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Examiners' Report June 2010

GCE Government and Politics 6GP03 3C

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Introduction

This paper will have contained few surprises for the majority of candidates as the questions were all on familiar themes. It was the second setting of the new specification, which differs from its predecessor principally in its assessment of synopticity. Synopticity requires candidates to engage with different approaches to the issues raised in the question; all three long answer questions on this paper gave candidates the opportunity to do this, and the majority recognised that this was what was required of them. The short answer questions posed no particular problems, although some candidates produced answers to similar questions for which they had prepared, particularly for questions four and five, rather than to the one which was in front of them. This reinforces the often repeated advice, to answer the question.

Question 1

Aside from a few candidates who confused mid-term elections with primaries, most seemed well prepared for this question and were able to produce some wide-ranging answers. The question did refer to mid-term elections in the plural, and consequently answers needed to refer to more than one to move into the higher mark bands. Reference to the 2010 elections was rewardable when placed in a historical context, but details of primary results, and extended speculation about their likely significance, did not add materially to an answer.

Mid-term elections are an extremely important event, both as an indicator of a party's popularity and also due to their effect on the rest of the Presidential term. Mid-terms often reflect public opinion in relation to Presidential actions and therefore can either benefit or weaken the party in power. This has a profound effect upon the rest of the term potentially crippling a President's power and in essence creating a 'lame-duck effect' early.

One of the best examples of the significance of mid-term elections is the 2006 election which saw a huge swing towards the Democrats, particularly in the House of Representatives, under Nancy Pelosi. This was due to a growing unpopularity surrounding George W. Bush who policy over Iraq and the War on Terror were held evidently failed. The effect experienced here is called the 'mid-term blues' and resulted in George Bush's ability to force legislation through to be stifled. This is almost opposite to the result Bush got in the 2002 mid-term elections in which he received a positive response because of successful policy and an effective use of patriotism.

Mid-terms can also lead to a change in policy, for example the 1994 Contract with America instigated by the Republicans under the leadership of Newt Gingrich. This saw the Republicans draw on their established political base rather than aiming openly and resulted in the Republicans' winning control of the Congress for the first time in decades. Such was the success that this became standard Republican policy.

Mid-term significance is also dependant on which Presidential term it is and how strong a majority held in Congress. If a unfavourable result occurs in a Presidents second term then they can become a 'lame duck' however if it is in the first term the chance for re-election remains high and therefore Congress will still appease the president. The other major factor is how strong a majority is held, for example if Obama was to lose a few seats in the next mid-term the consequences wouldn't be that great as he would still hold overall control of Congress.

In conclusion mid-term elections are very important as they show public opinion and can significantly undermine the power of a president however much is dependant on which Presidential term it is and the strength of a party's hold over Congress before it.



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Examiner Comments

This answer shows a quite detailed knowledge and understanding of the significance of three different mid-term elections. Many answers to this question began with a one sentence definition of mid-term elections, which at least reassures the examiner that the candidate knows the basics, and this candidate misses the opportunity to develop some points. For example, there is a link to be made between the point in the penultimate paragraph about first term presidents, and the preceding paragraph which concerns the 1994 mid-terms. Nevertheless, a good answer.

Question 2

The first requirement of an answer on iron triangles is to identify its three points correctly, and most candidates passed this test. However, a good number struggled to go further, and resorted to bringing in material from other pressure group answers they had prepared, not always convincingly. As with almost all short answer questions, there were two sides to consider, and some answers argued, with varying degrees of plausibility, that iron triangles were less significant than often supposed. The most successful answers were able to identify the benefits which flow to the different points of the triangle, and to place iron triangles in the pluralist/elitist debate.

The term 'iron triangle' relates to the formulation of a powerful partnership involving government departments, pressure groups and government committees. The government departments initiate the proceedings by formulating an idea for legislation, the process then goes on to the pressure groups who provide the expertise and then to the government committees who attempt to begin the passage of the legislation. One of the most prominent examples is of the hugely powerful defence iron triangle; the defence department working hand in hand with arms corporations such as Boeing who work with the defence related government committees. They are especially significant because there is a good deal of criticism that they are undemocratic. It allows, if abused, the corporations scope to influence with its money, in a 'pay to play' style. On the other hand however one might reason that progress is far more swift when pressure groups are part of an 'iron triangle'; compared to an outsider group

Such as Green Peace who has no government ties. Some also argue that Iron Triangles are significant because they provide the Pressure Groups a chance to ~~give~~^{provide} their expertise (which the government is often lacking in) and use it for the good of the nation.



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Examiner Comments

This is a very typical answer to this question. It eventually becomes clear that the candidate knows what the three points of an iron triangle are, they cite a plausible example and mention the criticism of iron triangles that they are undemocratic. It is evident, though, that the candidate is uncertain how to develop what s/he has said, and the final point that iron triangles operate for 'the good of the nation' is unconvincing, not to say at odds with the criticism made previously.



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Examiner Tip

Try to use terms accurately - this candidate's reference to 'government committees' is clarified when the candidate subsequently refers to their beginning the passage of legislation (although this is not in itself entirely accurate).

Question 3

There were a wide variety of approaches to this question; some answers began with the New Deal, and others focused exclusively on the last two years. It was the least popular question, but those who did attempt it often scored highly. The term 'conservatives' was interpreted broadly and candidates rewardably discussed the significance of the Clinton administration and the New Democrats. The strongest answers showed an impressively up to date knowledge of the significant influence conservatives are having on President Obama's legislative programme, while acknowledging that the base of the party is still on the left.

The Blue Dog Democrats have become increasingly influential within the Democratic Party. They believe that the party needs to respond to America's apparent shift towards conservatism which presents an agenda which while protecting the vulnerable they need to lower taxes and maintain Christian values. Their influence has increased since their membership in Congress has risen from 36-44 in the 2006 mid term election. Moreover they are the most likely to vote against party line's as shown by their opposition to Obama's healthcare. The Blue Dog Democrats with this stance are able to appeal to moderate Republicans.

However conservatives within the Democratic party are a minority as the party is mainly seen as a liberal party. For example the Internet Left who are a grass root movement which emerged in the 2004 election. They raised money to spread the message that for the Democrats to win the election they must oppose any attempt for the conservatives to destroy

war rights in Civil Rights, abortion and LGBT rights.

However conservatives within the party have been influential as shown by the Democratic Leadership Council which attempts to ~~gain~~ bring together the liberal left with the conservative right. However this policy of triangulation has come under criticism from liberal parts of the party who argue this objection is flawed. Under Clinton who became its leader in 1990 attempted to forge a synthesis between the conservatives and liberals with the "third way."

The influence of conservatives within the Democrat party is shown by this faction supporting Republican policies under Bush, for example huge tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 which is an extremely conservative policy. Moreover the Republicans gained support from conservatives in the Democratic party for other conservative policies including the Partial Ban Abortion Act and the introduction of a Vchip in Texas from 2000 to prevent inappropriate material being watched.

Conservative Democrats have influential in respect to supporting a more conservative stance which might mean a shift in allegiance to the Republicans. For example Joe Lieberman after failing to gain the New York nomination for the Democrats shifted to Republicans.

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Examiner Comments

Although there are a number of loose ends in this answer, there is nevertheless quite a lot of knowledge. The influence of three different groups within the Democratic Party is assessed, and supported by some accurate detail, such as the problems conservative Democrats caused for the passage of the recent health care legislation. There is more detail that could have been used - for example, in connection with the health care legislation, the Stupak-Pitts amendment would be relevant - and a more convincing overall assessment would pull the answer together.

Question 4

This was the most popular question, although relatively few answers were placed in Level 3. Affirmative action lacks a precise definition, but the main debate concerns schemes which give some applicants (who may be black, female or from a number of other groups) preferential treatment in their applications for employment or higher education. Many candidates identified only compensation for slavery and segregation as its justification, but a small number were able to refer to the benefits of diversity, which was deemed by Justice Powell, in his judgment in *University of California v Bakke*, as the only constitutional justification, or to benefits for the economy, which was part of the rationale of the Philadelphia Plan. Many candidates could not resist devoting a sizeable part of their answer to criticisms of affirmative action, but, given the wording of the question, these were not rewardable.

Affirmative action is a type of positive discrimination which deliberately favours ethnic minorities in order to help them make progress which, without it they would be unable to do so.

For example, a business or city council may deliberately give a proportion of its contracts to companies run by / those who employ ethnic minorities.

The idea behind affirmative actions is that ethnic minorities are not equal in society - therefore they need an extra 'push' in order to bring them to that equal level.

This in turn provides ethnic minorities with recognition, experience, and profits with which they can improve in order to bring them to the same level as the well established white people.

Another justification for affirmative action is that

It also helps to morally boost ethnic minorities who ~~were otherwise neglected~~ would otherwise feel neglected. Affirmative action also encourages companies to employ ethnic racial minorities in order to return for incentives, this helps to ~~re~~ lower the unemployment rate levels, and has a knock on effect on reducing crime levels, as well as improving education standards for those who were otherwise deprived.

There are some who argue that affirmative action is acting on the instructions of the founding fathers, making everyone equal! vision of equality and justice for all by bringing everyone equal!

Also, giving ethnic minorities such opportunities means that white people no longer consider them unequal but start treating them equally in society, which inevitably eases tensions.



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Examiner Comments

Again, this is not an untypical response. There is an adequate definition of Affirmative Action, but it then concentrates on what might be termed second order justifications, before touching very briefly on the core issues at the end.



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Examiner Tip

Keep answers focused on the question- the key term in the question, 'justification' doesn't appear until the bottom of the first page. Let the examiner know you are clearly aware what the question is asking - for example by beginning a paragraph 'The first and most important justification for affirmative action is...' - and use a similar sentence to introduce each subsequent point.

Question 5

This apparently straightforward question caused problems for a number of candidates, who devoted much of their answer to describing different categories of pressure group, with little reference to the powers of the Senate which should have been their focus. Likewise, many unrewardably described the methods these groups might use. Stronger answers did refer to the powers of the Senate, particularly the exclusive powers, and identified the groups which might attempt to influence their exercise.

Within Congress, the Senate and the House have each have special areas of power.

The Senate's are its roles in foreign policy & the confirmation of ~~pres~~ the President's appointments to certain positions

With regards to its power in foreign affairs, we are likely to see pressure groups such as AIPAC trying to create links with Senators to influence policy which relates to Israel.

Also, many defence firms will try to influence the senate, such as ~~BPA~~ Lockheed Lockheed Martin who will try to win contracts to build supply goods to the US army.

As the Senate also ratifies treaties & international agreements, it has been the case that groups with

whose concerns include Climate Change will lobby this ~~chamber~~ chamber, as well as energy firms. This was the case who oppose any measures to curb emissions.

This was the case after the Kyoto Protocol was put forward, & in that instance, the energy firms won, as it was never ratified by the Senate.

Finally, as the Senate confirms all presidential appointments, many pressure groups try to influence this decision. Perhaps this is the role of pressure group is probably most seen in regards to the appointment of supreme court justices, notably in recent years, that of justice Sotomayor. Many minority groups such as the NAACP offered up opinions to try to get Sotomayor confirmed. They were also supported by many liberal groups. Yet many conservative pressure groups opposed her appointment & as she was seen as another liberal judge.

Overall, pressure groups who are interested in foreign affairs will concentrate on the Senate, & those who will be affected by the judiciary & other executive positions.

will target the chamber when appointments occur.

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Examiner Comments

Unlike a lot of answers to this question, this one does focus on the powers of the Senate as the basis for considering which pressure groups would wish to influence its proceedings. Its scope is a little narrow and it would have been improved if it had included something on the role of the Senate in passing legislation.

Question 6

This was by some margin the most popular of the three long answer questions. It invited candidates to rehearse and assess arguments that have become familiar to centres over the past few years, and, consequently, it was slightly disappointing that more answers could not be placed in Level Three. Some candidates took the opportunity of a reference to the 2008 election to deliver their verdict on why Barack Obama was successful. Of those that tried to focus on race, many answers relied on stereotypes, unsupported generalisations and the same few textbook examples to develop their arguments, while others became a discussion of the merits and failings of affirmative action. The strongest answers showed an awareness of the ideological debate which places divergent interpretations on the same sets of facts; increasing numbers of black graduates, for example, can be seen both as evidence that racial divisions are still a concern, and that they have completely closed over.

In the 2008 election polls 5% ~~of~~ of people admitted that they would not vote for Obama on the grounds of his skin colour. However a surprisingly high 30% said they had a friend who would vote along those lines. This shows very clearly that there are still racial divisions in America. At the beginning of the campaign race was thought to be the key issue however ~~Clinton~~ Bill Clinton was ridiculed when he brought

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Examiner Comments

This clip comes from the second paragraph of the answer, and the candidate is trying to establish that white reservations about candidate Obama point to the continued existence of racial divisions.

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Examiner Tip

Cite a source if you use statistics - like many answers to this question, this answer relies on statistics to develop some of its points. The figures quoted in the clip may be accurate but there is no source cited; consequently, they look unconvincing and add very little support to the argument.

Question 7

The most successful answers to this question were a pleasure to read, and showed an impressive command of both history and contemporary developments, such as the rise of the Tea Party movement. It has been very evident in recent years that candidates and their teachers are making increasing use of internet sources to keep up to date, and this knowledge was deployed to very good effect here. Although the parties continue to be a minority interest, the wide variety of material to draw on allowed candidates to construct an answer which conveyed a genuine personal engagement with the subject.

Whilst the Republican party has traditionally been viewed as the more conservative, both parties are traditionally "broad churches" therefore moderates and conservatives pervade each party. However particularly in the last year, Republicans have appeared more conservative in reaction to the liberalism of Obama. The 2010 primaries have been influenced by radical conservatives, with the endorsement of Palin. However it could be argued that the true extent of this conservative shift will not be seen until November.



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Examiner Comments

This clip is a first paragraph which inspires confidence. The candidate conveys an intelligent understanding of how the recent history of the Republican Party links to the question. S/he shows an awareness of recent developments, and in the final sentence gives an indication of an interesting line of argument to be pursued later.



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Examiner Tip

Introductions - a strong introduction to a long answer puts the examiner on your side. If your first paragraph makes the examiner wonder whether you have really understood the question, you will need to work hard to recover. An introduction should show that you have engaged with the issues contained in the question, and ideally sets out the line of argument you intend to pursue.

Question 8

Campaign finance is a complex and technical area, and even the strongest answers were guilty of some confusions; these most often concerned the distinction between hard and soft money, and the difference between the matching funds that primary candidates are eligible for (which are now usually declined by the leading contenders), and the federal grant that the party's nominees can receive for the general election campaign (which Barack Obama was the first ever candidate to decline). As with question six, this question attracted some candidates who were looking for an outlet for their answer on the outcome of the 2008 election. Many candidates were understandably keen to demonstrate their knowledge of the Citizens United case, but, in this context, it was of marginal relevance. To progress beyond the bottom of Level 2, candidates had to at least implicitly offer criteria against which the effectiveness of finance regulation could be judged, and the strongest answers were able to do this, and identify ways in which the current regulatory framework both had and had not been effective.

However, critics of this theory would argue that the USA is still an elitist system, and that Obama only won because he raised significantly more funds than John McCain. He raised more than McCain's \$130m in August and September alone, with McCain accepting federal funds of \$84m. Obama initially accepted these funds too, but soon withdrew the request, in the knowledge that he could raise significantly more himself. As the campaign began to draw to a close, Obama's spare funds allowed him to flood TV and radio with campaign messages, ^{potentially} a key factor in his election.



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Examiner Comments

This clip is illustrative of the problems even strong candidates can have when writing about campaign finance. The point being made, that Obama's victory could be attributable at least in part to his financial advantage, is a valid one, but the two figures given for McCain's funds raised seem incompatible with each other. This weakens its effectiveness.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	a*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw boundary mark	90	61	54	47	40	33	27	21	0
Uniform boundary mark	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	0

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