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Principal Examiner Feedback
Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE Advanced Subsidiary
Level In Politics (8PL0-01)
Paper 1 UK Politics

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Introduction

The 2024 AS 8PL01 paper showed once again a continuing improvement in performance by students, and Centres can take reassurance that their teaching is both developmental and progressive.

What stood out this year was a real improvement on essay performance on questions 4a and 4b where candidates were much more effective at providing a balanced response and ensuring good coverage of all the assessment objectives. In many ways this complemented the progress which continued on the two source questions (2 and 3) from the previous series.

Overall, there was very effective use of political terms and precise vocabulary and alongside this a good coverage of contemporary political events which added value and scope across all the questions.

All examination series provide us with time and opportunity to reflect and consider the ways by which our teaching and our student's learning can be improved. Here we progress through each question in order to give a summary view of that performance.

Question 1(a)

This was the less popular of the two options, but students had a fair grasp of what the term 'right wing' entailed. It was common to see both economic and social aspects of the term manifesting themselves: the desire for a free market and capitalist system alongside a cautious approach to human nature. Many used the UK Conservative Party as a clear example to demonstrate right wing ideas. However, it was not uncommon to see a more global approach to the term right wing with other variances correctly identified. In the main it was depth and detail which made the transition from a level 2 to a level 3 response.

The term right wing describes an ~~political~~ ideology in the political spectrum ~~the~~, which is represented by political parties as well as personal opinions. Fundamentally a right wing view stands for slow and evolutionary change and not progressive and often changing ideas. Another feature of right wing a right wing standpoint is that it accepts the social inequality of the people and that it is of the opinion that everyone has the same chances and opportunities in life. It focuses ^{protecting} ~~rather~~ on the individual rights of citizens ~~than~~ rather than seeing society as a single body. From an economic perspective right wing accepts the free market supports the idea of a free market and uses capitalism as their economic system. Furthermore they favour low taxation in order to assure the freedom and liberty of the people.

Examiner Comment:

This is a short but precise response – full of correct detail and focused well on the question. It reaches a high level 2 reward. More detail with the use of illustrative examples may have earned the top level.

Right wing can refer to both social & economic ideologies. Socially right wing ideology^{osia} may be considered to carry views on immigration, family structure, crime & policing & even education. It is perceived that right wing ideology is strict on illegal and legal migration, favouring less number of migrants and intense border control & ~~immigration~~ immigration processing policy. ~~They also~~ For example, the Rwanda policy is considered right wing, with plans of deportation & processing of immigrants elsewhere. for Rwandan integration. ~~Right~~ Right wing social values ~~may~~ also favour a "traditional" nuclear family, with little acceptance of single parent & homosexual relationships. ~~This is~~ "Right wing" has a strict view on crime. Many of those who ~~hold~~ hold a right wing ideology believe in harsh sentencing, increase in law enforcement & stripping ~~certain~~ rights of prisoners. An example would be, the UK rejecting the EU's calls for UK prisoners to be able to vote. This is due to the 'right wing' belief that prisoners infringe on society & therefore

have no right to participation. Economic right wing ideals praise "small government", "free markets" and austerity policy. These are common alignments with neo-liberalism. An example of right-wing economic policy in the UK is Thatcher's ~~privatisation~~ privatisation ~~during her ten~~ of UK industry during her tenure. This was done with the belief in increased competition ~~and how her~~ Those. An important distinction is that 'Economically ~~Socially~~ right wing' does not necessarily have to be carried alongside 'socially right wing' policy or ideas. Cameron's government ~~has~~ introduced many social policies that are not considered 'right wing' like same sex marriage, but still favoured economically right wing policy of free-markets.

Examiner Comment:

Here we have a more detailed response and one which is manifestly level 3 – the precise use of political ideas accompanied by illustrative examples which demonstrate a great depth of knowledge and understanding.

Question 1(b)

This question was the more popular of the two questions. Students seem to be more disposed to pressure groups out of all the topics on this paper.

Unfortunately, as with pressure groups popularity is not a guarantee of complete success. The key element on Section A questions is that they are entirely comprised of AO1 – we cannot credit analysis or evaluation instead we are guided by the quality and depth of the knowledge and understanding presented. This works often to reward precision as opposed to volume. One common fault line on this question was that students wished to make wider comments than the questions had scope for. This was often a long discussion about how pressure groups are classified for instance as insider or outsider groups – and while this has some resonance the core remit was for an exposition of their methods not their classification.

There are various methods used by pressure groups, and depending on the pressure group they can either be aggressive or peaceful. Farmers union for example took peaceful steps to get the government to acknowledge their issues and they are a good example of a successful pressure group. A pressure group such as Just Stop Oil on the other hand employs methods that could be considered as aggressive & dangerous. Just a few examples of their methods include standing on the road to block cars ~~to~~ and stop them getting to their destination, running onto a Rugby pitch in the middle of a game, and defiling an old and very expensive painting. Some of these incidents have nothing to do with their cause however are for shock value and are successful in helping Just Stop Oil reach more people and gain traction. However ~~because~~ their success in gaining attention has not led to a great deal of success in their actual cause.

Examiner Comment:

In favour of this response, we have a clear binary example of methods, with aggressive or peaceful methods used by pressure groups with exemplification. Enough to gain a level 2 reward but not the scope and depth for level 3

One method that is used by pressure groups is having a celebrity that represents or promotes the pressure group. An example of this is when Marcus Rashford made it free for children who's ~~were suffering~~ family were suffering from ~~for~~ financial issues to have free school meals. This was beneficial for the pressure group as Marcus Rashford is a footballer and children would be familiar with him or even look up to him so they could ~~also~~ ^{increase} the popularity of ~~their~~ ~~their~~ ~~their~~ their pressure group.

Another method is having a social media platform. An example of this is when pressure groups like BLM ~~or Black Lives Matter~~ had social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook, ~~so~~ this was used to ~~to~~ gain more popularity and also share ~~information~~ recent information about the cause. This was very beneficial as it ~~updated~~ ^{updates} supporters of the pressure group about more recent information but also younger people who ~~would~~ use social media

platforms would get more involved and familiar with the topic.

Another method is public attention and protests.

~~This~~ A good example of this is the 'Just Stop Oil' pressure group. ~~to~~ They got public attention by protesting on roads ~~and places in~~ and in public places. This got them more attention from the public but also the media as they were broadcasted on various news platforms. This helped get their message through and even more supporters.

Examiner Comment:

Here we have illustration of three methods and illustrative examples to support them – celebrity endorsement, social media and the use of demonstrations. Enough detail here to gain a level 3 reward.

Question 2

This section now moves to the compulsory section of the paper – where the student must respond to the source. Here we have detail about the advantages of allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote. The task on question 2 is to amplify the knowledge and understanding in the points given – that means to enhance and develop them. Putting these in context – so showing a wider understanding of the impact of this age group voting, for example in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Then to stand back and analyse why giving this age sector the vote could be a good thing, a fair thing and a practical move. The source extract is not a complete picture but as microcosm of the wider debate. In the time allocation we are not requiring students to discuss any further advantages or even the disadvantages of this suggested move.

In recent years there has been a great push for 16-18 year olds to get the right to vote. To argue for wider suffrage it must be mentioned that previously there has been a private members bill sponsored by Julie... however, the bill ran out of time in Parliament. Although, this does not mean that if the bill were to be reintroduced again that perhaps there will be a greater amount of support.

Widening the vote can allow for greater participation, as seen in the Scottish Independence referendum having an 81% turnout, and turnout for those aged 16 and 17 being 75% and 97% speaks for the overwhelming enthusiasm

for the younger generation to gain more political influence. The current gen Z ~~gener~~ this vote would be going to is already becoming increasingly involved in current politics than ever seen before. However, at this rate it is just voices crowding together, but expanding the vote to 16-18 year olds can allow for these passionate voices to go towards a cause which allows them to be heard. As we are currently under a Conservative

government they will not extend the vote to younger generation as they tend to vote Labour. As seen in 2017 when Labour had a 47% more turnout of 18-24 year olds than the conservatives did. However, with party ideologies changing so may the sway of the younger generation. If 16 year olds have the ability to pay tax then it seems only fair they are deemed the right to have a say in the economic state of our society. Therefore 16-17 year olds should have the vote expanded to them.

Examiner Comment:

The main concern with this response is that it deviates too much from the source. It may be accurate political detail, but it cannot be rewarded. The task is clearly to adhere to the remit of the source as deviation cannot gain credit. It just about makes level 2.

The low turnout levels may be dealt with lowering the age bound of voting age, additionally it would be effective due to the fact that 16-18 y.o. tend to be more involved in voting than 18-24 y.o. Also allowing students to vote at 16-17 will increase the number of secure voters that will continue to vote in the future.

Giving people aged 16 and 17 a right to vote will increase ~~po~~ election turnout. In Scotland this way to increase a rate of turnout was used in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, which showed that turnout for people aged 16-17 is higher than for people aged 18-24 (which tends to be the lowest involved in elections age group). The reason for this might be due to the fact that 16-17 y.o. students tend not to have any important exams compared to 18 y.o. students. Another reason for a higher turnout of younger group is that people aged 18-24 tend to face a period of "adult responsibilities" for the first time, they are bothered and overwhelmed with issues about how to establish their lives and due to the cost of living crisis and absence of

secure income and life in general they might be the most vulnerable to depression group, which as a result lowers the rate of turnout of this group while 16-17 y.o people still don't have any real responsibilities and live with their parents.

If the 16-17 y.o. would be allowed to vote this would secure a higher probability of them participating in the elections in the future. The young people who turned out on the 2014 Scottish independence referendum were asked if they would vote in the future elections and 97% of them said "yes" while the turnout was 75%, which shows that allowing younger people to vote will secure a significant number of future voters. This might be because younger people may perceive participation as something exciting like a first valuable responsibility which has real outcomes. They also feel heard as lots of policies that affect them too are introduced without any interest about their views and opinions. This might be highly useful in educational reforms to get a valuable insight from people who are affected by educational policies, as then political participation will be associated with being heard and represented, which increases future turnout.

To conclude the arguments for allowing 16-17 y.o. reasonable and have real-life proof of effectiveness, which gives allows to make a prediction that this would increase turnout in future

Examiner Comment:

By contrast this response is detailed and accurate. It keeps well within the terms of reference set out by the source and builds both AO1 and AO2 points on this framework. It constantly uses the source as a 'touchstone' to validate the comments and discussions.

Question 3

We now move to question 3, the second compulsory source-based question. The focus on the source remains paramount but here the reward is through a different combination of assessment objectives. No credit is given for AO1 – the reward is for an analysis of the source (AO2) and then reaching a verdict or judgement (AO3) on the competing points raised. In addition, the rubric of the question also requires the candidate to identify anything that the two sources share an agreed view upon (which is essential to cover for level 3) as well as the often more profound disagreements.

The two sources who have distinct views on the current performance and importance of the Labour and Conservative parties. Poor responses tended to merely replicate the AO1 content of the source and scored low marks for this. Here the student is called upon to make a choice and deliver a verdict on which side of the debate they stand. So, this is done by diligent analysis which is laying the ground for a reasoned verdict or judgement.

The first and only similarity between the two sources is that the Conservatives and the Labour Party have a problem with producing new policies for important issues and ideas in society. This means that the two main parties are well established in the UK's political system and have been forming repetitive policies because of this. This can be seen in policies considering the ^{economy} ~~law and~~ order for the Conservatives, which is in most manifestos about lowering the taxes and improving the economy. For the Labour Party it is policies considering the welfare state such as ~~building 100,000 new homes for the~~ reducing

Examiner Comment:

This is a very limited response and carries all the hallmarks of level 1 in that it has limited comparative analysis and superficial evaluation.

Source 2 suggests that both parties can "no longer produce new policies for the important issues in society" whereas source 3 states "they produce policies in the interest of the public". As we can see both sources have differing views. Source 2 highlights how both parties struggle to create policies that are relevant to the current problems in society which shows how they both lack efficiency. However, source 3 highlights how both parties formulate policies that benefit the public. However, source 2 is clearer in its view as the source goes on to say "they are out of touch with real life" further reinforcing how both parties are in significant decline.

Source 2 states "they formulate policies because they have the resources and staff to do so". Similarly, source 3 also agrees and states that "we need them to formulate new policies". Both sources here suggest that neither party is in decline as they are creating new policies that can be

implemented to bring about change. Source 2 highlights how both parties have the means to formulate new policies, whereas source 3 highlights how it is a necessity for both parties to create new policies.

Lastly, source 2 suggests that a "significant number of voters have supported the liberal democrats and other parties, who have much to say about ~~the~~ issues such as the EU and climate change" whereas source 3 suggests "forming a government would be impossible without the Labour Party and the conservative Party". Source 2 highlights how both parties are in decline but there are upcoming parties which have the potential to be more successful than these two mainstream parties. However, source 3 highlights that both parties are not in decline as without them we wouldn't be able to formulate a government.

Examiner Comment

This Level 2 answer does engage more with the source and makes valid AO2 and AO3 points.

Both Source 1 and Source 3 differ on the topic of party policy in relation to the decline. Source 2 suggests that the reason the Labour & Conservative party is in decline is because their policy is not popular & not "reflective of its citizens". They argue that they do not know what people want on issues like foreign relations and climate change, which are known by other smaller parties like the Liberal Democrats. Source 3 on the other hand, makes the claim that the Conservative & Labour party choose policy that is popular. This is done through public consultations. It could be argued that the ~~reason they do this~~ reason they only carry out popular policy is to win the favor of the public. Source 3 provides a more logical statement about party policy because if Labour & Conservative policy was unpopular & out of touch they would not continuously win elections.

A similarity both sources highlight is the ~~size~~ benefits both parties have due to their size. Source 2 touches on the number resources & staff both parties have, which smaller parties don't have, and how this enables them to formulate & carry out policy. It hints that the reason they are able to politically function is because of their large number in resources. Source 3 brings up the advantages both parties have as a result of their size & numbers which is organisational ability. It explains that this is what allows them to be able to contest. Both sources however then conflict on the significance of this with source 2 ~~believing~~^{viewing} it in a negative light & source 3 claiming it is necessary. Source 2 does provide a more convincing argument in this regard as Labour & Conservative party enjoy ^{larger} resources that other smaller parties do not which gives them an advantage & a higher chance to win elections.

Examiner Comment:

This is a top-level response. It identifies similarity and shows logical reason to reach a valid judgment on the sources competing points.

Question 4 (a)

Unlike past series there was not a vast differences in choice for either essay titles – just at the margin 4a was slightly more popular. Hopefully indicative that both essays were seen as accessible and interesting. Here on 4a we asked for a comparison of at least two media types in reflection to class, age and region in having an influence on how people vote. In one respect this gave quite a wide canvas to exploit, which most students did. Many referred to recent elections and the impact of the above factors. What led to effective discrimination between the ability of students was the use of illustrative examples and putting in context the relevance influence of the above factors. It mattered not if a student opted for the media carrying more influence or class, age or region – as long as both sides were addressed, and avenues of logical reasoning were explored. A minority of students did not develop media types as well as was required for higher levels. Equally many placed too great an emphasis on the printed media (the press) often with dated illustrations with only a minority picking up on how newspaper readership has fallen in recent years.

In an age of social media in which the majority of news is shared through the use of technology, electoral outcomes have shown to be much more effected by this then the archais stereotypes of voting rooted in class, age and /or region, though this is fully dependent on the type of media regarding politics that is consumed by the media.

Supposedly once the most common form of media, newspapers are a lot less recognised and read today at least in their original, contemporary forms. This form of media has never really had an impact on voting behaviour but this can be put solely down to the fact that the majority of them such as The Times, The Daily Mail and the Guardian are all owned by one man and therefore all have the same political standpoint commonly resonating with that of the Conservatives. This can have an impact however as those readers with a similar political perspective can read these pieces of media and become fully reassured or stoic with their views. Also if a young or simply impressionable reader with no other political knowledge was to read these newspapers then this could also have an impact on what they end up voting for come election day. This form of media also has an impact as shown when the Sun changed sides after the outcome of an election. This had a lasting political effect as it changed its

standing on the political spectrum. However, newspapers as a form of media can also be representative of social factors that effect an electorate outcome. This is because readers of newspapers are more stereotypically older people who would be stuck in their tradition not only from reading the paper but also as a political standpoint.

Another form of media that is seemingly alot more common is that of the news on the television. An issue with this however is that the majority of mainstream news especially on the BBC has to remain neutral and cannot demonstrate a political sway. We can therefore argue that this does not have an impact on electoral outcome as compared to social factors. Other coverage of politics on the news can however be unfiltered and relies on the portrayal of political parties or their leader on national television. Politicians are welcomed to join debates or have interviews with certain people. The significance of this can be shown when Margaret Thatcher turned down an interview near the end of her time as Prime Minister despite being very keen on debate before that point. The coverage of politics on the news whilst constructed to simply inform rather than sway does not really have an impact on the electoral outcome.

A final form of media that does have a very large impact on the electoral outcome is that of social media. Especially in the younger generations, this is a platform that exhibits unfiltered opinions and views of political figures, parties and

ideologies alike. Even hopeful politicians have taken to social media to gain the attention and votes of those on it. This can be shown clearly through Boris Johnson's Campaign for Prime Minister. Videos of himself include one depicting him destroying a Brick Wall with the slogan 'Get Brexit Done!' as well as many other videos and remarks which led him to being voted successfully into power as Prime Minister in 2019 along with the Conservative Party. This election in specific is also very significant in showing the decline in class, age and region having an impact on electoral outcome. This can be shown through the breaking of the red wall and therefore a large level of partisan dealignment. In an area across the country made up largely of the middle class and so would usually be assumed to vote Labour, Conservative was voted for instead. However whether this was due to Boris Johnson's 'Incredible' Social Media Campaigns or simply the media's depiction of Jeremy Corbyn is up for debate.

~~Whilst social factors such as class, age and region can still have a large impact on electorate outcomes~~

That is not to say that the social factors of class, age and region do not still have some impact on electorate outcome especially as many are still stuck in their ways it is becoming a lot more sparse in today's society. It has become more common for political decisions to be made upon public current affairs (covered and educated by the media) or a general opinion regarding a

political Party or more commonly the leader of said Party. Age also does have some impact on the intake of certain media but is not more important than. This is quite evident as most university constituencies are red even in a sea of blue, Exeter is an example of this. These university students would have been educated through social media whilst also adhering to the stereotype that younger people are more likely to vote Labour. It also shows ~~an impact on~~ an overlying ~~impr~~ impact of social media. In regards to region as even though people within regions can uphold certain opinions that influence the party in which they vote for they can be educated and swayed by media as it is accessible for all in some shape or form.

In conclusion, I largely agree with the statement that different forms of media have more influence on electoral outcomes than class, age or region because I believe that although there still may be a small level of social impact on electoral outcomes the media has become unescapable and a way of securing a vote. I think that social media ~~spth~~ and the portrayal of political figures through the media will become much more common. It seems that in this modern day period votes are based more off of current affairs and personal opinions about the leader rather than the party and what it stands for in itself.

Examiner Comment:

This is a level 3 response. It has a focus on the question and has relevant examples, but it is dominated by the media. It is less articulate on class, age and region when compared to the media. It fails to make a strong and well-articulated case for the factors of class age and region. These are noted but there is some imbalance in overview.

The media is the main, if not only, way that people gain political information, meaning they cast their votes based on what opinion they form due to what they saw on the media. As a result, the media can have an impact on voting behaviour and therefore the outcome of election. Although it could be argued the media can have a profound impact on electoral outcomes for this reason, the stronger argument is that social factors have a greater influence on how people choose to cast their vote in an election.

Advocates of the view would argue that newspapers have a profound influence on electoral outcomes. They would point to the fact that in 1992, the Sun harshly ridiculed Neil Kinnock for being an unsuitable leader, and when John Major won the election, ~~he~~^{he boasted} "It's the Sun wot won it". In 1997, the Sun positioned itself firmly behind Tony Blair, arguing "It's the Sun wot doing it". This demonstrates the fact that newspapers can ^{potentially} lead to people changing their views and opinions about a party. As a result, newspapers have

had ~~an~~ ^{an} impact on electoral success
as they ^{could} have the power to swing voters from
the left to the right.

However, this argument is outdated, and is
predicated upon the assumption that newspapers
are still popular. The fact is that the Sun has
been in decline since the 1990s, with the Evening
Standard having a yearly readership rate of -30,
and the Daily Mirror -17%. Instead, given that
just 51% vote in line with the party their
preferred newspaper supports, it could be argued
that newspapers ^{today} serve as ~~a~~ just an echo
chamber, reinforcing preexisting views. As such,
whilst newspapers used to have a profound
impact, this is no longer the case.

The stronger argument is therefore that class
has a more significant impact. Currently, 40%
of voters ~~will~~ cast their vote based on social
class. In 1997, Blair was able to increase his
support base beyond his core vote as he
realised that ~~by~~ by winning the vote of just
those who vote traditionally Labour, he would not
win the election. This led to him adopting
the Third-way, with New Labour accepting a

variety of more right wing policies, and not abandoning Thatcherite policies, even removing clause IV. Thatcher died a similar stance in 1979, increasing her support to working class voters too. This demonstrates the point that social class is a significant factor in electoral outcomes, as leaders more continuously identified its large effect and thus going on to win the elections with large majorities - Blair died a 179 seat majority in 1997, demonstrating the country's wide support of Labour. Thus, it is the stronger argument that class is more significant than media in elections.

Advocates of the new media also argue that social media has significant influence over electoral outcomes. This would be argued considering that in 2017, the Conservatives spent £100,000 a month on Facebook advertising, significantly higher than Labour's total spend of £16,000. This is arguably what contributed to the Conservative success. Thus, it can be argued that social media broadens the public's support of a party, as it makes them more aware of their policies. When the electorate are more educated about one party's policies and manifesto, and thus trust the party more, leading to them voting for them in elections.

However, this view is myopic and is predicted upon the assumption that all social groups use social media. It is clear that younger voters ~~do not~~ ^{do use} social media as a source of information. In 2017, Labour successfully used social media to gain the support of 60% of 18-24 year olds. ~~to~~ Yet, the older generation are less likely to use social media, thus its impact is extremely limited.

The stronger argument is hence that age is a more important factor in determining electoral outcomes. ~~that~~ Turnout among older voters is generally higher, whereas it is lower for younger voters. In 2017, turnout for 18-24 year olds was 54%, compared to 71% for those aged 65+. The fact is that older voters are likely to be more traditional, and also are retired therefore paying less tax. Thus, older voters are more likely to vote for the Conservatives, whereas younger voters are more open-minded, and also favour more left-wing policies such as abolishing tuition fees, thus preferring more left-wing parties such as Labour. This demonstrates the fact that age is more important than media in determining voting behaviour, as policies of certain parties are more likely to appeal to certain

age groups. Therefore, age is more significant than social media, which in fact just reinforces the view that age is a ~~significant~~^{big} factor in voting behaviour.

Advocates of the view would argue that broadcast TV is more significant than region in electoral success. They would point to the fact that the Liberal Democrat leader has been in a ~~more~~ ^{leading} candidate in 2010, ~~with a~~^{following his} appearance on TV. This may have contributed to rejecting the Conservatives majority. ~~That, it would~~ Additionally, in 2015, 62% ~~said that leadership debates had an impact on their vote, and 34% said~~ broadcast TV was "by far the most influential media force", and 38% said the leadership debates shaped their view. This demonstrates the fact that broadcast TV can lead to changes in people's attitudes. Thus, broadcast TV can be seen to have an impact on electoral outcomes as people form views based on how the leader presents themselves.

However, this view is short sighted and in elections with more salient issues, such as Brexit, broadcast TV has less of an impact. Boris Johnson was informed when he refused to join a debate, ^{in 2019} demonstrating that broadcast TV ~~may~~ is not as significant as it may

seem, instead simply delivering information to viewers.

The stronger argument is that region is a more significant factor. In 2019, the break of the Red wall, a traditionally Labour supporting area, contributed greatly to Conservative success, with some constituencies not voting for the Conservatives since 1979. These areas had traditionally voted Labour due to Thatcher's policies regarding coal mines, thus, Labour has always had a strong base of support in the north. This demonstrates that region has a significant impact on electoral outcomes ^{as} ~~and the~~ parties can rely on certain regions to support.

Overall, although media has some impact, the stronger argument is that social factors such as age, region and class are more important, as the media may simply provide ~~to~~ information on ~~or~~ ^{person's} views, whereas social factors form people's opinions on parties, as certain social groups' interests lie more in certain parties' policies. Thus, the media is more significant than social factors in electoral outcomes.

Examiner Comment:

Here we have a much more developed response easily attaining Level 5. There is a good coverage of media and the other social factors which impact on voting behaviour and thus electoral outcomes. There is excellent AO1 which covers a broad time range – but is still contemporary. There is skilled analysis AO2 where the student considers the implications of the media and its opposition in the question. To complement this there is very nuanced AO3 which shows how well thought through the debate is. The line of direction is constant, and the debate introduced in the opening remarks is concise and follows through to the conclusion.

Question 4(b)

When the exam was taken on the 15th May the recent general election of July 2024 had not been called – hence the examples were from earlier dates. However, that did not dampen or limit the clear linkage to what then was the most recent elections of 2017 and 2019. It was good to see how a clear focus was made by the vast number of students to the question – by drawing on then the more recent elections to either support or deny the claim made in the question. In some senses this question had two stages to cover. Firstly, the claim that FPTP has failed (or not) and then secondly to consider the use of another electoral system currently in use in the UK. If there was a weaker link it was making a convincing connection to the conjectured possibilities of using another system. Admittedly this is speculative, and we are asking the student to make a forecast of how and why other systems in use may or may not be better.

I mainly agree with the view that 'the time has come to replace first-past-the-post (FPTP) with a different electoral system'; because of its flaws as a voting system, and because there are many working alternative systems used for devolved bodies.

FPTP is a flawed system that is unrepresentative.

This is because it creates electoral deserts, swing seats and safe seats, and is ultimately not a proportional voting system. It produces perverse outcomes such as in the 1954 and 1973 elections where the parties with the most votes got fewer seats in Parliament. There are certain constituencies where only one party wins every time, so people don't bother voting there because there is no real competition, for example Stoke-on-Trent is almost always Conservative.

This creates wasted votes as votes in a safe seat constituency that has been Conservative or Labour for many years and hasn't changed, count towards nothing unless they are for that same winning party. It is also not proportional because it has a tendency to produce a 'winner's bonus', where the winning party of the general election is over-rewarded with

a massive majority in parliament, and smaller parties such as UKIP who in 2015 got around 12% of the popular vote but only one seat, are under-rewarded. This creates a problem for democracy as it leads to 'tyranny of the majority', where minority groups and viewpoints are excluded.

However, FPTP is good at keeping extremist parties out of power. UKIP could be described as a far-right party, and FPTP is good at filtering out parties like these. FPTP is also easy for people to understand and quick to produce a result, so is more practical. It also tends to produce strong governments who can pass legislation through parliament easily, and because of this people are reluctant to change to a more proportional system which could produce a weaker government who take longer to get things done because they are a minority government or a coalition. Therefore, FPTP definitely has some practical advantages.

There are many alternative voting systems used in devolved bodies that work just as well as FPTP. For example, AMS in Scotland uses the D'Hondt formula and has a regional

list of candidates, which gives greater voter choice and proportionality. Northern Ireland uses STV to stop the conflict and force governments to work together. SV is used in the London Assembly although turnout is very low. These systems are much more proportional and therefore do not produce the 'tyranny of the majority' effect, and give people more choice to vote for who they actually want in power, rather than who they think stands a chance of winning.

However, in 2011 the public voted against replacing FPTP with an Alternative Voting System, which shows that the public were happy with FPTP in 2011. It would be undemocratic to scrap FPTP when people have clearly voted against this. Although, this could have been because they used this ^(joint PM at the time) referendum to give a verdict on Nick Clegg. Also, the turnout for the alternative voting systems in the devolved bodies is quite low, and in Northern Ireland it is not really working as their government has had to be dissolved many times due to failure to cooperate.

In conclusion, I mostly agree with the view that it is time to replace FPTP. This is because

of its huge flaws including lack of voter choice and proportionality. It is not representative of all groups in society. But I also think that it would be undemocratic to suddenly introduce a new voting system, and so there would have to be another referendum similar to 2011 as it is up to the public to decide.

Examiner's Comment:

This is a level three response. We have a clear focus on the question at the outset and then we are given a balanced view of FPTP. However, there is a lack of energy and drive in providing a suitable or possible alternative system – and it was hinted that is where the student was heading at the start of the response. This gives a type of 'imbalance' in that it is clear and detailed on FPTP but less detailed about why (and what type) of replacement is needed now.

It can be argued that perhaps the First past the post (FPTP) system has become slightly outdated because of issues with proportionality, wasted votes, and voter apathy, as it is a plurality system where the winning candidate can win with under 50% of the popular vote, so long as they receive ~~to~~ one vote more than the candidate in second place. Other electoral systems such as single transferable vote (STV), Additional Members System (AMS) and Supplementary Vote (SV) can solve some of these issues, but also have their ~~own~~ own problems, which is why this essay will argue in favour of FPTP, against the above statement.

One way that FPTP fails as an electoral system is with how it lacks proportionality, thus fails to reflect and represent the public.

This is because, under FPTP, there is only one winning candidate, thus making it impossible to have 100% proportionality, as someone will always disagree, making it a weak system as this is not fulfilling the aim of representation in a representative

democracy. For example, in 2017, the Belfast East constituency candidate won the election with 24.5% of the popular vote, leaving the area unproportionally represented. This is not an issue, as under the STV system used in Northern Ireland, constituencies are multi-member, thus making it better for proportionality as there is a more even vote-to-seat share. For example in Northern Ireland, one constituency had 3 Democratic Unionist ~~the~~ Party MPs (DUP) and 2 Alliance MPs which is more accurate to represent the constituency because power is spread and the mandate are given to ~~the~~ people based closely on the popular vote. However, this is not the strongest argument as representation will never be fully accurate under any electoral system, in terms of descriptive nor substantive representation, because the UK is ~~so~~ so diverse that not 100% can be fully represented, and some may not even want to be represented, so this raises questions of whether it is worth sacrificing that close MP constituency link for potential solutions to the issues of proportionality and representation. Additionally STV leads

~~to weaker~~ to weaker coalition governments which lack the mandate to rule, so despite the fact that this system works for Northern Ireland, it is inaccurate to support the above statement in terms of using STV instead of FPTP in Westminster so FPTP is a stronger system to keep as Parliament needs a strong decisive unitary government at the expense of perfect proportionality.

Another way FPTP fails is the fact that votes are wasted under FPTP, particularly in constituencies that are safe seats. This is because in a safe seat, the majority of members are likely to vote for a specific candidate, which limits the choices of people who do not support the candidate and cannot vote for who they truly want because their vote will not count. This leads to questions about whether each vote holds equal value under FPTP. For example, as of 2017, the constituency of Maidenhead has always been a conservative safe seat constituency, where Theresa May won over 60% of the popular vote, and other candidates did not stand as much of a chance at winning. This is challenged by STV which ensure that the electorate gets a second preference vote and so can

have their second preference votes counted if their vote is wasted in the first preference round. ~~Des~~ For example, in 2016 Sadiq Khan won with over 50% in the London ~~Mayor~~ Mayor election, and only 7% of second preference votes were wasted. Despite saving votes and wasting less, this is not the strongest argument as actually votes have still been wasted under SV, so this radical change may not be worth it if ~~it~~ it also has the same problems as FPTP, regardless of how it may try to resolve it. In the same 2016 Mayoral election, 15% of first preference votes were wasted, and if you voted for both losing candidates, your vote does not count at all. This also leads to problems around whether second preference votes hold more value to first preference votes, as they have different values, so FPTP may be better. Additionally, in the recent 2024 Mayoral election, the voting system was changed from SV to FPTP as SV was seen as too confusing and led to many spoilt ballots, so it is fairer to assume FPTP is better to keep, going against the above statement, as it works better with the general public

Finally, another area where FPTP fails, is how it leads to tactical voting. This is because voter apathy. This is because of how it works as a plurality system and limits voter choice because voters may support a party, but may not like the candidate that is standing for their party in their constituency, so may not vote ~~at~~ at all. This is probably one of the greatest weaknesses of FPTP, and there really is no way to solve this unless the ~~the~~ MP-constituency link is sacrificed. For example, someone may not like Theresa May in the Maidenhead constituency, but won't vote for any other party because they support the conservatives. The best alternative to FPTP attempts to solve the problem of voter apathy because of how it keeps the FPTP element and adds the party list. It is the AMS system, and this almost attempts to compensate for areas where someone may not like a candidate but wants to support their party, because of the 'split-ticket' voting advantage, where you get 2 votes; one for a party ~~to~~ and one for the candidate under FPTP. ~~to~~ Party votes are then given to ~~the~~ Party list members, but it could be argued that there is less legitimacy and lack of

a mandate to party list members who have not been elected by the people ~~which~~ which would ultimately result in a democratic deficit. Also, the 2011 Alternative Vote referendum shows how people are not demanding for a change, so this does not guarantee a solution to voter apathy if the people do not want to get involved as the turnout was 42% and 57% voted against it.

In conclusion, it is better to keep the FPTP system as it is simple, keeps a close MP-constituency link, and ~~se~~ produces strong majority governments, however if change ~~was~~ were to ~~to~~ occur the best alternative would be the AMS system as it has all the benefits of the FPTP system, and has the party list to ~~benefit~~ compensate for all its flaws but overall, there is demand for change, so I disagree with the above statement to a moderate extent.

(Total for Question 4 = 30 marks)

Examiner's Comment:

Here again we have a level 5 response. It is packed with detail and insight. At all times the essay question is core to the reply. It does discuss AV but is aware that this system has now been abandoned for the London mayoral elections. It covers a range of criticisms of FPTP which are linked in both AO2 and AO3 to capitalize upon. It is perhaps more focused on FPTP criticism, but we have enough detail in the answer to reach a solid conclusion.

Paper Summary

The following key points form the core messages from this summer 2024 series:

- For question 1a – a really impressive handling of the concepts and principles of what the term right wing means – coupled with some good examples. On 1b we saw a number of students digress from the remit of the question and veered to classification as opposed to the methods used by pressure groups. Both 1a and 1b require focus on the main thrust of the question and provide clarity and depth in the knowledge and understanding – upon which examiners make a call based on precision and quality.
- For question 2 – The task here is to make the most of what is presented in the source and not to deviate and introduce new elements which take the response away from the demands of the question. The task should be to enhance and develop the AO1 and bring clear analysis to the response.
- For question 3 we have an altered AO format. Here a student can gain no credit if the source is merely replicated. The task is to create a base of analysis and evaluation. The student has to weigh up the claims and counterclaims in the source and reach a verdict. Plus, at the same time – in order to attain level 3 some point of agreement has to be extracted from the source material.
- For the essay questions this series witnessed a clear improvement in both style and content. It was clear that many had followed a structural path where in the introduction they set out their vision and aims and then went on to deliver that vision. It is important to have that long term sight going through the essay. For to change views and opinions in mid-stream may seem inconsistent and arbitrary.
- As always contemporary examples add value and show wider understanding.

