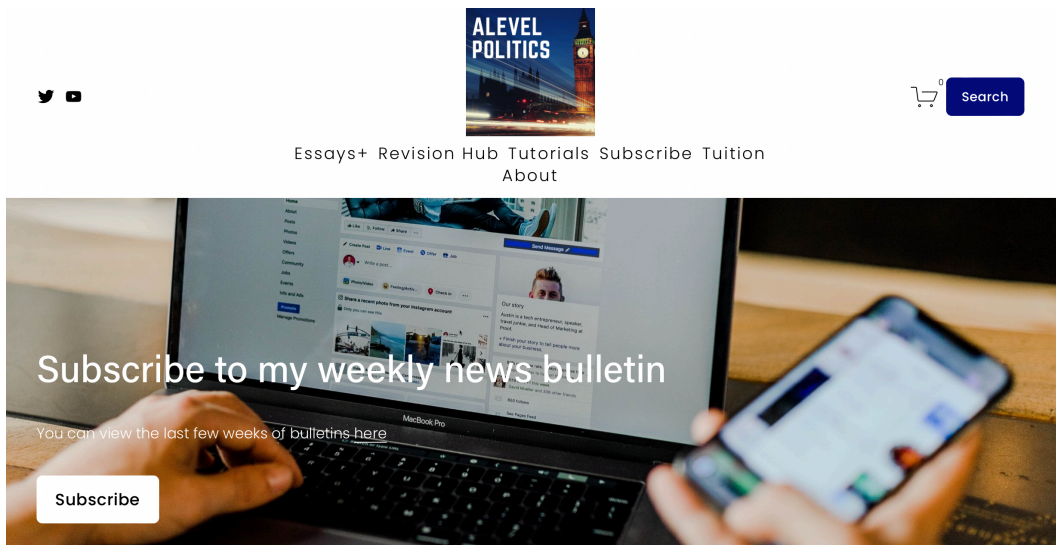


How to Answer a 30 Mark Source A Level Politics Essay Question

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The screenshot shows the top of the A Level Politics website. At the top center is the logo 'ALEVEL POLITICS' with a picture of Big Ben. To the left are social media icons for Twitter and YouTube. To the right is a search bar with a shopping cart icon. Below the logo are navigation links: 'Essays+', 'Revision Hub', 'Tutorials', 'Subscribe', 'Tuition', and 'About'. The main content area features a promotion for a weekly news bulletin, with the text 'Subscribe to my weekly news bulletin' and 'You can view the last few weeks of bulletins here' overlaid on a background image of a person using a laptop and a smartphone. A 'Subscribe' button is visible at the bottom left of the promotion.

The Basics

- Remember, in the exams for components 1 and 2 you have to answer one source question (out of a choice of two) and one non-source question
- Each source question is worth 30 marks and you will have to complete it in 45 minutes.
- Students often overcomplicate source answers.
- The first thing to remember is you have to answer a source question employing the same structure as a normal 30-mark question.
- So generally the approach to a standard 30-mark answer is the same as a source question.
- So the essay will look the same structurally.
- Also, choose the source based on the question, not the source.
- Don't read the source first.
- Ask yourself can I answer this question without a source?



SECTION A: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Answer ONE question from EITHER Question 1(a) on page 2 OR Question 1(b) on page 3 and then answer ONE question from EITHER Question 2(a) OR Question 2(b) on page 10.

EITHER

- 1 (a) *The source below considers the factors which deliver success for political parties in general elections. It reflects on whether the outcomes of general elections are predictable or whether the electorate can spring surprises, making the results more volatile.*

Some people claim that success in a general election for a political party depends on stable and predictable forces. Few seats change hands in a general election and voting patterns are predictable and constant. In studies of voting behaviour factors such as an individual's class and family background combined with the area in which they live all merge together to provide a clear indication of the way an individual will vote. On this basis, opinion polls accurately indicate the outcomes of a general election. When many people are asked, they readily identify with both a specific class and endorse the policies of a major political party. The dice is loaded from the start and outcomes of general elections are all too predictable and fixed.

However, many now doubt the idea of predictability and the assumptions on which it is based. Instead of predictability they infer unpredictability and volatility with an inability to forecast accurately the outcome of how the public will vote. In fact in 2015, 111 seats changed hands and in 2017, 70. General elections and success in them is built around capturing ideas and having media support. What the political parties say in new policies and their manifestos matters greatly. Opinion polls, as the general election in 2017 showed, are no longer good indicators of the outcome. If anything, the 2017 general election illustrated the importance of age and education as indicators of how people vote. The media can make and break a political party. Riding the wave of media attacks, a political party must have a good leader who can weather any storm and connect with the masses. This is what Blair and Thatcher did and was the basis of their success. Policies and leaders are the crucial factors and, as such, they are the leading indicators for success at the polls.

Using the source, evaluate the view that the outcomes of general elections are stable and predictable.

In your response you must:

- compare and contrast different opinions in the source
- examine and debate these views in a balanced way
- analyse and evaluate **only** the information presented in the source.

(30)

Do not answer Question 1(b) if you have answered Question 1(a).

OR

- 1 (b) *This source is adapted from a Hansard report of a debate in the House of Commons held in October 2017. More than 100,000 people had signed a petition calling for the introduction of proportional representation for elections to the Westminster parliament. Here are extracts from the speeches made by Steve Double MP (Conservative Party) and Caroline Lucas MP (Green Party).*

Steve Double MP

Proportional representation will damage democracy by putting more power into the hands of parties. First-past-the-post (FPTP) invariably delivers strong and stable government. Votes are not wasted for we have seen turnout increase in recent times. It is clear and easy to understand. In addition it prevents extremist parties from gaining seats. There is a direct link between the MP and their constituency. The FPTP system enables us to exchange our strongly, passionately held views in the House of Commons. My party is committed to FPTP as the best system for this country.

Caroline Lucas MP

FPTP is damaging the legitimacy of our system of governance. A winner-takes-all approach to elections promotes adversarial politics. It encourages each of the major parties to seek to defeat their opposition completely, negating the need for post-election cooperation. Policy is likely to change dramatically when governments change. Countries with proportional representation (PR) systems outperform those with FPTP systems; PR would be likely to encourage more people to vote. It is very hard to persuade people to vote when they live in so-called 'safe seats'. We would also improve the chances of electing a parliament that better reflects modern Britain.

(Sourced from: Crown Copyright)

Using the source, evaluate the view that proportional representation would improve elections to the House of Commons.

In your response you must:

- compare and contrast different opinions in the source
- examine and debate these views in a balanced way
- analyse and evaluate **only** the information presented in the source.

(30)

Assessment Objectives

- You do not have to overthink this but your essays must all target a number of assessment objectives.
- AO1 - Knowledge (finding points from the source, basic factual explanation and examples)
- AO2 - Analysis (will explain later)
- AO3 - Evaluation (Judgement)
- Each AO is worth 10 marks.



Structure

- There is not a prescriptive structure.
- I recommend to my students to stick with this format:
 - Introduction
 - **Point 1** - from the source
 - Counter Point - from the source
 - An Interim Judgement
 - **Point 2** - from the source
 - CounterPoint from the source
 - An Interim Judgement
 - **Point 3** - a final point from the source
 - CounterPoint from the source
 - An Interim Judgement
 - Conclusion
- So in essence an ideal essay has 3 sections - each with 2 paragraphs.
- So 6 paragraphs in the main body.
- You do not need to have it entirely symmetrical/balanced.
- An essay is an argument with balance, not a balanced piece with some argument.



What's the point?

- A paragraph may look something like this
- A point
- An explanation/expansion of your point
- Examples - mostly contemporary
- Analysis of the examples/explanation
- In a source essay - the 'point' is where you need to use the source.
- Not in the explanation, examples and analysis (although you may want to do so)
- So your 'point' and if possible your 'counters' have to come from the source
- In simple terms - you should be directly quoting the source six times at the start of your paragraphs.
- This means you have to pair up your paragraphs



Source

The first reason why it is clear that conventions on ministerial responsibility no longer apply is that recently "Brexit divisions and leaks"... and the "suspension of CCR" by Cameron has led to CCR becoming less important.

However these claims may be 'exaggerated', because "CCR was suspended in 1975 during the first European referendum"

Also in the source it is clear that "Ministers are today less likely to resign over policy failures".

However "ministers may resign less over departmental failures, this is because policy-making is far more complex these days"

Lastly the PM "has been accused of lying and misleading parliament. he did not resign... because the PM has the final decision on IMR."

However, "accusations about the Prime Minister misleading parliament finally caught up with him and he was forced to resign by members of his own cabinet." This shows that CCR does work, after over 50 ministers resigned from his government.

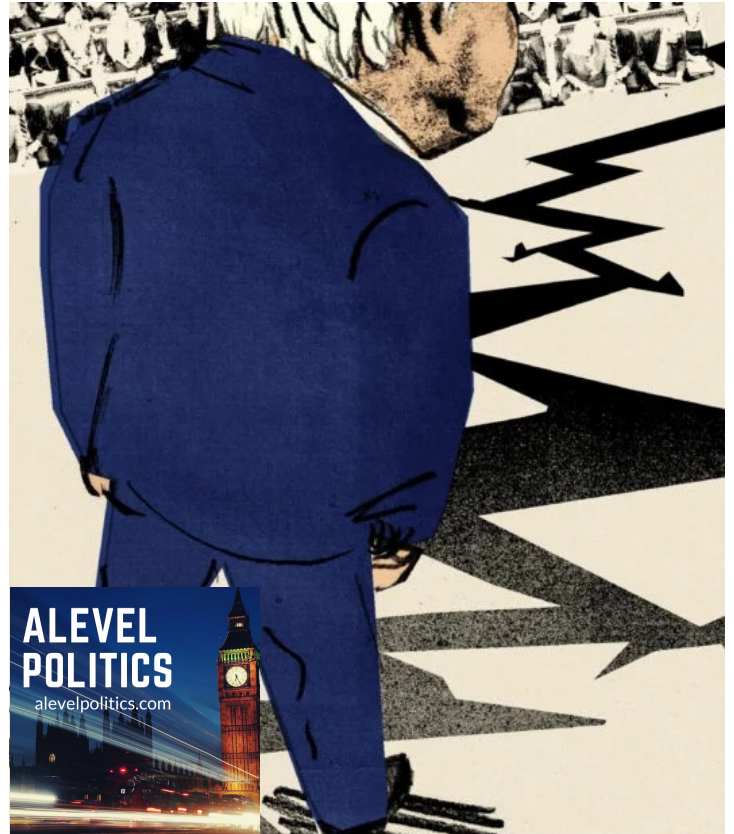
In recent years, conventions of ministerial responsibility have weakened. Collective cabinet responsibility, the well-established convention that binds the government to collective decision-making and orderly government, has been compromised over **Brexit divisions and leaks** from within the cabinet. David Cameron had to suspend CCR when he faced significant divisions and diluted it on occasion, opting to undermine constitutional principles over party and government unity. **Ministers are today less likely to resign over policy failures**, and there have been many in recent years, most notably over covid recovery and education. Prime Minister Boris Johnson refused to sack his Home Secretary despite being found to have broken the code and he was **accused of lying and misleading parliament**. Despite this, he did not resign **because the the PM has the final decision on IMR**.

However, claims that ministerial responsibility no longer applies are exaggerated. **CCR was suspended in 1975** during the first European referendum, and most cabinet conversations remain private. When cabinet ministers disagree on policy, they are expected to hand in their resignations, which has happened several times in the past five years. Although **ministers may resign less over departmental failures, this is because policy-making is far more complex these days**, and a minister is not expected to know every little detail; that's the job of the civil service. **Accusations about the Prime Minister misleading parliament finally caught up with him and he was forced to resign by members of his own cabinet**.

Evaluate the view that the conventions of ministerial responsibility no longer account for ministerial actions [30]

Introductions

- Introductions are very important.
- Most students don't know what to put into introductions so they end up telling a story or repeating themselves.
- I believe there are four things to put into an introduction:
 - Define key terms - e.g. codified constitutions
 - Give political context
 - Outline the main points from the source
 - Give a clear judgement
- A political context is to explain why the question has been asked. So if the question is on presidentialism, you may reference Blair for example.
- A judgement is absolutely necessary from the start.
- You have to tell the examiner what your opinion is.



Introductions

Context

Definition

Points from source

Judgement

Conventions of ministerial responsibility have been subject to much debate recently as Prime Minister Boris Johnson refused to sack ministers that had broken convention. These conventions are Individual Ministerial Responsibility (IMR) - which lays out the responsibility of ministers to answer for their departments and failures and tell the truth to parliament. Collective cabinet responsibility (CCR) is a convention that states the cabinet functions as a team and votes together. They are not meant to disagree with government policy once a decision is made. The source lays out three areas that will be explored: how CCR has become less important, how ministers are less likely to resign over failures, and how the PM is the ultimate decision maker, which means that he can break these conventions without consequence. It will be argued that these conventions no longer apply.



Judgements

- We have already said that your judgement has to be in your introduction.
- You also need to mirror your initial judgement in the conclusion.
- However to get the range of marks for AO3, your judgement must be embedded into the body of your essay.
- In other words, examiners must be constantly reminded of your final assessment.
- There are two kinds of judgements you can put into your essay
- Embedded judgements (typically at the start of your paragraph and counter).
- Interim judgements (at the end of your for and counter pair).



Embedded Judgements

It may be argued **but incorrectly** that the “Conservative Party has moved away from Thatcherism economically”. This is because...

However, **a stronger argument** is that the “current Conservative Party only moved away from Thatcherism to the extent it has because of the covid pandemic”.



Interim Judgements

This comes at the end of the paired paragraphs

‘Although there are arguments from the source that the Johnson government has interfered in the economy, a un-thatcherite approach. Their intention is to return to less spending and lower tax after the current crisis’

Here the student is coming back to the original judgement but also giving the main reason why they have concluded this (substantiated judgement)

“Thus, it can be argued that although backbenchers have less power when a government has a majority, in recent years for the reasons mentioned earlier, when the source points out that backbenchers have become more assertive, this is stronger, thus the executive is no longer able to dominate the legislature”.

“So, although referendums give people the ability to contribute to democratic decision making, the harms outweigh their benefits and so direct democracy should not be utilised in a representative system”.



What is Analysis?

- Analysis can be the most confusing concept. This is because it is used in common language to mean many things. When a teacher says, ‘more analysis needed’ – it can mean many things to many students. So here is a helpful breakdown I created for my students.
- Firstly, what isn’t regarded as analysis?
- Examples are not analysis. Examples would give you knowledge (AO1) marks. Describing a fact is not analysis either.
- Facts are not ‘analytical’ because generally they happened and not subject to your opinion. Why they happened and their impacts will require analysis.
- Analysis marks are not awarded for restating your judgement.
- So, what is analysis?
- **Analysis is showing significance, causes, consequences, motives, making observations of changes over time, making comparisons between leaders and institutions or to make links it to concepts and ideas.**
- It develops the point or example you are making.



Using Analysis

- Here are some key words you can employ to lead you into making analysis and examples of analytical sentences,
- This example is significant because...
- The consequence of this policy was that...
- The reason why the prime minister did it was
- Although this is mostly true, there have been exceptions that are important to highlight...
- It used to be that prime ministers dominated parliament, but today most prime ministers find it more difficult because...
- Cameron, unlike Blair decided that...
- Cameron, emulating Blair's strategy...
- The Human Rights Act (1998) led to judges having a greater impact upon the political life of the country...
- This illustrates how citizens have been able to use the HRA in bringing the actions of government to account, rights that previously would only be secured by a few if they could afford to take their case to Strasbourg.
- Boris Johnson has not returned to austerity because he wishes to retain the 'redwall' seats he won in 2019 and he knows that cutting public spending will not help this strategy. This is because these voters are very dependent on government spending...



Analysis in action

The following paragraph is rich with analysis, (analysis underlined).

The most significant area of constitutional reform since 1997 has been in the area of civil liberties, “the labour government revolutionised civil liberties in the UK”. The Blair government introduced a raft of new measures to give individual rights and create more fairness for citizens. Blair introduced the Human Rights Act (1998) which laid out the rights of citizens in a single piece of legislation. This was a significant piece of legislation because it created a rights-based culture where citizens could use human rights law to protect their rights. Previously, citizens would have to go to the European Court of Human Rights to protect their rights against the state. This tilted the balance away from the state to the individual citizen and brought the UK closer to a liberal culture of rights and individualism. The Belmarsh verdict (2005), the Afghan hijacker's case and more recently the verdict against the Department of Work and Pension, regarding Universal Credit, illustrate how citizens have been able to use the HRA in bringing the actions of government to account, rights that previously would only be secured by a few if they could afford to take their case to Strasbourg. All of these measures strengthened citizen's rights and brought Britain closer to a modern liberal democracy, typically seen by states with constitutions.

Conclusions

- Conclusions are necessary but can be shorter than introductions. In a conclusion you typically do the following three things:
 - Restate your judgement
 - Give the main reason why you have come to this judgement
 - Give a prediction for the future
-
- Don't just repeat all your points again or summarise - pick on a single important factor or a big reason why you came to your judgement.



An Example Conclusion

A particularly great example written by a student of mine recently,

To conclude, issues such as Brexit and devolution have shown a change in public opinion, as minority parties become more popular. For the Westminster electoral system to remain democratic, it needs to change to represent the views of minority parties. The decrease in popularity of minority parties recently is not a reliable trend, and as constitutional issues such as devolution continue to arise, it is important for minority views to be protected by an electoral system that does not disproportionately overrepresent Labour and the Conservatives. The emergence of multiple parties evidently suggests the Westminster electoral system, FPTP, must change.



From the examiners reports

- The source is the key platform on which the response is based.
- It contains competing views which can be justified, the key element is to treat each side with diligence and respect and argue through a range of points, pertinent to each
- In these points the challenge is to expand on the knowledge the source contains (AO1), then to analyse these points and explain their remit (AO2) then come to a judgment after weighing up the evidence and implications (AO3).
- There is no 'set' format of approach that is demanded
- There is enough AO1 base to achieve full marks. Newly introduced facts (AO1) can gain AO1 credit but no marks can be advanced for the analysis and evaluation of the newly introduced details.



From the examiners reports

- In particular, one very pleasing aspect was the ability of students to bring together competing argument from the source to create effective comparative analysis in order to build substantiated conclusions.
- The most effective approach taken was to pair up naturally competing arguments from the source (A01), develop each point with wider knowledge in order to analyse comparatively (A02) the strength of the arguments to lead to substantiated conclusions throughout the essay (AO3). Given that the marks are split evenly between the three AOs, then this approach enabled students to access the higher mark bands. This approach could be launched in a clear introduction, developed through the body of the essay and drawn to a clear judgement in the conclusion.



1. A STRONG INTRODUCTION
 • Give political context • Define any key terms • Set out the main points of the debate (your sections) • Give a clear judgement

2. YOUR JUDGEMENT IS SUSTAINED
 • Start with your judgement • Echo your judgement throughout

3. USE KEY TERMS
 • Eg Party systems, left-wing, pluralism, marginal seat, political sovereignty

4. AN INTERTWINED DEBATE
 • Respond to your main point with the other side of the debate

5. DEEP ANALYSIS
 • Significance of your point/example? • Strengths & weaknesses • Links

6. A STRONG CONCLUSION
 • Restate your clear judgement • Give your main reason behind judgement
 • Give predictions

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