5.9 US Elections: The Electoral College, Primaries and Caucuses: 30-minute Pack

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be brief but must be clear. For levels-marked questions, write a developed response using accurate political knowledge, examples and clear evaluation where required. The final two questions are source-based and essay tasks and require full-sentence answers.

1 Evaluate the view that the Electoral College should be replaced by a national popular vote.

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(Total for Question 1 is 30 marks)

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Mark scheme · 5.9 US Elections: The Electoral College, Primaries and Caucuses: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic, undeveloped knowledge of the Electoral College and popular vote, with little or no analysis or evaluation. Examples, if present, are generalised.	**1-7**
Level 2 Clear, accurate knowledge of how the Electoral College operates and of the national popular vote alternative, with some analysis and partial evaluation. Arguments may be one-sided or lacking full development across AO1, AO2 and AO3.	**8-15**
Level 3 Detailed knowledge deployed in a sustained analysis engaging with arguments for and against replacement, using precise examples and showing balanced evaluation across AO1, AO2 and AO3, reaching a reasoned judgement.	**16-23**
Level 4 Sophisticated, wide-ranging and accurate knowledge that analyses and evaluates the institutional, political and normative implications of replacing the Electoral College with a national popular vote. Response uses well-selected historical and contemporary examples, examines counterarguments and reaches a substantiated, balanced judgement.	**24-30**

Indicative content:

- Arguments for replacement: a national popular vote is more directly democratic, avoids instances where the electoral vote diverges from the national popular vote as in 2000 and 2016, enhances perceived legitimacy of the winner and ensures every vote carries equal weight.
- Arguments for replacement - practical reforms: description of routes such as constitutional amendment (difficult) or the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, which binds state electors to the national popular vote once enough states join, and practical obstacles each route faces.
- Arguments against replacement: defenders claim the Electoral College protects federalism by ensuring smaller states have influence, maintains a balance among diverse states and prevents purely regional candidates; it forces candidates to build geographic coalitions rather than win concentrated urban vote totals.
- Political consequences: replacing the Electoral College could change campaign strategy, shifting attention from battleground states to turnout-maximising efforts in population centres, which could alter policy platforms and the geographic focus of campaigning.
- Practical concerns and edge cases: consider third-party candidates, recount logistics in a nationwide close result, and whether a national recount would be feasible; the Electoral College can produce clear state-level results that resolve disputes locally.
- Evaluation of legitimacy and turnout: discuss evidence on whether winner-takes-all state systems suppress turnout, and whether a popular vote would increase turnout or simply change where parties focus mobilising efforts.
- Consideration of partisan incentives: demonstrate that parties advantaged by the current system are likely to resist change, making reform politically difficult despite normative arguments about fairness.
- Judgement: a reasoned conclusion weighing the democratic merits of equal vote weight and legitimacy against federalism, stability and practical difficulties, and noting that incremental reforms (e.g. district allocation, the Compact) offer partial remedies that have different trade-offs.

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