



POL.USC16 US Voting Behaviour and the Participation Crisis

Total Marks

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be concise. For levels-marked questions write full sentences and structured paragraphs. Time guidance: 75 minutes total; allow approximately 35 minutes for the two extended levels questions together and the remainder for short items and reading the source.

- 1** In the context of US voting behaviour, define the term 'gender gap' as used by political analysts in presidential elections.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** State one characteristic of Hispanic/Latino voting patterns in recent US presidential elections, as observed in the 2016 to 2024 period.

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

- 3** Explain two reasons why younger voters in the United States tend to have lower turnout than older voters in many midterm elections.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** State two features of automatic voter registration (AVR) as proposed or implemented in some US states to increase turnout.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

- 5** Identify one common argument made by opponents of strict voter ID laws in the US context.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6** Explain two ways in which felony disenfranchisement laws vary between US states and how that variation affects aggregate national turnout and group representation.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** State two long-term partisan realignment trends in the United States since the 1960s affecting the vote by region or demographic.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

- 8** Explain two ways religion influences voting behaviour in US presidential elections, naming an example denomination or movement where appropriate.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Identify two documented effects of strict voter registration deadlines and procedures on turnout, citing the mechanism by which turnout is reduced.

(Total for Question 9 is 3 marks)

- 10** State one empirical finding from turnout studies comparing US midterm and presidential elections, with a brief explanation.

(Total for Question 10 is 5 marks)

- 11** Source for questions 11 and 12: Extract A is from a 2023 academic review of turnout which finds that reforms such as automatic registration and same-day registration are associated with modest but consistent increases in turnout, especially among younger and minority voters. Extract B is a 2022 policy statement by a state election official arguing that strict voter ID and registration deadlines are necessary to protect election integrity and to allow timely verification, claiming no evidence of widespread fraud but arguing preventative rules maintain public confidence.

Using the source material above, analyse the strengths and limitations of using registration and ID reforms to address unequal turnout in the United States.

(Total for Question 11 is 12 marks)

- 12** Evaluate the extent to which demographic factors explain voting behaviour in the United States.

(Total for Question 12 is 30 marks)

Mark scheme · POL.USC16 US Voting Behaviour and the Participation Crisis

Question 1

- **B1** a concise definition identifying systematic differences in voting patterns or party support between men and women
- **Answer: Systematic differences in voting patterns or party support between men and women, for example women on average supporting Democratic presidential candidates more than men in recent cycles.**

Question 2

- **B1** one accurate statement, e.g. Hispanic voters are not monolithic and show variation by region and country of origin
- **Answer: Hispanic/Latino voters are not monolithic and show substantial variation by region and national origin, with differences in party support between, for example, Cuban Americans in Florida and Mexican Americans in the Southwest.**

Question 3

- **B1** one valid reason explained, e.g. lower political mobilisation and weaker ties to party organisations among younger people
- **B1** a second valid reason explained, e.g. registration barriers and frequent residential moves reducing the likelihood of being registered where they live
- **Answer: Younger voters often have weaker ties to party organisations and lower political mobilisation, and they move residence more frequently and face greater barriers under registration systems that require advance registration, both factors reducing turnout in midterms.**

Question 4

- **B1** one accurate feature, e.g. eligible citizens are automatically registered when interacting with government agencies unless they opt out
- **B1** a second accurate feature, e.g. the system updates voter records using reliable government data such as DMV records, reducing paperwork for voters
- **Answer: Eligible citizens are automatically registered when interacting with government agencies unless they opt out, and voter records are updated using reliable government datasets such as Department of Motor Vehicles records, reducing paperwork and administrative barriers.**

Question 5

- **B1** states a clear argument, e.g. that strict ID requirements disproportionately disenfranchise minority, low-income and elderly voters
- **B1** brief development, e.g. many affected voters lack the required documents or face costs to obtain them
- **B1** qualifier, e.g. framed as reducing turnout among groups that lean Democratic
- **Answer: Opponents argue strict voter ID laws disproportionately disenfranchise minority, low-income and elderly voters because many lack required documents or face costs to obtain them, which can reduce turnout among groups that tend to lean Democratic.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies one variation, e.g. some states permanently disenfranchise felons while others restore rights on release or after sentence completion
- **B1** explains the effect of that variation on turnout, e.g. permanent disenfranchisement reduces eligible voter numbers in some states, lowering turnout rates and excluding disproportionately affected demographic groups
- **B1** identifies a second variation, e.g. some states require a waiting period or application to restore rights whereas others restore automatically on completion of sentence, parole and probation
- **B1** explains the effect of the second variation, e.g. cumbersome restoration reduces participation among formerly incarcerated people and can depress turnout in communities with high incarceration rates
- **Answer: Some states permanently disenfranchise felons, while others restore voting rights automatically on release or after completion of sentence; permanent disenfranchisement lowers the pool of eligible voters in some states and disproportionately excludes groups such as young Black men, reducing measured turnout and representation. Other states require an application or waiting period to restore rights, and these administrative hurdles and uncertainty**

Question 7

- **B1** one accurate trend, e.g. the South's shift from Democratic to Republican dominance over several decades
- **B1** a second accurate trend, e.g. increasing Democratic strength in urban areas and Republican strength in rural areas
- **Answer: The Southern states shifted from Democratic to Republican dominance from the 1960s to the 1990s, and there has been an increasing urban-rural split with Democrats stronger in large cities and Republicans stronger in rural and some suburban areas.**

Question 8

- **B1** one valid explanation, e.g. evangelical Protestants tend to vote Republican due to conservative positions on social issues
- **B1** a second valid explanation, e.g. Jewish voters have tended to favour Democrats due to historic positions on social welfare and civil rights
- **Answer: Evangelical Protestants often support Republican candidates because of conservative positions on social issues such as abortion and religious liberty, while many Jewish voters have tended to favour Democratic candidates, reflecting historic alignments on social welfare, civil rights and foreign policy concerns.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies one effect, e.g. lower turnout among young and mobile voters
- **B1** identifies the mechanism for the first effect, e.g. advance deadlines mean recently moved or newly eligible voters miss registration cutoffs
- **B1** identifies a second effect and mechanism, e.g. reduced minority turnout where administrative complexity and lack of information discourage registration
- **Answer: Advance registration deadlines and complex procedures lower turnout among young and mobile voters because those who recently moved or became eligible miss cutoffs, and they reduce minority turnout where administrative complexity and information gaps discourage registration.**

Question 10

- **B1** states the finding, e.g. turnout is generally higher in presidential elections than in midterms
- **B1** gives an approximate quantitative statement, e.g. turnout rates are commonly 10 to 20 percentage points higher in presidential years
- **B1** explains one reason for the difference, e.g. greater media attention and mobilisation in presidential years
- **B1** explains a second reason or qualification, e.g. some midterms have higher turnout when high-salience issues or close races occur
- **B1** a short example or date, e.g. turnout in the 2020 presidential election was substantially higher than in the 2018 or 2014 midterms
- **Answer: Turnout is generally higher in presidential elections than in midterms, typically by around 10 to 20 percentage points, because presidential contests attract more media attention and national mobilisation; midterms can see higher turnout when high-salience issues or particularly competitive races occur. For example, turnout in the 2020 presidential election exceeded turnout in the 2018 midterms and was far larger than in 2014.**

Question 11

- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic, limited use of the source with simple statements about registration or ID policies and little developed analysis.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Clear use of the source with accurate points about how reforms affect turnout and some developed analysis of strengths and limitations, but limited contextual knowledge or evaluation.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Detailed analysis driven by the source, integrating contextual knowledge about turnout and specific reforms, and weighing strengths and limitations with some balance.
- **Level 4** (10-12): Sophisticated, source-focused analysis that evaluates the evidence and claims in both extracts, integrates wider empirical and contextual knowledge about turnout inequalities, and reaches a reasoned, supported judgement.
- **Indicative content:**
 - From Extract A: automatic and same-day registration are associated with modest but consistent turnout increases, particularly among younger and minority voters, so these reforms can reduce barriers to registration and immediate participation.
 - From Extract A: the magnitude of turnout gains is modest, suggesting registration reform helps but does not fully close turnout gaps driven by deeper socio-economic and mobilisation differences.
 - From Extract B: officials supporting strict ID and deadlines frame them as measures to protect integrity and public confidence, and admit no evidence of widespread fraud, which suggests the argument is largely preventative and reputational rather than responding to frequent fraud.
 - Strength: registration reforms directly target administrative barriers such as deadlines and complex paperwork, so they plausibly increase registration and short-term turnout among groups most affected by mobility and lack of documents.
 - Limitation: registration and ID reforms do not address deeper causes of unequal turnout, such as political alienation, lower party mobilization, socioeconomic disadvantage, or felony disenfranchisement, so their effect is partial.
 - Limitation: opponents argue strict ID reduces fraud risk and reassures voters, and in some contexts public confidence may be politically valuable; however, where evidence of fraud is minimal, strict rules may impose disproportionate costs on disadvantaged groups.
 - Contextual knowledge: variations by state in implementation and complementary policies (e.g. outreach, early voting, polling place resources) affect the efficacy of either reform, so outcomes depend on wider institutional design.
 - Evidence quality and judgement: weigh empirical findings in Extract A against the preventive claims in Extract B, concluding reforms like AVR and same-day registration are effective partial remedies to unequal turnout but need to be combined with broader measures to tackle structural causes and state-level inequalities.

Question 12

- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Level 1** (1-7): Basic, undeveloped knowledge of demographic influences with little analysis or evaluation; assertions are unsupported or generalised.
- **Level 2** (8-15): Clear, accurate knowledge of how specific demographic factors (race, gender, age, religion, region, urban/rural) influence voting with some developed analysis; evaluation is present but may be one-sided or limited in scope.
- **Level 3** (16-23): Detailed, accurate deployment of demographic evidence and analysis across multiple factors, integrating explanations (socio-economic, cultural, partisan realignment) and considering countervailing influences; reaches a supported evaluation.
- **Level 4** (24-30): Sophisticated, wide-ranging knowledge and analysis that compares demographic explanations with rival explanations (party identification, issue salience, campaign effects, institutional rules), evaluates relative explanatory power with precise evidence, and reaches a balanced, well-supported judgement on the extent to which demographics explain US voting behaviour.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Evidence for strong demographic effects: race is a major predictor, with Black voters reliably supporting Democrats in recent presidential elections; religion influences voting, with white evangelical Protestants strongly Republican; age shows younger voters leaning more Democratic on social and economic issues while older voters lean Republican; region and the urban/rural divide show long-term patterns such as Southern realignment to the Republican Party and growing Democratic strength in dense urban areas.
 - Mechanisms: socialisation, group identity, and issue alignment explain demographic patterns, for example civil rights history shaping Black Democratic loyalty, and religious teachings shaping social-issue preferences among evangelicals.
 - Counter-evidence and qualifications: demographics do not determine voting mechanically; education and income intersect with race and region to change patterns (e.g. the college-educated suburban shift), and partisan sorting means demographics have different effects over time.
 - Rival explanations: party identification, the impact of candidates and campaigns, issue salience (economy, immigration), and institutional factors (registration rules, turnout laws) can override or mediate demographic tendencies.
 - Long-term change: partisan realignment since the 1960s shows demographics can shift; for instance, the South's shift to the Republican Party demonstrates the interaction of ideology, racial politics and party strategies rather than immutable demographic fate.
 - Evaluation: a strong answer argues demographics are powerful and consistent predictors of aggregate patterns but are mediated by other factors and can change over time; therefore demographic factors explain a large portion of voting behaviour but do not fully determine it, and must be analysed alongside partisan, ideological and institutional explanations.
 - Use of evidence: credit precise use of exit-poll data, regional examples, and discussion of how turnout differentials by demographic group affect the observable vote and the extent to which mobilisation and institutional rules alter their impact.