

## Lesson 01: Political Culture in Britain Vs. Political Culture in the USA

Read the text carefully, then do the tasks that follow.

### Text:

Political culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices that shape a nation's political system and its citizens' engagement. Britain and the USA have distinct political cultures, which are influenced by their historical backgrounds, government systems, and societal norms. In this reading passage, we will explore the major differences and similarities between the political cultures of these two countries.

### 1. Historical Background:

The political culture of Britain is deeply rooted in its long history, with a parliamentary democracy dating back centuries. The Magna Carta (1215) and the Glorious Revolution (1688) are pivotal events that laid the groundwork for democratic principles and constitutional monarchy. Over the years, Britain has embraced traditions of conservatism, pragmatism, and a strong sense of class consciousness, all of which play significant roles in shaping its political culture. In contrast, the USA's political culture emerged from a revolutionary struggle for independence in the late 18th century. The American Revolution (1775-1783) and the subsequent creation of the Constitution established a federal democratic republic. The USA's political culture emphasizes individualism, the pursuit of liberty, and a strong belief in the principle of "American exceptionalism."

### 2. Form of Government:

Britain operates as a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system. The monarch serves as the ceremonial head of state, while the Prime Minister holds executive authority. The Parliament, consisting of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, is the primary legislative body. The British political culture emphasises parliamentary sovereignty, with the government being accountable to the majority party in the House of Commons.

On the other hand, the USA operates as a federal democratic republic, with a clear separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The President serves as the head of state and government, and Congress (the Senate and the House of Representatives) is the legislative body. The American political culture values checks and balances to prevent any single branch from gaining too much power.

### 3. Party Politics:

In Britain, the political culture is characterised by a multi-party system. The major political parties include the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, and others. Additionally, regional parties like the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru play significant roles in Scotland and Wales, respectively. The British electoral system follows the first-past-the-post method in most constituencies, leading to a concentration of power in two major parties. The USA, in contrast, has a two-party system, dominated by the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Third-party candidates face significant barriers to entry, making it difficult for them to gain widespread support. The American political culture encourages a strong allegiance to one of the major parties, leading to a more polarized political landscape.

#### **4. Political Participation:**

Both Britain and the USA have active political participation, but they differ in some aspects. In Britain, voter turnout tends to be higher, partly due to the country's parliamentary system and the ease of registering to vote. Additionally, the British public is more accustomed to engaging in protests and demonstrations to express their opinions. In the USA, voter turnout has historically been lower compared to Britain, although efforts have been made to increase participation. Americans tend to be more involved in grassroots activism and civic engagement, with a tradition of active lobbying and advocacy groups playing influential roles.

Political culture in Britain and the USA reflects the distinctive histories, governmental structures, and societal values of each nation. While Britain's political culture is steeped in tradition and parliamentary democracy, the USA's political culture is rooted in revolutionary ideals and a federal democratic republic. Understanding these differences helps shed light on how each country approaches governance and political engagement.

#### **References and Additional Sources:**

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