



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2021

Pearson Edexcel A Level
In Politics (9PL0) Paper 01

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Principal Examiners Report

Politics Autumn 2021

General introduction

The autumn paper was a deferred paper which would have been taken in the summer of 2021. The impact of the pandemic has made its mark once more on the full sitting of the all A level examinations. Under the normal examination process numbers would have been far higher and more examples of work and differing approaches would have been seen and thus a fuller and more robust set of judgments and lessons could have been taken from the handling by candidates of the paper. In the light of the small cohort this report attempts to highlight good practice which was evidenced but at the same time draw out the key expectations of what is demanded by the different types of question and key approaches which could have been taken.

Source questions

- The source is the key platform on which the response is based.
- It contains competing views which can be justified, the key element is to treat each side with diligence and respect and argue through a range of points, pertinent to each
- In these points the challenge is to expand on the knowledge the source contains (AO1), then to analyse these points and explain their remit (AO2) then come to a judgment after weighing up the evidence and implications (AO3).
- There is no 'set' format of approach that is demanded
- There is enough AO1 base to achieve full marks. Newly introduced facts (AO1) can gain AO1 credit but no marks can be advanced for the analysis and evaluation of the newly introduced details.

Question 1a

Most candidates were able to appreciate the challenge posed by the question. Again most used the source effectively but very few were able to develop and probe the contested view of opinion polls and their benefits and disadvantages. There were many 'hooks' given by the source which were not capitalised upon. For instance identification of where political parties change their policy if opinion polls indicate they may lose votes.

This question sought to draw out both the benefits and the drawbacks of the use of opinion polls. Hence the paradox is can they be used to improve democracy and aid the understanding of issues, or alternatively do they actually damage the political process and cause more problems. The counter points came first – and there is a need to expand on the knowledge we are given – what is a lower turnout? What is tactical voting? What principles are possibly abandoned? How do opinion polls mislead? Hence the first step is showing a clear understanding of the points raised – and to develop these. Next the response needs to provide analysis, why can a low turnout be problematic? Why tactical voting is considered a problem? Are principles more important than victory? Is the outcome of opinion polls that they mislead? What candidates have to do is to create a framework which is contained in and around the context and drivers in the source. The above process is repeated for the opposing

view – again ensuring that the focus is to exploit and cover the three assessment objectives in the process.

Few candidates had difficulty in being able to appreciate both sides of the debate – but as always the skill was in developing these with accuracy and constructing a sound debate which covered both aspects.

Example: Comment

No issues with the content, certainly relevant – but it is preferable if points for and against – if they are separate points are kept apart rather than run together.

The source states that 'opinion polls are part of a free media and integral to a healthy representative democracy'. This shows that opinion polls are needed in the UK in order to have a healthy democracy. They allow the adaptation of political parties in order to tackle new problems such as those of COVID 19 or Brexit. The source argues back by saying that this constant change caused by opinion polls can create damage towards a democracy. By forcing political parties to not follow their manifesto and policy goals in order to remain in power leads to a damaged democracy as well as uncertainty in the government. This is a disadvantage to opinion polls as it means that politicians are breaking their promises in order to stay in power, and original policy goals are scrapped which can lead to a lack of progress. This uncertainty can again lead to lower turnouts if people feel that their wishes are simply going to be ignored if they vote for their parties.

Question 1b

Again candidates as advised above should aim to exploit and then develop the knowledge in the source. In one sense the two contrasting views being set out in each letter to the editor. To make sound headway a sound understanding of the mandate and the manifesto was crucial, as indeed was the position of MPs in relation to party policy and the role of referendums in a representative democracy. In many ways this was an action packed source with many avenues which are contestable and current. It was a minority who took the opportunity to develop these to their full extent. Many candidates lacked a firm conviction as to whether to come down on one side of a debate or the other. Yes, there is a need to articulate both sides of the debate – but in order to reap the rewards at AO3 a judgment or conclusion has to be made with a rational argument cited why that choice was taken. Lots of claims have been made of the statement 'to govern is to choose' well in handling effectively the source question a choice has to be made – and often it was not a convincing choice that was taken.

Essay Questions (30 marks)

- The theme of a contested and debatable is central to the essay
- There is no official or desired form of an essay – all approaches are marked on their applicability to the question and the coverage of the assessment objectives
- Again as with the source it is expected that candidates will review contested arguments rather than being one sided
- A conclusion is central to this – and often it echoes a sustainable view which permeates the essay – it is not a ‘throwaway’ comment in the last paragraph.

Question 2a

The stronger candidates who did well on this question were able to produce coherent arguments which understood the fate of small parties under first past the post and relate to outcomes and detail which arises. By contrast weaker responses just treaded the essay as a debate surrounding the overall unfairness of first past the post and had little by way of empirical detail about the outcomes for a range of parties – and this was central to the question. In many senses across all papers there is now the ability to draw on a wider base of the specification. Essay questions and source questions are not simply restricted to one section of the specification. Hence on this question stronger answers provided clear detail on a range of political parties and incorporated this.

Example comment

This candidate makes the position of a range of parties and the impact of FPTP clear

Out of all the more minor parties UKIP in my opinion has the strongest voice in terms of Electoral Reform, even though Nigel Farage who has stood seven times for parliament accumulated a large number of support from members he still failed to be elected even if the numbers puts him ahead, he claims that FPTP almost always guarantees no or minimal tertiary political influence in government and will always result in a fixed two party system.

However, the Conservative and Labour Party debate this and believe that FPTP allows for strong governments that last throughout the term and believe that scrapping FPTP for AV or Proportional Representation will result in successive government collapses due to the likelihood of having to partner with another party because coalitions are almost always inevitable. Italy is a prime example in their eyes of a country that endures consecutive collapses because there will always be disagreements in government particularly over whipping which may differ between the governing parties.

Other parties claim that FPTP doesn't allow for voices to be heard from across the UK, the Green Party which currently only has one member of parliament claim that the electoral system denies them representation in the house of commons, in the 2021 local elections the Greens won more local council seats than the Conservatives in Bristol and this was still the case in elections prior to 2019 as well. This shows that even though these parties have a high degree of support FPTP places unfair constraints on where they can accumulate power

Question 2b

As always correct and precise detail is important, for it is on this base that effective analysis (AO2) and evaluation (AO3) is built. Stronger answers on this question had a rounded understanding of the media – in its widest sense both broadcasting and print – with social media being appreciated for its growing importance. By contrast weaker scripts relied too heavily on the print media and claims built around claims made by ‘The Sun’. The reliance exclusively on print media for one election nearly twenty years ago is not a broad enough base; yes it is creditworthy but the media has a wider shadow or influence on politics. Essential to the question is the notion of bias – it was a minority that correctly identified the different regulations between print and broadcast media for bias and this is a crucial element in the question Furthermore the question aims to draw on the influence of the media – to both confirm and change political preference, this has to be a crucial part of the analysis which informs any conclusion.

Example Comment

This extract effectively incorporates contemporary events to the position of the media.

The rise in media ~~and~~ in politics can also be shown through the rise in strong party and class disalignment. A culture of 'spin' in today's political climate shifts focus of politicians to how things appear in the media ~~to~~ from how they really are. For example, the emergence of anti-semitism in Corbyn's Labour ~~was~~ spread by media outlets as 'anti-Jewish' as opposed to 'anti-Israeli colonialism and imperialism' meant that a significant amount of Jewish voters defected to other parties as they felt alienated by their own party through misinformation spread by right wing media.

Core political ideas questions.

- These can arise exclusively on one core political idea or from any combination of the three
- All AOs are once again evenly split

- The stem of the question changes and states ‘evaluate the extent ..’
- This command differs from the more polarised stem in the 30 mark essays and source question
- This makes for a more nuanced approach of how and where differences within each core idea sit and the impact of this tension.
- To escape any form of cap – at least two of the named key thinkers have to be accurately referenced in the response

Question 3a

This question rested on two main aspects studied for each core idea namely the economy and society. In line with the command ‘to what extent..’ the challenge was to note the consistencies and inconsistencies which liberalism shows in respect of both of these. The mark scheme gives details of how this view is seen in unison by classical and modern liberals and then how contrasts emerge.

The average mark for both core ideas was very similar. Key thinkers in the main were perhaps better deployed on the liberalism question.

Question 3b

All candidates were aware of the tension which exists between One Nation conservatives and the New Right. However the differences were better deployed than the consistencies within the core idea. A few candidates failed to mention two of the five key thinkers cited on the specification and thus had to have their responses capped in level 2. Often many of those who failed to deliver the named key thinkers did provide others – most notably Thatcher for the New Right and Disraeli for One Nation conservatism. These are both applicable thinkers and can be used – however they cannot be used to the exclusion of the named five key thinkers. At times this denies many good answers valuable marks. In particular the exclusion of Disraeli for the list on the specification is disappointing – but the choice of the key thinkers was mandated. Hence other thinkers are welcome but they can never act as a substitute for the named ones. Credit is given for other where relevant thinkers but their inclusion cannot overcome the need to name at least two of the listed five in a response.

Example Comment

This is clearly an articulate and well informed candidate, able to appreciate the remit of the New Right and One Nationism. However despite all the relevant material no key thinkers from conservatism as listed on the specification are noted and an automatic cap of Level 2 applies. Lots of other relevant thinkers but not the required ones

One Nation Conservatism is the more popular faction in the Conservatives both in the past and present. Ted Heath the Conservative PM in the 1970s was considered a One-Nation conservative up until the election of Margaret Thatcher as Party Leader in 1975 considered a prominent figure on the New Right.

Both One-Nation Conservatives and New Right/Thatcherite Conservatives believe in slashing taxes and the rule of law despite one being more prudent than the other. Both are placed on the right of the political spectrum with One-Nation Conservatives being more central than the new right. One key embodiment of both of these factions are their passionate support for British Unionism where the UK remains together. Both factions believe in individual liberties, a private sector where government interference is kept to a minimum which symbolises the large amount of ideas these two factions have in common. John Locke who is widely considered the father of liberalism is an advocate of the free market and classical liberalism which both factions of the Conservatives agree with.

However, there are also many stark differences between the two factions as many on the New-Right are a lot more Eurosceptic than One-Nation conservatives, indeed this is true as during the 2016 Brexit Vote One Nation Conservatives who voted for the legalisation of Same Sex Marriage supported remain in the referendum citing protections in terms of women's rights, human rights and LGBT. whereas those who are socially conservative, particularly members of the Cornerstone Group and many who are advocates of Thatcherism voted against Same Sex Marriage and for Brexit. This shows that there tends to be a pattern in these particular wings of the party where social conservatives are predominantly more Eurosceptic, and not as progressive as One-Nation Conservatives in terms of abortion and same sex marriage.

Friedland and Hayek are widely considered to be influential in shaping Thatcherism and her New-Right policies along with Enoch Powell who inspired her greatly. The new right are staunchly anti trade union as per the case in the 1980s where tough legislation was imposed this included a near total ban on striking and the authoritarian policing tactics used against advocates of trade unionism such as mounted police and tear gas. This led many especially on in the opposition to believe that Thatcher was turning the UK into a police state where the condoning of violent practices was widely pitted against trade unionists and those that disagree with her.

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