



## GSOC.ST10 Pluralist and Elite Theories of Power

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 60 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 60 minutes in total.**

- 1** Which one of the following best describes the pluralist view of power in Britain?
- ☐ A) Power is concentrated in a single ruling class that controls all institutions
  - ☐ B) Power is dispersed among many competing groups such as parties, unions and pressure groups
  - ☐ C) Power is held only by elected politicians with no influence from other groups
  - ☐ D) Power is purely symbolic and has no impact on decisions

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** 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 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Identify and explain one way trade unions could influence government policy in Britain, according to pluralist ideas. Give one clear example of the method and explain its effect.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 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)

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- 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)

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- 7** Identify and explain one way that the mass media, in pluralist accounts, helps ordinary citizens influence policy in Britain.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

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

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Using the idea of C. Wright Mills' 'power elite', identify and explain one mechanism by which business leaders might exert influence over government policy in Britain.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

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- 10** Explain two differences between pluralist and elite theories of power in how they view the distribution of power in Britain.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

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- 11** Identify one way citizens can try to influence decisions between elections in Britain, and give one brief reason why pluralists consider this effective.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

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- 12** State one piece of evidence someone who supports elite theory might use to argue elites control policy in Britain.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

- 13** Identify and explain one practical limitation that pressure groups in Britain often face, which may limit their influence compared with elite actors.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

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- 14** Explain one way that lobbying by professional lobbyists differs from grassroots campaigning by ordinary citizens, and give one implication for who gains influence in Britain.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

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- 15** 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 15 is 4 marks)

- 16** 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 about which offers the stronger explanation.

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 16 is 8 marks)

# Mark scheme · GSOC.ST10 Pluralist and Elite Theories of Power

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## Question 1

- **B1** B (power dispersed among many competing groups)
- **Answer: B**

## Question 2

- **B1** 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
- **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 3

- **B1** identifies a method, e.g. strikes or collective bargaining
- **B1** explains how this can influence government or employers, e.g. strikes disrupt services or production and push policymakers to negotiate
- **B1** identifies a second linked point, e.g. unions lobby MPs or fund campaigns
- **B1** development, e.g. lobbying can change legislation or pressure parties to adopt union-friendly policies
- **Answer: Trade unions can organise strikes or use collective bargaining, which disrupts services or production and pressures employers and policymakers to negotiate. They also lobby MPs and run campaigns that can push parties to adopt union-friendly policies.**

## Question 4

- **B1** 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
- **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

- **B1** 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
- **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

- **B1** 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
- **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

- **B1** identifies a media role, e.g. reporting issues and providing a platform for debate
- **B1** explains how this can influence policymakers, e.g. wide coverage can increase public pressure on politicians to respond
- **B1** identifies a second linked point, e.g. media helps frame issues and set the political agenda
- **B1** development, e.g. agenda setting can prioritise issues for government attention and consultation
- **Answer: The media reports issues and provides a platform for debate, which can increase public pressure on politicians to respond. The media also frames issues and sets the political agenda, prioritising topics for government attention.**

#### Question 8

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

#### Question 9

- **B1** identifies a mechanism, e.g. revolving doors between business and government or direct lobbying
- **B1** explains how it works, e.g. revolving doors create personal networks and shared interests which shape policy choices
- **B1** identifies a second linked point, e.g. large donations or funding of think tanks
- **B1** development, e.g. donations and funded research can shape political priorities and the evidence base used in decisions
- **Answer: Business leaders may use revolving doors and direct lobbying, creating personal networks and shared interests that shape policy choices. They may also provide donations or fund think tanks, shaping political priorities and the evidence used in decisions.**

#### Question 10

- **B1** identifies a first difference, e.g. pluralists see power dispersed, elite theorists see it concentrated
- **B1** development of first difference
- **B1** identifies a second difference, e.g. pluralists emphasise competition and compromise, elites emphasise decision-making by a connected minority
- **B1** development of second difference
- **Answer: Pluralists see power as dispersed among competing groups and claim policy reflects compromise, while elite theorists argue power is concentrated in a connected minority who make major decisions. Pluralists emphasise competition and influence by many groups, whereas elites emphasise shared interests and networks among powerful leaders.**

#### Question 11

- **B1** identifies a method, e.g. joining or supporting pressure groups, signing petitions or contacting MPs
- **B1** brief development, e.g. pluralists argue pressure groups aggregate public views and mobilise voters, making politicians respond between elections
- **Answer: Joining or supporting pressure groups, signing petitions or contacting MPs; pluralists argue pressure groups aggregate public views and mobilise voters, making politicians respond between elections.**

#### Question 12

- **B1** identifies evidence, e.g. examples of senior politicians, top military figures and business leaders sharing social ties and making common policy decisions
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this network of personal ties suggests coordinated influence beyond democratic accountability
- **Answer: Examples of senior politicians, top military figures and business leaders sharing social ties and making common policy decisions; this suggests coordinated influence beyond ordinary democratic accountability.**

#### Question 13

- **B1** identifies a limitation, e.g. limited resources or organisational capacity
- **B1** explains how this limits influence, e.g. less ability to fund research, sustained lobbying or legal challenges
- **B1** identifies a second linked point, e.g. dependence on public support or media attention
- **B1** development, e.g. without consistent public interest their campaigns may fail to change elite priorities
- **Answer: Pressure groups may have limited resources or organisational capacity, reducing their ability to fund research, sustained lobbying or legal challenges. They also depend on public support and media attention, so without consistent interest their campaigns may fail to change elite priorities.**

#### Question 14

- **B1** identifies a difference, e.g. lobbyists have expert knowledge and regular access to policymakers while grassroots campaigns rely on public mobilisation
- **B1** development, e.g. implication is that organised, well-funded actors can secure more direct influence than uncoordinated citizen action
- **Answer: Lobbyists have expert knowledge and regular access to policymakers, whereas grassroots campaigns rely on public mobilisation; this implies organised, well funded actors can secure more direct influence than uncoordinated citizen action.**

#### Question 15

- **B1** 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
- **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 16

- **Level 1** (1-2): Basic statement about pluralist or elite views with little explanation or no conclusion
- **Level 2** (3-5): 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
- **Level 3** (6-8): 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
- **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