POL.USC10 US Political Parties, Pressure Groups and Campaign Finance

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: ______________________________ Date: ____ / ____ / ______

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be answered in note form unless a full sentence is requested. For levels-marked questions, write a well-structured, developed response using accurate political knowledge, named examples and precise terminology. Time guidance: 75 minutes for the whole pack.

1 Define a Political Action Committee (PAC) in the context of US campaign finance and party politics.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 Give two legally distinct types of Political Action Committees used in US elections, naming each type.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 State the principal legal distinction between a Super PAC and a traditional PAC in US campaign finance law.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

4 State the year and the United States Supreme Court case that loosened restrictions on independent political spending by corporations and unions.

(Total for Question 4 is 1 mark)

5 Explain the term 'dark money' as used in discussions of US campaign finance and give one consequence for transparency.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Explain two methods US interest groups use to influence public policy beyond direct donations, naming each method and its mechanism. Use examples where appropriate.

(a) Explain lobbying by professional lobbyists as a method of influence and its mechanism. **(2)**

(b) Explain grassroots mobilisation and media campaigning as a method of influence and its mechanism. **(2)**

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 State two major internal factions within the contemporary US Republican Party and give one policy stance for each faction named.

(a) State one faction within the Republican Party and a policy stance associated with it. **(2)**

(b) State a second faction within the Republican Party and a policy stance associated with it. **(2)**

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

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8 Explain how increasing party polarisation in the US Congress can affect the ability of interest groups to build coalitions, giving two effects and brief examples.

(Total for Question 8 is 6 marks)

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9 Using the two short source extracts below about campaign finance in the contemporary United States, evaluate how far they support the claim that big money undermines electoral fairness. Source A is an academic summary citing patterns of spending; Source B is an industry spokesperson defending independent expenditure. Source A: "Since 2010, independent groups and Super PACs have increasingly outspent party committees in many high-profile Senate and House contests, concentrating resources on a small number of races and on costly media markets, which tends to amplify the voices of wealthy donors." Source B: "Independent expenditure groups and corporate donors provide additional avenues for civic expressive activity; their spending supplements, rather than replaces, grassroots engagement and direct candidate fundraising and is protected political speech under Supreme Court precedent." Using these sources and your knowledge of US campaign finance, evaluate how far the sources support the claim that big money undermines electoral fairness.

(Total for Question 9 is 12 marks)

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10 Evaluate the extent to which money buys success in US elections.

(Total for Question 10 is 30 marks)

Mark scheme · POL.USC10 US Political Parties, Pressure Groups and Campaign Finance

Question 1

- **B1** a concise definition identifying a PAC as an organisation that pools campaign contributions to donate to candidates, parties or other committees
- **Answer: A PAC is an organisation that pools contributions from members or donors to make donations to political candidates, parties or other political committees, subject to legal contribution limits.**

Question 2

- **B1** names one valid type, e.g. 'connected PAC' or 'leadership PAC' cao
- **B1** names a second valid type, e.g. 'non-connected PAC' or 'super PAC' cao
- **Answer: Any two of: connected PAC; non-connected PAC; leadership PAC; Super PAC.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies that Super PACs may accept unlimited contributions
- **B1** identifies that Super PACs are prohibited from coordinating directly with candidates, unlike some PACs which can donate directly subject to limits
- **Answer: Super PACs can accept unlimited contributions and spend independently to advocate for or against candidates, but they are not allowed to coordinate directly with candidates or parties; traditional PACs accept limited contributions and may make direct contributions to candidates within legal limits.**

Question 4

- **B1** Citizens United v Federal Election Commission, 2010 cao
- **Answer: Citizens United v FEC, 2010.**

Question 5

- **B1** defines 'dark money' as political spending by groups that do not disclose their donors
- **B1** identifies a typical vehicle, e.g. certain nonprofit organisations such as 501(c)(4) social welfare groups
- **B1** states a consequence for transparency, e.g. voters and regulators cannot trace funding sources
- **B1** further development of consequence, e.g. it can hide corporate or foreign influence and weaken accountability
- **Answer: Dark money refers to political spending by organisations, often 501(c)(4) nonprofits, that are not required to disclose their donors; this reduces transparency because voters and regulators cannot trace who is funding adverts or campaigns, which can allow corporate, wealthy individual or foreign-linked influence to be hidden and weaken public accountability.**

Question 6

- (a) **B1** identifies lobbying by professional lobbyists who provide information, draft legislation and persuade legislators
- (a) **B1** explains the mechanism, e.g. supplying technical expertise, arranging meetings with policymakers and shaping bill wording to favour group interests
- **(a) Answer: Professional lobbyists influence policy by providing legislators and staff with expertise, research and draft text, arranging meetings and hearings, and persuading decision makers to adopt or amend legislation in ways favourable to the interest group.**
- (b) **B1** identifies grassroots mobilisation and media campaigning, e.g. organising voter contact, protests, or advert campaigns
- (b) **B1** explains the mechanism, e.g. shaping public opinion and pressuring elected officials by demonstrating electoral consequences or mobilisation capacity
- **(b) Answer: Grassroots mobilisation uses phone banks, door-knocking, petitions and protests to show elected officials there is popular support or opposition; media campaigning places adverts and op-eds to shape public opinion and pressure policymakers by signalling electoral consequences.**

Question 7

- (a) **B1** names one faction, e.g. fiscal conservatives/establishment conservatives/Trump-aligned populists/evangelical social conservatives
- (a) **B1** gives a correct policy stance associated with that faction, e.g. fiscal conservatives favour tax cuts and deregulation
- **(a) Answer: Example: fiscal conservatives, who favour lower taxes, deregulation and reduced public spending; or Trump-aligned populists, who favour restrictive immigration policy and trade scepticism.**
- (b) **B1** names a second faction distinct from the first
- (b) **B1** gives a correct policy stance associated with that faction
- **(b) Answer: Example: evangelical social conservatives, who prioritise socially conservative policies such as opposition to abortion and support for religious liberty measures.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies effect 1, e.g. ideological sorting makes bipartisan coalitions harder to form
- **B1** develops effect 1 with mechanism or example, e.g. members are less willing to cross party lines even for narrow issues
- **B1** identifies effect 2, e.g. interest groups may shift to targeting party base and primary electorates
- **B1** develops effect 2 with mechanism or example, e.g. groups support more polarised candidates via Super PAC spending and endorsements
- **B1** identifies a further consequence, e.g. increased use of procedural tools and gridlock reduces policy wins for groups that rely on compromise
- **B1** brief development of this consequence, e.g. filibusters or party-line votes can block negotiated outcomes
- **Answer: Polarisation means ideological sorting and party discipline make bipartisan coalitions harder to form, since members are less willing to cross party lines even on narrow policy issues, which reduces the pool of potential allies for interest groups. As a result, interest groups may shift tactics to target the party base and primary electorates, using endorsements and Super PAC spending to back more polarised candidates. A further consequence is increased procedural gridlock, for example widespread use of filibusters or strict party-line votes in the Senate, which reduces the likelihood of negotiated policy wins that interest groups often rely on.**

Question 9

- **Level 0** (0): No relevant evaluation or use of the sources.
- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic use of the sources with limited knowledge. Simple assertion about spending with little development or contextual knowledge.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Clear use of both sources with some contextual knowledge. Begins to weigh how the sources support or challenge the claim, but evaluation is limited or one-sided.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Effective use of the sources and wider knowledge to construct a balanced evaluation of the extent to which big money undermines electoral fairness, with developed analysis and specific examples.
- **Level 4** (10-12): Sophisticated, well-supported evaluation that integrates both sources critically with comprehensive contextual knowledge, addresses counterarguments and reaches a reasoned judgement on the extent to which big money undermines electoral fairness.
- **Indicative content:**
    - How Source A supports the claim: evidence that Super PACs and independent groups outspend party committees indicates resource concentration in few races and expensive media markets, advantaging wealthy donors and potentially drowning out ordinary voters.
    - How Source A supports the claim: targeted spending on specific constituencies can skew agenda-setting and the information environment, affecting voters decisions in ways that favour wealthy backers.
    - How Source B challenges the claim: frames independent expenditure as civic expression and a supplement to grassroots activity, arguing it expands avenues for political speech and is protected as free speech by the Supreme Court, which undercuts an argument for restricting such spending on fairness grounds.
    - How Source B challenges the claim: the claim that spending supplements rather than replaces grassroots engagement can be tested empirically; evidence exists of both substitution and supplementation in different contexts, so the source's assertion requires qualification.
    - Wider knowledge supporting the claim: examples such as large single-donor influence in some special elections, the role of dark money groups hiding donors, and evidence of advertising saturation by wealthy groups in key media markets.
    - Wider knowledge challenging the claim: campaign finance also includes many small donors, party mobilisation, and legal safeguards such as disclosure rules for many entities; courts have interpreted money as speech making direct restrictions legally difficult following Citizens United v FEC (2010).
    - Evaluation of weights and limits: distinguish between normative concerns about fairness and legal free-speech protections; a strong answer will judge that big money creates tangible inequalities in influence and visibility in many races, but that effects vary by election type, media market and the presence of countervailing mobilisation, so the claim is substantially supported but not universally true.
    - A reasoned judgement might conclude that the sources together show there is credible evidence that big money can and does undermine electoral fairness in specific and important ways, but legal protections and other political dynamics mean this is not an absolute, system-wide truth in every election.

Question 10

- **Level 1** (1-7): Basic, general knowledge of campaign finance and candidates with limited or undeveloped analysis. Claims about money and success are asserted without adequate evidence or explanation.
- **Level 2** (8-15): Clear and accurate knowledge of campaign finance mechanisms and examples, with some developed analysis of how money can influence electoral success. Evaluation may be one-sided or lack depth in considering countervailing factors.
- **Level 3** (16-23): Detailed, accurate knowledge used to construct a sustained analysis that weighs evidence for and against the proposition, using specific examples such as incumbency advantages, Super PAC spending, advertising effects and the role of small donors. Evaluation is balanced and reaches a reasoned judgement.
- **Level 4** (24-30): Sophisticated, wide-ranging knowledge and analysis addressing the multiple dimensions of the claim: electoral context, incumbency, candidate quality, media environment, legal constraints, dark money and campaign strategy. Evaluation integrates evidence, addresses counterarguments and reaches a nuanced, well-substantiated judgement on the extent to which money buys success.
- **Indicative content:**
    - Arguments that money buys success: greater spending improves name recognition via advertising, funds ground operations and data targeting, allows rapid response to attacks, and can deter credible challengers; empirical studies show spending has a positive impact, especially for challengers seeking to close recognition gaps.
    - Incumbency and diminishing returns: incumbents often start with advantages such as name recognition and institutional resources, so additional spending may have diminishing marginal effect; incumbents tend to outspend challengers, but victory is not solely determined by money.
    - Role of Super PACs and outside spending: independent expenditure groups can dramatically increase total spending in key races, sometimes changing the information environment and bolstering or attacking candidates in ways correlated with electoral outcomes.
    - Countervailing factors limiting the effect of money: candidate quality, scandal, national political tides, party brand, turnout dynamics and the Electoral College in presidential campaigns can all swamp financial advantages in particular elections.
    - Dark money and transparency: undisclosed donors allow wealthy interests to influence outcomes without public accountability, which can affect fairness and the effective value of spending, but the causal link to electoral victory can vary by context.
    - Small donors and digital fundraising: the growth of small-dollar online donations has allowed some insurgent campaigns to compete successfully against better-funded opponents, altering the simple money-success relationship, as seen in recent primary campaigns.
    - Legal and institutional constraints: contribution limits, disclosure rules for many entities and court rulings such as Citizens United shape the landscape and create both avenues for large-scale spending and limits on direct coordination, complicating the causal chain.
    - A strong conclusion will judge that while money is a significant factor that increases the probability of electoral success, especially for lesser-known challengers and in expensive media markets, it is not a deterministic guarantee; political context, candidate factors and institutional rules mediate its effect, so money buys advantage but not assured victory.