General Certificate of Education

Government and Politics 1151

GOVP1 People, Politics and Participation

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

Government and Politics

GOVP1 – People, Politics and Participation

General

Topics 1 (*'Participation and Voting Behaviour'*) and 4 (*'Pressure Groups and Protest Movements'*) were by far the most popular. Far fewer candidates tackled Topic 2 (*'Electoral Systems'*) and Topic 3 (*'Political Parties'*). This reflects the pattern established across the three previous GOVP1 examinations (January 2009, May 2009 and January 2010).

The paper elicited a full range of responses, though relatively few scripts were consistently in Level 1 or at the top end of Level 4. Most candidates appeared to have little difficulty coping with the format of the paper and the new numbering system did not appear to result in an increase in the number of rubric infringements.

As was the case in the three previous GOVP1 examination series, dividing the time available between the various sub-questions was clearly an issue for some of those sitting this paper. Many candidates wrote far too much in response to the 10-mark questions (Questions 02, 05, 08 and 11), with the result that their 25-mark responses (Questions 03, 06, 09 and 12) often lacked the necessary range and depth. A number of candidates also introduced material into 5-mark answers (Questions 01, 04, 07 and 10) that would have been more appropriately deployed in the longer questions that followed. Many candidates at the lower levels of response – probably more so than in previous series – failed to address the precise demands of the questions posed and instead produced rather generic responses.

The majority of candidates appeared to have at least a reasonable grasp of the subject matter and many were able to select and apply knowledge appropriately in order to meet the precise demands of the questions posed.

Topic 1 – Participation and Voting Behaviour

Question 01

This question was reasonably well answered. Most candidates were able to define the electorate as those eligible and registered to vote in a given election. Many referred to the age requirement, though far fewer made mention of nationality/citizenship. There were varying degrees of accuracy on those barred from voting but many mentioned imprisonment and detention under the Mental Health Act. At the higher levels of response, many candidates drew a distinction between the electorate and turnout – with many defining the latter as a percentage of the former who cast a ballot on polling day.

Some knew about the eligibility of EU citizens to vote in certain elections and some explained the historical development of the franchise. Weaker responses saw candidates confusing the electorate with voters.

Question 02

Significant numbers of candidates relied heavily on the extract, with little evidence of 'own knowledge'. Relatively few candidates were aware of George Galloway's Respect candidacy in 2005 but those that were generally related this knowledge to the material provided in the extract. Higher level responses tended to outline reasons why Labour traditionally gained significant support from ethnic minorities before suggesting reasons why this may have changed (eg the Iraq War, embourgeoisement, etc).

Very few candidates offered higher level analysis on the ethnic minority vote. Most simply saw ethnic minority voters as a homogeneous block and only a handful questioned whether or not the material provided (on Muslim voters) was really that helpful (ie, the difference between religion and ethnicity). At the lower levels of response, some candidates looked to turn this into a generic voting behaviour question and wrote lengthy responses covering a range of primacy and recency factors.

Question 03

A significant proportion of candidates answered on turnout/abstention alone, despite the wording of the question. Such an approach may well have been creditworthy, if candidates had presented a sustained case as to why political participation **can** simply be measured in terms of electoral turnout. However, few took this line. Indeed, many appeared to be answering the question 'explain the factors that might have resulted in historically low levels of turnout at recent elections' as opposed to the one posed.

The scope and content of candidate responses suggested that the topic of participation might not have been taught in its broader sense at some centres. Although many of the candidates tackling Topic 1 also answered Topic 4, few appeared to see the merit of mentioning pressure group activity when answering the former.

Those candidates who did address the terms of the question generally focused on the rise of pressure groups and social movements, the decline in party membership, grassroots party activity, etc. Some observed that as one had to be over 18 to vote, measuring political participation in terms of turnout alone would exclude many younger activists. Others argued that abstention was a form of political participation. Some even commented on the fact that significant numbers of potential voters were prevented from casting a ballot at the 2010 General Election due to the polling stations closing.

Topic 2 – Electoral Systems

Question 04

At the lower levels of response, candidates often confused mandate with manifesto and explained the latter. Higher level responses generally took the mandate as the authority to act on the basis of those policies set out by the victorious party in their election manifesto. Many candidates used the information in the extract to extend this definition to include the more focused mandate secured as a result of a referendum. It was pleasing to see so many students detailing potential problems with the doctrine of the mandate – not least in the light of the hung (balanced) parliament and a coalition government that came in the wake of the 2010 General Election.

Question 05

At the higher levels of response, candidates were aware of some of the main referendums held since the 1970s and were able to comment on the reasons why such ballots were held (eg on constitutional issues, to avoid damaging splits within parties, when the party in government was convinced it could win, etc).

At the lower levels of response, candidates often spent far too long discussing the use of referendums outside the UK with little or no attempt to relate such discussion to the terms of the question posed. Indeed, even some of those who were aware of UK referendums often failed to consider why they had been held, preferring to outline the circumstances in which referendums had not been called (eg over the euro, Lisbon Treaty, abortion, etc) or simply to reel off generic arguments for and against referendums.

Question 06

Higher level responses generally identified some of the problems with the first-past-the-post/ simple plurality system as a means of identifying precisely what 'problems' PR might be said to solve. The discussion of PR systems that followed generally focused on STV, List and AMS systems, though many candidates also appear to think that AV and SV are proportional systems and therefore wasted a good deal of time discussing the merits/demerits of such systems.

At the lower levels of response, answers often appeared to be answering the question 'is coalition government good or bad?' rather than the one posed. Higher level responses moved beyond the issue of coalition government to consider other issues in relation to electoral systems, eg the MP–constituency link, voter choice, wasted votes/disproportionality, the confusion that some systems might cause, etc. Some of this discussion was very sophisticated, for example when considering the enhanced role given to parties under the closed list system. A significant minority of candidates appeared confused over the features of the various electoral systems and this had a fairly major effect in terms of limiting the potential for high AO1 and AO2 marks.

Topic 3 – Political Parties

Question 07

Though Topic 3 was the least popular on the paper, Question 07 elicited far more 5-mark responses than any of the other three entry-level questions. Candidates were generally able to define the term clearly and to develop their explanation with reference to both the rise of New Labour and to the transformation underway in the Conservative Party since David Cameron became party leader in 2005.

Candidates generally contrasted such 'catch-all' parties with the more ideologically rooted and driven parties common in the UK in the early 1980s and at various points prior to that. Some candidates even referred to the origins of the two main parties as a way of showing how far they had come in terms of their outlook and electoral appeal.

Question 08

This question was not particularly well answered, though many candidates nonetheless picked up reasonable marks. Many answers jumped from Thatcher to the 2010 General Election with little reference to what had gone on during the two intervening decades. In addition, coverage of the changes in the Conservative Party was often expressed in quite simplistic terms ('nasty party' to nice party) or with reference more to image/style than to policy (eg, the adoption of the tree logo).

Higher level responses generally provided an outline of the main tenets of Thatcherism before considering the extent to which the modern Conservative Party can still be considered Thatcherite. Such candidates invariably used their own knowledge of changing party policy to build upon the material provided in the extract. Some knowledgeable candidates slipped into chronological narrative, thereby losing sight of the question (ie, extent of change).

Question 09

This question was not well answered, on the whole. Many candidates appeared unable even to identify the roles or functions that political parties might reasonably be expected to perform in the UK system, let alone offer any evaluation. The few that did address the demands of the question tended to focus on the effectiveness of parties in providing representation and

avenues for participation, their involvement in political recruitment and policy formation. Though such answers often lacked balance in terms of the time spent on and depth of knowledge applied to each area, they generally scored well.

However, many candidates at the lower levels of response appeared to be answering a GOVP2 question on the 'roles of MPs' or the 'functions of parliament', with the result that they wrote at length about the passage of legislation, scrutiny of the executive and the rise of prime ministerial power rather than addressing the demands of the question posed. Though such material sometimes became more relevant (for example when discussing the role of the Official Opposition) it was invariably tangential and often entirely irrelevant.

Topic 4 – Pressure Groups and Protest Movements

Question 10

Candidates were generally able to explain the term mass media and provide an overview of what might be included within the definition. References were generally made to the print media (eg, named newspapers), the broadcast media (terrestrial and satellite) and to new media (such as the internet). When explaining new media some candidates made useful reference to the rise of social networking sites as political forums. Whilst the higher level responses generally tried to tie such discussion in to the topic of UK pressure groups, some candidates had again failed to read ahead and therefore ended up including material far better reserved for Question 11.

Question 11

The question asked candidates to identify and explain two **ways** in which pressure groups make use of the media. However, many candidates simply gave a range of examples of pressure groups using the media in the same way (generally as a way of gaining public support for their cause or sectional interests). Higher level responses addressed the terms of the question posed more explicitly, referring to a number of different ways, eg to gain exposure and/or support, or to raise money and membership.

Many candidates were aware that pressure groups often used new media as a way of engaging with the public by establishing their own websites as a means of educating voters on their chosen cause or allowing the broader public to make donations and/or join the group in question. In a similar vein, some candidates made reference to the way in which better resourced groups were able to take out full-page adverts in the print media or run television adverts in support of their cause/interest.

Question 12

This question was generally well answered. Most candidates were well prepared and many explicitly addressed the demands of the question by focusing on the insider-outsider pressure-group typology and demonstrating that those groups that had the larger public profile were not necessarily those who achieved the greatest levels of success.

Higher level responses moved beyond generalisations to point out that, in recent years, many outsider groups had been able to secure some or all of their objectives by stimulating 'widespread interest in their activities'. Some higher level responses took a more theoretical line, bringing in issues of pluralism, elitism and Marxism. Some also referred to the likely influence of pressure groups in an age of coalition government, with the likelihood of increased public consultation and debate over policy.

Whilst the use of examples was limited in some cases (eg Fathers for Justice, Snowdrop Campaign, BMA, NFU) many also referred back to earlier campaigns (eg roads protesters, fuel protests, protests against live animal exports).

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.