about 41 percent and the first-round presidential turnout of about 40 percent showed public disengagement. The presidential runoff turnout rose to nearly 50 percent, demonstrating that competition can still mobilize voters when they believe the choice matters.

The Supreme Leader

Selection and Tenure

The Assembly of Experts selects the Supreme Leader. The constitution does not give the leader a fixed term. The Assembly may remove a leader who no longer meets constitutional qualifications, but it has rarely acted as an independent check in practice.

Powers of the Supreme Leader

- Sets the general direction of the Islamic Republic and supervises implementation of major policies.
- Serves as commander in chief of the armed forces.
- Appoints senior military commanders, including leadership of the Revolutionary Guard.
- Appoints the head of the judiciary.
- Appoints six clerical members of the Guardian Council.
- Appoints the head of state broadcasting.
- Appoints members of the Expediency Council.
- Confirms the elected president and may remove the president under constitutional procedures.
- Exercises strong influence over foreign policy, national security, the nuclear program, and relations with regional allies.
- Uses representatives and foundations to influence religious, economic, and administrative institutions throughout the country.

Formal and Informal Authority

The leader's constitutional powers are extensive, but informal authority also matters. The Supreme Leader's office maintains networks across the clergy, military, media, judiciary, charitable foundations, and state enterprises. These networks help coordinate the system and limit the independence of elected officials.

AP COMPARISON

The Iranian president is not equivalent to the presidents of Mexico or the United States. In Iran, the Supreme Leader controls the most important security and ideological institutions. The president manages much of ordinary government but remains subordinate to the leader.

The President and Executive Government

Election of the President

The president is elected by direct popular vote for a four-year term and may serve no more than two consecutive terms. A candidate must win an absolute majority. If no candidate receives a majority in the first round, the two leading candidates compete in a runoff.

Before voters see the ballot, the Guardian Council decides which applicants are qualified to run. This filtering is one of the most important limits on popular choice.

Current Presidency

Masoud Pezeshkian won the July 2024 runoff after defeating Saeed Jalili. He campaigned as a reform-oriented candidate who supported greater social openness and improved external relations. His election demonstrated that voters can influence the political direction of the executive, but his ability to change the system is limited by unelected institutions and security bodies.

Powers and Responsibilities

- Implements the constitution and laws in areas not reserved for the Supreme Leader.
- Directs the executive bureaucracy and chairs the cabinet.

- Prepares the national budget and proposes economic and social policies.
- Appoints ministers, subject to confirmation by the Majles.
- Signs treaties and manages diplomacy within limits set by the leadership and national-security institutions.
- Appoints provincial governors through the national executive structure.
- Represents the government in public and may shape the political agenda.

Limits on Presidential Power

- The Supreme Leader controls the armed forces and has final authority over major security questions.
- The Guardian Council can block legislation and restrict the candidates available to the president's political faction.
- The judiciary and state broadcasting are not controlled by the president.
- The Majles can question ministers, reject cabinet nominees, and remove ministers.
- The IRGC and bonyads possess resources and networks outside ordinary presidential control.
- Sanctions and structural economic problems limit the government's policy choices.

THE DUAL EXECUTIVE

Iran has a dual executive: the Supreme Leader is the highest political and religious authority, while the president is the highest popularly elected executive official. The two offices are unequal. The leader dominates strategic policy; the president manages much of daily administration.

The Majles: Iran's Parliament

Composition and Election

The Islamic Consultative Assembly, commonly called the Majles, is a unicameral legislature with 290 members elected for four-year terms. Most members represent geographic districts. Five seats are reserved for recognized religious minorities: Zoroastrians, Jews, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, and Armenian Christians.

Elections use majoritarian rules in single-member and multi-member districts. Candidate vetting by the Guardian Council greatly shapes the result before voting begins.

Powers of the Majles

- Passes ordinary legislation and approves the national budget.
- Confirms cabinet ministers and may question or impeach them.
- May question the president and can declare presidential incompetence under constitutional procedures.
- Approves international agreements and loans.
- Investigates public institutions and receives citizen complaints.
- Provides a public arena for factional debate, criticism, and constituency demands.

Limits on the Majles

Every law passed by the Majles must be reviewed by the Guardian Council. The Council can return legislation that it considers inconsistent with Islam or the constitution. In addition, major questions of national security and foreign policy are often decided outside parliament.

How a Law Is Made

Stage	Institution and Action
1. Proposal	A government bill or member-sponsored proposal is introduced in the Majles.
2. Debate and vote	Majles committees review the proposal and members vote.
3. Guardian Council review	The Council checks consistency with Islamic law and the constitution.

Stage	Institution and Action
4. Revision	If rejected, the proposal returns to the Majles for amendment.
5. Deadlock	If the Majles and Guardian Council cannot agree, the Expediency Council may settle the dispute.
6. Implementation	An approved measure is signed and administered by the executive government.

The Guardian Council

Composition

The Guardian Council has twelve members serving staggered six-year terms. Six Islamic jurists are appointed directly by the Supreme Leader. Six legal specialists are nominated by the head of the judiciary and approved by the Majles. Because the head of the judiciary is appointed by the Supreme Leader, the leader influences both halves of the Council.

Main Powers

- Reviews every law passed by the Majles for compatibility with Islam and the constitution.
- Interprets the constitution.
- Supervises national elections and referenda.
- Approves or disqualifies candidates for president, Majles, and Assembly of Experts.
- Protects the ideological boundaries of the Islamic Republic.

CANDIDATE VETTING

Candidate vetting occurs before the election. Citizens choose among applicants approved by the Guardian Council, not among all people who wish to run. This allows competition but prevents open challenges to the constitutional order.

Political Importance

The Guardian Council is one of the clearest examples of theocratic control over republican institutions. It can prevent laws from taking effect and can shape the ideological character of elected bodies by deciding who may compete.

The Assembly of Experts

Composition and Election

The Assembly of Experts has 88 members elected for eight-year terms. Members are Islamic scholars, and candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council. Citizens therefore vote for the body, but the candidate pool is restricted.

Constitutional Role

- Selects the Supreme Leader.
- Is expected to supervise the leader's performance.
- May remove a leader who becomes unable or unqualified to serve.
- Determines some of its own internal rules.

In practice, the Assembly has operated privately and has rarely challenged the Supreme Leader. Its importance becomes most visible during leadership succession, as occurred in 1989 and again in 2026.

The Expediency Discernment Council

The Expediency Council was created to resolve disputes between the Majles and Guardian Council. Its members are appointed by the Supreme Leader. The body also advises the leader on broad policy questions and may help coordinate powerful factions.

INSTITUTIONAL FLOW

Majles passes a law -> Guardian Council objects -> Majles revises or insists -> Expediency Council may decide what best serves the interests of the system.

The Judiciary and the Rule of Law

Structure and Leadership

The Supreme Leader appoints the head of the judiciary for a five-year term. The judicial chief then influences senior judicial appointments and nominates the six legal members of the Guardian Council. This creates a strong institutional link between the judiciary and the Supreme Leader.

Different Court Systems

- Ordinary courts handle civil and criminal cases.
- Revolutionary courts hear many cases involving national security, political opposition, and serious offenses against the Islamic Republic.
- Special Clerical Courts handle alleged offenses by members of the clergy.
- Administrative and specialized courts deal with particular areas of law.

Rule of Law and Rule by Law

Rule of law means that all officials are genuinely limited by clear, predictable, and independently enforced law. Rule by law means rulers use legal institutions to organize society and punish opponents without accepting equal legal limits on their own power.

Iran has a detailed constitution and a large court system, but judicial independence is limited in politically sensitive cases. Vague national-security charges, restrictions on legal defense, and closed proceedings can weaken due process.

The Armed Forces, IRGC, and Basij

The Regular Military and Revolutionary Guard

Iran maintains both a regular military, known as the Artesh, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The regular military focuses mainly on national defense. The IRGC was created after the revolution to protect the Islamic Republic and its revolutionary principles.

The IRGC

- Reports to the Supreme Leader rather than the president.
- Operates ground, naval, aerospace, intelligence, and special external units.
- Controls the Quds Force, which supports Iran's regional security strategy and allied groups.
- Has influence in construction, energy, telecommunications, finance, and other economic sectors.
- Has former officers and allies in elected and appointed political offices.
- Plays a major role in responding to protests and perceived threats to the regime.

The Basij

The Basij is a volunteer paramilitary organization connected to the IRGC. It operates in neighborhoods, universities, workplaces, and religious institutions. It provides mobilization, ideological education, social services, surveillance, and domestic security support.

WHY THE IRGC MATTERS

The IRGC is not only a military organization. It is also a political network, economic actor, and guardian of the regime. This makes it an example of a para-state institution whose influence extends beyond the ordinary chain of civilian government.

Elections and Political Participation

National Elections

Citizens vote for the president, Majles, and Assembly of Experts. Elections can reveal public preferences, permit competition among approved factions, and produce changes in the executive. Yet they do not allow voters to replace the entire political system through ordinary electoral competition.

Turnout and Political Legitimacy

High turnout has traditionally been presented as proof of popular support. Falling participation therefore creates a legitimacy problem. In 2024, parliamentary turnout was about 41 percent. Presidential turnout was about 40 percent in the first round and nearly 50 percent in the runoff.

WHAT TURNOUT CAN SHOW

Low turnout may reflect apathy, alienation, protest, weak competition, or distrust. Higher runoff turnout in 2024 suggests that some citizens who reject parts of the system still participate when they believe the candidates offer a meaningful difference.

Local Councils

Citizens elect local councils in cities and villages. Councils deal with local development and municipal matters, but Iran remains a unitary state. Provincial governors are part of the centrally directed executive system, and local autonomy is limited by national law and security priorities.

Protest as Participation

When elections appear unable to produce major change, citizens may turn to demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, petitions, online activism, and informal networks. Iran has experienced student protests, labor actions, women's rights campaigns, environmental protests, ethnic demonstrations, and nationwide movements.

The state may respond through concessions, arrests, force, internet restrictions, propaganda, or selective policy adjustment. Protest therefore shows both the continuing political engagement of society and the coercive capacity of the regime.

Media, Internet, and Censorship

Iran has newspapers, television, online platforms, and lively political discussion, but the state controls broadcasting and restricts content that challenges religious authority, national security, or the political order. Websites and social-media services may be filtered, and internet access may be slowed or shut down during crises.

Citizens often use virtual private networks, satellite media, encrypted communication, and diaspora sources to obtain information. This creates a continuous struggle between state control and technological adaptation.

Political Factions and the Weak Party System

Factions Rather Than Stable Parties

Iran does not have a stable party system like the United Kingdom. Political competition is organized through personal networks, electoral lists, clerical associations, professional groups, media outlets, and temporary coalitions. Labels may change from one election to another.

Faction	General Position	Typical Support and Priorities
Principlists / hard-line conservatives	Strong defense of clerical authority and revolutionary values	Close ties to religious institutions, security bodies, and socially conservative voters
Traditional conservatives	Support the Islamic Republic while favoring established clerical and bazaar networks	Order, private commerce, religious authority, and gradual economic management
Pragmatic conservatives / moderates	Seek stability, professional administration, and selective engagement abroad	Technocrats, business interests, and voters prioritizing economic improvement
Reformists	Seek greater rule of law, civil liberties, participation, and social openness within the Islamic Republic	Urban middle classes, students, professionals, many women, and younger voters

Limits on Factional Competition

All factions that legally compete must operate within the Islamic Republic. Organizations that openly reject velayat-e faqih, demand full secular government, or seek regime replacement cannot participate freely. The Guardian Council may also disqualify reformist or moderate candidates, changing the balance among factions.

Interest Groups, Civil Society, and Para-State Organizations

The Clergy

The Shia clergy is not politically uniform. Some clerics strongly support the ruling system, some favor reform, and others prefer greater separation between religious scholarship and government. However, senior state institutions give politically connected clerics exceptional influence.

Bazaaris

Bazaar merchants historically helped finance religious institutions and revolutionary opposition. They remain politically important, although the growth of state companies, modern retail, and IRGC-linked economic networks has changed their position.

Bonyads

Bonyads are large charitable foundations that control businesses, property, and social programs. Many were created from assets taken after the revolution. They are connected to the leadership, enjoy special privileges, and often operate with limited public transparency.

KEY TERM: BONYAD

A large religious or charitable foundation with major economic holdings and political connections. Bonyads provide welfare and employment but can also reduce transparency and weaken ordinary market competition.

Labor, Students, Women, and Professional Groups

Workers, teachers, pensioners, students, lawyers, journalists, artists, and women's organizations have organized around wages, legal rights, education, professional independence, and social freedom. Independent organization is restricted, but informal networks and issue-based campaigns remain important.

Civil Society under Authoritarian Conditions

Civil society exists in Iran but operates under pressure. Some organizations are licensed and closely supervised. Others are informal or temporary. The state may tolerate social activity until it becomes a political challenge, at which point leaders can face closure, arrest, or professional punishment.

Political Culture and Social Cleavages

Religion and Secular Social Life

Most Iranians are Shia Muslims, and religious belief remains important. However, citizens differ sharply over whether clergy should directly rule the state, how Islamic law should be enforced, and how much personal behavior government should regulate.

Generation and Youth

Iran has a large educated population shaped by urbanization, higher education, digital media, and global culture. Younger citizens may value national identity while rejecting revolutionary-era restrictions. Generational change is therefore one of the strongest sources of long-term political pressure.

Gender

Women participate heavily in education, professional life, voting, and social movements. At the same time, family law, dress requirements, political restrictions, and unequal legal treatment create major grievances. Women have served in the Majles and cabinet-level positions, but no woman has been approved to run for president.

Class and Urban-Rural Differences

Urban middle-class voters have often supported reform and social openness. Poorer citizens may depend more directly on subsidies, public employment, bonyads, and local patronage. However, economic protest has spread across both small towns and major cities, so class patterns are not fixed.

Ethnic and Regional Cleavages

Iran is ethnically diverse. Persians form the largest group, while Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baluch, Turkmen, Lurs, and other communities maintain distinct identities. Demands may concern language, economic development, local administration, religious rights, or political autonomy.

Minority regions often face weaker development and stronger security control. The state fears separatism and foreign interference, which makes ethnic demands especially sensitive.

Religious Minorities

The constitution recognizes Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians and reserves parliamentary representation for them. Sunni Muslims are a significant minority but are not treated as a separate recognized community in the same way. The Baha'i community is not recognized and faces severe restrictions.

Political Economy and the Rentier State

Oil, Gas, and Rentierism

Iran possesses major oil and natural-gas resources. A government that receives large external revenue from natural resources is called a rentier state. Because it can finance itself without relying fully on direct taxation, it may face weaker demands for accountability from citizens.

RENTIER-STATE LOGIC

Oil and gas revenue -> less dependence on citizen taxation -> greater ability to fund subsidies, security, and patronage -> weaker taxation-and-representation link. When energy revenue falls, the state faces stronger pressure to tax, borrow, cut benefits, or print money.

The Three Economic Sectors

Sector	Main Features
State sector	Oil, major industries, infrastructure, banking, and strategic enterprises under government control.
Para-state sector	Bonyads, pension funds, religious organizations, and IRGC-linked companies with political connections and limited transparency.
Private and informal sector	Small businesses, agriculture, services, traders, professionals, and informal work outside full regulation.

Subsidies and Social Welfare

The government has long subsidized fuel, food, electricity, and other essential goods. Subsidies can strengthen distributive legitimacy, but they are expensive and often benefit wealthier consumers who use more energy. Attempts to reduce subsidies can produce inflation and protest.

Sanctions and Economic Isolation

International sanctions have restricted oil exports, finance, investment, shipping, technology, and access to foreign currency. Sanctions reduce growth and create hardship, but domestic policy problems also matter. Corruption, weak banking, political uncertainty, and privileged organizations reduce efficiency.

Inflation, Employment, and Inequality

High inflation weakens wages and savings. Young people may complete higher education but struggle to find stable employment. Regional inequality, housing costs, and currency weakness add to public dissatisfaction. Economic grievances have repeatedly contributed to protest.

Economic Reform

Governments have attempted privatization, subsidy reform, tax reform, and greater foreign investment. Yet privatization may transfer assets to para-state organizations rather than create open competition. Political conflict and sanctions make long-term planning difficult.

The Nuclear Program and External Pressure

Iran states that its nuclear program serves peaceful purposes, while foreign governments have feared possible weapons development. The issue has produced inspections, negotiations, sanctions, and recurring confrontation.

The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action limited parts of the program in exchange for sanctions relief. The United States withdrew from the agreement in 2018, and Iran later reduced compliance with several restrictions. Nuclear policy is strongly influenced by the Supreme Leader, the national-security system, and external threats rather than by the president alone.

DOMESTIC POLITICAL EFFECT

External pressure can weaken the economy and increase public dissatisfaction, but it can also strengthen hard-line arguments that Iran must resist foreign coercion and rely on military deterrence.

Foreign Policy and National Security

Strategic Independence

A central goal of the Islamic Republic is independence from foreign domination. The memory of Russian and British influence, the 1953 coup, support for the shah, and the Iran-Iraq War shapes distrust of outside powers.

Regional Influence

Iran has developed relationships with governments and armed movements across the Middle East. Supporters describe these ties as strategic defense and resistance. Critics describe them as intervention that consumes resources and increases regional conflict.

Institutions That Shape Foreign Policy

- The Supreme Leader sets the broad direction and has final authority.
- The Supreme National Security Council coordinates major security policy.
- The president and foreign ministry conduct diplomacy.
- The IRGC and Quds Force implement important regional strategies.
- The Majles debates treaties and may influence public pressure but does not control the entire security system.

Contemporary Political Challenges

Challenge	Why It Matters
Leadership succession	A new Supreme Leader must build authority, balance institutions, and maintain elite unity.
Electoral legitimacy	Candidate vetting and low turnout reduce the representative value of elections.
Economic pressure	Inflation, sanctions, unemployment, currency weakness, and inequality undermine performance legitimacy.
Women and personal freedom	Dress rules and unequal legal treatment have produced sustained resistance.
Youth and generational change	A connected and educated population often has expectations different from the revolutionary elite.

Challenge	Why It Matters
Civil liberties	Restrictions on speech, media, organization, and protest create recurring conflict.
Ethnic and regional inequality	Peripheral regions combine development problems with security tensions.
Water and environment	Drought, water mismanagement, pollution, and land degradation threaten communities and agriculture.
Institutional rivalry	President, Majles, clerical bodies, judiciary, and IRGC may have competing priorities.
External conflict	Military confrontation and sanctions increase security pressure and reduce space for domestic reform.

Iran in Comparative Perspective

Feature	Iran	Useful Comparison
Regime	Authoritarian theocratic republic	China is authoritarian but officially secular and communist.
Highest authority	Unelected Supreme Leader	Russia has a powerful elected presidency; the UK has a ceremonial monarch and parliamentary executive.
Executive	Dual executive: leader and president	Mexico has a single elected presidential executive.
Legislature	Unicameral Majles with candidate vetting	The UK parliament operates in competitive multiparty elections without ideological vetting.
Religion	Official Shia Islamic state	Mexico is constitutionally secular; the UK has an established church but liberal democratic politics.
Military	IRGC has political and economic roles	China's PLA is controlled by the Communist Party; Mexico's military has growing security duties but does not define regime ideology.
Economy	Oil-based rentier features and sanctions	Nigeria also depends heavily on petroleum revenue; China depends more on manufacturing and trade.
Political organizations	Factions and controlled electoral lists	The UK and Mexico have more institutionalized political parties.

Key Terms

Term	Meaning
Theocracy	A political system in which religious authority and religious law directly shape government.
Islamic Republic	Iran's system combining elected republican institutions with Islamic supervision.
Velayat-e faqih	Guardianship of the Islamic jurist; the principle supporting rule by the Supreme Leader.
Supreme Leader	Iran's highest political and religious authority.
Dual executive	A system with both a Supreme Leader and an elected president, with the leader holding greater power.
Majles	Iran's 290-member unicameral parliament.
Guardian Council	Twelve-member body that reviews laws, interprets the constitution, supervises elections, and vets candidates.
Assembly of Experts	Elected body of Islamic scholars that selects and formally supervises the Supreme Leader.
Expediency Council	Appointed body that resolves disputes between the Majles and Guardian Council and advises the leader.
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; military, political, security, and economic guardian of the Islamic Republic.
Basij	Volunteer paramilitary organization linked to the IRGC.
Artesh	Iran's regular military.
Quds Force	IRGC unit responsible for important external and regional operations.
Bonyad	Religious or charitable foundation with major economic holdings and political connections.
Rentier state	A state financed heavily by external resource income rather than citizen taxation.
Candidate vetting	Official approval or rejection of people who seek to compete in elections.
Faction	A political network or tendency that competes without necessarily forming a stable party.
Principlist	A conservative political current emphasizing loyalty to revolutionary and Islamic principles.
Reformist	A political current seeking greater openness and rule of law within the Islamic Republic.
Para-state institution	An organization formally outside ordinary government but closely connected to political power.
Rule by law	Use of law as an instrument of government without equal and independent legal limits on rulers.
Reserved seat	A legislative seat guaranteed to a recognized minority group.
Subsidy	Government support that lowers the price of a good or service.
JCPOA	The 2015 international agreement concerning Iran's nuclear program and sanctions relief.
Green Movement	Mass protest movement after the disputed 2009 presidential election.
Woman, Life, Freedom	Movement that began in 2022 and challenged compulsory dress rules and political repression.
Political legitimacy	Public acceptance of the state's right to rule.
Coercion	Use or threat of force to secure obedience.
Unitary state	A state in which final authority is concentrated in the national government.
Political socialization	The process through which citizens learn political values and attitudes.

Facts to Remember

1. Iran is an authoritarian theocratic republic, not a liberal democracy.
2. The 1979 Constitution created the Islamic Republic; important amendments were adopted in 1989.
3. Velayat-e faqih is the constitutional basis of the Supreme Leader's authority.
4. The Supreme Leader is more powerful than the elected president.
5. The Assembly of Experts selects the Supreme Leader and may theoretically remove him.
6. The Assembly of Experts has 88 members elected for eight-year terms.
7. The president is directly elected for four years and may serve two consecutive terms.
8. Presidential candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council.

9. Masoud Pezeshkian was elected president in 2024.
10. Mojtaba Khamenei became Supreme Leader in March 2026 after the death of Ali Khamenei.
11. The Majles is a unicameral legislature with 290 members elected for four-year terms.
12. Five Majles seats are reserved for recognized religious minorities.
13. The Guardian Council has twelve members: six Islamic jurists appointed by the leader and six legal specialists approved by the Majles from nominees of the judicial chief.
14. The Guardian Council reviews legislation and vets candidates.
15. The Expediency Council may resolve disputes between the Majles and Guardian Council.
16. The Supreme Leader appoints the head of the judiciary.
17. Iran has a dual executive: Supreme Leader and president.
18. The IRGC reports to the Supreme Leader and has military, political, and economic influence.
19. The Basij is a paramilitary organization connected to the IRGC.
20. Iran has political factions but weakly institutionalized political parties.
21. Reformists seek greater openness within the system; principlists emphasize revolutionary and Islamic authority.
22. Iran is a unitary state, although citizens elect local councils.
23. Oil and gas income gives Iran important rentier-state characteristics.
24. Bonyads and IRGC-linked organizations form part of the para-state economy.
25. Sanctions, inflation, unemployment, and inequality weaken performance legitimacy.
26. The 2024 parliamentary election had turnout of about 41 percent.
27. The 2024 presidential runoff turnout was nearly 50 percent.
28. The Green Movement followed the disputed 2009 presidential election.
29. The Woman, Life, Freedom movement began in 2022.
30. AP answers should connect institutions with actual limits on political competition and policy-making.

Practice

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which institution has final authority over Iran's armed forces?
 - A. President
 - B. Majles
 - C. Supreme Leader
 - D. Guardian Council
2. What is the main purpose of the Guardian Council?
 - A. Manage local government
 - B. Review legislation and supervise candidate eligibility
 - C. Command the regular military
 - D. Negotiate the national budget
3. Iran is best described as which type of regime?
 - A. Liberal parliamentary democracy
 - B. Military junta
 - C. Authoritarian theocratic republic
 - D. Federal presidential democracy
4. Which body selects the Supreme Leader?
 - A. Majles
 - B. Assembly of Experts
 - C. Expediency Council
 - D. Cabinet
5. The term rentier state is most closely connected with Iran's dependence on:
 - A. Agricultural taxes
 - B. Oil and gas revenue
 - C. Tourism

- D. Foreign aid
6. Which institution can resolve a deadlock between the Majles and Guardian Council?
- A. Expediency Council
 - B. Basij
 - C. Assembly of Experts
 - D. Local councils
7. Which statement best describes political parties in Iran?
- A. Two stable parties alternate in government.
 - B. All parties are prohibited and no electoral groups exist.
 - C. Loose factions and electoral coalitions are more important than stable mass parties.
 - D. One communist party legally monopolizes elections.
8. The IRGC is best described as:
- A. A purely ceremonial guard
 - B. A military organization with political and economic influence
 - C. The elected national legislature
 - D. An independent court
9. Candidate vetting most directly limits which democratic principle?
- A. Judicial review
 - B. Broad electoral competition
 - C. Fiscal federalism
 - D. Bicameralism
10. Which official is directly elected by Iranian voters?
- A. Supreme Leader
 - B. Head of judiciary
 - C. President
 - D. Clerical members of the Guardian Council
11. Velayat-e faqih refers to:
- A. Proportional representation
 - B. Guardianship of the Islamic jurist
 - C. Economic privatization
 - D. Local autonomy
12. Which comparison is accurate?
- A. Iran and Mexico both have unelected supreme leaders.
 - B. Iran and China both hold fully open multiparty elections.
 - C. Iran and Nigeria both display important rentier-state characteristics.
 - D. Iran and the UK both have parliamentary executives.

Answer Key and Brief Explanations

Answer	Explanation
1-C	The Supreme Leader is commander in chief and controls senior military appointments.
2-B	The Guardian Council reviews laws, interprets the constitution, supervises elections, and vets candidates.
3-C	Iran combines elected republican institutions with dominant theocratic authority and authoritarian limits.
4-B	The Assembly of Experts selects the Supreme Leader.
5-B	Oil and gas provide external revenue that reduces dependence on direct taxation.
6-A	The Expediency Council can settle unresolved disputes between the Majles and Guardian Council.
7-C	Competition is organized mainly through factions, lists, and temporary coalitions.
8-B	The IRGC is a military, security, political, and economic actor.
9-B	Vetting limits which candidates voters may choose.
10-C	The president is directly elected, although candidates are screened.
11-B	The phrase means guardianship or rule of the Islamic jurist.

Answer	Explanation
12-C	Both Iran and Nigeria receive important petroleum revenue and show rentier-state features.

Concept Application Questions

1. Define theocracy and explain how one Iranian institution demonstrates the concept.
2. Define candidate vetting and explain how it affects electoral competition in Iran.
3. Define dual executive and explain how it operates in Iran.
4. Define rentier state and explain one political effect of oil revenue in Iran.
5. Define legitimacy and explain one reason declining turnout may concern Iranian leaders.
6. Define para-state institution and explain how either a bonyad or the IRGC demonstrates the concept.

Comparative Questions

1. Compare executive power in Iran and Mexico.
2. Compare political-party organization in Iran and the United Kingdom.
3. Compare the political role of the military in Iran and China.
4. Compare rentier-state features in Iran and Nigeria.
5. Compare candidate selection in Iran and Russia.
6. Compare local government in unitary Iran and federal Mexico.

Data Analysis Practice

Election	Turnout
2024 Majles election	About 41%
2024 presidential election, first round	About 40%
2024 presidential election, runoff	About 50%

1. Identify the election with the highest turnout.
2. Describe the change from the presidential first round to the runoff.
3. Explain one institutional or political reason turnout may have increased in the runoff.
4. Explain one reason low parliamentary turnout may weaken regime legitimacy.
5. Explain why turnout alone cannot prove that an election is fully free and fair.

Argument Essay Questions

1. Develop an argument about whether elected institutions provide meaningful accountability in Iran.
2. Develop an argument about whether rentier income strengthens or weakens political legitimacy.
3. Develop an argument about whether candidate vetting contributes more to stability or to political alienation.
4. Develop an argument about whether the IRGC increases state capacity at the cost of civilian accountability.
5. Develop an argument comparing the role of unelected institutions in Iran and one other AP course country.

Model Concept Application Response

QUESTION
Explain how the Guardian Council limits electoral competition in Iran.

The Guardian Council limits electoral competition through candidate vetting. Before presidential, parliamentary, and Assembly of Experts elections, the Council decides which applicants are qualified to run. It may disqualify candidates who are considered insufficiently loyal to the Islamic Republic or its

religious principles. As a result, voters can choose among approved candidates, but they cannot freely select from the full range of political views in society. This preserves controlled competition while preventing ordinary elections from replacing the basic theocratic system.

Why This Response Works

- It identifies the correct institution.
- It defines the relevant process: candidate vetting.
- It explains the mechanism before the election occurs.
- It connects the mechanism to limited electoral choice.
- It distinguishes controlled competition from the complete absence of elections.

Final Revision Checklist

- Know the importance of the Constitutional Revolution, Pahlavi monarchy, and 1979 Islamic Revolution.
- Explain why the 1953 coup remains politically important.
- Know the main causes and consequences of the 1979 Revolution.
- Explain how the Iran-Iraq War strengthened revolutionary institutions.
- Define velayat-e faqih.
- Describe Iran as an authoritarian theocratic republic.
- Explain the dual structure of republican and theocratic institutions.
- Know the current Supreme Leader and current president.
- Know how the Assembly of Experts selects the Supreme Leader.
- List the Supreme Leader's major powers.
- Explain why the president is weaker than the Supreme Leader.
- Know the presidential term and two-round election rule.
- Know the composition and role of the 290-member Majles.
- Know the composition and powers of the Guardian Council.
- Explain candidate vetting.
- Know the role of the Assembly of Experts and Expediency Council.
- Explain how the Supreme Leader influences the judiciary.
- Distinguish rule of law from rule by law.
- Explain the roles of the Artesh, IRGC, Quds Force, and Basij.
- Explain why Iran has factions rather than a strongly institutionalized party system.
- Know the general differences among principlists, conservatives, moderates, and reformists.
- Define bonyad and para-state institution.
- Explain political participation through elections and protest.
- Know the significance of the Green Movement and Woman, Life, Freedom movement.
- Explain media control and internet censorship.
- Know the major gender, generation, class, ethnic, regional, and religious cleavages.
- Define rentier state and apply it to oil and gas revenue.
- Explain the effects of sanctions, subsidies, inflation, and unemployment.
- Understand why nuclear policy is not controlled by the president alone.
- Be ready to compare Iran with the United Kingdom, Russia, China, Mexico, and Nigeria.

Source Note

This chapter follows the AP Comparative Government and Politics Course and Exam Description and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Election figures are based on official 2024 results and widely cited reporting. Current leadership references are updated through 28 July 2026; because leadership changed in 2026, older AP materials may identify Ali Khamenei rather than Mojtaba Khamenei as Supreme Leader.

Chapter Eight: Government and Politics in Nigeria

Federalism, presidentialism, diversity, oil wealth, military legacies, and democratic consolidation

Nigeria is a federal presidential republic made up of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Since 1999, elected civilian governments have replaced the long periods of military rule that shaped much of the country's post-independence history. Nigeria holds competitive multiparty elections, has an active press and civil society, and has experienced peaceful transfers of presidential power.

Formal democratic institutions, however, operate alongside powerful informal practices. Patron-client networks, regional balancing, party defections, political godfathers, corruption, and the distribution of oil revenue often influence how authority is gained and used. Federalism helps manage a highly diverse society, but disputes over revenue, representation, religion, ethnicity, security, and local autonomy remain central to politics.

For AP Comparative Government, Nigeria is especially useful for understanding federalism, presidentialism, democratization, civil-military relations, electoral systems, political cleavages, rentier states, resource dependence, clientelism, state capacity, and the gap between constitutional rules and political practice.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Historical foundations: colonial rule, independence, military government, civil war, and the Fourth Republic
- The 1999 Constitution, presidentialism, federalism, legitimacy, and democratic consolidation
- The president, cabinet, federal bureaucracy, National Assembly, judiciary, states, and local governments
- INEC, presidential and legislative elections, political parties, zoning, defections, and godfather politics
- Political participation, civil society, media, protest, youth movements, and declining voter turnout
- Ethnic, religious, regional, class, gender, indigene-settler, and urban-rural cleavages
- Oil, the rentier state, revenue allocation, the Niger Delta, economic reform, and inequality
- Security, corruption, state capacity, key terms, facts to remember, MCQs, data analysis, and AP-style practice

Nigeria at a Glance

Feature	Nigeria
Official name	Federal Republic of Nigeria
Regime type	Federal presidential democracy with important institutional and governance challenges
Constitution	1999 Constitution, as amended
Head of state and government	President
Current president	Bola Ahmed Tinubu, in office since 29 May 2023
Vice president	Kashim Shettima
Territorial structure	Federal system: 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory, and 774 local government areas
Legislature	Bicameral National Assembly: 109-member Senate and 360-member House of Representatives
Judiciary	Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, federal and state courts, with customary and Sharia institutions in parts of the country
Election authority	Independent National Electoral Commission, or INEC
Main national parties	All Progressives Congress, Peoples Democratic Party, Labour Party, and New Nigeria Peoples Party

Feature	Nigeria
Economic pattern	Mixed economy with major petroleum dependence, a large informal sector, and growing services
Major political themes	Federalism, diversity, patronage, resource allocation, security, corruption, and democratic consolidation

Historical Foundations of the Nigerian Political System

Precolonial Diversity and British Rule

The territory that became Nigeria contained many political communities before colonial rule. The Hausa-Fulani emirates of the north, Yoruba kingdoms of the west, Igbo communities of the southeast, and numerous smaller societies developed different systems of authority, religion, trade, and social organization. This diversity later made national integration both necessary and difficult.

Britain gradually conquered the region and joined the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914. Colonial authorities often governed through indirect rule, using emirs, chiefs, and other local authorities. Indirect rule worked differently across regions and strengthened some traditional institutions while creating or reshaping others.

Colonial policy encouraged regional administration and uneven development. Western and eastern regions developed stronger missionary education and professional classes, while the north retained more separate educational and political structures. These differences influenced later competition over the civil service, military, elections, and national resources.

Independence and the First Republic, 1960-1966

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 and became a republic in 1963. The First Republic used a parliamentary system and a federal structure. Political parties were strongly connected to regions and ethnic constituencies. Coalition governments were necessary, but disputes over elections, census figures, revenue, and regional power weakened the system.

Corruption allegations, electoral violence, and political deadlock reduced legitimacy. In January 1966, military officers overthrew the civilian government. A second coup followed later that year, deepening regional fear and violence.

Civil War and Federal Restructuring

In 1967, the Eastern Region attempted to leave the federation as the Republic of Biafra. The resulting civil war lasted until 1970 and caused enormous suffering. The federal government defeated secession and promoted a policy of reconciliation after the war.

The war convinced many leaders that a highly regionalized federation could threaten national unity. Military governments created additional states to weaken the old regions and give minority communities greater access to federal institutions. State creation became an important method of managing diversity and distributing resources.

WHY THE CIVIL WAR MATTERS

- It strengthened the national government and the armed forces.
- It discouraged open secession but did not end regional grievances.
- It encouraged the creation of more states and local governments.
- It made national unity and territorial integrity central sources of legitimacy.
- It remains important in debates about memory, representation, and development in southeastern Nigeria.

Military Rule and the Oil Boom

Military governments ruled Nigeria for most of the period from 1966 to 1999. They suspended or limited civilian institutions, governed by decree, centralized authority, and expanded the role of the armed forces in administration. At the same time, the discovery and export of petroleum transformed public finance.

Oil revenue gave the federal government control over a large pool of national income. This supported infrastructure and state expansion, but it also encouraged corruption, patronage, and competition for access to government. Political office became a route to public resources, and the economy became vulnerable to changes in oil prices and production.

The Second Republic and Failed Transitions

Civilian government returned in 1979 under a presidential constitution influenced by the United States. The Second Republic sought to reduce regional politics by requiring national party organization and geographic support for presidential candidates. It ended in a military coup in 1983.

Later military rulers promised transitions but repeatedly delayed or controlled them. The annulment of the 1993 presidential election created a major legitimacy crisis. General Sani Abacha then established a highly repressive regime. After his death in 1998, General Abdulsalami Abubakar supervised a rapid transition to civilian rule.

The Fourth Republic, 1999-Present

The Fourth Republic began in 1999 with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo. The Peoples Democratic Party, or PDP, dominated national politics for sixteen years. Elections were often disputed, but democratic institutions survived and gradually became more competitive.

In 2015, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress, or APC, defeated the sitting president, Goodluck Jonathan. This was the first time an opposition candidate defeated an incumbent president in Nigeria. Jonathan accepted the result, strengthening the principle of peaceful alternation.

The 2023 election produced a more fragmented party system. Bola Tinubu of the APC won the presidency, while the PDP, Labour Party, and New Nigeria Peoples Party won significant support in different regions. The election also highlighted concerns about turnout, technology, result transmission, court challenges, and public trust.

Timeline of Major Political Developments

Year	Development	Political Significance
1914	Amalgamation of northern and southern territories	Created the colonial unit that became Nigeria.
1960	Independence	Established sovereign Nigerian government.
1963	Republic declared	The British monarch was replaced as head of state.
1966	Military coups	Ended the First Republic and began prolonged military influence.
1967-1970	Nigerian Civil War	Preserved the federation and strengthened central authority.
1979	Second Republic begins	Introduced a presidential system.
1983	Military returns	Ended the Second Republic.
1993	Presidential election annulled	Produced a severe legitimacy crisis.
1999	Fourth Republic begins	Restored elected civilian government under the current constitutional order.
2015	Opposition presidential victory	Marked the first defeat of an incumbent president.
2023	Tinubu elected president	Showed a more regionally fragmented and competitive party system.

The Constitution, Regime, and Political Legitimacy

The 1999 Constitution

Nigeria's current political order is based on the 1999 Constitution, as amended. It creates a federal presidential republic with separation of powers, a bicameral legislature, an independent judiciary, elected state governments, and constitutionally recognized local governments.

The constitution contains a long list of rights and institutions, but formal rules do not always determine political outcomes. Informal networks, party leadership, patronage, regional bargaining, security agencies, courts, and access to public resources also shape government.

Democracy and Democratic Consolidation

Nigeria has held regular national elections since 1999 and has experienced peaceful presidential succession. Opposition parties govern several states, courts sometimes overturn election results, civil society remains active, and media organizations criticize public officials. These are important democratic achievements.

Democratic consolidation remains incomplete because elections may involve violence, vote buying, logistical failures, low turnout, and legal disputes. Corruption, insecurity, unequal access to resources, and weak public services can reduce confidence in elected government. Nigeria is therefore best understood as a democracy whose institutions continue to face serious tests.

Sources of Political Legitimacy

Source	How It Supports Legitimacy	Main Limitation
Constitutional rule	Provides legal procedures, elected offices, rights, and separation of powers.	Citizens may see a gap between constitutional promises and actual practice.
Elections	Allow citizens to choose leaders and remove parties from office.	Low turnout, disputed results, and vote buying may weaken trust.
Federalism	Gives regions and groups access to state-level government.	Revenue disputes and central control can create dissatisfaction.
Federal character	Promotes geographic inclusion in appointments and institutions.	May encourage quota politics and claims of unfairness.
Performance	Economic growth, security, jobs, and services can build support.	Inflation, unemployment, poverty, and insecurity weaken performance legitimacy.
National identity	The survival of the federation and pride in Nigeria support unity.	Ethnic, religious, and regional loyalties remain powerful.
Traditional and religious authority	Local leaders can connect government with communities.	Their influence varies and may not be democratically accountable.

Formal Rules and Informal Politics

AP questions often require students to connect formal institutions with informal practices. Nigeria has a written constitution, competitive parties, and elected offices. Yet political bargaining may depend on personal loyalty, patronage, regional balancing, and elite networks.

CORE DISTINCTION

Formal institutions tell us who is legally authorized to act. Informal institutions help explain how coalitions are built, how appointments are distributed, how campaigns are financed, and why constitutional powers may be used differently in practice.

Federalism and Territorial Government

Three Levels of Government

Nigeria has a federal system with national, state, and local levels. The country contains 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. The constitution also recognizes 774 local government areas. Each state has an elected governor and a unicameral House of Assembly.

Federalism is designed to manage Nigeria's size and diversity. It gives communities access to government below the national level and allows policies to vary. However, the federal government remains financially and institutionally powerful.

Division of Powers

- The federal government controls defence, foreign affairs, currency, major taxation, interstate trade, and many national economic matters.
- States manage important areas such as local administration, some education, health services, land policy, and state-level infrastructure.
- Some responsibilities are shared or overlap, which can produce conflict over funding and authority.
- Local governments are expected to provide basic services, markets, local roads, sanitation, and community administration.
- Federal courts and the Supreme Court settle disputes between levels of government.

Fiscal Federalism and Revenue Allocation

Nigeria's federalism is strongly shaped by revenue. Petroleum and other nationally collected revenues enter the Federation Account and are distributed among federal, state, and local governments. Many states depend heavily on these transfers because they collect limited internal revenue.

The derivation principle returns a share of natural-resource revenue to the area where it is produced. This is especially important in the Niger Delta. Supporters see derivation as compensation for environmental and social costs. Critics fear that very high derivation could weaken national redistribution.

FEDERALISM IN PRACTICE

- Nigeria is constitutionally federal, but fiscal dependence gives the centre great influence.
- State creation has increased representation but also increased dependence on federal transfers.
- Revenue allocation is both an economic policy and a method of managing political conflict.
- Disputes over policing, natural resources, taxation, and local government reveal continuing tension between centralization and autonomy.

Federal Character

The federal character principle seeks to prevent domination by one region or group. Public appointments, admissions, and government institutions are expected to reflect the country's geographic diversity. The president must appoint at least one minister from each state, subject to constitutional requirements and Senate confirmation.

Federal character can promote inclusion, but it also creates controversy. Citizens may disagree about whether appointments are fairly distributed, and quotas may compete with demands for merit. The principle is best understood as an institutional response to Nigeria's national diversity.

States and Governors

State governors are powerful political figures. They control state budgets, influence party organizations, appoint commissioners, and shape local political networks. Governors may also influence which candidates receive party nominations for legislative and local offices.

The Governors' Forum gives state executives a platform to bargain with the president and national institutions. Governors may support national leaders from their party while also defending state interests.

Local Government

Local governments are the level closest to citizens, but their autonomy has often been limited. State governments have exercised strong influence over local elections, finances, and administration. Debates over direct financial allocation and elected local councils show that constitutional recognition does not automatically create practical independence.

The Presidency and Executive Government

Election of the President

The president is directly elected for a four-year term and may serve no more than two terms. A winning candidate must receive the highest number of votes and at least one-quarter of the votes in at least two-thirds of the states and the Federal Capital Territory. This geographic-spread rule encourages candidates to build support beyond a single region.

If no candidate meets the constitutional requirements, a runoff is held under the rules established by law. The president and vice president run together on the same ticket.

Powers of the President

- Serves as head of state, head of government, and commander in chief of the armed forces.
- Appoints ministers, ambassadors, senior officials, and heads of many federal agencies, subject to legal requirements and confirmation where necessary.
- Prepares the federal budget and directs national economic policy.
- Signs or vetoes legislation passed by the National Assembly.
- Conducts foreign policy and represents Nigeria internationally.
- Directs the federal civil service and security institutions.
- May issue executive actions within constitutional and statutory limits.
- Has significant influence over the governing party and national policy agenda.

The Cabinet and Federal Character

The Federal Executive Council is the president's cabinet. Ministers lead departments and help implement policy. Because the constitution requires geographic representation, cabinet formation is also a process of national coalition building.

Appointments may balance region, religion, gender, party support, experience, and political loyalty. This can broaden inclusion, but it may also make cabinets large and politically negotiated.

Current Presidency

Bola Ahmed Tinubu became president on 29 May 2023, with Kashim Shettima as vice president. The administration began with major economic changes, including the removal of the long-standing petrol subsidy and reforms to the foreign-exchange system. Supporters argued that these measures were necessary to reduce fiscal pressure and economic distortions. Critics emphasized the immediate rise in transport, food, and living costs.

This policy debate illustrates a central AP concept: governments may pursue long-term economic reform while facing short-term losses in performance legitimacy. The political effect depends on whether citizens see improvement, compensation, fairness, and credible implementation.

PRESIDENTIAL STRENGTH AND CONSTRAINT

- The president controls the executive branch and has national electoral legitimacy.
- The Senate confirms many appointments and the National Assembly controls legislation and appropriations.
- Courts can review executive action and decide election disputes.
- Governors, parties, civil society, media, and public protest can limit political room for action.
- Fiscal pressure, insecurity, and dependence on bureaucratic implementation may reduce effective capacity.

Impeachment and Accountability

The constitution provides procedures for removing a president or vice president for serious misconduct. The process requires action by the National Assembly and investigation under constitutional rules. The high threshold makes removal difficult, but legislative oversight, court review, elections, media scrutiny, and anti-corruption agencies provide additional forms of accountability.

The National Assembly

Bicameral Structure

Nigeria's federal legislature is the National Assembly. It contains the Senate and the House of Representatives. Members of both chambers serve four-year terms.

Chamber	Membershi P	Basis of Representation	Leadership
Senate	109	Three senators from each of 36 states and one from the FCT	President of the Senate
House of Representatives	360	Single-member federal constituencies broadly distributed by population	Speaker of the House

Main Powers

- Passes federal laws and approves the national budget.
- Represents states, constituencies, parties, and social interests.
- Conducts oversight of ministries, agencies, and public spending.
- May investigate public institutions and summon officials.
- The Senate confirms many presidential appointments.
- Approves treaties and certain national decisions under constitutional procedures.
- May override a presidential veto with the constitutionally required majority.
- Participates in impeachment and removal procedures.

How a Federal Law Is Made

Stage	Action
1. Introduction	A bill is introduced in either chamber, except where special financial procedures apply.
2. Committee review	A committee studies the proposal, hears evidence, and recommends changes.
3. Chamber approval	The bill passes readings and receives approval in the chamber of origin.
4. Second chamber	The other chamber considers and approves the same text.
5. Harmonization	Differences between Senate and House versions are reconciled.
6. Presidential action	The president signs the bill or withholds assent.
7. Possible override	The National Assembly may override a veto with the required supermajority.

Legislative Strengths

The National Assembly has become more important during the Fourth Republic. It debates budgets, conducts public hearings, investigates ministries, and sometimes rejects executive proposals or nominees. Its committee system creates specialized oversight and gives legislators access to policy information.

Limits and Informal Pressures

- The executive may dominate policy because it controls the federal bureaucracy and proposes most major spending.
- Party leaders and governors may influence nominations and legislative behaviour.
- Party switching can weaken stable opposition and programmatic accountability.
- Constituency projects and patronage may receive more attention than national policy design.
- Corruption allegations and high legislative costs can weaken public trust.
- Frequent court cases may alter membership after elections.

AP COMPARISON

Nigeria and Mexico both use presidential systems with bicameral legislatures. Nigeria's Senate gives equal representation to states, while its House is population-based. Unlike the United Kingdom, the executive does not depend on maintaining the confidence of parliament.

The Judiciary and Legal Pluralism

Court Structure

Nigeria's judiciary includes the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, Federal High Court, state high courts, and specialized courts. The Supreme Court is the final court of appeal. Courts also decide constitutional disputes between the federal and state governments.

Nigeria has a plural legal system. English-based common law operates alongside customary law, and Sharia courts have jurisdiction in parts of the country. Some northern states have expanded the use of Sharia law. The interaction of these legal traditions can create debates about rights, religion, and equality.

Judicial Powers

- Interprets the constitution and legislation.
- Reviews actions of the executive and legislature.
- Settles disputes between federal and state governments.
- Hears civil and criminal appeals.
- Decides election petitions and may order reruns or change declared winners.
- Protects rights through constitutional and statutory procedures.

Judicial Independence

Judicial independence is constitutionally protected, but courts face pressure from appointment politics, funding problems, delays, corruption allegations, security threats, and heavy caseloads. Even so, courts remain central to electoral competition because losing candidates frequently challenge results through legal petitions.

Election Tribunals and Political Consequences

Election tribunals and appellate courts may review claims about eligibility, voting procedures, results, and party nominations. Judicial intervention can strengthen legality by correcting violations, but heavy dependence on courts may also show weakness in party management and election administration.

RULE OF LAW

Rule of law requires government officials and citizens to be subject to publicly known laws applied by independent institutions. A large number of laws or court cases does not by itself prove strong rule of law; enforcement, equality, access, and judicial independence also matter.

Elections and the Independent National Electoral Commission

Role of INEC

The Independent National Electoral Commission organizes federal and state elections, registers voters, regulates political parties, manages election logistics, and declares results according to law. The commission is constitutionally established, but debates continue about appointment procedures, resources, security support, and independence.

Electoral Rules

- Presidential candidates need the highest vote total and a constitutionally required geographic spread.
- Senators and members of the House are elected in single-member districts by plurality.
- Governors also need the highest vote total and a geographic spread across local government areas.
- Citizens elect state Houses of Assembly and local representatives under applicable laws.
- Courts and election tribunals hear challenges to results and nominations.

Election Technology

Nigeria has introduced technologies such as biometric voter registration, the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System, or BVAS, and the INEC Result Viewing portal. These tools are intended to reduce multiple voting, identify eligible voters, and improve transparency.

Technology can strengthen administration, but it does not eliminate political conflict. Equipment failures, delayed uploads, misinformation, violence, and distrust may still affect public confidence. Institutions must combine technology with clear procedures, trained staff, security, communication, and legal accountability.

The 2023 Presidential Election

The 2023 election was highly competitive and produced strong regional variation. Bola Tinubu of the APC won the presidency. Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, Peter Obi of the Labour Party, and Rabiu Kwankwaso of the NNPP also won major regional support. The result showed that Nigeria's party system was no longer simply a two-party national contest.

Turnout was approximately 26.7 percent of registered voters, continuing a long-term decline. Low turnout may reflect insecurity, logistical difficulty, distrust, migration, registration problems, and dissatisfaction with political choices. It weakens the claim that election results represent broad participation, even when the legal winner is clear.

Turnout in Presidential Elections

Election Year	Turnout
2011	53.7%
2015	43.6%
2019	34.7%
2023	26.7%

WHAT THE DATA SHOW

Presidential turnout fell in every election shown. This does not mean Nigeria ceased to be democratic, but it does raise questions about participation, trust, security, voter access, and performance legitimacy.

Common Electoral Challenges

- Vote buying and the use of money to influence voters or party delegates.
- Violence, intimidation, and attacks on election offices or communities.
- Logistical delays and uneven access to polling stations.
- Party disputes over candidate selection and internal democracy.
- Misinformation and ethnic or religious appeals.
- Low trust in result transmission and collation.
- Court cases that continue long after voting.
- Declining voter turnout and political apathy.

Political Parties and Informal Power

The Major Parties

Party	General Position and Support
All Progressives Congress (APC)	Governing national party since 2015; broad coalition with strong networks across several regions.
Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)	Dominant national party from 1999 to 2015; remains a major opposition organization.
Labour Party (LP)	Expanded rapidly in 2023, especially among many urban, younger, and southeastern voters.
New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP)	Important regional force, especially in Kano and parts of the northwest.
Other parties	Smaller parties compete nationally or regionally but face financial and organizational disadvantages.

Weak Programmatic Differences

Nigeria has a multiparty system, but parties are often less ideological than parties in many advanced democracies. Major parties support elections, federalism, economic development, and national unity. Differences may be based more on leaders, coalitions, regional strength, access to resources, and candidate networks than on clear policy programs.

Zoning and Rotation

Zoning is an informal practice in which political offices rotate or are balanced among regions, states, religious communities, or internal party zones. Parties use zoning to create inclusion and reduce fears of permanent domination. It is not the same as a constitutional quota, and parties may disagree over whether it should control a particular nomination.

A common example is the expectation that the presidency should alternate between northern and southern Nigeria. Supporters see this as conflict management. Critics argue that it may limit voter choice or place regional identity above competence and policy.

Patron-Clientelism and Prebendalism

Patron-clientelism describes an exchange in which powerful patrons provide jobs, money, protection, contracts, or services in return for political loyalty. In Nigeria, elected officials may build networks that connect national leaders, governors, local brokers, traditional rulers, businesspeople, and community organizations.

Prebendalism is a related concept often used in the Nigerian context. It describes the treatment of public office as an opportunity to distribute state resources to oneself, supporters, family, or community. The concept helps explain why competition for office may be intense and why corruption can become embedded in political networks.

Godfatherism

A political godfather is an influential sponsor who helps a candidate obtain a party nomination, campaign resources, and electoral support. The sponsor may later expect appointments, contracts, or influence over policy. Godfatherism can mobilize voters and organize parties, but it weakens accountability when officeholders serve sponsors rather than citizens.

Defections and Cross-Carpeting

Politicians frequently change parties, especially before elections or when national power shifts. Defections can reflect genuine disagreement, but they may also be strategic efforts to gain nominations, protection, or access to the governing coalition. Frequent switching makes parties less stable and reduces ideological accountability.

INFORMAL POLITICS AT A GLANCE

- Zoning balances regions and communities.
- Patronage distributes benefits for support.
- Prebendalism treats office as access to public resources.
- Godfatherism links candidates to powerful sponsors.
- Defections weaken stable party identity.
- Federal character is formal, while many balancing practices are informal.

Political Participation, Civil Society, and the Media

Forms of Participation

- Voting in federal, state, and local elections.
- Joining parties, campaigns, unions, professional associations, and community organizations.
- Contacting legislators and local officials.
- Participating in religious, traditional, youth, women's, and ethnic associations.
- Using social media to organize, monitor government, and spread political information.
- Protesting against corruption, police violence, economic hardship, or insecurity.
- Using courts, petitions, investigative journalism, and public-interest litigation.

Civil Society

Nigeria has a large and active civil society. Human-rights organizations, professional associations, labour unions, religious groups, election-monitoring organizations, women's groups, youth networks, and community organizations participate in public life. Civil society helped oppose military rule and continues to monitor elections and public policy.

The Media

Nigeria has a diverse media environment that includes television, radio, newspapers, online journalism, and social platforms. Investigative reporting and public debate can expose corruption and provide opposition voices. At the same time, journalists may face legal pressure, ownership influence, harassment, misinformation, and security risks.

Labour and Protest

The Nigeria Labour Congress and other unions organize strikes and negotiations over wages, fuel prices, public policy, and working conditions. Labour action can force the government to bargain, but its effectiveness depends on organization, public support, and the government's response.

The End SARS Movement

In 2020, young Nigerians organized mass protests against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, known as SARS, and wider police abuse. Social media helped coordinate demonstrations, collect funds, and share evidence. The movement showed the political importance of urban youth and digital organization.

The protests also revealed limits on participation. Security-force responses, disagreement over leadership, and the difficulty of converting a decentralized movement into lasting institutional reform reduced its immediate political effect.

AP CONCEPT LINK

Civil society can increase accountability by providing information, organizing citizens, monitoring elections, and pressuring officials. It does not need to win office to influence politics.

Political Cleavages and National Integration

Ethnic Diversity

Nigeria contains hundreds of ethnic communities. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo are the largest broad groups, but many minorities are politically important. Ethnicity can shape voting, party coalitions, appointments, language, land claims, and demands for new states or local governments.

Ethnic identity does not determine every political choice. Class, religion, generation, urbanization, personal leadership, and policy performance may cross-cut ethnic divisions. Successful national coalitions usually combine several identities and regions.

Religion

Islam is strongest in the north, Christianity is strongest in much of the south, and traditional beliefs remain influential. Religious communities operate schools, charities, media, and political networks. Religion can support social organization and public service, but it may also intensify conflict when political disputes are framed as religious threats.

The use of Sharia law in parts of northern Nigeria is both a legal and political issue. Supporters see it as an expression of religious identity and local preference. Critics raise questions about equal rights, constitutional protections, and uneven enforcement.

North-South and Regional Divisions

Regional differences reflect colonial history, education, economic activity, religion, party organization, and access to infrastructure. Northern leaders may emphasize population, agriculture, security, and national inclusion. Southern regions may emphasize commercial activity, resource control, ports, restructuring, and local autonomy. These are broad tendencies, not fixed positions.

Indigene-Settler Conflict

Many public benefits are connected to recognition as an indigene of a state or local area. Nigerians who live outside an ancestral area may be treated as settlers even after many years. This distinction can affect access to public jobs, education, land, and political office.

The indigene-settler divide is a major example of the tension between equal national citizenship and local claims to representation. It can intensify conflict where land, religion, and ethnicity overlap.

Class, Gender, and Generation

- Economic inequality separates political and business elites from citizens working in the informal economy or living in poverty.
- Women vote and organize politically but remain underrepresented in many elected institutions.
- Young people form a large share of the population and often face unemployment, underemployment, and weak public services.
- Urban voters may have different priorities from rural communities, especially on jobs, policing, technology, housing, and transport.
- Education and internet access can produce political attitudes that cross older regional and party divisions.

Cross-Cutting Cleavages

WHY NIGERIA REMAINS UNITED

Nigeria's cleavages overlap but do not always reinforce one another. A citizen may share a religion with one group, an occupation with another, a party with a third, and an urban identity with a fourth. Federalism, national parties, interregional trade, migration, and mixed cities create cross-cutting ties that help contain conflict.

The Political Economy: Oil, Revenue, and Development

Oil and the Rentier State

Petroleum has long been Nigeria's most important export and a major source of public revenue. Because much government income comes from the resource sector rather than direct taxation, Nigeria shows important rentier-state characteristics.

Rentier income can strengthen the state by financing infrastructure, public employment, security, and social programs. It can also weaken accountability if leaders depend less on taxing citizens. Control of oil revenue may encourage corruption, patronage, centralization, and conflict over distribution.

The Resource Curse

The resource curse refers to the possibility that countries rich in natural resources may experience corruption, conflict, economic instability, weak diversification, or poor human development. Nigeria's oil wealth has produced major national revenue, but many citizens still experience poverty, unemployment, unreliable electricity, and weak public services.

The resource curse is not automatic. Institutions, transparency, taxation, investment, environmental protection, and diversification influence whether resource wealth becomes broad development.

The Niger Delta

Most Nigerian oil production is connected to the Niger Delta. Communities in the region have experienced pollution, damaged farmland and fisheries, unemployment, and conflict over the distribution of revenue. These conditions contributed to protest movements, militancy, pipeline attacks, kidnapping, and illegal oil activity.

Government responses have included derivation payments, development agencies, security operations, and an amnesty program for militants. These measures reduced some violence but did not fully solve environmental damage, corruption, unemployment, or local distrust.

Economic Diversification

Nigeria has important agriculture, telecommunications, finance, entertainment, technology, manufacturing, trade, and services. Economic diversification is necessary because oil prices and production can change sharply. A broader tax base could also strengthen the relationship between citizens and government.

The Informal Economy

A large share of Nigerians work outside fully regulated wage employment. The informal economy provides livelihoods and entrepreneurship, but workers may lack legal protection, pensions, stable income, and access to credit. It also makes taxation and economic planning difficult.

Economic Reform and Political Costs

Governments often face pressure to reduce subsidies, stabilize public finance, reform exchange rates, improve electricity, and attract investment. These changes may improve efficiency over time, but they can increase living costs before benefits appear. Public acceptance depends on compensation, credibility, fairness, and visible improvement in services.

Economic Issue	Political Effect
Oil dependence	Makes revenue vulnerable and intensifies distributional politics.
Fuel subsidies	Can provide visible benefits but create large fiscal costs and opportunities for corruption.
Inflation	Reduces household purchasing power and weakens performance legitimacy.
Unemployment	Increases frustration, migration, and vulnerability to political mobilization or insecurity.
Informal employment	Provides flexibility but limits taxation, protection, and reliable data.
Public debt and revenue pressure	Restrict spending choices and increase demand for reform.
Regional inequality	Feeds demands for federal redistribution and local control.
Corruption	Diverts resources and lowers trust in public institutions.

Security, the Military, and State Capacity

Civil-Military Relations

The military ruled Nigeria for many years, but it returned to the barracks during the transition of 1999. Under the Fourth Republic, elected civilians formally control the armed forces. This is a major achievement of democratization.

The military remains politically important because it responds to insurgency, banditry, communal violence, kidnapping, piracy, and threats to oil infrastructure. Frequent domestic deployment may increase state capacity in the short term, but it can also blur the boundary between military and civilian policing.

Boko Haram and Insurgency

Boko Haram developed into a major Islamist insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. It attacked civilians, schools, religious institutions, security forces, and government facilities. A faction later aligned with the Islamic State and became known as ISWAP.

The conflict has displaced communities and required cooperation among the military, neighbouring states, local vigilantes, humanitarian organizations, and civilian authorities. Military operations weakened insurgent control in some areas, but insecurity continues.

Banditry, Kidnapping, and Communal Conflict

Armed groups have carried out kidnappings, village attacks, cattle theft, and extortion in several regions. Farmer-herder conflict may involve land, water, migration routes, climate pressure, ethnicity, and weak local security. Criminal and political motives can overlap.

These conflicts test state capacity. Citizens judge government not only by constitutional procedures but also by whether it can protect life, enforce law, and provide justice.

Police and Public Trust

The Nigeria Police Force is nationally organized, which reflects the strength of the federal government. Supporters of state police argue that local forces would respond more quickly and understand communities better. Critics fear that governors could misuse state police against opponents. The debate is a direct example of federalism and state capacity.

Corruption and Anti-Corruption Institutions

Nigeria has created agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission. They investigate financial crimes, public corruption, and misuse of office.

Anti-corruption enforcement can strengthen accountability, but agencies may face limited resources, slow trials, political pressure, or accusations of selective action. Strong accountability requires independent investigation, courts, transparent procurement, audit systems, free media, and citizen access to information.

STATE CAPACITY

State capacity is the ability of government to make and carry out decisions, collect revenue, enforce law, protect citizens, and provide services. Nigeria has substantial national institutions and resources, but capacity varies sharply across regions and policy areas.

Contemporary Political Challenges

Challenge	Why It Matters
Democratic trust	Low turnout and disputed elections weaken participation and legitimacy.
Economic hardship	Inflation, unemployment, and high living costs create pressure for immediate relief.
Security	Insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence test state authority.
Federal restructuring	Citizens disagree over revenue, policing, state creation, and the balance of national and state power.
Corruption	Misuse of public resources weakens services and trust.
Oil dependence	Revenue remains vulnerable to prices, production, theft, and global energy change.
Youth expectations	A young population demands jobs, education, digital opportunity, and accountable government.
Gender representation	Women remain underrepresented in elected institutions and senior political leadership.
Public services	Electricity, health, education, transport, and water strongly affect performance legitimacy.
Climate and environment	Flooding, desertification, erosion, and oil pollution affect migration, agriculture, and conflict.

Nigeria in Comparative Perspective

Feature	Nigeria	Useful Comparison
Regime	Federal presidential democracy	Mexico is also a federal presidential democracy; the UK is parliamentary and unitary with devolution.
Executive	Single elected president	Iran has an elected president subordinate to an unelected Supreme Leader.
Legislature	Bicameral National Assembly	China has a formally unicameral legislature controlled by the Communist Party.
Federalism	36 states and strong revenue-sharing politics	Russia is formally federal but more centralized in political practice.
Parties	Competitive but weakly programmatic and personalistic	The UK has more institutionalized programmatic parties.
Elections	Competitive with INEC administration and legal challenges	Iran restricts competition through candidate vetting.

Feature	Nigeria	Useful Comparison
Economy	Petroleum-dependent with rentier features	Iran also has rentier features; China depends more on manufacturing and trade.
Cleavages	Ethnic, religious, regional, class, and indigene-settler	Mexico has important regional and class cleavages but less religious division in national party competition.
Military	Long history of rule, now under elected civilian government	China's military is institutionally controlled by the ruling Communist Party.

Key Terms

Term	Meaning
Federalism	Division of constitutional authority between national and regional governments.
Presidential system	A system in which the president is separately elected and serves as head of government.
Fourth Republic	Nigeria's current period of elected civilian government, beginning in 1999.
Federal character	Principle requiring broad geographic representation in public institutions and appointments.
Revenue allocation	Distribution of nationally collected revenue among federal, state, and local governments.
Derivation principle	Return of part of resource revenue to the area where the resource is produced.
Rentier state	A state financed heavily by external resource income rather than direct taxation.
Resource curse	Political and economic problems that may accompany dependence on valuable natural resources.
Patron-clientelism	Exchange of benefits and protection for political loyalty.
Prebendalism	Use of public office to distribute state resources to personal or group networks.
Godfatherism	Political sponsorship in which a powerful broker helps select or elect a candidate and expects influence in return.
Zoning	Informal rotation or distribution of political offices among regions or groups.
Cross-carpeting	Defection of a politician from one political party to another.
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission, which administers national and state elections.
BVAS	Bimodal Voter Accreditation System used to verify voters.
IReV	INEC Result Viewing portal used to make polling-unit results available for public viewing.
Plurality	Winning an election by receiving more votes than any other candidate.
Geographic spread	Requirement that a presidential or governorship candidate receive support across a broad area.
Bicameralism	A legislature divided into two chambers.
National Assembly	Nigeria's federal legislature, made up of the Senate and House of Representatives.
Federal Capital Territory	The territory containing Abuja; it is not one of the 36 states.
Indigene-settler divide	Distinction between people considered native to an area and long-term residents treated as outsiders.
Sharia	Islamic legal tradition applied in personal law and, in parts of northern Nigeria, expanded legal jurisdiction.
Civil society	Organizations outside the state that represent interests, monitor government, and organize citizens.
Political legitimacy	Public acceptance of the government's right to rule.
State capacity	Ability of government to enforce decisions, provide security, collect revenue, and deliver services.
Democratic consolidation	Process through which democratic rules become stable, accepted, and difficult to reverse.
Political cleavage	A social division that becomes politically important.
Civil-military relations	Relationship between elected civilian authorities and the armed forces.
Niger Delta	Oil-producing region central to debates about revenue, pollution, and local development.

Facts to Remember

1. Nigeria is a federal presidential republic under the 1999 Constitution, as amended.
2. The Fourth Republic began in 1999.
3. Nigeria has 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory, and 774 local government areas.
4. The president is head of state, head of government, and commander in chief.
5. The president serves a four-year term and may serve no more than two terms.
6. A presidential winner needs the highest vote total and a constitutionally required geographic spread.
7. Bola Ahmed Tinubu has served as president since 29 May 2023.
8. Kashim Shettima is vice president.
9. The National Assembly is bicameral.
10. The Senate has 109 members: three from each state and one from the FCT.
11. The House of Representatives has 360 members.
12. State governors are elected and politically powerful.
13. The Supreme Court is the final court of appeal.
14. Nigeria has common-law, customary-law, and Sharia legal institutions.
15. INEC administers federal and state elections.
16. National Assembly elections use single-member districts and plurality.
17. The APC has held the presidency since 2015.
18. The PDP governed nationally from 1999 to 2015 and remains a major opposition party.
19. The Labour Party and NNPP showed important regional strength in 2023.
20. The 2015 election produced Nigeria's first opposition defeat of an incumbent president.
21. Turnout in the 2023 presidential election was approximately 26.7 percent.
22. Federal character promotes geographic inclusion in appointments.
23. Zoning is an informal method of regional balancing.
24. Prebendalism describes the use of office to distribute public resources through personal or group networks.
25. Godfatherism links political candidates to powerful sponsors.
26. Party defections are common and weaken ideological party identity.
27. Petroleum revenue gives Nigeria important rentier-state characteristics.
28. The derivation principle directs part of resource revenue to producing areas.
29. The Niger Delta combines oil wealth with pollution, underdevelopment, and political conflict.
30. Civilian government has controlled the military since 1999, although the armed forces remain important in domestic security.
31. Ethnic, religious, regional, class, gender, and indigene-settler cleavages shape politics.
32. Civil society, labour unions, media, and youth movements are important forms of participation.
33. The End SARS protests demonstrated the political power of digitally connected youth.
34. AP answers should distinguish Nigeria's formal democratic rules from informal patronage and coalition-building practices.

Practice

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Nigeria is best described as which type of political system?
 - A. Unitary parliamentary democracy
 - B. Federal presidential democracy
 - C. Theocratic republic
 - D. One-party communist state
2. Which institution administers federal elections in Nigeria?
 - A. Supreme Court
 - B. National Assembly

- C. INEC
 - D. Governors' Forum
3. How many members are in the Nigerian Senate?
- A. 88
 - B. 100
 - C. 109
 - D. 360
4. The federal character principle is intended mainly to:
- A. Increase oil production
 - B. Promote geographic inclusion in public institutions
 - C. Abolish state governments
 - D. Reduce the powers of courts
5. Which concept best describes the exchange of government benefits for political loyalty?
- A. Judicial review
 - B. Patron-clientelism
 - C. Secularism
 - D. Corporatism
6. Nigeria displays rentier-state characteristics mainly because of:
- A. Tourism revenue
 - B. Petroleum revenue
 - C. Agricultural taxation
 - D. Foreign military aid
7. Which event most clearly demonstrated democratic alternation in Nigeria?
- A. The 1966 coup
 - B. The 1979 Constitution
 - C. The opposition presidential victory in 2015
 - D. The creation of Abuja
8. Which statement about the National Assembly is correct?
- A. It is unicameral.
 - B. It appoints all state governors.
 - C. It contains a Senate and a House of Representatives.
 - D. Its members serve life terms.
9. Zoning is best described as:
- A. A court order dividing states
 - B. Informal rotation or balancing of offices among regions
 - C. A tax on petroleum exports
 - D. A military security strategy
10. The derivation principle is connected with:
- A. Returning part of resource revenue to producing areas
 - B. Selecting Supreme Court justices
 - C. Registering political parties
 - D. Electing senators
11. Which organization is most directly associated with labour strikes?
- A. Nigeria Labour Congress
 - B. INEC
 - C. Supreme Court
 - D. Federal Executive Council
12. Which comparison is accurate?
- A. Nigeria and Mexico are both federal presidential systems.
 - B. Nigeria and the UK both have parliamentary executives.
 - C. Nigeria and China both prohibit opposition parties.
 - D. Nigeria and Iran both have unelected supreme leaders.

Answer Key and Brief Explanations

Answer	Explanation
1-B	Nigeria constitutionally divides power between federal and state governments and separately elects a president.
2-C	INEC organizes and regulates federal and state elections.
3-C	The Senate has 109 members: three per state and one from the FCT.
4-B	Federal character seeks broad geographic representation.
5-B	Patron-clientelism exchanges material or political benefits for support.
6-B	Petroleum has supplied major export earnings and public revenue.
7-C	In 2015 an opposition candidate defeated the sitting president for the first time.
8-C	The National Assembly is bicameral, with a Senate and House.
9-B	Zoning is an informal arrangement for regional or group balancing.
10-A	Derivation returns part of resource revenue to the producing area.
11-A	The Nigeria Labour Congress is a major union federation.
12-A	Both Nigeria and Mexico combine federalism with a separately elected president.

Concept Application Questions

1. Define federalism and explain one way it helps Nigeria manage diversity.
2. Define patron-clientelism and explain one way it may affect political accountability in Nigeria.
3. Define rentier state and explain one political effect of petroleum revenue in Nigeria.
4. Define federal character and explain why Nigerian leaders use it.
5. Define democratic consolidation and explain one development that supports it in Nigeria.
6. Define state capacity and explain one security challenge that tests it in Nigeria.

Comparative Questions

1. Compare presidential power in Nigeria and Mexico.
2. Compare federalism in Nigeria and Russia.
3. Compare political parties in Nigeria and the United Kingdom.
4. Compare rentier-state features in Nigeria and Iran.
5. Compare the political role of the military in Nigeria and China.
6. Compare electoral competition in Nigeria and Iran.

Data Analysis Practice

Presidential Election	Turnout
2011	53.7%
2015	43.6%
2019	34.7%
2023	26.7%

1. Identify the election with the highest turnout.
2. Describe the trend in turnout from 2011 to 2023.
3. Calculate the percentage-point decline from 2011 to 2023.
4. Explain one political reason for declining voter turnout.
5. Explain one way low turnout may weaken political legitimacy.
6. Explain why declining turnout does not by itself prove that Nigeria is no longer democratic.

Argument Essay Questions

1. Develop an argument about whether federalism strengthens political stability in Nigeria.
2. Develop an argument about whether petroleum revenue has strengthened or weakened political accountability.
3. Develop an argument about whether Nigeria's party system provides effective programmatic choice.
4. Develop an argument about whether informal practices such as zoning improve democratic representation.
5. Develop an argument about whether civil society has become more effective than political parties in demanding accountability.

Model Concept Application Response

QUESTION

Explain how federal character is intended to strengthen legitimacy in Nigeria.

Federal character is the principle that federal institutions and appointments should reflect Nigeria's geographic diversity. It is intended to strengthen legitimacy by reducing fears that one region or ethnic group will permanently control the national government. When citizens see ministers, public officials, and institutions drawn from different states, they may be more willing to accept the federation as inclusive. However, the principle can create disagreement when citizens believe that political balancing is unfair or that it replaces merit.

Why This Response Works

- It correctly defines federal character.
- It identifies geographic inclusion as the main mechanism.
- It connects inclusion to legitimacy and national unity.
- It recognizes a possible limitation without losing focus.
- It uses Nigeria-specific evidence rather than a generic definition.

Final Revision Checklist

- Know the significance of colonial indirect rule and the 1914 amalgamation.
- Know why regional parties weakened the First Republic.
- Explain the causes and political consequences of the civil war.
- Know how military rule shaped centralization and political culture.
- Explain how oil changed public finance and patronage.
- Know why the annulled 1993 election damaged legitimacy.
- Know that the Fourth Republic began in 1999.
- Explain why the 2015 opposition victory was important.
- Describe Nigeria as a federal presidential democracy.
- Know the 36 states, FCT, and 774 local government areas.
- Explain fiscal federalism, revenue allocation, and derivation.
- Define federal character and zoning.
- Know the president's four-year term and two-term limit.
- Explain the geographic-spread requirement for presidential victory.
- Know the current president and vice president.
- Know the structure and powers of the National Assembly.
- Know that the Senate has 109 members and the House has 360.
- Explain the role of state governors.
- Know the main levels of the judiciary and the importance of election tribunals.
- Explain legal pluralism: common law, customary law, and Sharia.
- Know the main functions of INEC.

- Explain BVAS and IReV without assuming technology automatically creates trust.
- Know the major political parties and their broad regional strengths.
- Define patron-clientelism, prebendalism, godfatherism, and cross-carpeting.
- Explain the political purpose of zoning and regional balancing.
- Know the main forms of civil-society participation.
- Explain the significance of the End SARS protests.
- Know the main ethnic, religious, regional, class, gender, and indigene-settler cleavages.
- Define rentier state and resource curse.
- Explain the political importance of the Niger Delta.
- Explain how petroleum dependence affects accountability and federalism.
- Know the basic security challenges: insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal conflict, and oil theft.
- Explain why domestic military deployment creates a civil-military challenge.
- Define state capacity and connect it to security and public services.
- Be ready to compare Nigeria with Mexico, Iran, Russia, China, and the United Kingdom.

Source Note

This chapter follows the AP Comparative Government and Politics Course and Exam Description and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended. Current institutional details were checked against the Nigerian State House, National Assembly, and Independent National Electoral Commission. Leadership references and the current political snapshot are updated through 28 July 2026. Election-turnout figures are based on INEC statements.



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