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Politics podcasts: a guide for A-level students

Politics is a 'live' subject. This fact makes its study exhilarating but also challenging, especially when writing essays that require up-to-date evidence. Your teachers will no doubt have told you to keep up with the news, but where should you look when there are so many options and not much time? A decade or two ago, the answer would have been simple: watch the 10 p.m. news on the BBC or read a quality newspaper such as *The Times* or *The Guardian*. Yet while these news outlets remain trustworthy, they can be a little dry for the average sixth-form student. That's why the growth in podcasting is such an exciting development, since these audio (and sometimes video) recordings are cheap, easily accessible on your mobile, more entertaining and often far more useful. They can also be listened to while on your way to school, in your lunch break, before you go to bed or – for this particular writer – while doing the ironing.

Listed below are some of my favourites (full disclosure – one is my own).

The News Agents

<https://www.globalplayer.com/podcasts/42KuVj/>

Why is it worth a listen?

Three top former BBC journalists broke out of conventional news reporting to bring a show that presents UK politics in such a way that is both easily accessible and entertaining. The easy chemistry between hosts Jon Sopel, Emily Maitlis and Lewis Goodall is what makes this podcast work.

How is it useful for your exams?

Every day, the show covers a breaking news story in UK politics and often gives useful insight into the motivations of politicians. The podcast is particularly helpful for highlighting the divides within the two major political parties.

Best episode?

The News Agents launched during the tumultuous days of the Liz Truss premiership, so take your pick from episodes of that time (the autumn of 2022), as they all cover the factors that affect the power of a prime minister. My favourite is the one entitled ["A shambles, and a disgrace"](#), released the day before Truss quit.

The Rest is Politics

<https://www.goalhangerpodcasts.com/the-rest-is-politics>

Why is it worth a listen?

In these febrile political times, where mud is slung every which way and that, it is refreshing to hear two people from different political tribes model how to 'disagree agreeably'. Former Conservative leadership candidate Rory Stewart and former Labour spin doctor Alastair Campbell give the listener

the benefit of their years of political experience at the heart of UK government, while also providing centrist and thoughtful commentary on global events.

How is it useful for your exams?

Both hosts convey their opinions on a wide range of UK political topics (a recent episode considered whether the Lords should be elected, and another gave viewpoints as to why Labour won in 1997). Yet it is Stewart's foreign policy expertise that really elevates the use of this podcast, particularly to politics students taking the global route.

Best episode?

A recent [interview with former prime minister John Major](#) provides an illuminating portrait of a man who came from humble origins to become the leader of his country.

The A Level Politics Show

<https://open.spotify.com/show/0pdAY6egNBq0tFOLFjMk7O>

Why is it worth a listen?

The show is specifically produced with A-level politics students in mind. It covers UK and US politics, as well as the core ideologies of liberalism, conservatism and socialism. One podcast is released free every month, and you can subscribe for bonus episodes.

How is it useful for your exams?

Most episodes take an essay question, with content structured in such a way that will help you answer it. There are also some 'How to' episodes, which focus on exam technique and how to write specific types of answers, such as dealing with sources or answering the 12-mark question on the Edexcel paper.

Best episode?

Check out Episode 132, which analyses the importance of manifestos in determining election outcomes.

The NPR Politics Podcast

<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510310/npr-politics-podcast>

Why is it worth a listen?

For a whistlestop tour of the day's political events across the pond, this show is second-to-none. The hosts follow the three branches of government, so if there is a case before the Supreme Court or a press conference at the White House, you can find out about it by listening to the NPR Politics podcast.

How is it useful for your exams?

Recent coverage has focused on the difficulties of passing legislation in a divided government and the challenges faced by the Biden administration in holding the Democratic Party together over the events in the Middle East. The listener is left with a far better understanding of the separation of powers and its impact on the ability of presidents to get things done.

Best episode?

Biden's re-election challenges were laid bare in the recent Michigan primary, which were covered [here](#).

Coffee House Shots

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/podcasts/coffee-house-shots/>

Why is it worth a listen?

As the inhouse podcast for *The Spectator*, it provides the listener with a centre-right skew on the day's political news. The magazine's political editor, Katy Balls, and its assistant editor, Isabel Hardman, are regular contributors.

How is it useful for your exams?

The podcast shines in its analysis of Tory Party infighting, in large part due to the excellent connections that the magazine editors have built up with Conservative politicians down the years. Let's not forget that Boris Johnson was a former editor of *The Spectator*.

Best episode?

[Why Sunak wants to ban vapes](#) centred around the debate over the so-called 'nanny state' and the authoritarian tendencies of some in the Tory Party, who are at odds with those of a more libertarian persuasion.

Pod Save America

<https://crooked.com/podcast-series/pod-save-america/>

Why is it worth a listen?

Hosted by four former Obama staffers, this show traces its origins back to the start of the Trump presidency. It is at times outrageously funny and at others thought-provoking and serious. It is unashamedly anti-Trump but also critical of the Democratic Party's timidity over public policy.

How is it useful for your exams?

For students following the US politics route, it is really helpful for the Democracy and Participation topic, since it covers US elections and, specifically, voter suppression on a regular basis.

Best episode?

The fear that Republicans have over the vote-losing *Dobbs v Jackson* Supreme Court decision has led them to attack Taylor Swift, a long-time campaigner for reproductive rights. This podcast episode details the baseless conspiracies swirling around the most famous solo artist on the planet and is neatly entitled [Trumpworld takes on Taylor Swift](#).

Other noteworthy mentions

- **Pod Save the UK:** the sister show to Pod Save America; also really funny.
- **Politics Weekly UK:** a weekly politics summary show brought to you by *The Guardian*. The episodes containing interviews with voters in marginal constituencies are particularly fascinating.
- **The NS Podcast:** *The New Statesman*'s inhouse production, with a centre-left approach to news.
- **Politics without the boring bits:** I especially like the coverage of what ordinary voters are saying about political leaders in focus groups.

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This resource is part of POLITICS REVIEW, a magazine written for A-level students by subject experts.
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