1.9 The Media, Opinion Polls and Their Influence on UK Elections

Total Marks

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be answered in note form unless a question asks for a developed sentence. For levels-marked questions, write a well-structured, developed response using accurate political knowledge, named examples, and precise terminology. Allow approximately 55 minutes for the whole paper.

1 State two features of social media campaigning used by UK political parties since 2010.

(a) Feature one of social media campaigning used by UK parties since 2010. **(1)**

(b) Feature two of social media campaigning used by UK parties since 2010. **(1)**

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Explain how a tabloid newspaper endorsement might influence voting behaviour in a UK general election.

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

3 Explain three methodological reasons often cited for why opinion polls underestimated the Conservatives in the 2015 UK general election.

(a) Reason one for polling error in 2015. **(2)**

(b) Reason two for polling error in 2015. **(2)**

(c) Reason three for polling error in 2015. **(2)**

(Total for Question 3 is 6 marks)

4 Using the source, analyse the strengths and limits of social media and polling methods for party strategy and their influence on voter behaviour.

(Total for Question 4 is 12 marks)

5 Evaluate the view that the media has a significant impact on voting behaviour in the UK.

(Total for Question 5 is 30 marks)

6 Explain two ways algorithmic targeting on social media can change the reach of political messages in UK campaigns.

(a) Way one algorithmic targeting changes reach of political messages. **(2)**

(b) Way two algorithmic targeting changes reach of political messages. **(1)**

(Total for Question 6 is 3 marks)

Mark scheme · 1.9 The Media, Opinion Polls and Their Influence on UK Elections

Question 1

(a) identifies one feature, e.g. targeted advertising using voter data — **B1**

(a) Answer: Targeted advertising using voter data and microtargeting.

(b) identifies a second feature, e.g. use of short viral videos or influencer amplification — **B1**

(b) Answer: Use of short viral videos, hashtags and influencer amplification to shape online conversation.

Question 2

identifies an influence channel, e.g. shaping readers political perceptions through editorial framing — **B1**

explains development, e.g. regular readers may take editorial stances as cues for voting choices — **B1**

applies a consequence, e.g. endorsements can reinforce existing partisan choices more than convert committed opponents — **B1**

Answer: Newspaper endorsements influence readers by framing issues and presenting a clear recommended choice; regular readers may treat the editorial stance as a cue and adjust weaker or undecided preferences accordingly, but endorsements are more likely to reinforce existing partisan loyalties than to convert strongly committed voters.

Question 3

(a) identifies a reason, e.g. non response bias where likely Conservative voters were less likely to take part — **B1**

(a) explains how this biased the final sample and undercounted Conservative support — **B1**

(a) Answer: Non response bias, where likely Conservative voters were less likely to take part in polls, produced a sample underrepresenting Conservative preferences and thus an undercount in published estimates.

(b) identifies a reason, e.g. weighting and turnout models that underestimated Conservative likelihood to vote — **B1**

(b) explains how incorrect turnout models skewed the predicted vote share — **B1**

(b) Answer: Incorrect turnout modelling and weighting assumptions meant pollsters underestimated the likelihood that Conservative supporters would actually turn out, skewing the projected vote share against the Conservatives.

(c) identifies a reason, e.g. sample frame problems such as undercoverage of older or rural voters — **B1**

(c) explains how undercoverage can miss demographic pockets of stronger Conservative support — **B1**

(c) Answer: Problems with the sample frame, including undercoverage of older, rural or less internet connected voters who leaned Conservative, meant polls missed pockets of support and underreported the party's true share.

Question 4

Level 0 No relevant material from the source or own knowledge. — **0**

Level 1 Some basic points drawn from the sources or simple description of social media and polling, with limited analysis and little direct use of the source to support claims. — **1-3**

Level 2 Clear use of the sources to identify strengths and limits of social media and polling, with some development and linkage to party strategy or voter behaviour, but analysis may be partial. — **4-6**

Level 3 Good use of both sources to analyse multiple strengths and limits for party strategy and voter behaviour, including consideration of how poll methodology and social media dynamics shape campaign choices. — **7-9**

Level 4 Detailed, well-developed analysis using the sources and wider knowledge to weigh the strengths and limits of social media and polling for shaping party strategy and voter behaviour, reaching a reasoned conclusion grounded in the evidence. — **10-12**

Indicative content:

- From Source A, strength of social media: high engagement among younger voters creates opportunities for mobilisation, rapid message dissemination and low cost campaigning targeted at youth demographics.
- From Source A, limit of social media: interactions within like minded clusters reduce persuasive reach and may create echo chambers, so social media is less effective at persuading older or undecided voters.
- From Source A, implication for party strategy: parties may use social media for mobilisation and fundraising among their base but still rely on broadcast and local press to reach persuadable older voters whose turnout is decisive.
- From Source B, limit of contemporary polling: reliance on weighting by past turnout can be misleading when turnout patterns change, producing biased forecasts and misinforming party resource allocation.
- From Source B, strength of improved polling: adopting dynamic turnout models and mixed mode sampling can enhance accuracy and help parties better target ground resources and messaging where persuadable or likely-to-turnout voters are located.
- Synthesis point: parties that overrely on social media metrics or flawed polling assumptions risk misallocating resources, for example focusing online persuasion while neglecting broadcast or door to door work in older demographics where votes will be decided.
- Wider knowledge: mention of real world examples where social media shaped narratives but broadcast coverage reached swing voters, and of poll failures such as 2015 that prompted methodological reform, supports the argument.
- Conclusion could weigh that social media is powerful for mobilisation and shaping agenda among certain groups, while improved poll methodology is essential to accurately target limited resources; both have strengths and limits so parties must use them alongside traditional campaigning.

Question 5

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Level 1 Basic knowledge of media influence with little analysis or evaluation. Answers may be descriptive, lacking developed argument or clear judgement. **1-6**

Level 2 Clear, accurate knowledge and some developed analysis of how different media types can influence voting behaviour. Evaluation is present but may be one sided or superficial. **7-12**

Level 3 Detailed knowledge and sustained analysis of multiple media influences, including social media, broadcast impartiality, and partisan press, with considered evaluation of empirical evidence and counterarguments. **13-18**

Level 4 Wide ranging and well supported analysis applying theory and evidence to weigh the significance of media influence, including discussion of limits, methodological issues in measuring impact, and clear, substantiated judgement. **19-24**

Level 5 Sophisticated evaluation that integrates strong factual knowledge, conceptual clarity and balanced critical reasoning. Demonstrates awareness of causation versus correlation, drawing on an array of evidence across elections and media types, and reaches a clear, well-justified conclusion on the extent of media impact. **25-30**

Indicative content:

- Arguments that media has significant impact: agenda setting and framing by major tabloids and broadcasters shape which issues voters view as salient, influencing vote choice where voters rely on media for cues; high circulation tabloids with clear endorsements can shift undecided or weakly attached voters; social media can rapidly amplify narratives and microtarget persuadable individuals.
- Evidence and examples: historical cases where tabloid campaigns coincided with voting shifts, the role of television in leader debates altering perceptions of leaders, and targeted social media adverts influencing turnout among specific groups.
- Theoretical mechanisms: priming, framing, agenda setting, media cueing for low information voters, and mobilisation effects via online networks.
- Arguments for limited impact: selective exposure and partisan reinforcement mean media often reinforces existing preferences rather than converting strong partisans; the role of social networks and interpersonal influences may mediate media effects; measurement problems make causal attribution difficult because correlation does not equal causation.
- Empirical limitations: polling and survey evidence can show associations between media consumption and vote intention but isolating direct causal effects is methodologically challenging; recall bias and self selection into media types complicate inference.
- Role of regulation and context: statutory impartiality for broadcasters constrains overt bias in traditional broadcast media, limiting its partisan influence relative to the unregulated press; the fragmented media environment since 2010 means effects are dispersed and conditional on audience demographics.
- Countervailing factors: party identification, local campaigning, tactical voting, and socio economic determinants remain powerful influences on voting behaviour and can reduce the marginal effect of media messages.
- Balanced conclusion: a reasoned judgement might state that the media has a significant conditional influence, especially in setting agendas, framing debates and mobilising certain groups, but its power to directly change voting decisions is often limited by partisan reinforcement, regulatory constraints and the continuing importance of non media factors.

Question 6

(a) identifies one effect, e.g. amplification of tailored content to users most likely to engage **B1**

(a) explains the mechanism, e.g. engagement metrics feed back into algorithms to increase visibility among similar users **B1**

(a) Answer: Algorithms amplify tailored content to users most likely to engage, because engagement metrics are used as signals to promote similar material to audiences with similar profiles.

(b) identifies a second effect, e.g. creation of filter bubbles that narrow exposure to alternative views **B1**

(b) Answer: Algorithms can create filter bubbles, reducing exposure to countervailing viewpoints and concentrating messages within sympathetic networks.