6.10 Pluralist and Elite Theories of Power: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For short answer questions, write in full sentences for questions worth 2 marks or more. Spend about 30 minutes in total.

1 Identify and explain two ways in which pluralist theory allows for ordinary citizens to influence decisions in Britain, using different mechanisms for each way.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Discuss how far power in Britain is genuinely shared between different groups such as political parties, sectional and cause pressure groups, and the media. In your answer, make reference to both pluralist and elite perspectives and reach a reasoned conclusion.

(Total for Question 2 is 8 marks)

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3 Define what sociologists mean by an 'elite' in the context of elite theories of power in Britain, referring to the kinds of positions such a group may hold.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

4 Identify one feature of pluralist democracy in Britain that is intended to allow ordinary citizens to influence decisions, and briefly explain how it helps.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

5 Explain two ways cause pressure groups, such as environmental campaigns in Britain, try to influence public opinion and policymakers. Give an example of each method.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Identify one argument elite theorists use to claim ordinary citizens have limited real influence over decisions in Britain.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 State one limitation of relying on voting as a way for ordinary citizens to influence government in Britain, from either perspective.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

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Mark scheme · 6.10 Pluralist and Elite Theories of Power: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies first way, e.g. voting in free elections **B1**

development of first way, e.g. choosing representatives who reflect public views **B1**

identifies second way, e.g. joining pressure groups or campaigns **B1**

development of second way, e.g. pressure groups aggregate views and lobby to change policy between elections **B1**

Answer: Citizens can vote in free elections to choose representatives who reflect public views, and they can join pressure groups or campaigns which aggregate views and lobby to change policy between elections.

Question 2

Level 1 Basic statement about pluralist or elite views with little explanation or no conclusion **1-2**

Level 2 Clear description of both pluralist and elite positions and some explanation of how each accounts for sharing or concentration of power, but limited evaluation or an unbalanced conclusion **3-5**

Level 3 Balanced analysis comparing pluralist and elite accounts, evaluation of strengths and limits of each using specific examples, and a supported conclusion about which explanation is more convincing overall **6-8**

Indicative content:

- Pluralist view: power is dispersed among many groups, political parties, sectional groups and cause groups compete and compromise, media gives voice to different interests, elections allow citizen influence
- Evidence for pluralism: examples of successful campaigns by environmental groups or trade unions that led to policy change, media coverage forcing government inquiries
- Elite view: C. Wright Mills argument that a power elite of political, military and business leaders hold real power, networks and revolving doors concentrate influence
- Evidence for elite theory: examples of close ties between business and government, influential think tanks, large corporate lobbying and donations that shape policy priorities
- Evaluation points: pluralism explains diversity of voices and some genuine influence, but may underestimate resource inequalities and insider access; elite theory highlights concentration and coordination but may underplay pluralist competition and occasional policy shifts driven by public pressure
- Conclusion: weigh evidence, acknowledge mixed reality that some areas show pluralist competition while key decisions may be steered by elite networks, give a judgement on which explanation is stronger with reasons

Question 3

identifies an elite as a relatively small, interconnected group with disproportionate power or influence (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. often made up of political, economic and military or corporate leaders who have close links **B1**

Answer: An elite is a relatively small, interconnected group with disproportionate power or influence, often made up of political, economic and military or corporate leaders who have close links.

Question 4

identifies a feature, e.g. free and regular elections where citizens vote **B1**

brief development, e.g. voting allows citizens to choose representatives and influence policy indirectly **B1**

Answer: Free and regular elections where citizens vote, allowing them to choose representatives and influence policy indirectly by changing which party or MPs hold power.

Question 5

identifies one method, e.g. media campaigns or public demonstrations **B1**

development, e.g. media coverage and demonstrations raise public awareness and put issues on the political agenda **B1**

identifies a second method, e.g. petitions and lobbying MPs or ministers **B1**

development, e.g. petitions and direct lobbying can lead policymakers to respond or consult on proposed changes **B1**

Answer: Cause groups use media campaigns and demonstrations to raise awareness and put issues on the political agenda, and use petitions and lobbying of MPs or ministers to push for specific policy responses.

Question 6

identifies an elite-style argument, e.g. decisions are made by a small interconnected group regardless of elections **B1**

development, e.g. this reduces the impact of ordinary citizens voting or campaigning because elite networks steer major choices **B1**

Answer: Elite theorists argue decisions are made by a small interconnected group regardless of elections, which reduces the impact of ordinary citizens voting or campaigning because elite networks steer major choices.

Question 7

identifies a limitation, e.g. low turnout or that elections occur only occasionally **B1**

brief development, e.g. low turnout means many citizens do not take part and occasional elections limit how quickly citizens can respond to policy **B1**

Answer: A limitation is low voter turnout and that elections only happen occasionally, so many citizens do not take part and elections limit how quickly the public can change policy between contests.

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