



General Certificate of Education

Government and Politics 2150

GOVP1 People, Politics and Participation

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – June series

This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)

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General

This was the first summer examination of this unit and it is satisfying to report that candidates generally appear to have been well prepared.

The papers elicited a full range of responses, with marks awarded throughout the range and it was pleasing to note how few scripts were in Level 1. Candidates appeared to have no problems in coping with the format of the paper and there were few rubric infringements. There was some tendency for 10-mark questions to be given more attention than they merited, with the result that the 25-mark responses often lacked range and depth. However, apart from this there did not appear to have been problems with time management.

GOVP1 – People, Politics and Participation

Topic 1 Participation and Voting Behaviour

This proved a very popular question.

Question 01

Although this question focused on the term ‘partisan alignment’, many candidates chose to answer entirely on ‘class alignment’ without making the more general points about socialisation and party identification. Only those at the higher levels were able to distinguish between the two terms. A small minority of candidates explained the term partisan ‘dealignment’ as opposed to ‘alignment’.

Question 02

When assessing the importance of party leaders in the election campaign most candidates focused entirely on the decline of primacy factors in shaping voting behaviour and the increasing importance of image/personality. Many mentioned the images of Blair, Brown and Cameron, though relatively few addressed the precise terms of the question – ie the role the party leaders play in the election campaign. This failure to link the discussion to election campaigns was particularly apparent when candidates chose to focus on David Cameron. Stronger responses were able to link the theoretical discussion to actual campaigns by making use of relevant examples; some of these were historical (eg Kinnock in 1992) and others were more recent (eg Brown at Glenrothes). A significant number of candidates drifted into areas that would have been more relevant in answer to Question 03.

Question 03

This question, asking for a consideration of the extent to which short-term factors have become far more important than long-term factors in shaping voting behaviour, prompted some excellent responses. Candidates were generally able to offer some coverage of both long-term and short-term factors, along with supporting examples. It was also encouraging to see so many candidates comfortably discussing the merits and demerits of the various theoretical models of voting behaviour. At the higher levels candidates explicitly addressed the precise terms of the question posed (ie ... ‘more important ...’). There remained a significant minority of candidates who did not appear to understand the phrase ‘long-term factors’, taking it to mean things that happened a long time ago.

Topic 2 Electoral Systems

This question proved moderately popular.

Question 04

This question asked for an explanation of the term *direct democracy*. Of the four 5-mark questions on the paper, it was probably the one that prompted the most impressive responses. The term was generally clearly defined and many candidates were able to develop their explanation with references to UK referendums, Ancient Greece, Switzerland and town meetings in New England. Many contrasted the term with 'representative democracy'.

Question 05

Asking candidates to identify and explain two advantages of representative democracy in the UK, this question was less well done than Question 04. Some candidates achieved respectable marks by the judicious application of material provided in the extract. Few candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of the term 'representative democracy' and this hindered their efforts to detail the advantages of this form of government. Though many repeated the Burke quotation provided in the extract, relatively few got to grips with what Burke was actually saying. Significant numbers of candidates produced answers 'for' and 'against' direct democracy and referendums and then repeated the same arguments, sometimes word for word, in answer to Question 06. A significant minority mistook the question for one on electoral systems and simply outlined the merits and demerits of the UK's first-past-the-post system.

Question 06

Most candidates wrote well and at length about the advantages and disadvantages of referendums. Indeed, many who struggled on parts 'a' and 'b' were able to pick up marks here when they were able to put forward well-rehearsed arguments. Far fewer candidates explicitly tackled the precise terms of the question: whether the UK would benefit from the greater use of referendums. Many responses were entirely generic, with little or no reference to the UK. Very few candidates supported the points made with examples of UK referendums past or proposed.

Topic 3 Political Parties

As in January 2009, few candidates chose the political parties study area.

Question 07

This question elicited a very weak set of responses, with very few candidates even able to explain what *constituency parties* are, let alone what functions they perform. Many simply chose to define 'constituency'. Others merely lifted content from the extract on the role of constituency parties at conference without demonstrating any understanding of what constituency parties were.

Question 08

This question required candidates to outline the different roles performed by the annual UK party conferences. At the lower levels of response candidates simply lifted content from the extract without comment or explicit understanding. A significant minority did not appear to understand what conferences are, or what roles they are said to perform. Some candidates understood the roles of conferences in generic terms but relatively few appreciated the differences between the Labour and Conservative conferences in terms of either theory or

practice. A handful of answers explained the changes in both parties in recent years, such as the rise of policy forums and the decline of the union block-vote.

Question 09

In assessing the power of individual members within the main UK political parties few candidates appeared to recognise the need to focus on internal party democracy. Many took 'individual party members' to mean MPs and wrote at length about the weakness of backbenchers. Others candidates focused on the rise of prime ministerial power. Discussion of the relative power of MPs and their party leader was credited where the focus was on internal party democracy. In only a handful of cases did candidates address the terms of the question explicitly. Those who did tended to focus on the power of individual members in policy formulation, candidate selection and the election of party leaders.

Topic 4 Pressure Groups and Protest Movements

Along with Question 01, this question was very popular.

Question 10

The majority of candidates were able to offer a definition of the term *access points*, although a significant minority focused more on pressure group methods such as lobbying and holding marches. Stronger answers referred to the access points provided by different tiers of government; many made use of the extract, with reference to Euro groups and their efforts to lobby the European Parliament or Commission.

Question 11

In attempting to identify and explain two reasons why pressure groups might wish to lobby at the European level many candidates produced generic answers, focusing on the benefits of being on a bigger stage. Surprisingly few made full use of the material provided in the extract – namely that the EU could be seen as a useful access point where national governments were unsympathetic or where their cause was supranational. Higher levels of response showed awareness of the power of the EU over UK law – particularly in areas such as farming and environmental policy – and used this knowledge to develop the points offered in the extract.

Question 12

Candidates were asked to evaluate the argument that UK pressure group activity presented a major threat to democracy. At the lower levels of response candidates appeared to assume that all popular protest, particularly direct action, was undemocratic because it sought to put the needs of the minority over those of the majority. Such an approach obviously ran the risk of defining all pressure group activity as undemocratic. Many responses often included lengthy passages of descriptive material (eg on 'Fathers4Justice') with little or no attempt to link such material to the question posed. Stronger responses demonstrated a more sophisticated understanding of the part played by pressure groups within a democratic system. Some addressed the threat that pressure group activity presented to 'joined-up government', others offered a developed explanation of the way in which it could be seen to undermine representative democracy.