



2003

Political Studies GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students were able to demonstrate a very good political knowledge and a sound understanding of political concepts.

The short-answer questions in Section A of the examination were generally well answered. However, students are advised to consider the following when attempting Section A of the examination:

- Question a requires students to define a political term, and be precise in their responses. More successful students were able to do this, and responses were often characterised with accurate examples to reinforce the definition. There was a tendency for some less successful students to be vague in their responses, and some included incorrect examples
- Question b requires students to 'briefly describe' three aspects relating to a section of the course. Students are advised to number or bullet point three separate and distinct aspects. More successful students were able to accurately describe aspects in one to two lines. Students who wrote up to five lines per aspect were writing far more than is required. Less successful students merely listed rather than briefly describing
- Question c requires students to evaluate an argument. More successful students were able to clearly identify arguments and evaluate them in detail by exploring counter arguments, often using relevant and accurate examples to reinforce comments made. More successful students also included a brief one to three line summary at the end of their response. However, there was also a tendency for students to write more than was required in these responses. Less successful students struggled to evaluate, giving little or no consideration to counter arguments in their response and using few, if any, relevant examples to reinforce their comments.

Students should note that they are expected to answer only four of the five sets of short-answer questions in Section A of the examination. Only a few students attempted to answer all questions in Section A. Teachers can mirror the format of Section A of the examination in their School-assessed Coursework throughout the year. This should facilitate in allowing students to practise the skills necessary to accurately answer the questions and better allow them to manage their time in the examination.

The standard of essays continues to improve, although time management is crucial in this aspect of the examination. Students should devote one hour to the essay in the examination. More successful students wrote long essays which directly and comprehensively addressed all aspects of the question. They were able to include comprehensive examples to illustrate points being made. Less successful students wrote short essays of less than three pages, essays which only looked at one aspect of the question, or alternatively wrote lengthy essays which paid little, if any consideration to what the question was actually asking. There was also a tendency for students to write lengthy plans, yet very short essays.

Students must use the 15-minute reading time to maximum effect to plan their thought processes and answers to questions. If possible, students are advised to read over their work so as to avoid careless spelling errors such as: 'According to S114 of the constitution, only the federal government has the power to raise an arm' 'Australians should be very proud of their Feral system of government'.

Furthermore, incorrect sweeping statements such as the following should be avoided:

'Eddie Mabo claimed he found Australia'

'Another case involving individual rights was the movie *The Castle*'

'The Liberal Party invented socialism'.

Section A – Short-answer questions

Question 1

The Australian Constitution

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	10	9	81	1.71

What is meant by the term convention in relation to the Australian Constitution?

A convention is an unwritten rule, accepted practice, custom or agreement. Constitutional conventions often exist in areas where the Constitution is lacking. For example, the cabinet and prime minister are not mentioned in the Constitution so conventions apply to their roles. A controversial example of the breaching of a convention occurred in 1975 relating to the convention that if a Senator resigns or dies before the end of their term they are replaced by a

person from the same political party. As a consequence of this breach, the convention was incorporated as Constitutional law after a referendum in 1977. Most students had little problem with this question, although less successful students neglected to state that conventions are not actually written in the Australian Constitution, and many thought that conventions apply only to parliament.

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	10	24	59	2.35

Briefly describe three exclusive powers of the Commonwealth government.

Exclusive powers are those that only the Commonwealth Government has power to exercise. Examples include defence, immigration, customs and excise, lighthouses, currency, foreign affairs, family law and quarantine. Most students were able to briefly describe three exclusive powers. Less successful students merely listed exclusive powers, with no brief description of what the power entails, or they included incorrect information such as taxation or income taxation, education, health, transport, or environment, all of which are concurrent powers.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	12	14	13	20	25	16	2.79

Evaluate the argument that Australia should retain its federal system of government.

More successful students noted that a federal system is one in which there is a central government and state governments. To retain a federal system means to retain the state governments.

Arguments in favour of retention of state governments could include:

- a country as geographically large as Australia operates most efficiently when power is decentralised
- it offers people political choice, e.g. a L/NP government in Canberra, an ALP government in Victoria
- the states are different and have their own characteristics and therefore need their own governments
- the states are closer to the people, the central government in Canberra is somewhat removed
- in referendums, the voters have consistently opposed giving the Commonwealth Government more power.

Arguments against the retention of the state government could include:

- the federal system is inefficient
- sharing of powers (e.g. health, education, transport) can result in duplication
- the federal system is costly
- the States and the Commonwealth blame each other and refuse to take responsibility.

This question was quite well answered, although it did pose problems for a significant number of students. More successful students were able to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of what a federal system of government is and arguments for and against its retention. High-scoring responses clearly evaluated the main arguments and used accurate examples to reinforce their comments. Less successful students were unable to demonstrate an understanding of what is a federal system of government. Some students thought this referred to arguments for Australia remaining a Constitutional Monarchy, whilst others thought it referred to arguments for Australia retaining its two Houses of federal parliament. Less successful students also failed to consider counter arguments and to evaluate the argument.

Question 2

Parliament and the Executive

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	22	4	74	1.52

What is meant by the term conscience vote?

A vote in parliament where the members (specifically those who are members of a political party) can vote according to their own personal views or conscience on an issue, rather than on party lines. Conscience votes usually occur on social or ethical issues. A conscience vote has recently occurred on issues including abortion, euthanasia and stem cell research. Most students had little trouble answering this question. Less successful students thought a conscience vote referred to a voter considering all issues and policies before voting in a federal election.

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	13	32	52	2.32

Briefly describe three roles of the Australian federal cabinet.

More successful students cited the following roles:

- deciding on policies and programs to be presented to parliament and taking responsibility for these policies
- determining government policy
- advising the prime minister
- making appointments (e.g. to High Court)

- dealing with submissions made by cabinet ministers
- deciding the order of parliamentary business
- discussing relevant and current issues
- hearing from cabinet sub-committees.

Students should be advised to choose three distinctly different roles. More successful students were able to do this. Less successful students struggled to identify three roles of cabinet, or included incorrect roles such as ‘representing an electorate’ or ‘choosing the Governor General’.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	5	14	27	29	19	3.25

Evaluate the argument that the Senate does not perform its intended functions.

More successful students noted that when the Senate was established, it was expected to carry out two functions:

- a House of review (reviewing legislation passed by the House of Representatives)
- a States’ House (representing the interests of the States).

To support the proposition:

- the Senate does not properly review legislation if the government has a Senate majority. In such cases the Senate is seen as rubber stamping government policy
- the Senate never votes on State lines. Senators vote on party lines, always putting the interests of their States second. This is reflected in Senate seating where Senators sit with their parties rather than in state blocs.

In evaluating it could be argued that the Senate:

- has carried out its reviewing role well, as governments rarely have control of the Senate
- does occasionally represent the States’ interests in speeches and committee work.

The main criticism of the Senate in terms of not carrying out its original functions revolves around the argument it has never been a States’ House and if the government has a Senate majority it is not a House of review. More successful students identified and critically evaluated these arguments, whereas less successful students only focused superficially on one function of the Senate and showed no evaluation. Some students thought the Senate has only recently moved away from its role as the States’ house.

Question 3

Voting and elections

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	12	12	76	1.63

What is meant by the term electoral redistribution?

The redrawing of electoral boundaries for an electorate (division) to ensure that there are as nearly as possible (+ or – 10%) equal numbers of electors in each electorate. Electoral redistributions are undertaken by the Australian Electoral Commission when the number of electors in more than one third of electorates in a state deviates from the allowed variation of + or – 10%, or the number of parliamentary representatives in a State or Territory has changed or 7 years has elapsed since the last redistribution.

More successful students had no problems answering this question. Less successful students were vague in their responses, stating that electoral redistribution is conducted as a result of population changes rather than voting population changes. Students need to be precise in their responses to these questions.

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	9	23	61	2.37

Briefly describe three key differences between the preferential and proportional voting systems as used in Australian federal elections.

More successful students raised the following:

- preferential voting utilises single member electorates; proportional voting utilised multimember electorates (12 per state and two for the territories)
- under preferential voting successful candidates must gain 50% + 1 of the two party preferred vote, for proportional representation successful candidates must gain a quota (approximately 14% at a half Senate election, 7% at a full Senate election)
- minor parties have a greater chance of representation under proportional voting than preferential voting
- preferential voting used to elect House of Representatives; proportional used to elect the Senate

- proportional voting allows voters to indicate preference for parties without having to indicate preferences (i.e. party list); preferential voting requires voters to numerically rank all candidates
- proportional voting utilises State and Territories as electorates so number of voters in each electorate varies considerably; preferential voting electorates are established with as near as possible equal numbers.

This question asked students to compare the two voting systems, requiring six pieces of accurate information to receive full marks. Most students were able to do this. Less successful students concentrated only on one voting system. There was a tendency for many students to write far more than was required for this question.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	4	8	28	36	23	3.63

Evaluate the argument that voting in Australian Federal elections should remain compulsory.

More successful students noted that voting is not in fact compulsory as there is a secret ballot; that is, compulsory voting is a misnomer. The only compulsion is to enrol, turn up to a polling station and have your attendance recorded.

Arguments for maintaining compulsory voting could be:

- it provides a greater probability of the government being elected by the majority
- the government can claim legitimate mandate to carry out policies
- it reflects most fully the wishes of the people
- it is comparable to other citizen duties (jury duty, tax)
- it may encourage more voters to take an interest in party policies
- it does not disadvantage (as compared to non compulsory) parties whose support comes from voters in low income, non-English speaking backgrounds
- political parties do not have to spend funds to get voters to the polling stations – if parties were to bus voters to the polling booth as happens in Britain there is a possibility of influencing voter choice
- it promotes citizenship; responsibility as citizens
- it is not a great burden on voters (polling booths within an average of 10 kilometres from voters residence, postal voting, pre-poll voting, can vote out of electorate)
- there has been little objection from the public to compulsory voting.

Arguments for abolishing compulsory voting could be:

- it impedes citizens' freedom
- it forces those who are disinterested to vote
- apathetic and politically ignorant can determine election outcomes
- it advantages conservative parties as their supporters tend to be in higher income groups with a vested interest to vote whereas voters in lower income groups may not
- voters may feel disempowered and disaffected
- political parties must make a greater effort to appeal to as many voters as possible to ensure they vote
- it increases percentage of informal and donkey votes.

This question was straightforward and as a result most students understood it and answered it well. More successful students were able to identify strong arguments for the retention of compulsory voting and evaluate them effectively by looking at counter arguments. Some students compared to good effect the positive impact of compulsory voting in Australia to the problems of low voter turnout in the USA. More successful students also included accurate statistics relating to voter turnout, informal votes and donkey votes. Most students concluded that compulsory voting should remain, whilst some concluded that it should be abolished. Less successful students failed to evaluate in their response, merely citing the positive effects of compulsory voting.

Question 4

Political parties and pressure groups

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	12	9	79	1.66

What is meant by the term faction as applied to a political party?

A faction is a sub-group of parliamentary members and extra-parliamentary members of a political party who form into a collective for the purpose of exerting influence over the internal operations of the party. Critically, these groups operate within the parties themselves. Most students were able to answer this question correctly, and more successful students were able to cite an example of a faction, such as the 'wets' in the Liberal Party.

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	7	31	60	2.50

Briefly describe three ways that minor parties contribute to the democratic process

More successful students raised the following:

- minor parties provide an alternative to the two major political parties thereby widening political debate
- the presence of minor parties gives a practical example of how liberal democracies are characterised by a multiplicity of parties
- the presence of more minor parties gives voters a wider choice
- minor parties provide an additional basis on which individuals might seek to join a political organisation in order to participate in the political process
- minor parties may assist in diversifying the policy debate by raising policy issues that might not otherwise be covered or addressed by the major political parties
- where minor parties get elected to the legislature (such as to the Australian Senate) they can act to provide a check on executive power.

More successful students had little trouble briefly describing three ways in which minor parties contribute to the democratic process, often citing examples to reinforce their responses. There was some repetition from less successful students, such as 'allow alternate views to be heard' and 'allow different opinions to be voiced'. Students are advised to choose three separate and distinctly different responses in such questions.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	6	13	29	33	17	3.34

Evaluate the argument that it is important for the Australian Labor Party to maintain its relationship with the union movement.

Students answering this question needed to identify the historical relationship that exists between the ALP and the union movement, including the presence of affiliated unions within the ALP's organisational structure. The more successful students also indicated they appreciate the relationship is complex and an important power struggle tends to ensue between the parliamentary Labor party and the affiliated trade unions. Excellent essays noted the historical record of relations between the two: tensions during the Chifley government that led to the use of troops to break coal strikes, tensions between Whitlam and the labour movement that arose out of massive pay increases, and the corporatist-tending relationship between the Hawke government and the ACTU.

The critical points that students needed to identify in this relationship included the following:

- not all unions are part of the ALP: indeed, unions choose to affiliate with the Labor Party
- affiliated unions supply an important source of revenue to the ALP by way of their affiliation fees; particularly important when Labor's opponents are able to obtain funds from business
- affiliated unions are guaranteed representation in Labor's organisational structure, and especially at National Conference. This means that, if one accepts that the Conference is the supreme policy-making body, the affiliated unions have input to an important party organ and to the consequential document, the Labor Party Platform
- affiliated unions tend to provide a training ground and socialisation environment for future generations of Labor MPs.

It may also be argued that the relationship between the unions and Labor has been problematic and that, for this reason, it has been evolving to the point where affiliated unions have not been able to wield great influence. This position includes the following key points:

- the union movement tends to be looked upon with anything from mild suspicion to abject hostility by sections of the community, the business community and the media. In order to make itself more appealing to a conservative electorate, it could be argued, the parliamentary Labor Party needs to distance itself from the unions
- the decline in blue-collar employment corresponding with the decline in manufacturing employment due to Australia's economic restructure has led to a major decline in the number of Australians who are members of trade unions. It could be argued that unions now represent only a minority of the Australian work-force, and so their influence over Labor policy and politics should be diminished accordingly
- the influence unions have over the ALP tends to be overstated. It could be argued that union power over the internal workings of the ALP is mitigated by the presence of factions that tend to transcend the industrial-parliamentary divide in the party. This important point serves to remind that union power is actually limited by the complexities of internal Labor politics
- reforms to Australia's electoral laws are reducing the ALP's dependence upon the affiliated unions particularly for funds. With the advent of public funding for elections, the major political parties are less reliant on external organisations for funds. It could be argued that the adoption of public funding for elections is reducing the parliamentary party's dependence on affiliation fees and that this, in turn, is also eroding union power.

This question was complex yet was generally well answered by most students. More successful students were able to give strong reasons for the ALP maintaining its relationship with the union movement, citing in particular the ALP's historic relationship with the union movement. They were then able to offer counter arguments in their evaluation of the arguments, noting the decline in union representation at the ALP National Conference and recognising the decline in

union membership nationally. Some students noted that close ties with the union movement could harm the ALP electorally and that this was a complex issue that Crean and Latham were struggling to resolve. Less successful students were inclined to make broad sweeping statements such as ‘The union movement will be dead in 10 years, so the ALP had better start looking for new supporters’ and merely offered reasons why the ALP should maintain its relationship with the unions, with no evaluation of counter arguments.

Question 5

Foreign Policy

a

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	10	21	69	1.59

What is meant by the term regional security?

A desire that geographically close nations (Asia Pacific region) are characterised by economic, political and social stability in order to reduce threats to Australia in terms of factors including terrorism, drug and arms trafficking. Attempts to maintain Australia’s security are undertaken through a range of political, economic and military strategies implemented in South East Asia, the South Pacific and the eastern reaches of the Indian Ocean. These strategies include promoting bilateral and multilateral relationships including formal military and economic relationships (e.g. ANZUS, APEC), diplomatic ties throughout the region and the provision of aid to the region.

This question posed some difficulties for students. While more successful students were able to clearly articulate that regional security relates to the stability of the Asia Pacific region, less successful students were vague in their responses and demonstrated a simplistic understanding of the term. Some students thought incorrectly that regional security referred to the security of regional and rural Australia.

b

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	4	16	78	2.70

Briefly describe three ways that Australia meets its obligations as a global citizen.

More successful students raised the following:

- membership of the United Nations and participation in UN peacekeeping forces and UN organisations (e.g. UNESCO)
- membership and participation in international bodies/organisations (e.g. WTO and the Dohar round of trade talks)
- signatory to international treaties and arms control (e.g. CTBT, NNPT)
- foreign aid-both direct and indirect (e.g. to PNG and through the IMF and World Bank)
- international humanitarianism (e.g. immigration, refugees, disaster relief).

This question was very well answered by most students who had little trouble citing three ways in which Australia meets its obligations as a global citizen.

c

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	5	13	29	33	19	3.43

Evaluate the argument that the promotion of trade should be a priority of Australia’s foreign policy?

More successful students included a discussion of the relative merits of economic policy, as represented by trade versus strategic security and international humanitarianism. The question does not necessarily assume that trade should be the only priority but rather a key priority.

The arguments for trade being a priority were:

- national economic benefit, a positive influence on the balance of trade and therefore a political advantage for the Government and better economic conditions for the people
- trade increases understanding between nations and therefore fosters peace and goodwill
- it is an inevitable requirement as part of the momentum of globalisation that if Australia did not have trade as a priority of foreign policy, the nation would be disadvantaged in world markets.

The arguments against trade being a priority were:

- increasing instability in the world means that a range of security and defence must be priorities; the ‘war against terror’ means that security must be more important because of the threat to Australia
- Australia’s alliances, especially ANZUS, remain the single most important element of our foreign policy
- International humanitarianism is much more important than seeking economic benefit; the idealist argument versus the pragmatic one, trade should be an economic priority rather than a foreign policy priority.

This question was very well answered by most students. More successful students were able to develop arguments on the benefits of trade, both to Australia and other countries, including specific examples. They were then able to offer strong counter arguments, in particular stating that in the current world climate Australia should not neglect defence and security. Students also stated that Australia should not neglect its responsibilities as a global citizen at the expense of

trade. Less successful students merely stated why trade is important, with no evaluation of the arguments. Some students merely stated the costs and benefits of Australia's proposed free trade agreement with the USA.

Section B – Essay questions

(Available marks 40)

The Australian Constitution

Question 1

'The Australian Constitution gives too much power to the High Court and the Governor General.'

To what extent do you agree?

High Court

Section 71 of the Constitution states that the judicial power of the Commonwealth shall be placed in the High Court. Section 73 states that the High Court hears appeals from any other court and its judgments are final and conclusive. Section 76 gives the High Court power to interpret the Constitution.

Therefore, the Constitution in 1901 did give the High Court considerable power as both:

- a court of appeal
- the interpreter of the Constitution.

The debate over whether the High Court has too much power revolves around some of its famous cases and the implications, which flow from them. Invariably, the High Court has interpreted the Constitution to expand the powers of the Commonwealth Government at the expense of the States. On other occasions the Commonwealth's powers and areas of jurisdiction have been limited. Critics of the High Court usually are those who disagree with one of the Court's decisions. Additionally, High Court judges are appointed by the government so the Court could act as tool of government policy.

More successful students were aware of the above arguments and were able to make reference to some of the High Court's famous cases, such as:

- Engineers
- Uniform Tax Cases
- Franklin Dam
- Mabo
- Wik
- cases relating to Section 92 (free trade between the states).

Students also argued the merits of the High Court:

- court of appeal and interpretation of the constitution are important roles to maintain democratic values
- a judiciary is required to intercede when constitutional interpretation is required – to maintain the separation of powers and act as a check on government powers
- a number of High Court decisions have been significant in terms of social and environmental issues (Mabo, Franklin Dam).

The Governor General

In theory, the Constitution gives the Governor General enormous powers.

- appointments and dismissals (PM, ministers, public servants) (S64)
- opening, proroguing and dissolving Parliament (S5)
- appointing members of courts, including the High Court (S72)
- granting a double dissolution of parliament (S57)
- issuing writs for an election (S32)
- granting an early election (S28)
- Commander in chief of armed forces (S68)
- Head of the Executive Council (S62)
- returning legislation to the Parliament (S58).

However, these powers are seen as reserve powers, that is, powers that are rarely exercised. Students should have knowledge of the following issues:

- the powers of the Governor General as outlined in the Constitution
- the meaning of the term 'reserve powers'
- in practice, the Governor General should only exercise power after consultation with the government.

Generally, the Governor General has been seen to be prominent in Australian politics. However, more successful students demonstrated an understanding and use the example of November 1975 (the 'constitutional crisis'). In

addition, other Governors General (McKell, Casey, Stephen) have been involved in issues, which are worth noting. In conclusion, the Governor General has great power in theory. 1975 showed that a Governor General can use powers which, previously held in theory, can be used in practice.

This question was quite popular and was generally well answered. More successful students gave equal weight in their discussion to the High Court and the Governor General. They included relevant and accurate examples to reinforce their comments and were able to analyse in detail the extent to which they agree or disagree with the proposition in the question. Most noted that the Constitution does give the Governor General a great deal of power, yet the Constitution does not specifically give the High Court great power. More successful students cited specific High Court cases and were able to accurately state and discuss the sections of the Australian Constitution which relate to the Governor General and the conventions surrounding these powers. Less successful students wrote very brief essays on this topic or concentrated almost solely on either the High Court or the Governor General. Several less successful essays appeared to be pre-prepared, and merely wrote about the High Court and/or the Governor General with little regard for the actual question.

Question 2

‘The division of powers as set out in the Australian Constitution is the main reason for conflict between Commonwealth and state governments.’

To what extent do you agree?

More successful students acknowledged that the division of powers especially as related to issues of finance has been a key source of conflict since Federation. Students could take the position that the division of power has been the main source of conflict but need to provide key examples.

Students pointed out that conflict between Commonwealth and state governments has resulted from a range of factors including:

- the division of powers – causes confusion, legislative and policy management problems in areas including the environment, transport (e.g. road laws), libel and defamation, education and health. In many of these areas there is considerable overlap of responsibilities and cooperation is required (this cooperation does not always occur)
- financial issues – Commonwealth taxation power means states have to rely on handouts from the Commonwealth government when they have key and very costly areas of responsibility such as education and health
- political party differences – at present state governments are Labor who face-off against a LNP Commonwealth Government. State governments also do not always agree. Party differences can lead to policy differences and the perception that the Commonwealth can use its power to discredit state governments of a different political complexion
- personality clashes between premiers, prime ministers and ministers
- High Court decisions – have favoured the Commonwealth Government.

In discussing areas of conflict, more successful students referred to sections of the Constitution that have caused the most concern. They include:

- S92: free trade
- S96: Commonwealth special grants to the states – states perceive this as a way of the Commonwealth dictating how the money should be spent (e.g. the current dispute over the Scoresby Freeway)
- S109: Commonwealth legislation prevails in cases of conflict between the Commonwealth and state governments
- S51: articulates areas over which the Commonwealth has power. The commonwealth has used this area to increase its power (e.g. foreign affairs power used to stop building of Franklin Dam)
- S90: gives Commonwealth control over customs and excise – has been a concern to the states in terms of the ways that the Commonwealth has interpreted what is and what is not a custom or excise
- S128: referendum section of the Constitution – only the Commonwealth can initiate constitutional change.

This was not a particularly popular question, although more successful students were able to answer it very well. In particular, they were able to discuss areas of conflict between the Commonwealth and state governments which stem from the division of powers in the Constitution and those conflicts which relate more indirectly to the Constitution. There was an excellent use of examples in many answers. Less successful students merely explained what exclusive, concurrent and residual powers are, with little regard for the question. Few examples of conflict were cited by less successful students and an apparent lack of knowledge of the Australian Constitution was evident.

Parliament and the executive

Question 3

‘The House of Representatives and the Senate are only a rubber stamp for cabinet decisions.’

To what extent do you agree?

More successful students recognised the role of cabinet in decision making in terms of proposed legislation – developed through interaction with backbench, bureaucracy, interest groups and implemented once legitimised by both houses of parliament. They recognised the distinction between government and cabinet. There are many examples where

parliamentary debate has had a significant role in policy formulation, amendment or rejection of cabinet decisions. – GST, Telstra privatisation. Backbench has also thwarted cabinet and prime minister, e.g. under Hawke – MX missile testing.

It is more likely that the Senate will not act as a rubber stamp as governments rarely have control of the Senate whereas a party cannot be in government unless it has a majority in the House of Representatives so the latter on most occasions acts as rubber stamp.

Extent to which House of Representatives and Senate are rubber stamps for cabinet decisions depends on a number of contextual factors:

- control of the Senate – if government does not control Senate is not a rubber stamp – can act as a house of review and/or be obstructionist, e.g. 1975
- size of backbench and extent of government majority in the House of Representatives
- extent of party unity
- strength and popularity of the prime minister and ministers
- size of government majority in House of Representatives
- relationship with coalition partner (LNP)
- nature of the issue.

This was quite a popular question, and more successful students explored the complexities of the topic. Many defined the terms ‘rubber stamp’ and ‘cabinet’, then clearly looked at each House and the extent to which it acts as a rubber stamp for cabinet decisions. Many included recent and relevant examples to illustrate their analysis. Less successful students appeared to disregard the question and write all they knew on the two Houses of Parliament, the functions of Parliament, the role of cabinet, committees and reforms to Parliament. These students scored very poorly. Some students failed to consider the extent to which both Houses act as a rubber stamp for cabinet decisions.

Question 4

‘Backbenchers have little influence in the federal parliament, the electorate and the party room.’

To what extent do you agree?

More successful students recognised that a backbencher is a member of parliament without a portfolio or shadow portfolio. Backbenchers may be a member of the House of Representatives or the Senate. Backbenchers can be members of a political party or independents. Students need to consider the issue of party membership as compared to independents in terms of the ability to exercise influence.

More successful students discussed the three areas of responsibility and the ways in which backbenchers can and cannot exercise influence, including:

- responsibility to the parliament – backbenchers must participate in a variety of parliamentary activities on the floor of the house and senate and on parliamentary committees – can exercise influence on committees and through performance on the floor of the House and the Senate
- responsibility to constituents – acts as an ombudsman and a link between citizens and the parliament – can raise issues and have influence especially in a marginal seat. Senators have a limited role in this area.
- responsibility to the party – backbenchers have a responsibility to support party decisions publicly but are free to and are expected to express their point of view in the party room. Backbenchers also must attend local party meetings and maintain the standing of the party in the electorate. Independents do not have this role. The influence of a backbencher may depend on factional membership and his/her relationship with the leader
- the introduction of private members bills, e.g. Kevin Andrews and the Euthanasia legislation.

The extent to which backbenchers have influence in the Federal Parliament depends on a number of contextual factors including:

- control of the Senate – if government does not control Senate it is not a rubber stamp – backbenchers (from minor parties and independents) can have a role, can be obstructionist, e.g. influence of Harradine
- size of backbench and extent of government majority in the House of Representatives
- ability, experience and factional membership/party room support of the backbencher
- Senator or member of the House
- party member or independent
- if member of the House – nature of the electorate and issues, e.g. Pauline Hanson
- popularity of the government
- level of unity in the party – danger of backbench revolt, leadership spill, crossing the floor
- party affiliation - in theory an ALP backbencher is constrained by oath; in theory a Liberal is free but extent to which they tow the party line depends on circumstances.

This question was not popular; however, more successful students were able to answer it well. It is a straightforward question in which students must assess the influence of backbenchers in three areas: federal parliament, the electorate and the party room. More successful students briefly explained the role of backbenchers and gave equal weighting in their discussion to all three areas. Many critically evaluated the statement, explaining that backbenchers can in fact exercise considerable influence in one or more of the areas listed. Many students gave relevant and accurate examples to illustrate their discussion. Less successful students did not discuss the real or potential influence of backbenchers in all three areas, instead concentrating on just one. Many were quick to reach the conclusion that backbenchers have little power, without exploring the question in any detail. Few distinctions between the influence of backbenchers in different parties, independents, the House of Representatives and the Senate were made. Few examples were cited by less successful students, many of whom appeared unable to name a single backbencher.

Voting and elections

Question 5

‘The Australian federal electoral system delivers both majority rule and the opportunity for minority interests to be represented.’

To what extent do you agree?

Students needed to consider both the preferential and proportional voting system. Elections should deliver majority rule through elected representatives and also provide opportunities for minority representation. A government elected by the majority of voters has a mandate to implement policy promises.

Preferential (House of Representatives)

- students could suggest that single member electorates do not deliver members of parliament that represent the majority but rather members of parliament are the most preferred candidates
- five elections since 1945 have delivered governments who on House of Representatives two party preferred vote have not represented majority of voters
- In 1998, ALP gained over 51% of the H of R vote and lost; in 1990 the LNP gained over 50.4% of the H of R vote and lost. After the 1998 election the government’s GST mandate was questioned. The LNP has numerical mandate but not necessarily a moral mandate. This situation is caused by two factors, malapportionment and vote wastage. Between 1943 and 1984 the LNP gained government three times without majority support due to malapportionment. Nevertheless, each government has won broader national appeal as they have won more votes in more electorates than their opponents
- minority representation is limited as minor parties without concentrated support and independents have difficulty gaining Houses of Representatives seats as the electorates are single member. Success requires 50%+1 of the primary vote or a high primary vote coupled with a significant preference distribution from other candidates. In addition, up to 50% of the electorate can remain unrepresented
- in the House of Representative elections, the National Party has the advantage of concentrated majorities. In the 1998 election, the National Party gained 5.32% of the House of Representative vote winning 16 seats, whereas both the Democrats and One Nation, with 5.11% and 8.39% of the vote respectively did not win any seats
- encourages people to vote for minor parties or independents, not wasting votes as preferences may decide winner - gives minor parties influence over outcome and policies of major parties
- minor parties and independents have difficulty getting elected but can have an influence on the outcome.

Proportional (Senate)

- Senate does not deliver majority rule or one vote one value due to malapportionment - malapportionment is a feature of the Senate system. Electorates (the states and territories) do not have approximately the same number of voters yet each state gets the same number of Senators as does each territory. NSW has 4 million voters, Tasmania has 330 000 voters and this means the party that controls the Senate may not represent the majority of voters
- Senate can thwart the will of the majority as represented by the government (if it has been elected by the majority) in the House of Representatives
- Senators elected on quota (require approximately 14% at a half Senate election and 7% at a full Senate election) thus it allows small parties and independents, nine can be elected, e.g. Democrats, Greens, NDP, DLP, Harradine to gain parliamentary representation – diversity of opinions. Unlike House of Representatives where minor parties and independents require 50% +1
- minor parties and independents may hold balance of power that gives them disproportionate influence in the parliament, e.g. 1993–1996 Greens with less than 1% of total vote, Brian Harradine wields powers far beyond that represented by the Tasmanians who elected him
- electors have a more diverse representation through multimember electorates as compared to single member electorates – more chance of an elector having a Senator who represents their political position.

This question was very popular and was generally well answered. More successful students were able to explore the two voting systems in detail and relate each to majority rule and minority interests. They included a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the two voting systems and were able to cite specific examples and statistics from recent elections, in particular 1998 and 2001. More successful students also critically analysed the voting systems,

noting that preferential voting can lead to ‘bogus majorities’ which can undermine the value of majority rule. They also explored the problems of minorities holding the balance of power in the Senate and related this to the mandate of the elected government. Less successful students merely explained the two voting systems with some superficial discussion of how majority rule and minority interests are represented. They did not attempt to question the extent to which these values are upheld or to critically evaluate the topic. They contained few statistics and examples and were generally short in length.

Question 6

‘Leadership and economic performance are the most important factors that influenced the result of a recent (in the last 10 years) federal election.’

To what extent do you agree?

More successful students acknowledged that leadership and economic factors play a significant part in determining the result of all elections and for the most part are the significant factors. Nevertheless, there are exceptions, 2001 was the first time since Vietnam that ‘foreign policy’ issues had a significant impact on an election result.

- election of 2001 was an example of when in addition to leadership and economic performance, external issues and refugee policy influenced the election result
- students should acknowledge that leadership was a factor – Howard more popular than Beazley despite the fact that both took a similar stance on refugee issue
- leadership also a factor in terms of loss of support for Beazley on the immigration issues as sections of traditional ALP voters turned to the Greens
- economic factors did not play a significant role in 2001 – in the sense that economy was seen as being strong– low inflation, surplus, declining unemployment, GST not on the agenda as in the previous election
- Howard was portrayed as a leader who was able to keep a ‘strong hand on the tiller’ in times of crisis – threat to the security of the nation
- Discussion of context – September 11 and Tampa – diverted attention and allowed the government to exploit electoral xenophobia and fear to gain support
- Beazley lost support from sections of traditional ALP support base through his support for Howard’s refugee policy
- ALP leadership team low profile compared to LNP

This was not a popular question and was attempted by very few students. More successful students showed a thorough knowledge of the issues surrounding a recent election, with most concentrating on the 2001 election, but some on the 1998 election. They addressed the question in detail, citing examples of how leadership and economic performance can influence election results. More successful students also recognised that other factors can influence election results and there were very good attempts to assess the relative importance of factors which can impact on elections. Less successful students paid little attention to the question and simply wrote as much as they knew about an election. Students were asked to refer to one election only, although some students referred to more than one election. Others concentrated solely on leadership or economic management, instead of on both.

Political parties and pressure groups

Question 7

‘At the federal level, the major differences between the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party are in key policies and leadership.’

To what extent do you agree?

More successful students successfully tackled this question from two quite different viewpoints/arguments. They either agreed or disagreed with the proposition contained in the question. Some argued that, on policy and leadership matters, Labor and Liberal have tended to appear similar, whereas others argued that the parties are fundamentally different, notwithstanding the sense that there has been convergence on some matters of policy. These propositions were based on the following issues:

- Labor and Liberal have taken very similar positions on some of the more prominent (‘key’) policy issues that have dominated debates in recent elections. Labor and Liberal have both supported the privatisation of the public sector; both have sought to return surplus budgets when in government; both have a policy of giving income earners tax cuts. In more recent times, both parties have taken similar positions on asylum seekers, foreign policy, defence and security.
- Labor and Liberal have grappled with problems of leadership particularly where the parties perceive the need for leaders to combine image and style with a sense of substance. Students might identify the way leadership is influenced by the operation of opinion polls, and note that both parties have had to grapple with endless leadership ‘crises’ especially when in opposition.

Students who argued the case for convergence between the major parties made reference to the argument that the major political parties in Australia have moved from being ‘massed parties’ to ‘catch all’ parties (see particularly Dean Jaensch’s book *The Hawke-Keating Hijack*). The essence of this argument is that, in order to appeal to an electorate that is clustered around the political centre (that is, they are not ideological, they are not rigidly aligned to one party or another, and tend to have a more market-oriented approach to politics) the major political parties have had to jettison

their commitments to traditional party values and seek to present policy promises that will appeal to a range of voters (e.g. Howard targeting traditionally Labor supporters). More successful students raised the above points and also highlighted instances where major differences exist between the parties, including:

- the link between the approach parties take to some aspects of industrial relations policy and the expectations of their core constituencies. In other words, students might note that Labor will seek to work within the spirit of its relationship with the trade union movement, whereas the Liberal party will try to press ahead with the agenda particularly of its small business constituency. Students might refer to the very different position the parties have taken on Unfair Dismissal legislation put before the parliament by the Howard government as a practical example of this in the context of the policy debate. Students might also note that, while the ALP derives much of its operating revenue from the affiliated trade unions, the Liberal party does not allow organisations to affiliate with the party
- while there has been some convergence between the major parties on some policy issues, on others differences are still discernible. The Labor and Liberal parties have very different positions on health and education policies and this has been played out in the policy debate over matters such as Medicare, bulk-billing, university fees and the provision of social welfare
- while the parties might have much in common on the issue of leadership and policy, they still have different organisational structures and rules.

Students could note the following:

- i. the Labor party organisation tried to decentralise power from the parliamentary leadership in favour of the rank and file; the Liberal party concentrates power in the hands of leader (this is an important point of difference and should be mentioned by students)
- ii. the Labor leader is subject to the power of Caucus and may be directed by Caucus on certain policy matters; no such formal caucusing applies in the Liberal party
- iii. the Labor leader allocates portfolios after Caucus has selected the ministry or shadow ministry; the Liberal leader has a free hand to select the ministry and allocate portfolios
- iv. the Labor leader can expect high levels of discipline amongst his or her Caucus colleagues when they vote in the parliament, as any Labor MP who crosses the floor will be expelled. In theory, Liberal MPs can vote as their conscience dictates. The actual practice of internal party politics may be a little more complex in practice. It has been possible for Labor dissidents to survive (Carmen Lawrence on the issue of asylum-seekers, for example) and for Liberal dissidents to be punished (the disendorsement of Ian McPhee).

Very few students attempted this question. More successful students were able to demonstrate the differences between the policies of the ALP and the Liberal Party and the leadership of the ALP and the Liberal Party. Equal consideration was given to each. They considered the differences and similarities of each party and cited current, relevant and accurate examples to reinforce their comments. Less successful students appear to have prepared an essay on everything they know about the ALP and the Liberal Party, with little consideration for the actual question. They included few examples and were generally very short in length.

Question 8

**‘Not all pressure groups have equal access to government.’
To what extent do you agree?**

This question gave students the opportunity to debate the issue of how pressure groups interact with the policy-making process, and what implications this interaction has for the distribution of power in a liberal democratic state.

More successful students agreed with the proposition, for the vast majority of political theory – including pluralist theory – concedes that there is not an equal distribution of power and influence across groups, and that the rather unequal access to government is part of that inequality. Students accounted for this inequality in access to government using the following arguments:

- unequal access to government may be a reflection of the distribution of societal and economic power – that is, those groups who come from the more ‘important’ areas of economic activity, or from the more ‘powerful’ sectors of society, will obtain much greater access to government
- access to government may be determined by the party persuasion of the government. It may well be that trade unions get slightly better access to ministers during Labor governments than coalition governments
- access to government may be profoundly influenced by government policies and attitudes towards particular groups – for example, a government may decide to punish a group or set of groups and ‘freeze’ them out of decision making, or, alternatively, the government may actively seek to court favour with a particular group and allow it access to the exclusion of others (this has occurred on many occasions, including the time after 1996 when the Howard government sought to freeze out conservation groups such as the Australian Conservation Foundation – a body that had enjoyed good access to government during the years of the Hawke Labor government)

- some interest groups have impeccable access to government because of the control they exert over important functions. Groups representing business and producer interests, for example, are often able to get access to government on the basis that decisions made by these groups can profoundly influence economic outcomes
- by the same token, groups representing the poorer or weaker elements of society may find it difficult to obtain access to government. This relationship tends to be an expression of the link between political power and societal power. The real concern of democratic theorists is that a policy-making system based on the inclusion of interest groups may end up serving the interests of the affluent and influential at the expense of less organised or less resourced groups
- there is some concern that small and noisy but very well organised groups obtain an access to government well out of proportion to their support base. Recent studies of pressure groups have focused on the way socially conservative groups such as the Right to Life have been able to exert influence and gain access to government despite their status as a fringe group. A similar argument has been made in the United States apropos the National Rifle Association. Such groups are able to maximise their ability to exert leverage via 'lobbying' notwithstanding the fact that they represent minority or fringe opinion.

Very few students attempted this question. More successful students were able to explore the concepts of pluralism and elitism and use relevant examples of pressure group activity to illustrate their discussion. More successful students concluded that not all pressure groups have equal access to government and that access can be influenced by a range of factors. Less successful students failed to cite specific pressure groups and tended to generalise about access or lack of access to government, without explaining why this might be the case. Concepts of pluralism and elitism were either not discussed or superficially explored.

Australian foreign policy

Question 9

'Foreign policy is formulated by the government, with little influence from public opinion and the opposition.' To what extent do you agree?

More successful students discussed the relative influence of key players, institutions and organisations on the formulation of foreign policy, including:

- the role of ministers (especially the prime minister, foreign, trade and defence ministers)
- the role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Defence
- the role of Parliament, in particular committees
- pressure groups and international organisations (e.g. United Nations, ASEAN, APEC, Amnesty, anti-globalisation protesters)
- the media
- the Opposition.

Consideration was given to the context in which decisions are made. Therefore, the relative influence of the following was considered:

- domestic issues (e.g. refugees) and the level of bipartisanship
- international events (e.g. Bali attacks and the war on terror)
- external influence from other nations (e.g. USA, ASEAN nations).

Over the last two decades foreign policy has in the main, had bipartisan support and was perceived as having minimal electoral impact therefore there has been little challenge to the government's foreign policy positions as compared to domestic policy. Recent events changed this situation largely as a consequence of the impact of terrorism, immigration and refugee issues and the vocal policy positions of parties such as the Greens.

This was a very popular question and was generally well answered. More successful students were able to discuss the question in detail, to disagree with the statement and to note that recently the public and the opposition have exercised significant influence on the formulation of Australian foreign policy. They cited detailed and relevant examples to reinforce their arguments and some students made the distinction between where public opinion and/or the opposition have attempted to influence foreign policy and where they have actually been successful in influencing the policy formulation. Some students wrote accurate and long essays on this topic. Less successful students concentrated more on the role of the government in the formulation of foreign policy and paid little attention to the role of public opinion and the opposition. Many essays appeared to have been prepared. Less successful students struggled to cite relevant examples and wrote brief essays of only two to three pages.

Question 10

'Australia lacks an independent foreign policy as a consequence of its relationship with the United States.' To what extent do you agree?

More successful answers to this question were structured around a debate as to the extent to which Australia's actions since the World War II have been independent. More successful answers included the following aspects:

1. reasons for ANZUS in 1951 and the extent to which our involvement in Korea was used to get this treaty. Australia was committed to the war against communism and as such the actions with regards to Korea was within this context. Also, a good answer would indicate that Australia has always desired a powerful protector
2. the extent to which actions of the Australian government through the Cold War were driven by the desire to follow America or were in line with Australia's national interests, for example Korea and Vietnam. These involvements could be contrasted with Australia's involvement in Malaya and Borneo, with the British, again in the fight against communism. Australia, like other western nations, had signed up to the doctrine of 'forward defence'
3. actions such as Australia's involvement in Somalia, Afghanistan and Gulf Wars One and Two, should be considered in the context of the US relationship. Also, the influence of the UN on whether Australia was involved
4. consideration could be given to the argument that as a like-minded western liberal democracy our policies would naturally coincide with those of the USA, therefore the concept of independence is a moot point
5. the extent to which actions noted above have been the result of successive Australian Governments viewing ANZUS as an insurance policy and our involvements as paying the premiums
6. students could indicate that governments have occasionally defied the US, e.g. MX missiles
7. independent actions that Australia has taken, e.g. East Timor or Cambodia. These were taken with the support of the US but were not driven by the US. 'Cooperative intervention' in the Solomons could also be viewed in this context
8. discussion of the trade/economic relationship between Australia and the USA is necessary. The good student will indicate that this is the main area of contention, although both nations do pay lip service to the aims of the WTO and free trade. The application of free trade is the area of most annoyance in the relationship. Examples of differences, Lamb (Clinton Administration) and Steel (Bush Jnr Administration), this could be contrasted with recent moves towards a free trade agreement
9. discussion around whether an independent foreign policy is truly achievable for a middle power like Australia would indicate a student with a higher level of understanding of the question.

This was a very popular question and related to a current and topical issue. More successful students clearly understood the question and were able to demonstrate a sophisticated knowledge of issues surrounding the topic. They were able to put Australia's relationship with the USA into an historical context and to clearly cite examples of how Australia's foreign policy could be interpreted as being dependent. They also cited clear examples of independence within the relationship with the USA and in regional Australian foreign policy. Some students posed the question of whether it is possible for Australian foreign policy to be truly independent. Less successful students concentrated too heavily on Australia's historic relationship with 'great and powerful friends', with little current information. They also failed to refer to any examples of independence within Australia's relationship with the USA and within Australian foreign policy in general, and seemed committed to simply agreeing with the question. Many concentrated purely on military aspects of Australian foreign policy and made simplistic judgments about the relationship between the two countries and between Bush and Howard in particular.

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