

General Certificate of Education
June 2007
Advanced Level Examination



GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
Unit 8 Government and Politics – Synoptic Module

GOV8

Tuesday 26 June 2007 9.00 am to 11.00 am

For this paper you must have:

- a 12-page answer book.

Time allowed: 2 hours

Instructions

- Use blue or black ink or ball-point pen.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book. The *Examining Body* for this paper is AQA. The *Paper Reference* is GOV8.
- Answer **both** questions in **either** Section A **or** Section B **or** Section C **or** Section D.
- Do all rough work in the answer book. Cross through any work you do not want to be marked.

Information

- The maximum mark for this paper is 80.
- The marks for questions are shown in brackets.
- You will be marked on your ability to use good English, to organise information clearly and to use specialist vocabulary where appropriate.

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.

SECTION A: POWER

If you choose this Section, answer Question A1 **and** Question A2.

When answering the questions that follow, you may wish to refer to the extract below but you do not have to do so. However, your answers must present material drawn from the range of your studies in Government and Politics.

A1 ‘The true power of governments is demonstrated in their ability to shape policy in the face of opposition.’ Discuss. (40 marks)

A2 ‘Political power is closely linked to socio-economic power.’ Discuss. (40 marks)

Inequality and Politics

During Mrs Thatcher’s tenure in Downing Street, average income rose by 36% but the income of the bottom 10% fell by 14%, while that of the top 10% rose by 64%. It is clear that these inequalities in wealth and income are related to gender and race. So, for example, even today the average earnings of women are consistently well below those of men.

At the same time, although there is a considerable debate about the concept of an underclass, there is a significant section of the population that is caught in a poverty trap. The British Government’s own figures show that 14% of the population is totally dependent on welfare. Children from such backgrounds do much worse at school, are one and a half times more likely to have a long-standing illness and twice as likely to have a disability. Welfare dependent people are much more likely to be black and to be women who are lone parents. Of course, there is social mobility, but while there is evidence to suggest that it is greater now than previously, it is still limited. In particular, upward social mobility is more common than downward social mobility. Origins still shape, but don’t determine, destinations.

Structured inequality is also reflected in education. English fee-paying schools, such as Eton, are a clear bastion of privilege, as are Oxford and Cambridge universities. In less extreme form, the education system generally reflects similar patterns of privilege. Working-class children are less likely to stay on at school or to attend university. As far as race is concerned, black students are only a third as likely to obtain GCSEs and A levels, or to go to university, as other groups. Some researchers argue that boys are much more likely to study maths and science, a choice that benefits them in the labour market.

Regarding access to positions of political power, the under-representation of the working class, women and ethnic minorities in the political elite hardly needs demonstrating. The dominant political elites in Britain are overwhelmingly white, male and middle class, if not by birth, then by education.

SECTION B: PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

If you choose this Section, answer Question B1 **and** Question B2.

When answering the questions that follow, you may wish to refer to the extract below but you do not have to do so. However, your answers must present material drawn from the range of your studies in Government and Politics.

B1 ‘Representative government is the only viable form of democracy for the modern state.’
Discuss. (40 marks)

B2 ‘Traditional political institutions are failing to offer many citizens the participation they desire.’
Discuss. (40 marks)

Young People’s Engagement with Politics

The general message that youth in Britain today are politically disengaged is one that seems to hold particular sway within academic and policy circles. Consequently, there is concern amongst politicians and officials that this age group has a disaffection from politics that is deeply entrenched; that in the medium to long term, the more civic-oriented older generations will be replaced by this younger sceptical generation; and that the legitimacy of the political system is itself therefore under threat.

There are four possible approaches to the study of specifically young people’s engagement with politics in Britain identified in the literature. The first is associated with ‘lifestyle’ explanations and suggests that young people are chronically politically apathetic as a consequence of their individual lifestyles. These lifestyles and contextual circumstances include increased mobility, lack of long-term attachments to neighbourhoods and, ultimately, an absence of patterns of electoral registration and voting. Another argument is that the nature of British politics is changing, with political parties adopting increasingly centralised and market-led campaigning methods. Typically, these methods involve focusing their attentions on key groups whose votes are likely to yield maximum electoral dividends – these groups often do not involve young people. In this process, young people’s views tend to become marginalised.

An alternative account asserts that young people have a distinct political agenda outside the scope of the main parties in Britain. This leads them to reject political parties and prioritise single-issue campaigns and new social movements. Young people are politically engaged, but avoid formal politics and voting, in favour of a new type of politics.

Finally, a ‘generational’ explanation suggests that the world in which today’s young people find themselves is not conducive to the development of their active engagement with, and participation in, the British political system. The transition to adulthood is comparatively more lengthy, complex and risky and there are fewer mechanisms available to transmit knowledge about the world of politics to youth than there were in the past.

SECTION C: POLITICAL CULTURE

If you choose this Section, answer Question C1 **and** Question C2.

When answering the questions that follow, you may wish to refer to the extract below but you do not have to do so. However, your answers must present material drawn from the range of your studies in Government and Politics.

C1 ‘It is political culture that gives each nation its unique political identity.’ Discuss. (40 marks)

C2 ‘Political cultures are in a state of continual change.’ Discuss. (40 marks)

Politics, Culture and National Identity

While flirting during the 1990s with ‘Britishness’ as a substitute for new political ideas, Prime Minister John Major became fond of proclaiming that his nation could trace its monarchy back over 1,000 years, while its Parliament dates back over 700 years. His central vision of contemporary Britain was inspired by people watching the sunset over the village cricket ground, before retiring to the pub for warm beer and amicable conversation between teams and locals.

These images have parallels in many older academic studies, including the pioneering opinion poll work carried out by Almond and Verba at the turn of the 1960s. This saw Britain as a model of stable democracy, a ‘civic culture’, which derived its strength from social values rather than a clearly codified constitution. Crucial to Britain’s strength was a high level of consensus, and a tendency of individuals to belong to overlapping social groups. Another allegedly key feature was a balance between a willingness to participate and deference towards authority.

Yet although Almond and Verba noted the importance of history, they produced a remarkably ahistorical picture. At best it was a picture of southern England in the 1950s. In fact, many changes had taken place by the time John Major spoke. From the 1960s Britain became much less homogeneous in a variety of ways. One way concerned the steady, albeit erratic, growth of Welsh and Scottish nationalism, where relative economic decline had reinforced anti-English feeling. Moreover, since the 1960s Britain had become a more multicultural society. New non-white groups had continued to arrive, while a relatively higher birth rate had further expanded the size of this community. The National Front and the British National Party showed signs of having significant support in tense urban areas. Mounting unemployment had also contributed to a growth in social inequality. The idea of consensus was challenged by Mrs Thatcher, who launched a powerful attack on the old Butskellite, post-war political consensus. Notable ideological divisions emerged, particularly over the welfare state and the EU. As most schools and most families have become less authoritarian, so too has the traditional characteristic of deference declined.

Source: adapted from R EATWELL, ‘Britain’, *European Political Cultures: Conflict or Convergence?*, Routledge, 1997

SECTION D: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

If you choose this Section, answer Question D1 **and** Question D2.

When answering the questions that follow, you may wish to refer to the extract below but you do not have to do so. However, your answers must present material drawn from the range of your studies in Government and Politics.

D1 ‘Continuity, rather than change, is the dominant feature of politics.’ Discuss. (40 marks)

D2 ‘Change in one part of a political system will inevitably have repercussions throughout the rest of it.’ Discuss. (40 marks)

The Unravelling of the Constitution

During 18 years of Conservative Government, the British state underwent a programme of almost continuous transformation. Where some commentators would have expected a period of consolidation under Labour after 1997, instead the Government pursued a programme of reform, which will again fundamentally redraw the contours of the state.

Labour’s policies on the constitution and the state fully revealed the dilemmas of New Labour. On the one hand, it was extremely radical and was new in the sense that it owed very little either to old Labour or to Thatcherism. On the other, it was bound by tradition and pragmatism. Labour grappled with many features of the constitution – devolution, electoral reform and the House of Lords, but without recognising the ways in which the core executive and the Westminster model were fundamentally linked to the reform process. Thus, many features of the constitution were changed without any real consideration being given to its foundations. This proved a fundamental problem because the changes that Labour were introducing had profound implications for the Westminster model, which the Government failed properly to consider. It is difficult to have devolution, a Human Rights Act, and an independent Bank of England and maintain notions of sovereignty. The fragmentation of the policy process and proportional voting threaten executive sovereignty and further reveal the tenuous nature of ministerial responsibility. The greater use of referendums will lead to questions concerning the centrality of Parliament. This reveals the contradictions of the reform programme. Finally, while notions of ministerial and collective responsibility are continually used to conceal how decisions are really made, the system will remain difficult to democratise. So, under Labour, the framework of the Westminster model remains, whilst key elements of the model are undermined. This leads to the suggestion that, despite the flexible nature of the British constitution, under Labour it will be stretched almost to breaking point and the Westminster model could be left openly exposed as a sham.

Source: adapted from D RICHARDS & M J SMITH, ‘New Labour, the Constitution and Reforming the State’, in S LUDLUM & M J SMITH (eds), *New Labour in Government*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001

END OF QUESTIONS

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