



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/1L The quest for political stability: Germany, 1871 - 1991
Report on the Examination

7042/1L
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General Observations

The paper proved accessible to the vast majority of students and generally discriminated well, allowing a full range of marks to be awarded. Time management did not appear to be an issue and most students were able to complete all three questions.

There was evidence that students had taken time to plan and structure their answers and there was some careful reading of the extracts in Q.01. Not surprisingly, some were more confident than others in assembling their answers to the compulsory extract evaluation question, particularly when it came to appropriate own knowledge to explain arguments identified. Most, however, adopted a focused and balanced approach when writing their Section B essays and the very best showed judgement and upheld an argument, linking well to the question throughout, whilst providing some conceptual awareness. There were, of course, some, whose knowledge of material or understanding of developments, were inadequate for the tasks set. Others, meanwhile, had some good knowledge but were let down by poor technique. It is largely to help such students that the following comments are offered.

It always needs to be remembered that Component 1 is a breadth study and that students have to be able to deploy second order concepts such as continuity and change in their analysis of a time period which can be up to 20 years or more. As such, knowledge needs to be deployed carefully in terms of enough to provide some support to arguments identified in 01, or made in essays, and not become so precise and concentrated that development becomes bogged down, does not move the response on, and fails to cover the breadth in question.

Question 01

There were some very good answers to the extract question this year. It is pleasing to see that students understand that they have to treat each extract as a separate response although there were some unnecessary developments of comparing all 3 extracts in a final paragraph at the end and deciding which was overall most convincing. This is not a requirement of the question and such development was not considered in the final mark.

The key aim of extract question is to identify arguments made within each extract, in relation to the key focus of the 01 question, and in terms of how convincing they are. The focus this year was political developments in Germany in the years 1966 to 1989. Ideally the student should identify an overall main argument for each extract, in relation to the focus. It is a stronger response if the student is able to express this overall argument in an holistic way. This is not about specific words, or a sentence in the extract, but using their own words to express what the historian seems to be saying overall once the extract has been completely read. After that there will generally be other specific arguments made in the extract that reinforce the overall main argument. Students should try to identify at least one of these. There should be an attempt to challenge an argument at some stage. The main argument is always a strong one to develop. However, there should only be challenge made to the main argument. Some students wasted time by challenging too many arguments. There should be a small judgement at the end reinforcing the students overall thinking about the extract in terms of convincing or not. Again, this should be a brief paragraph only, using ideas like the main argument being too narrow, one-sided or balanced.

It needs to be remembered that in some cases an overall argument may not be that obvious with an extract, and that they may, in fact, have a number of disparate arguments. In such cases the student simply needs to be able to identify and develop some of these arguments using the techniques indicated in the previous paragraph.

There are some approaches within this, which students should try to avoid: the comment on the overall argument should reflect the application of the focus of the question to the extract, not simply be a paraphrase of the extract itself. The presentation of the analysis suggesting ways in which main or sub-arguments within the extract are convincing, or otherwise, should avoid identifying only 'part' of an argument and then fact-checking against own knowledge. The key aim is to indicate the 'whole' argument, be it the main, or a sub-argument, within the extract, then evaluate within the context of own knowledge. Finally, evaluation of arguments needs to be developed in a way that any own knowledge used should be sufficient enough to explain why they are convincing or not, and not become a long commentary, bordering on an essay style approach.

Extract A

The overall main argument here was that governments in Germany in these years were centrist in nature, with little difference between parties. Many students did not express this explicitly, beyond quoting the extract with statements like 'party distinctions became blurred'. Although this is an indication of the main argument, it is stronger if the student can develop it in their own words.

Evaluations and contextual own knowledge were key to success with all three extracts. Students who knew this material did very well. It was clear that some students did struggle to apply appropriate own knowledge to any arguments identified; knowing exactly who Schmidt was why he was popular with conservative voters was, being a good example. Developments in Germany from 1966 to 1991 is a key part of the specification, and although students may have an eye on revising the earlier part of the course by this stage, they must focus and take onboard any, potential examination material.

Extract B

The overall main argument here was that there were clear divisions between left and right-wing political opinion. This was made obvious in the first sentence. Again, to make the students' understanding of the overall argument more manifest to the examiner, is for them to read the whole extract and develop the overall argument in their own words.

Most students were more comfortable with developing ideas about Brandt, reforms and 'Ostpolitik'. However, whatever contextual own knowledge is used must be sufficient to evaluate an argument, and many students simply developed overlong, descriptive commentaries around this material. Another issue with extract analysis is taking part of an argument and developing that, which is then really not in context with what the whole argument is on about. An example was students stating 'slow growth under Schmidt' then developing it as a criticism, when in fact the full argument states how the 'recession of the early 1970's gradually turned to slow growth under Schmidt', which is actually a positive development.

Extract C

The overall main argument there was a period of polarisation between established parties and radical, left-wing opposition. Most students were able to develop this quite well as the theme of opposition, at this time, is a popular part of the course. On the down side, this then led to overlong developments of ideas indicated in the extract like 'diversification' of opposition, and particularly, RAF activities, which became descriptive commentary, rather than evaluation, and resulted in less time to develop further arguments.

Question 02

The most popular question for the essays and as it was the Bismarckian period this was not surprising. The key focus was based on whether Germany became more socially and economically divided between 1871 to 1890. Most students were able to develop relevant ideas based on these two themes. Political developments like the rise of the SPD, and policies directed against this were allowed as long as they linked clearly to the idea of division or not. The key to a good essay answer is how well any support used is relevant and linked to the focus. As such, long developments on the Kulturkampf or Tariff Act, that become descriptive and not moving the response forward, are less effective than concise analysis, getting straight to the point, and developing the essay focus clearly. Equally, good essays, with strong overall judgements, were rewarded higher than those responses more inclined to 'sit on the fence', which was case for many responses in all three essays.

Question 03

The least popular question for the essays though generally demonstrating some of the strongest responses of all. The key focus was whether the Reichstag influenced the Kaiser's government between 1890-1914. A key discriminator here was whether students were able to clearly indicate the natural balance to the question: that the Reichstag did influence the government, and that it did not influence the government, during this period, before making an overall judgement. Many responses were too quick to jump away from the focus and develop the idea of cartels, pressure groups, or the Kaiser himself as being influential. Such ideas have validity, but more as part of an overall judgement, once the role of the Reichstag has been clearly developed. A good essay will always be focused with a range of ideas and some balance. For the highest marks students should be able to think conceptually about their ideas. An example might be the idea of the SPD's desire not to appear unpatriotic in the face of growing nationalist feeling and therefore failing to exploit opportunities like the DT affair fully, meant the Reichstag was less influential.

Question 04

A popular question with students and one that proved quite accessible. The key focus was based on the impact of the First World War and the growth of extremist right-wing movements. Most students were able to develop impacts of the First World War in terms of the 'stab-in-the-back', or the Treaty of Versailles. However, exhaustive descriptions of the Treaty's terms was less successful unless analysis was based on how and why it lead to growth of extreme right-wing movements. Balance was also a major discriminator here. Many students were too quick to develop ideas about the Weimar's weaknesses, Hyperinflation, or the impact of the Great Depression, as other factors for the rise of extreme right-wing movements, failing to make their obvious link to the legacy of the war. For example, Germany's suffering in the Great Depression was made worst by the loans from America, which came about as a way of dealing with economic aspects of the Treaty of Versailles.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.