1.5 First Past the Post: Operation and Impact on UK General Elections: Test Pack

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 15 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Write full sentences for extended responses (questions worth 6 marks or more). Spend approximately 15 minutes on this pack.

1 Define First Past the Post in UK general elections, focusing on how individual constituencies are won.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 This question asks you to explain one institutional reform often proposed as a remedy for FPTP's disproportionality, and to state why this remedy is excluded from this pack's detailed coverage. The reform named should be one of: Additional Member System (AMS), Single Transferable Vote (STV) or Supplementary Vote (SV).

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 This question asks for an explanation of why First Past the Post tends to produce single-party majority governments, with reference to constituency-level mechanics.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 This question asks for two distinct consequences of FPTP on party behaviour or the party system in the UK, illustrated with recent election evidence from 2015 to 2019.

(Total for Question 4 is 5 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.5 First Past the Post: Operation and Impact on UK General Elections: Test Pack

Question 1

a concise definition identifying single member plurality, e.g. the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins the seat	**B1**

Answer: A voting system in which each constituency elects one MP and the candidate with the most votes, a simple plurality, wins the seat.

Question 2

identifies the chosen reform and gives a concise explanation of how it changes vote-to-seat conversion (e.g. AMS mixes constituency seats with compensatory list seats)	**B1**
explains how that change reduces disproportionality or increases representation of smaller parties	**B1**
states that this pack does not cover those systems in detail because they belong to the companion POL.UKP6 pack on alternative systems or the 2011 AV referendum	**B1**
gives a brief comment on one practical or political obstacle to adopting the reform in UK general elections	**B1**

Answer: Example: Additional Member System (AMS) combines single-member constituency seats with regional party list seats top-up to make overall representation more proportional; this reduces disproportionality by compensating parties that won fewer constituency seats than their vote share would suggest. This pack does not cover AMS in detail because alternative electoral systems and the 2011 AV referendum are treated in the companion POL.UKP6 pack. A political obstacle to adopting AMS would be the need for parliamentary consensus and public approval for a major constitutional change, as seen in past reform debates.

Question 3

identifies that single-member constituencies and winner takes all lead to many seats won by a single party even without an absolute majority of votes	**B1**
explains that geographically concentrated support translates into many seats, e.g. the party with most first places gains a plurality of seats	**B1**
explains that small leads in many constituencies can translate into large seat majorities nationally	**B1**
gives a brief example or consequence, e.g. 2015 Conservative majority with under 40% of the vote	**B1**

Answer: Because each constituency is winner takes all, a party that wins the most votes in many constituencies gains all those seats even if its national vote share is below 50%. Geographically concentrated first-place support turns into many seat wins, and narrow first place finishes across many seats can produce large parliamentary majorities, as when the Conservatives secured a substantial Commons majority in 2015 with around 37% of the national vote.

Question 4

one valid consequence identified, e.g. strategic/tactical voting, two-party concentration, regionalisation of representation, or marginalisation of smaller parties	**B1**
development of that consequence explaining the mechanism	**B1**
a second valid consequence identified distinct from the first	**B1**
development of the second consequence explaining the mechanism	**B1**
each consequence is linked to a contemporary example, e.g. UKIP 2015, SNP 2015, Conservative 2019 majority, tactical Remain/Leave voting in 2017/2019 marginals	**B1**

Answer: Possible answers include: 1) Tactical voting: voters back the main challenger to stop an undesired candidate in marginals, as seen in some remain-leaning marginals in 2017 where anti-Brexit tactical voting boosted Conservative or Labour challengers. 2) Marginalisation of smaller, nationally dispersed parties: UKIP won 12.6% in 2015 but 1 seat, while the SNP's regional concentration turned into 56 seats in 2015, showing how FPTP alters party fortunes and encourages parties to focus on concentrated support.

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