

General Certificate of Education
January 2005
Advanced Level Examination



GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
Unit 5 The Politics of the USA

GOV5

Thursday 27 January 2005 Afternoon Session

In addition to this paper you will require:
an 8-page answer book.

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions

- Use blue or black ink or ball-point pen. Pencil should only be used for drawing.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book. The *Examining Body* for this paper is AQA. The *Paper Reference* is GOV5.
- Answer **Question 1** and **one** other question.

Information

- The maximum mark for this paper is 80.
- Mark allocations are shown in brackets.
- You will be assessed on your ability to use an appropriate form and style of writing, to organise relevant information clearly and coherently, and to use specialist vocabulary, where appropriate. The degree of legibility of your handwriting and the level of accuracy of your spelling, punctuation and grammar will also be taken into account.

Advice

- You are advised to read through the examination paper before you attempt the questions.
- You are advised to spend the same amount of time on each question.

Answer **Question 1** and **one** other question.

Each question carries 40 marks.

1

Total for this question: 40 marks

Study the extract below and answer parts (a), (b) and (c) which follow.

American Parties

Political parties are essential to any liberal democratic political system, as it is only through political parties that electoral choices become meaningful. Yet, since the time of the Founding Fathers, Americans have never felt comfortable with strong parties and, because of this, American parties have acquired several peculiar characteristics.

Unlike in other liberal democracies, American parties are weak organisations which do not control nominations for office. This is done through the device of the primary election where party candidates at all levels are chosen by the voters themselves rather than by the party organisation. Before 1968, the majority of delegates to the national nominating conventions were selected by party activists in local caucuses. After 1968, the power of nomination was increasingly transferred to the hands of the ordinary voters in the primaries. This democratic extension of the electoral process, whereby American citizens effectively decide the major party candidates, is virtually unique in western democracies. It follows that in the United States voters are more powerful and party organisations are less powerful compared with other countries.

Similarly, after the campaign finance reforms of the 1970s, candidates could raise money from individual donors, Political Action Committees or the federal government itself, but rarely from the parties. In short, the parties had been effectively removed from the presidential nomination process.

Many American voters today lack a strong sense of *party identification*. At the same time, the old party machines that used to 'deliver the vote' have all but disappeared. Increasing levels of affluence and education have led to voters becoming more sophisticated in their political views, and more motivated by single issues than by party ties.

In sum, the parties can appear increasingly irrelevant to American politics generally and instead the candidates themselves, pressure groups and members of the media are seen as the new key actors on the political stage. As a result, American parties may seem to some to be disintegrating into bland and empty labels, useful only for structuring the vote at election time.

Source: adapted from T. HAMES and N. RAE, *Governing America* (Manchester University Press) 1996

- (a) Using the extract, explain the term *party identification*. (8 marks)
- (b) Using the extract and your own knowledge, explain the increasing significance of primary elections in the selection of presidential candidates. (12 marks)
- (c) Discuss the view that American political parties are simply "bland and empty labels", weakly organised and increasingly irrelevant. (20 marks)

Answer either **Question 2** or **Question 3** or **Question 4**.

- 2 Critically assess the methods by which pressure groups seek to achieve their objectives in the American political system. *(40 marks)*

- 3 “America has the best democracy money can buy.”
To what extent, and why, is money the dominant influence on the electoral process in the USA?
(40 marks)

- 4 “Democratic overload is the main cause of the very low electoral turnout in the USA.”
Discuss. *(40 marks)*

END OF QUESTIONS