

Government and Politics

Advanced GCE A2 H495

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H095

Report on the Units

June 2010

HX95/R/10

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Chief Examiner Report

Generally centres adapted well to the new specifications. There were indications that not all had fully grasped the changes to F853 and F854, with their compulsory questions, where it is no longer possible simply to focus on quite small sections of the specifications. Now that the coursework, which was worth 30% of the marks of the old A2, has gone, expectations about the depth and breadth of coverage on F853 and F854 have, not unnaturally, risen in this new age of 'stretch and challenge'. There was also some evidence that candidates were not taking full advantage of the additional time available on F855 and F856 to think and plan first, and then write a really developed essay. Some of the answers on those two papers were as brief as those on F853 and F854, where only half the amount of time is available. Candidates are rewarded for demonstrating reflection and holistic overview on those two papers. The AS papers are well established by now, but a lack of source utilisation and a shortage of basic knowledge on the topics where there are guaranteed questions still surprised examiners.

It is worth stressing that we are still awarding AO3 marks separately and too many candidates did not get all the marks available because they wrote poor English. While examiners are instructed to be tolerant of some variations of the current Governor of California's name, we are less inclined to be tolerant of words like 'comitee' or 'priminister' which are actually in the question paper. Paragraphs also help.

On the plus side it was good to see so many candidates with a real awareness of contemporary politics, and a much less historical approach being adopted by many.

F851 Contemporary Politics of the UK

General Comments

Generally speaking, the paper this summer performed very much as expected, but with two major caveats:

- some candidates, even very good ones, ignored the request in Q2 to discuss internal party democracy in the Labour and Conservative parties and instead wrote about the contribution of parties to British democracy generally. Given that this was the question set in January, it is tempting to conclude that they had used it for revision purposes but failed to realise that the question on this paper was a different one;
- some candidates, again even very good ones, attempted to answer Q3 on the election systems used for the House of Commons and the European Parliament without knowing anything about the party list system used to elect MEPs in Great Britain or STV in Northern Ireland.

Candidates who combined these errors of judgement inevitably did badly – and much worse than they probably anticipated.

The examiners can only repeat what has oft been said in the past:

- all parts of the mandatory topics – on this paper parties and pressure groups – will be examined;
- if candidates answer half a question they will get no more than half the marks and if they answer a different question they will get nothing. Reading the question carefully to see exactly what is required is essential.

Three further points may help centres prepare their candidates more fully:

1. It is becoming increasingly clear that most 'introductions' to the essay questions are a waste of time, both metaphorically and literally. Most candidates would be well-advised to 'get on with it' rather than provide an often lengthy first paragraph that does nothing more than rephrase the question and indicate what the candidate is going to do.
2. Much the same could be said of 'conclusions' which simply summarise what has already been said. If the question asks candidates to make a judgement about how important 'x' is in explaining something – for example, questions 2, 4 and 5 on this paper – then there is a case for a brief conclusion which provides a direct answer to the question, but most candidates do not do this.
3. In terms of the qualities examiners look for, focus, range and balance are vital and any answer which:
 - does not directly address the question;
 - makes a limited number of points;
 - does not give roughly equal weight to each side of an argument or each part of the question will not do as well as those that do.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) **Using the sources and your own knowledge, outline the differences between an 'insider pressure group' and an 'outsider pressure group'.**

This is a fairly standard question and most candidates accepted it gratefully. There was some confusion about whether insider status referred to access to MPs or to the executive, which limited the value of some responses, and some candidates found it harder to explain what an outsider group was than an insider group, but generally the answers were accurate and illustrated with current examples. Weaker answers tended to be over-reliant on the sources.

- 1 (b) **Using the sources and your own knowledge, discuss the view that being an insider group is the most important factor affecting the success of a pressure group.**

The best answers explained the advantages insider status conferred on a pressure group while also acknowledging the limits before considering other factors that might have an important effect on the success. Weaker answers often ignored insider status altogether and just provided a generic 'what factors affect pressure group success' response without attempting to answer the question. Others focussed entirely on insider group status without considering what other factors might be important or just provided examples of outsider group 'success' without identifying the factors which contributed to such success.

- 2 **To what extent are the Labour and Conservative parties democratic organisations?**

There were many good answers to this question, but a significant minority of candidates wrote about the contribution of political parties to democracy rather than the internal arrangements of the Labour and Conservative parties. Such answers often scored 0. Others confused democracy within parties with prime ministerial style or just wrote about leadership elections. It is worth noting that in answer to broad questions, such as this one, where a number of points can be made, the depth expected on any one point is not as great as in some other questions, but some illustrative detail is still required.

- 3 **Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the electoral systems used in the UK to choose members of the Westminster and European parliaments.**

This question required a knowledge and understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the first-past-the-post system used to elect MPs and the advantages and disadvantages of the regional party list system to elect MEPs (STV in Northern Ireland). While most candidates had a good grasp of the former, and scored highly, a surprising number attempted to answer the question with no apparent knowledge of the latter and so were lucky to get half marks. Others devoted 80% of their answer to FPTP and 20% to regional lists and found it difficult to access the highest levels. Few candidates commented on the fixed date nature of EP elections or STV in Northern Ireland.

- 4 **Discuss the view that the Labour party won the 2001 and 2005 general elections because of its policies.**

Although by far the least popular of the optional questions, there were a number of good answers from candidates who clearly had studied the 2001 and 2005 elections and who were able to provide thoughtful reflections on why Labour won. The best candidates had a precise knowledge of party policy at both elections but were also able to assess the impact of a range of other factors. Weaker answers tended to be short and vague.

5 Discuss the view that the mass media is the most important factor influencing the way people vote.

On the surface, this was a very straightforward question, requiring candidates to discuss the role played by the mass media during elections and the importance of other factors which might also affect the way people vote. In practice, questions on the mass media seem to bring the worst out in many candidates who resort to description rather than analysis. The use of theories of media influence is one way this could be reduced. Some candidates used the question as an excuse to write 'all I know about voting behaviour' essays which lacked focus, even if they contained relevant knowledge.

F852 Contemporary Government of the UK

General Comments

Examiners were still surprised at candidates' reluctance to make intelligent, or even much, use of sources provided to help with Q1. Even a brief glance at them shows how useful they can be to both parts of the question and there were quite a few candidates who got high marks basing their answers to the first question largely on the sources and expanding on them utilising their own knowledge. The other surprising feature was still the lack of basic knowledge on the compulsory topics/guaranteed questions, particularly on something as basic as the powers of the Prime Minister. However there were plenty of plus points, a much better awareness of contemporary politics being one and a willingness to 'discuss' intelligently when asked, being another. There was a tendency at times to demonstrate knowledge when it had no relevance, MPs expenses being the classic case, and we got details of what many local MPs (or ex-MPs) had been up to in often tremendous detail, but sadly it had little or no relevance to Commons Committees or Prime Ministerial power. Another factor which could damage candidates' chances was a failure to utilise the correct terminology, which could cause doubts about the candidates' overall grasp of politics. Using the word 'Minister' when 'MP' was meant, or 'government' instead of 'party', or 'Parliament' when 'the House of Commons' were intended, being some of the more frequent examples.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 (a) Using the sources and your own knowledge, describe the methods by which the House of Commons scrutinises the executive.

There were two ways to top marks. One was done by those who did not know any methods other than those mentioned in the sources, but went into plenty of detail about questions, debates and the role of committees making obvious use of their own knowledge. Others dealt with the methods mentioned in the sources more superficially, but brought in other methods which were not mentioned in the sources such as adjournment debates and the ombudsman. One failing which might well have lost marks later was to get involved in a great discussion about the merits and demerits of committees (and then to replicate it in Q1 (b)). There are only AO1 marks available for Q1 (a), and care should be taken to ration the amount of time spent on it. We don't expect more than a couple of shortish paragraphs yet we could often get a couple of sides. Some wasted a lot of time on the Lords as well, although the question clearly specified the House of Commons.

1 (b) Using the sources and your own knowledge, discuss the importance of parliamentary committees.

What was interesting was that those who brought in the Lords on Q1 (a) did not bring them into Q1 (b)! The few who did bring in the Lords' Committees of course got plenty of credit when they looked at the work of the Lords in the committee stages of bills as well as the specialist committees in the Lords. As always the reluctance to use the sources surprised us, particularly the heavy hints such as 'committees which deal with legislation' and the title and agenda of the PAC as well. However there were also some excellent answers, particularly from those candidates who had seen the committee session dealing with penitent (?) bankers. As always those who had some basic textbook knowledge, used the sources intelligently, and had seen committees at work via the Parliamentary Channel, did well. Most were fine with the 'discuss' element of the question; the problems arose with a lack of knowledge about

the actual work of committees. Several centres' candidates confused parliamentary committees with public enquiries and went on at great length about either Saville or Chilcott (or in one case, both). Sadly they gained no credit. For some reason several centres' candidates wrote at length about Cabinet Committees which showed some serious confusion. Actually spelling the word 'committee' correctly would help as well. There are AO3 marks allocated here and candidates at this level ought to be able to at least copy a word correctly from the question and sources.

2 Discuss the view that the appointment and dismissal of ministers is the Prime Minister's most important power.

On the whole this question was well done. Candidates either had a reasonable knowledge of Prime Ministerial powers, or they did not. Some let their essays get very descriptive with a long list of the way in which powers were utilised from Thatcher onwards (although there are still frequent references to MacMillan's 'Night of the Long Knives'). Some candidates could often wander off into long discussions about Ministerial responsibility, with the usual well remembered examples about Clapham Common/brown envelopes/dodgy expenses claims rather than focusing on the need to stay relevant. The better answers tended to spend some time weighing up the importance of this power, and then comparing it with other 'powers' such as those stemming from party leadership and other elements of the old royal prerogatives. There were some very interesting essays which considered the impact of coalition government on this 'power' as well. What surprised us a little was the lack of knowledge of Blair and Brown, while knowledge of Thatcher and Major could be very impressive.

3 Discuss the view that statute law is the most important source of the UK constitution.

By far the most popular of all the optional topics. There was usually good awareness of what the principal sources of the constitution were, but there could be a reluctance to discuss which was the most important and why. Some had an answer on the principles which underpin the UK's constitution and were very anxious to write it, but inevitably it had limited relevance. Most candidates were good at dealing with sources such as convention and common law, and had a good idea of the role of statute law and could give plenty of good examples of it. The one weakness tended to be the impact of membership of the EU which could digress off into attacks on the ECHR for damaging our constitution in some way. It was interesting to note that the amount of detail and understanding on this topic could often be more thorough than what we saw in the course of the answers to Q1 and Q2.

4 To what extent is the judiciary independent in the UK?

As is always the case this tended to be done by few centres, but usually it was well done. The better candidates really thought about 'extent' and considered the impact of the 2005 Act on judicial independence. Some thought the essay was about judicial review and went into great detail on the judicial/political row over the length of sentences given to Jamie Bulger's killers. Some (perhaps those doing Law AS Level?) spent a long time on the structure of the judiciary and too little on the ways in which the judiciary could be seen as independent, or otherwise. There are still some centres who regard the Griffiths critique of the judiciary as central to this issue and we got a lot of information about the social background of judges and the lack of women in the judiciary etc, but not a lot on judicial appointments and the relationship the judiciary has with the executive and the legislature.

5 Discuss whether enlargement has been the most important European Union development for the UK since 1997.

Very few candidates did it. They tended either to be outstanding; comparing enlargement with other key developments such as Lisbon, the EURO and the referenda on the constitution and coming up with some very balanced and well informed answers. The rest were clearly strongly influenced by UKIP's messages put out at election time and showed limited balance and even less accuracy.

F853 Contemporary US Government and Politics

General Comments

The paper was generally handled well and few candidates encountered problems with the rubric and time management. Some did spend rather too long on Q1 (a) and Q1 (b) but they were in the minority. It is pleasing to report that there was no significant “fourth answer” factor. All the questions were attempted in a relatively even fashion.

As has been stated on many occasions in previous reports and at INSET, those candidates who are able to refer to contemporary developments in the USA are rewarded. The recent health care reforms provided an excellent case study which could have been used to illustrate the powers of the presidency, the processes of Congress, the role of pressure groups and even the Constitution, federalism and the Supreme Court given challenges to the use of the inter state commerce clause by some states. Similarly, the Tea Party protest and election of Scott Brown are examples of recent developments which need to be incorporated into the delivery of the specification in order to facilitate good performances by the candidates. Indeed, where possible, future questions will attempt to have as contemporary a focus as possible, such as in Q2.

It is also worth reiterating that this is primarily a US government and politics paper. References to the UK may be made and these will be rewarded if used in context to illustrate a point of analysis or evaluation, however, such comment should be made concisely and not form a major part of the essay.

Comments on Individual Questions

Source for Question 1

One of the main functions of parties is to provide ideological choice. Many argue however there are no great differences between the two main parties in the USA and that they share the same ideology. Some argue that this is because elections are won and lost on the ability of candidates to appeal to independent floating voters. Parties have therefore moved together in order to win the “vital centre” vote. Others state both parties lack a coherent ideology altogether and are merely broad coalitions of different interests.

1 (a) Outline the functions of parties in the USA.

This question was generally handled well. Most candidates were able to identify a range of functions and credit was also given for those who could provide US examples to illustrate functions such as:

- participation;
- representation;
- aggregation of interests;
- mobilisation of voters;
- provision of ideological choice at election time;
- training and recruitment of politicians;
- educative and informative roles;
- governmental roles in the running of federal and state governments.

1 (b) Discuss the view that the ideologies of the Democratic and Republican parties have converged in recent times.

This question posed more problems. Ideology seems to be an area of the

specification that does not receive too much attention. Some candidates wanted to answer the question of more differences within than between parties. Students tended to focus on policy differences which, whilst relevant, were not at the heart of the question. Better candidates were able to discuss concepts such as conservatism, liberalism, Reaganism/Reaganomics, New Deal Democrats, Third Way politics, and compassionate conservatism. Better answers referred to the 2008 election and the Obama administration and developments such as health care reform and the Tea Party movement to support their arguments.

2 To what extent did the nominations of McCain and Obama strengthen the case for reforming the method of choosing presidential candidates?

This was a popular question although the answers were not always able to offer many of the well documented arguments for and against the nomination system. The best answers were able to make direct reference to 2008 by reference to the excitement created by the contests evident in the record levels of participation; the improvement upon the old system; the ability of McCain to triumph despite a lack of money over Romney; the less than critical role played by New Hampshire and Iowa; the ability of super delegates or otherwise to provide peer group review; the value of media scrutiny; the ability of outsiders to challenge for the nomination; the test of stamina and character and counter arguments such as Iowa and New Hampshire still having too much importance (Giuliani) and their unrepresentative nature; the impact of frontloading ("super duper" Tuesday) and the benefits this confers to those with money and national profile; the impact of the media (soft ride for Obama?); negative advertising and the impact upon party unity; the absence of peer group review and the triumph of telegenic qualities over political skills.

3 Evaluate the claim that pressure groups undermine democracy in the USA.

Inevitably, this was a popular question and equally predictably, a key discriminator was the ability of candidates to refer explicitly to the role of pressure groups in the USA. This has been mentioned on numerous previous reports, at INSET, and was stated in the question to give students a further prompt. Better answers attempted to go beyond the traditional arguments and consider the nature of US government and politics and consider the various models of pressure group activity in a democracy such as pluralism and elitism. There were some good examples of pressure group activity in the 2008 election and with the recent health care reforms and activities of the Tea Party movement.

4 Examine the reasons for the changes in the balance of power between federal and state governments since 1980.

This was probably one of the least popular questions although it is a standard on examination papers and will continue to be so. There was a wide range of answers and on occasion, candidates struggled to focus on the topic and wrote rather unfocused answers on the role of federal government in areas such as foreign policy. Whilst students could score quite well on the AO1 marks for knowledge, AO2 marks were less frequently rewarded. The separate roles played by presidents, Congress, the Supreme Court, the states and circumstance were not always identified. Better answers referred to recent developments such as Obama's education reforms and the impact of the recession.

5 Assess the importance of committees in the work of Congress.

This was a question which allowed candidates to accumulate AO1 marks relatively well if they were well versed with the range of congressional committees and their respective roles. The better answers evaluated the importance of the roles played by committees in the legislative process including: scrutiny of legislation through the hearings conducted at the committee stage; the standing committees' powers of pigeon holing and of amendment; role of timetabling played by the House Rules Committee; and the role of reconciling differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill played by conference committees. The impact of partisan politics and leadership in the Congress as evidenced by the health care reforms was a source of reward.

6 Discuss the view that the cabinet does not serve any significant presidential purpose.

This was another popular question. Candidates accessed the higher mark levels by referring to the EXOP and the roles played by the various departments within it. Some candidates were able to identify the roles played by the cabinet but needed specific examples from various presidencies to support their arguments. In this respect, references to the ethnic and gender representation of the Obama and Bush cabinets for instance could have been used to support the potential electoral role played by the cabinet.

7 Evaluate the factors which influence appointments to the Supreme Court.

The timing of this question was quite fortuitous with Kagan appearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the day of the paper. The best answers made reference to this and Obama's other appointment of Sotomayor. They were able to identify and discuss a range of factors such as; gender, race and religion, personal qualities, qualifications and experience. Details of both the successful and failed appointments such as Bork, Miers, Carswell and Haynesworth, Roberts and Alito and Thomas also provided much scope for discussion.

8 Assess the role of the Supreme Court in the defence of rights and liberties.

In most instances on Supreme Court questions, there is a generic warning against writing out a list of cases, however, on this question, such an approach would have yielded some success. A knowledge of the Bill of Rights and relevant cases would have gone a long way to providing a considered answer to this question. Better candidates were able to refer to the Roberts Court and recent rulings such as *Gonzales v Carhart* and *DC v Heller* and their significance. The inability or reluctance of the Court to defend certain rights was a discriminating AO2 factor. The role played by the president, Congress and pressure groups was also recognised.

F854 Political Ideas and Concepts

General Comments

This is only the second live paper set for this unit, and although many centres have prepared their candidates well for this exam, there are a number who need to think carefully about the demands of this unit. The best scripts were highly analytical, focused and very knowledgeable of a range of relevant political theory. However, weaker scripts lacked this knowledge and understanding of relevant theory, were often unfocused on the question set and very descriptive in their style. There were a number of answers that lacked any real political theory at all, very worrying in an A2 Political Ideas and Concepts unit. Below are a number of key issues that need to be considered:

- 1 Candidates need to have been prepared for all syllabus areas - there were a number of scripts which lacked any real understanding required to cope with the compulsory question.
- 2 Answers must be focused on the question set - when there are only 30 minutes available to write each answer, candidates who fail to focus will inevitably suffer badly. It is important that they read carefully the question and not launch into pre-prepared answers on what may appear to be a similar area.
- 3 Candidates should illustrate their knowledge of relevant political ideas with reference to political thinkers - this is essential if candidates are to access the higher mark bands for AO1.
- 4 Candidates should develop a range of arguments or points of comparison when answering the questions - too many answers were highly descriptive, thus achieving low marks for AO2. A useful guide when answering questions is to think about criteria for comparison and relative importance style questions.
- 5 Candidates need to avoid lengthy or frequent reference to practical examples - this is the basis for F856 and not F854.
- 6 Candidates should make sure when preparing to take this unit that they make use of the relevant textbooks available. At the very least candidates should have access to the OCR recommended text (Political Ideas and Concepts), but should also make use of the Heywood series (Political Theory, Politics, and Political Ideologies) and other useful texts.

Comments on Individual Questions

Source for Question 1

Political authority is often seen as a specific branch of power. Politicians talk about acquiring authority from a variety of different sources, most notably via the consent of the electorate. Yet the extent of authority a politician enjoys varies enormously, dependent upon a variety of factors including their personality and the circumstances in which they find themselves. According to the German writer Max Weber (1864-1920) there are three main types of authority: traditional, legal-rational and charismatic.

1 (a) Explain what is meant by the term 'authority'.

A significant number of answers displayed a lack of any real knowledge of authority and as such only paraphrased information in the accompanying source. The best answers were able to give a clear definition of the concept, outline its links to power and highlight differing types (de jure and de facto), as well as illustrate their answers with relevant political thinkers.

1 (b) Compare and contrast Weber's three forms of authority.

The focus for this question was AO2, but unfortunately many answers only described Weber's 3 types of authority. The best answers utilised a criteria for comparing the three types, highlighting points of similarity and difference in areas such as how authority is bestowed, the degree of permanence, and the extent of legitimacy.

Candidates need also to think about the time split when answering this two part question. Too many candidates wrote longer answers for part (a), than for part (b). Candidates are advised to spend only approximately 10-12 minutes answering part (a), and 18-20 minutes for part (b).

2 Assess the arguments in favour of democracy.

This question was very popular, but also displayed a great diversity in the range of responses. The weakest answers failed to focus upon the question set and candidates attempted to write all they knew on democracy – especially the four main models of democracy. Better answers tended to at least think about what arguments could be used in support of democracy, but many answers only described the arguments, not attempting to assess their merits. Some good answers did actually look at arguments for democracy and then highlight a list of arguments against democracy; however these would have achieved even better marks if they had integrated the counter arguments where relevant, with the arguments in favour. A frustrating number of answers focused almost exclusively on the arguments against democracy, once again failing to read the question set. Also too many candidates failed to relate the arguments to the views of political thinkers, thus failing to achieve higher marks for AO1. Linked to this was the usual misunderstanding of the ideas of thinkers such as Locke and Burke – both were frequently used as advocates of democracy, when in reality both supported a very limited franchise.

3 Discuss which characteristic best defines the concept of the nation state.

This question resulted in a series of answers that failed to focus upon the characteristics of the nation state, instead highlighting models on the role of the nation state or the different ideological perspectives on the state. Once again candidates must carefully read the question set. Where answers did focus upon the characteristics (sovereignty, territorial jurisdiction, coercive power, legitimacy and public institutions etc.) many only described them and failed to differentiate between their relative importance (or did so in a concluding sentence at the end). The best answers did consider relative importance throughout their essays and most highlighted sovereignty as the key factor, albeit possibly of declining importance in the modern globalised world.

4 Compare and contrast negative with positive liberty.

This proved to be a popular question and one in which most answers displayed a reasonable level of understanding. Some, however, did confuse the meaning of each, but at the very least most were able to differentiate between the two with regards to the attitude towards state intervention. Many answers highlighted ideological differences between classical liberals, such as Locke, who advocated a very limited state designed to protect negative aspects of liberty, and modern liberals and socialists, such as Green and Tawney, who saw intervention of the state as a means to maximise liberty for all (positive) especially by the removal of economic obstacles to the fulfilment of liberty. The very best answers developed themes such as self mastery in distinguishing between the types of liberty, utilising effectively the theories of Mill and Constant's distinction between liberty of the ancients and moderns.

5 To what extent do natural duty and social contract theories of obligation differ?

This question was often well done with many answers displaying a clear understanding of the concept of obligation. Where there were problems was with the balance between the extent of discussion on social contract and natural duty theories. The former often was discussed at great length and the latter was often dealt with in a single paragraph, thus some answers were more concerned with the differences within social contract theory than with the focus of the question. Once again, the very best answers utilised a criteria for assessing the extent of difference, considering the basis for obligation, the extent of its commitment and prospects for withdrawal of obligation.

6 Discuss whether nationalism is more than just self-determination.

Whilst this was a popular question, as many candidates were wanting to answer a question in this topic area, many unfortunately had little idea of the meaning of self-determination, thus ignoring it or trying to work out a meaning based upon their understanding of the words. There was, on a better note, some good understanding of different forms of nationalism (right wing, racial, liberal, cultural and post-colonial) and the best answers did seek to highlight the important characteristics associated with each form. Where understanding of self-determination was shown, this was rightly linked to liberal and post-colonial forms of nationalism.

7 Discuss the extent of similarity between democratic and revolutionary forms of socialism.

Once again, this was a popular question with many answers able to outline the central tenets of each strand of socialism. Many highlighted similarities regarding attitudes to human nature, equality, class and capitalism, albeit with differences in extent, and also highlighted the fundamental difference in the way to achieve a socialist outcome (force versus parliamentary reform). The best answers also highlighted differences within each broad strand of socialism (eg Marxist-Leninism versus Maoism, and democratic socialism versus social democracy). Some answers, however, failed to fully address the question by instead attempted to write history based essays on Marxist inspired revolutions and also the history of the Labour Party. A significant number also could only identify aspects of Marx's theories when illustrating their knowledge with the views of specific socialist thinkers.

8 Discuss the view that religious fundamentalism can be seen as merely a reaction to the expansion of modern liberal values.

This was the least popular question on the examination paper, unsurprisingly as the alternate ideologies section is a new area on the syllabus. Unfortunately, the great majority of those that answered it lacked any real understanding of the theory behind religious fundamentalism, and wrote what was more akin to a general studies style answer to the question. Most could only highlight links between religious fundamentalism and terrorism, with hardly any essay going beyond Islamic forms of religious fundamentalism. There were often references to 9/11 and 7/7 with some bringing in themes such as the wearing of the face veil, abortion and freedom of speech. Hardly any specific theorists were mentioned, nor was any reference made to central themes in fundamentalism (anti-modernism, religious versus secular law, importance of literal translation of religious texts and militancy). Overall, this was the least well answered question on the paper.

F855 US Government and Politics

General Comments

The paper as a whole did not seem to present any particular problems to candidates. Similar numbers of candidates attempted each of the questions and there were few problems with time management. As a consequence, there was a pleasing standard overall.

For teachers in centres, there are several points from this year's sitting that they may wish to consider when delivering the specification. Candidates need to develop their essay technique. This should incorporate an ability to both focus on the question set and to provide discussion from more than one country. It is worth reiterating here that the general expectation is that most candidates will mostly focus on the UK and the USA and, where appropriate, include other examples. The ease with which candidates will do this will vary from topic to topic. Discussion of electoral systems for example probably invites more international comparisons than say an essay on pressure groups.

In this regard, knowledge of the EU's institutions and recent developments therein do provide a rich seam of material which can be used to good effect. Perhaps as a consequence of the new specification, this is an area which is less to the fore than in the past. Centres might then consider giving the EU greater prominence in their teaching. Some centres deliver an EU module when their students return after AS exams.

It would also be worthwhile if students could appreciate the need to take a more holistic view when writing. Essays sometimes seemed to be too centred on one particular country. Rather than consider the role of judiciaries, the role of the Supreme Court would be assessed. Again, greater attention to essay technique would help remedy this particularly trait.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 Discuss the view that elections are never won by campaigns alone.

This was a popular question. It was anticipated that the question would invite a discussion of voting behaviour and the relative importance of the campaign, and other short term factors, due to the consequences of dealignment in both the UK and the USA. Most essays however did not adopt such an approach and generally tried to argue in a more generalised fashion about the relative importance of the campaign. The increased importance of the campaign though due to the increase in volatility and number of floating voters was something which should have been centre stage. The best answers were able to make reference to the both the UK 2010 and US 2008 elections and significant developments within them such as "Cleggmania" and "Bigotgate". Candidates made useful points of contrast between the role of the campaign in the US and the UK given their differing lengths and contrasting roles of money and advertising in each. The best also questioned the impact of campaigns by reference to other factors such as past performance, race, region and religion etc. Discussion of the media could have been linked to the campaign but frequently was not. It would have been useful for candidates to attempt to assess the actual impact of the media during a campaign by reference to the filter/reinforcement effects.

2 To what extent are parties less ideological today?

Although this was a popular question, there was a fundamental problem in that candidates were very reluctant to focus on ideology. There was scant, if any, reference to relevant theories such as “dominant” ideology and “End of History” arguments nor to events such as the abolition of clause IV/New Labour, fall of Soviet style communism, the removal of Thatcher, the Republican Revolution and Contract with America, The Third Way, compassionate conservatism, neo-conservatism and liberalism. The rise of pragmatism, candidate centred politics and the role of spin doctors and the pursuit of the floating voter would all have provided fertile grounds for relevant discussion. Candidates did offer discussion of policy differences and whilst some credit could be given, a sharper focus on the key words in the question would have paid dividends.

3 Examine the claim that the first past the post electoral system cannot be justified in a modern democracy.

Candidates were generally able to offer some of the arguments for and against the first past the post electoral system. There was limited discussion of alternative systems such as majoritarian systems (eg the second ballot used in France), hybrid systems (eg AMS used in Germany, Scotland and Wales) and proportional systems (eg the party list used in Israel, and STV used in Northern Ireland and Holland). Better candidates considered the functions of elections and contrasted the participatory and representative functions with the governmental function. They provided examples from across the EU and used the Con Lib coalition in context. Reference to the pending referendum in the UK really needed detailed consideration of the reform proposals rather than an assumption it was a vote for a PR system.

4 Evaluate the role of a bill of rights in the protection of rights and liberties.

There were some good answers to this question. Candidates were able to refer to the US Bill of Rights and acknowledge the ECHR as a “quasi bill of rights” and thus provide examples of the protection of rights and liberties in recent times. The role of the judiciary was generally recognised as playing a vital role in this regard and the two could have been treated collectively as one or as separate entities. References to “paper” rights from around the world were frequently provided to illustrate the potential impotence of a BoR and the need for further support for rights from other quarters such as the executive, legislature, pressure groups and media. This was often placed in the context of post 9/11 developments and totalitarian regimes.

Inevitably, there was some confusion over the role and nature of the ECHR and of the role played by the EU and ECJ.

5 ‘The success of a constitution is dependent upon its ability to evolve.’ Discuss.

On many occasions candidates seemed to want to write an essay they had prepared earlier on the advantages of an written/unwritten constitution. Rather like the essay on ideology, answers needed to focus on the question set. In this instance, those who were able to establish criteria which might provide the basis for success were able to write effective answers. Reference to the EU here would have been particularly worthwhile but most were unable to comment in this regard. Whilst the UK’s flexibility was generally recognised, the benefits and need for entrenchment were not often established. It was surprising to note that detail of the amendment process in the USA was frequently

incorrect and the impact of recent reforms in the UK and developments since 9/11 were not to the fore.

6 Discuss the differences in power exercised by second chambers.

This was a popular question and many were able to provide an informed discussion of the relative powers of second chambers. It was acceptable for candidates to regard the House of Representatives as the second chamber for the US although most discussed the Senate and the House of Lords. Better candidates brought in other examples such as the Bundesrat in Germany. Discussion of the EU's institutions and processes in this regard was quite confused although citing the European parliament as a second chamber was regarded as legitimate. Few were able to discuss recent and future reforms to the House of Lords in a relevant manner and, surprisingly, knowledge of the actual powers, functions, processes and work of the chamber was sketchy.

7 Analyse the factors influencing chief executives when making appointments.

Whilst this question did elicit some discussion of Supreme Court appointments, knowledge of cabinet appointments in the UK was less evident. Better answers were able to make reference to the coalition government in the UK. Reference to judicial appointments in the UK was omitted from many answers although it would have provided a useful point of comparison.

8 Compare and contrast the role of judiciaries in different political systems.

Rather like the above, questions seemed to be skewed in favour of the US and knowledge of the role of the UK Judiciary, the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice received less attention. Central concepts such as judicial review and judicial activism, married to recent rulings and events provided the basis for better answers. The presence or absence of a written constitution was a critical part of this discussion. Assessment of the impact of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 was weak on occasion. There seemed to be an assumption that the creation of the Supreme Court in the UK automatically meant their powers had increased. Similarly, the impact of the ECHR and administrative law as a basis for increased judicial activism in the UK needed greater clarification in some essays. Better answers were able to make reference to the Roberts Court, the recent Obama appointments and developments post 9/11.

F856 Political Ideas and Concepts in Practice

General Comments

Despite this unit being available in January 2010, no candidates were entered. As such this is the first opportunity to see candidate answers for this unit. The range of quality was large. The weakest answers displayed a limited appreciation of the demands of the paper. Answers were very limited in their understanding of relevant political theory, often lacking a focus on the question set, and very generalised in their application of ideas to modern politics. At the other end the best answers were balanced in the amount of theory and practical application, often using the theory to structure their arguments and testing these out through specific examples drawn from modern politics.

Below are a range of issues future candidates should be aware of:

- 1 Answers should be focused on the question set and not try and adapt it to fit a pre-prepared essay.
- 2 With an hour to write each essay there should be time available to plan answers in advance. This will help candidates make sure they have the appropriate balance between political theory and practical application.
- 3 The political theory should be used to structure the argument covered in the essay; don't forget to illustrate theory ideas with reference to specific political thinkers as is required in F854.
- 4 The practical application should take the form of specific examples drawn from modern politics and be used to evaluate the theory arguments covered. Most examples should come from the study of British Politics and also the EU (as per AS specification), however reward will be given for the relevant use of examples from other countries (US etc), although this is not essential to achieving top marks.
- 5 Essay structure should be appropriate to academic essays; introductions should define key terms, outline main structure of argument to be covered and even potentially suggest a development of argument the candidate wishes to make; main part of the essay should consist of a series of paragraphs each highlighting a particular argument – developing theory and practical application; conclusions should directly address the question and highlight strongest arguments covered.
- 6 Candidates should attempt to utilise relevant textbooks available for the study of political theory (see board recommendations) and in preparation for the examination attempt to apply the theory to their AS study of British Politics and other political knowledge. This will require assistance from staff in leading discussions on relevant evidence to use.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 To what extent is the theory and practice of direct democracy relevant to modern politics?

The question gives a steer in using the key phrase in theory and in practice (candidates should mentally apply this phrase to all questions). However many answers failed to get beyond the theory of democracy. Weaker answers tended to be a very superficial explanation of direct democracy, mainly in its Athenian sense, and an equally superficial discussion of how modern democracy operates. In these answers there was very little attempt to outline how the principles behind direct democracy (political equality, selection via sortition, majoritarianism and continuous political input by the citizenship) could still be seen as relevant, nor methods by which this is possible, beyond superficial references to referendums. Better answers did at least show understanding of direct democracy and did

try and outline how aspects were still used. There was surprisingly limited understanding of the use and role of referendums in the UK (often only vague reference to the devolution referendums) and even less in other states (with the exception of Switzerland), especially as this appears directly on the AS syllabus. There was even less specific evidence of the use of initiatives, citizens' juries, 'e'-democracy and town hall democracy. Some candidates even argued that voting in general elections, devolution and pressure group activity were examples of direct democracy in practice (some appear to have confused direct with participatory democracy – some overlap but not the same). The very best answers were able to use effective examples of each as well as use theory to highlight questions of scalability and desirability.

2 Discuss which model of the role of the state best describes the UK.

Whilst this question was popular, there were a surprising number of candidates who confused models on the role of the state with characteristics of the nation state and ideological perspectives on the state. The key models should have been night-watchman, developmental, welfare (social democratic), collectivist and totalitarian. Those that argued for feminist, pluralist or liberal democratic roles were rewarded when they discussed the specific role of the state; however those that talked of sovereignty, social contract models, etc, could only be given minimal reward. Of those that understood the models, the theory tended to be stronger than the practice with many candidates only being able to make generalised observations. Some better answers did try and link models to recent political activity such as Cameron's views on the Big Society and Osborne's cutting back on welfare in his emergency 2010 Budget.

3 Discuss how far there is a legitimisation crisis in modern democracy.

This phrase directly appears in the specification and relevant text books use the term, but a surprising number of candidates were not aware of the central arguments surrounding this question. Probably only a minority of answers made reference to Habermass and also New Right attempts to address the problems of government overload, despite there being much potential for practical application through the recent credit crunch and Sovereign debt crises (Greece, Spain etc.). Reward was given also for those candidates that did highlight issues relating to low turnout, unpopular government activities and aspects of democratic deficit. Some better answers did use Beetham's criteria of legitimacy to shape the development of their arguments. However, weaker answers tended to only list ways in which politicians have become unpopular with the electorate.

4 Discuss the extent to which the UK can still be regarded as a fundamentally free society.

This question tended to see a heavy imbalance between theory and practice, with the latter often being in the form of a list of recent accusations over government intrusion on civil liberties (post 9/11 anti-terrorism measures, CCTV cameras and ID cards). Whilst much of this was relevant, the best answers tried to integrate this into a coherent argument as to the meaning of a fundamentally free society. Here use of Berlin's negative and positive liberty, allied to ideological perspectives including classical liberal, modern liberal, socialist, elitist and Marxist perspectives were used to assess the meaning of freedom. When done well this secured some very high mark answers. Some weaker answers tried to adapt the question to a pre-prepared one on how liberal democratic is the UK – once again partially relevant but not completely.

5. Discuss the extent to which principles behind civil disobedience can be used to justify modern direct action campaigns.

This proved not to be a popular question, despite strong links to the AS syllabus. Those that did answer it ranged from a random list of pressure group actions to a carefully thought out attempt to establish a set of principles such as those advocated by Thoreau, Luther King and Ghandi and then assess their use in modern direct action campaigns. Still a significant number of candidates appear to confuse civil disobedience with terrorism, making reference to IRA violence and Al Qaeda. Some candidates also once again misread the question and instead focused on the arguments against civil disobedience, writing F854-style, heavily theory based answers.

6 Assess the legacy of Thatcherism on modern British politics.

This was a very popular question and on the whole, most answers displayed a reasonably good level of understanding of what Thatcherism advocates (especially in its neo-liberal economic form, less on neo-conservatives aspects). Some answers spent too long on what Thatcherism is and not enough on trying to examine its legacy to modern politics. Of those that did this, many restricted themselves just to its legacy on the Conservative Party, whereas the better answers looked at its legacy across all mainstream parties and also how it has shaped British politics as a whole (the best ones talked of a social market consensus). There was plenty of scope for practical application, although some answers narrowly focused almost exclusively on the 2010 party manifestos as proof for the extent of its legacy.

7 Assess whether democratic socialism still has a role to play in British politics.

This also proved to be a popular question and most answers had some understanding of the principles behind democratic socialism. Weaker answers tended only to make superficial references to New Labour and dismiss any continuing role, whereas better answers did distinguish between democratic socialism and social democracy, arguing the latter has been much more prominent in modern left wing politics. There were some good answers that attempted to consider the prospect for democratic socialism outside of the Labour Party through Respect and the Green Party, as well as consider the likely prospects of a move back to democratic socialism post new Labour.

8 Discuss the view that environmentalism is becoming increasingly important in shaping the modern political agenda.

This was the least popular question on the paper. Those that did attempt it had little understanding of the theory behind environmentalism, instead only listing incidents where Green issues have found their way onto the political agenda (Caroline Lucas' victory in Brighton 2010, Plane Stupid, and attempts to cut CO2 emissions). Better answers did try and look at how the issue has shaped party attitudes (eg vote blue go green), but still tended to be imbalanced due to the lack of theory (eg impact of light green environmentalism versus the limited impact of dark green ecologism).

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