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Global politics

How to use Trump's presidency in Edexcel global politics answers

This article should be read alongside 'Trading blocs: is global governance under threat?' (pp.7–9).

Donald Trump's presidency, both his first term (2017–21) and his second (2025 onwards), offers a wide range of examples for Paper 3 Global Politics. It connects directly to Topic 3: Power and sovereignty and Topic 4: Global governance (political and economic), as well as to debates on populism, intervention and constitutional checks. This article demonstrates how to integrate examples from Trump's presidency effectively to achieve the top level in essays. You could also use these examples in Section B answers, when comparing realism and liberalism.

Populism

Trump's rise to power was rooted in populism, framing politics as 'the people versus the elite'. His 'America First' agenda prioritised sovereignty over multilateralism, evident in trade wars, his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, and immigration restrictions. In Trump's second term, executive orders reinforced unilateralism, reversing previous regulations and asserting presidential control. Populism strengthens sovereignty but can undermine global cooperation, as tension can be created between national autonomy and interdependence. This is an excellent example to use in questions on whether populism erodes global governance or revitalises democracy. It also illustrates how populist leaders often challenge liberal norms, presenting sovereignty as a solution to perceived globalist overreach.

Power

Trump's approach to power can be analysed through Joseph Nye's framework of hard, soft and smart power.

- Hard power was evident in his introduction of tariffs on China during his first term and their expansion in 2025, as well as in the dramatic military strike on Venezuela in 2026. These actions demonstrate the use of economic and military tools to achieve strategic objectives.
- Soft power, however, suffered as the global image of the USA was damaged due to travel bans, withdrawal from international agreements and rhetoric that alienated allies.
- Smart power – the strategic combination of hard and soft power – was mixed. Trump leveraged NATO burden-sharing and Ukraine aid negotiations to assert US influence, but his unpredictability and aggressive unilateralism weakened trust among allies. Hard power wins short-term leverage, but the decline in soft power can limit the long-term influence of a state.

This duality is ideal for questions on whether hard power is rising or falling, as it shows that power is multidimensional and context dependent.

Global governance

Trump's presidency also illustrates the fragility of global governance. Institutions such as the WTO were weakened as Trump imposed universal tariffs (10% on all imports in 2024) and the favouring of bilateral deals over multilateral frameworks. His rhetoric suggested hostility to global institutions, yet the US still pledged \$3.2 billion to development organisations in 2025, showing partial continuity of support.

Meanwhile, the rise of regional blocs such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) signals a retreat from WTO principles. Trump has accelerated a trend of economic nationalism, but globalisation was already under strain. This aligns with John Jefferies' analysis that governance erosion predates Trump. His actions amplify the crisis, but they are not the cause. These developments are crucial for questions on whether global governance is in decline or adapting to new realities. They also highlight the tension between liberal economic principles and nationalist protectionism, which is central to debates about the future of globalisation.

Venezuela

The case study of Venezuela provides a striking example of sovereignty and intervention. At the start of 2026, Trump authorised a military strike on the capital Caracas, capturing Nicolás Maduro and asserting control over Venezuela's oil infrastructure. This intervention demonstrates hard power through military force and economic coercion. It also bypassed UN mandates, raising concerns about the legality of Trump's actions. Global reaction was swift: condemnation from the EU, Brazil and the UN highlighted reputational costs for US soft power. The episode illustrates the strength and dangers of sovereignty-driven foreign policy, which can be assertive but destabilising.

This is an excellent example to use for questions on intervention, sovereignty and the limits of international law. It also raises questions about whether great powers can act outside international frameworks without undermining the legitimacy of global governance.

Domestic matters

Domestic checks and balances also shaped Trump's presidency. In his first term, his two impeachments highlighted constitutional checks but failed to remove him from office. In his second term, Supreme Court rulings expanded presidential immunity and limited nationwide injunctions, increasing executive latitude. These developments show how domestic checks influence foreign policy credibility: greater executive freedom enables rapid action but raises concerns about the rule of law. This demonstrates how constitutional frameworks interact with foreign policy, as legal rulings on executive power can affect the scope and speed of international action.

Allies

Trump's relationship with the USA's allies further illustrates his approach to global politics. He strongly encouraged NATO allies to finance US-made Patriot systems for Ukraine, framing it as 'America First' burden-sharing. While this preserved the alliance, it risked fragmentation if his unpredictability persisted.

This example can be used to answer questions on collective security and whether alliances can remain effective in an era of nationalist foreign policy. It also shows how transactional diplomacy can strain long-standing partnerships, challenging liberal assumptions about cooperation and trust.

Migration

US migration policy also reflected Trump's sovereignty narrative. Travel restrictions and immigration proclamations in 2025 reinforced national control over borders but damaged US soft power and America's humanitarian reputation.

This is relevant for debates on globalisation and whether states can reconcile security with openness. It also provides a useful lens for examining how domestic priorities, such as border security, intersect with international norms on human rights and mobility.

Summary

Trump's presidency provides effective examples for:

- Populism vs multilateralism
- Economic nationalism and trading blocs
- Hard vs soft power dynamics
- Challenges to global governance institutions
- Executive power and constitutional checks
- Intervention and sovereignty.

How to use these examples

For top marks:

- Define the concept (sovereignty, populism, global governance).
- Apply two recent examples in each paragraph.
- Evaluate the consequences, considering – for example – effectiveness, legitimacy and any impact on global norms.
- Signpost your argument clearly with phrases like 'However...' and 'Overall...'.

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