

# Mark Scheme (Results)

## Summer 2007

GCE

GCE Government and Politics (6491) 01

## **Unit 1 - 6491**

### **1 (a) What is pluralism?**

Pluralism, in its broad sense, is a belief in, or a commitment to, diversity or multiplicity (the existence of many things). As a theory of political power, pluralism suggests that power is widely and (relatively) evenly dispersed in society, rather than concentrated in the hands of an elite or ruling class. In this form, pluralism is usually seen as a theory of group politics, in which individuals are represented largely through the membership of organised groups (pressure groups), and all such groups have access to the political process. Pluralists therefore tend to regard pressure group politics as broadly democratic.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge of pluralism is a theory of group politics (AO1)
- Awareness that pluralism is associated with the idea that political power is widely and evenly distributed (AO1)

### **1 (b) Explain the different types of pressure group**

Pressure groups are either classified as promotional or sectional groups or as insider and outsider groups. The promotional/sectional distinction is based on the aims and goals of a group. Sectional (or interest) groups exist to advance or protect the (usually material) interests of their members, examples including trade unions, businesses and professional associations. Their sectional character derives from the fact that they represent a particular section of society. Promotional (or cause) groups are set up to advance shared values, ideals or principles. They are concerned to bring benefit to the larger society or to groups other than their members. Some groups nevertheless have both sectional and promotional characteristics. The insider/outsider distinction is based on the relationship between the group and government. Insider groups enjoy regular, privileged and usually institutional access to government through routine consultation or representation on government bodies. Outsider groups are either not consulted by government or consulted only irregularly and not at a senior level. They therefore tend to exert influence indirectly via public opinion campaigns or the media. Both insider and outsider groups are sometimes broken down into sub-categories.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of the sectional/promotional distinction (AO1)
- Knowledge and understanding of the insider/outsider distinction (AO1)
- Ability to analyse comparisons and contrasts between different types of group (AO2)

**1 (c) To what extent are the largest pressure groups the most powerful?**

A variety of factors affect the power of pressure groups. The size of the group, reflected in its formal membership, is a factor, as it may give the group greater influence over government or better enable the group to conduct public campaigns or raise funds. However, other factors may be as important or more important. These include the following. The extent of public sympathy for the group and its goals will affect the interest that political parties and the government take in it, particular if the government calculates that ignoring the group and its demands may damage its electoral credibility. The financial strength and organizational capacities of a group is a crucial factor, as it affects the group's ability to fund and mount political campaigns, which may range from advertising campaigns to sophisticated lobbying of Parliament. The personal and institutional links the group has to political parties or government are likely to be vital, giving the group insider status and the ability to influence policy while it is being formulated. A further factor is the economic power a group possesses. Business groups, widely recognised as the most powerful pressure groups, are able to exert influence because they are the country's major source of investment and employment, and as such cannot be ignored by government. Trade unions have traditionally exerted influence through the threat or reality of industrial action. Other factors include the specialist knowledge a group can deploy or even the celebrity backers a group can attract.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge of the factor that may affect pressure group power (AO1)
- Analysis and evaluation of the significance of factors (AO2)
- Comparison and contrast of different factors, especially membership size (AO2)

**2 (a) What is a referendum?**

A referendum is a vote in which the electorate can express a view on a particular issue of public policy. As such, it provides the public with means of directly influencing government policy, although some referendums are advisory rather than binding (in theory at least, this applies to all referendums in the UK, as Parliament is sovereign). Referendums are therefore a device of direct democracy, although they are typically used to supplement, rather than replace, representative democracy.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of the nature of referendums (AO1)
- Awareness of the link between referendums and direct democracy (AO1)

## 2 (b) Explain the circumstances of three referendums held in the UK since 1997

Since 1997 there has been an increasing in the number of referendum held in the UK. Key referendums include the following:

- [Scottish devolution referendum \(1997\)](#) - two questions were posed: whether there should be a [Scottish Parliament](#) (yes); whether a Scottish Parliament should have tax varying powers (yes)
- [Welsh devolution referendum \(1997\)](#) - whether there should be a National Assembly for [Wales](#) (yes)
- [London devolution referendum \(1998\)](#) - whether there should be a [Mayor of London](#) and [Greater London Authority](#) (yes)
- [Northern Irish Agreement referendum \(1998\)](#) – whether to accept the [Good Friday Agreement](#), including creation of a Northern Irish Assembly (yes)

Each of these referendums was held in a particular context and particular set of circumstances, particularly the Northern Irish Agreement referendum. However, some wider circumstances influenced all of them, to a greater or lesser extent. These include the following. First, a Labour government was elected in 1997: Labour has traditionally been less opposed to the use of referendums than the Conservatives, and by 1997 had become positively enthusiastic. Second, the Blair government, elected in 1997, was committed to a radical programme of constitutional reform – each of the issues put to the electorate had major constitutional significance. Third, Blair and Labour had come to accept that major constitutional reforms required popular endorsement via a referendum, if only out of recognition that a successful outcome would make the implementation of the policy, through Parliament and beyond, easier.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of three referendums held since 1997 (AO1)
- Knowledge and understanding of the circumstances of three referendums held since 1997 (AO1)
- Analysis and evaluation of the significance of the circumstances in explaining each referendum (AO2)

## 3 (c) Do referendums strengthen or weaken the power of government?

The relationship between referendums and the powers of government is a complex issue. On the face of it the decision to hold a referendum involves a weakening of government power: instead of making a decision itself, government allows the electorate to make the decision itself.

Whatever influence the government can exert over the conduct of the referendum, it cannot compare with the level of control a government with a secure parliamentary majority possesses in other circumstances. On the other hand, referendums can be said to strengthen the power of government in that, first, a successful referendum outcome can weaken other obstacles to the implementation of a policy, and second, government have significant advantages in securing their desired outcome. On the first issue, 'yes' votes in Scotland and Wales in 1997 ensured that Conservative opposition to devolution was severely compromised and that backbench Labour reservations evaporated – neither could effectively challenge a policy that had been popularly endorsed. In addition, by giving them democratic legitimacy, the referendum outcomes helped to ensure that the devolved bodies would be enduring and successful. This was especially important in Northern Ireland. On the second issue, the advantages that government has in influencing the outcome of referendums include the following. Governments decide the issues that will be put to referendums and the ones that will not; they decide the date of referendums; they decide the question that will be asked; and, up to a point, they are able to deploy public monies in support of their preferred outcome.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of implications of referendums for government power (AO1)
- Analysis of how referendums may strengthen or weaken government (AO2)
- Evaluation of overall impact referendums on government (AO2)

### **3 (a) Define democracy**

Democracy is most simply defined as 'rule by the people'. Its core principle is the notion of political equality, an equal distribution of political power and influence. As a political system, democracy is often associated with 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people'. However, the ideas of government *by* the people and government *for* the people imply different models of democracy, broadly linked to the difference between direct democracy (based on direct popular participation) and representative democracy (based on government in the public interest). Democracy is commonly associated with the liberal-democratic model of democracy. As such, its distinctive features are regular, free and fair elections, universal adult suffrage, and party and candidate competition.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of the features of democracy (AO1)
- Awareness of different kinds of democracy (AO1)

### **3 (b) What are the main features of representative democracy in the UK?**

The UK system of government is based on the principle of representative democracy. Its main features are as follows. The right to rule in the UK is based on success in regular and competitive elections; in particular, governments are formed on the basis of general elections, which are held within a maximum term of five years and are held in the context of party candidate competition. The UK has a system of universal adult suffrage (since 1928), and elections are based on the principle of one person one vote, one vote one value (an effort is made to ensure rough equality in terms of the size of constituencies). The existence of basic 'democratic' freedoms, such as free speech and freedom of assembly, and of a free media help to support representative democracy by ensuring that elections are fair. Parliament is the central institution within the UK's representative democracy, in that its elected chamber, the House of Commons, represents the electorate and also holds the government to account, ensuring responsible government, in the sense of responsiveness. The existence of pressure groups is also a feature of representative democracy, in that groups can represent the public's views when this is done inadequately by elections and political parties.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of representative democracy (AO1)
- Awareness of the main features of representative democracy in the UK (AO1)
- Analysis and explanation of the features of representative democracy in the UK (AO2)

### **3 (c) To what extent has the UK political system become more democratic in recent years?**

The UK political system of government has become more democratic in recent years in three main ways. First, the introduction of devolution has strengthened democracy by giving a stronger and more independent political voice to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Previously, they had been represented primarily through Parliament, where they were always outnumbered by English MPs. However, the devolution process has not furnished England with an independent voice, and the devolved bodies remain subordinate to a sovereign Parliament. Second, referendums have been more widely used since 1997. This has enabled representative democracy to be supplemented by a stronger element of direct democracy, and brought other benefits such as improved political education. However, referendums tend to be used at the convenience of the government of the day, and may be used to reduce the accountability of governments for political decisions, thereby weakening democracy. Third, PR electoral systems have been introduced for the newly-created bodies since 1997. This has improved the representation of small parties and prevented electoral distortion. However, Westminster elections continue to be based on a majoritarian electoral system that leads to plurality rule and

underpins a system of elective dictatorship. Other considerations could include the fact that the reform of the House of Lords has not to date involved the introduction of an elected element.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of recent changes in the UK's democratic system (AO1)
- Analysis of the significance of these recent changes (AO1)
- Evaluation of changes in terms of their impact on democratic effectiveness (AO2)

#### **4 (a) Outline two differences between a political party and a pressure group**

There are several differences between a political party and a pressure group. These include the following. Political parties aim to exercise government power by winning political office, which in liberal democracies means putting candidates up for election. Pressure groups, by contrast, seek to exert influence on those who hold government power, and so do not put candidates up for election. Political parties typically adopt a broad issue focus, developing positions on all aspects of government policy, whereas pressure groups have a narrower issue concern and are concerned only about a single issue. Political parties usually have an ideological character in that their members are united by shared (if broad) political preferences. Pressure groups, by contrast, are bound together either by shared interests or by common support for a cause, regardless of their wider political preferences.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of differences between political parties and pressure groups (AO1)
- Knowledge of examples of political parties and pressure groups (AO1)

#### **4 (b) Explain the main functions of a political party**

Political parties have a variety of functions. These include the following. First, political parties carry out representation. They represent the public by framing policies that will attract sufficiently wide public support to enable them to win general election, as implied by the economic model of democracy. Second, they are involved in interest articulation and aggregation. They do this by forming links with organized groups and interests (eg, Labour and the trade unions), and then by reconciling these various interests with each other. Third, political parties have traditionally been important agents of political socialization and mobilization, helping to increase participation and understanding of politics through party membership, campaigning activities and voting. Fourth, political parties play a crucial role in the organisation of government, the UK, in effect, having a system of party government. Governments are formed by parties, as are oppositions; and parties

control the workings of Parliament. Fifth, parties recruit politicians into politics and help to train and prepare them for public office, forming the UK's political elite.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of the functions of a political party (AO1)
- Evaluation of the main functions of a political party (AO2)
- Analytical explanation of the functions of a political party (AO1)

#### **4 (c) To what extent are parties effective in promoting political participation?**

The chief ways in which political parties promote political participation are through providing the public with an opportunity to become members of parties and by encouraging them to vote. Through party membership, the public are able to participate in policy formulation via conferences, hold offices at local and even national level, and engage in campaigning and electioneering. In encouraging the public to vote, parties foster political education. However, in each of these respects there has been evidence of the declining effectiveness of political parties in promoting participation. Membership of political parties in the UK fell from over 3 million in the 1960s to around 800,000 in the 1990s. There has been a similar decline in activism within parties and in party identification generally. Whereas almost half of members of the major parties in 1964 claimed to be very strong party identifiers, this had fallen to about 15 per cent in 2001. Major changes have also occurred in voting patterns. The share of the vote gained by Labour and Conservative parties has fallen from on average 91 per cent in 1954-1970 to 75 per cent. Turnout in general elections has fallen sharply since 1997, with only 59.4 per cent voting in 2001, the lowest figure since 1918, and 61.3 per cent turnout in 2005, the second lowest since 1918. Such trends are widely interpreted as reflecting a shift in emphasis from political parties to pressure groups, especially cause and single-issue groups, as agents of political participation.

In marking this question, consider the following issues:

- Knowledge and understanding of how parties promote political participation (AO1)
- Knowledge of levels of political participation in the UK (AO1)
- Analysis and evaluation of parties' effectiveness in promoting participation (AO2)



