

A Brief Summary of UK Government

Transition Work Pre-Reading

Read through and take notes from the following.

**Try to build a mind map of structures and processes
where possible!**

**Having a working knowledge of what follows will give you
a massive advantage come the start of the course.**

Where does political power reside in the UK and how is it controlled?

How (most) laws are made in the UK

- **First reading**
The bill's title is read out in the Commons. The bill is then made available members of Parliament (MPs).
- **Second reading**
MPs / peers discuss the principles of a bill. MPs may vote at the end of this point, particularly if a bill is a controversial one. A bill in the House of Lords passes to the next stage without having a vote.
- **Committee stage**
A bill is considered, line by line, by committees of MPs or peers. Changes – these are called amendments - are proposed and then voted on. The Commons bill committee normally consist of 20 MPs. The entire House of Lords often takes part at this stage in proceedings.
- **Report stage**
The bill, with amendments, is then 'reported' to the House. All members can then the amended bill. Those not involved at the previous stage may suggest that no further changes are needed.
- **Third reading**
MPs debate and vote on the bill in its very final form. In the Lords, further amendments may then still be introduced.



A bill approved by one chamber is considered by the other

If an approved bill leaves the House of Commons it is then sent to the House of Lords, where it goes through the same stages again. If the Lords were to make changes to the bill, it would return to the Commons for the MPs to consider the Lords' amendments. Both the Commons and Lords must then all agree on the final form of a bill before it can then become an actual law.

The Queen's 'assent' turns a bill into an Act

With the approval from the Lords and the Commons, a bill will also receive formal approval by the monarch (the Queen) this is called 'Royal Assent'. The Queen always gives her approval on the advice of ministers (and Queen Elizabeth has never turned one down). A bill then becomes law, and is described as an Act of Parliament.



How parliament works

Parliament is a legislative body of government. In the UK, parliament is made up of the Sovereign, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. There are three main functions of a parliament: make laws; represent the electorate; hold the government to account.

Scrutinising government and making it accountable

Government can be held to account through hearings and inquiries. The main ways in which parliament can hold government to account are: parliamentary debates; questioning government ministers; investigations undertaken by committees.

Parliamentary Questions

MPs and Lords can question government ministers either verbally or in writing. Parliamentary Questions takes place in the House of Commons on Monday-Thursday at varied times during the day, with each key government department being given a particular slot in which to answer questions relating to their work. The House of Lords incorporates questioning into their daily schedule. As well as this, there is also Prime Minister's Question Time, which takes place every Wednesday from 12pm to 12:30pm. This is where the Prime Minister answers questions from MPs in the House of Commons, including the Leader of the Opposition, who is the only MP allowed to pose follow-up questions once a question has been answered.

Committees

There are select committees set up by the House of Commons for each key department. The role of these select committees is to examine the spending, policy and administration of their specific government department. Committees produce reports of their findings, which the government can respond to and act on. These reports can be advisory, and can sometimes contribute to legislation being changed.

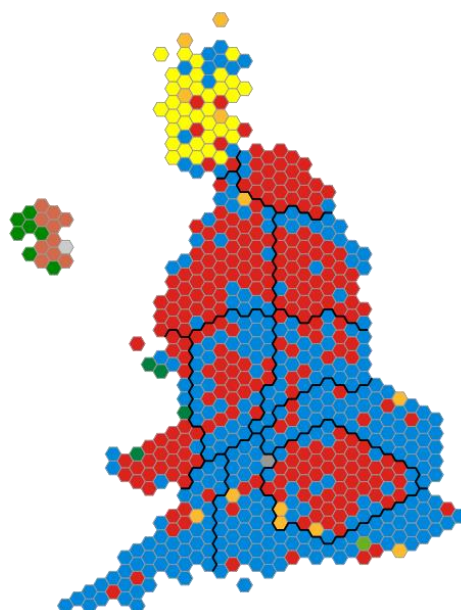
Debates

Laws are created and altered as the result of debates in the House of Commons. These can be on any subject and are voted on at the end.

MPs are given the opportunity to raise local or national issues (for example, if their constituents are particularly concerned about something) in the Commons secondary chamber. A government minister gives a response to the concerns raised.

The role of Members of Parliament (MPs)

Members of Parliament (MPs) are responsible to three separate groups: their constituents; their political party; Parliament. Their duties include: participating in debates, voting on legislation and other matters in parliament.



They also give advice and support (especially on government issues) to their constituents, representing their issues in the House of Commons.

Representing their constituencies

An MP is elected by the UK public and has a responsibility to the constituents of the area which they represent. An MP will listen to the concerns of their constituents and take these issues to parliament, where these issues will be debated and responded to. MPs can also propose new laws or amendments to laws in response to the concerns of their constituents.

Debating policy

MPs and Lords take part in debates to discuss government policy, proposed new laws and current issues. This enables MPs to express the concerns of their constituents. The purpose of debates is to allow MPs and Lords to reach an informed decision on a particular subject. This decision is then formalised in a vote, either for or against.



Scrutinising legislation

MPs are given the ability to scrutinise legislation through select committees, debates, and submitting questions (written and verbal) to ministers.

Ceremonial roles

- * Lord Speaker - chairs meetings in the House of Lords. The Lord Speaker 'collects the voices' in a debate, which means the Lord Speaker puts forward a motion or amendment to a vote at the end of the debate, and tries to decide by the volume of voices which side has more support.
- * Lord Chancellor - traditionally served as head of the judiciary and speaker of the House of Lords. However, in 2006, the role was reformed in order to allow the lord chancellor to concentrate on constitutional matters.
- * Clerk of the Parliaments - chief advisor on procedure in the House of Lords, and the employer of the House's nearly 500 permanent staff.
- * Black Rod - more properly known as Lady or Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod. Responsible for maintaining order within the Lords Chamber. Black Rod also plays a role in the State Opening of Parliament. When the Queen has taken her seat on the Throne, she sends Black Rod to the Commons Chamber (to call members to come and hear the Queen's Speech). The door of the Commons is then shut in Black Rod's face. Black Rod has to bang on the door with the rod three times. This is a tradition dating back to the 1600s, and has been upheld as a way of showing the Commons' independence from the Sovereign and the Lords.
- * Clerk of the House - the highest authority on House of Commons procedures.

* Serjeant at Arms - responsible for keeping order in the House of Commons. Also carries the House of Commons mace for the Speaker's procession (when the Speaker and staff walk to the House of Commons Chamber). The Serjeant at Arms wears a traditional uniform complete with sword

The House of Commons is the most powerful of both Houses

The political party with the most MPs forms the government. Occasionally the government is a coalition. This is when two parties run the government together.

Prime Minister's questions is every Wednesday. This is when your local MP can put questions to the government. The government also updates the house at this time on new developments, white papers and changes to be made in the law. Special dates might be commemorated too and orders of the day debated. The budget is also revealed in here.

The opposition, the party who is not in power, sit opposite to the government in the house.

The House of Lords is the second chamber.

Amendments to a bill when it reaches the Lords means it can be sent back to the Commons, who can then amend it further and send back to the Lords again.

The number of Lords is not fixed, but there are usually over 700 at a time.

The House of Lords doesn't have the power to stop a bill if the Commons wants it, but it can delay it and send it back with amendments.

There are hereditary peers that sit in the Lords, that have inherited their title. This is something that many people disagree with.

Bills must go through both houses before they can become an act of parliament (a law).

The third stage for a bill becoming an act is when it reaches the Queen. Realistically, the Queen never refuses to make a bill an Act, the last Queen to do that was Queen Anne over 300 years ago, but this still is an official stage of proceedings. This is because the Queen is our Head of State.

Key parliamentary roles including the Speaker, whips, front bench and back bench MPs

Whips are MPs or members of the House of Lords who are appointed by each political party to organise their own members in Parliament. A whip's responsibilities include making sure that their members vote in line with party policy.



The Speaker of the House of Commons represents the Commons to the Monarch and other authorities. The Speaker also chairs the debates which take place in the Commons chamber. Their role is to keep order and call each speaker to speak when required. The speaker has to remain politically impartial when carrying out this role. This means that they have to resign from their political party upon being elected as Speaker.



Front bench MPs (also called Frontbenchers) sit on the front bench in the chamber when the House is in session. Front bench MPs are either government ministers or their counterparts on the Opposition.

Back bench MPS (also called backbenchers) are MPs or members of the House of Lords that are not government ministers or their Opposition counterparts. They sit in the rows of benches behind their parties' spokespeople (Frontbenchers). The Backbench Business Committee decides which subjects are debated in the time allocated for issues raised by backbench MPs

The legislative process; parliamentary debates and deliberation of public issues and policy

A proposal for a new law (or a new amendment to an existing law) is called a bill. A bill may start in the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Whichever House it starts in, a bill will be debated on its second reading. It then goes to a committee, where it is further examined, and amended if necessary. It has a third reading, with more opportunity for debate, before going across to the other House (depending on where it started).



After going through a very similar process in the other House, it is returned to the House where it began, so that the House can consider any amendments. Both Houses have to agree on the exact wording of the final bill. It is then granted Royal Assent and becomes an Act of Parliament.

The formation of government by the leader of the political party with a majority in the House of Commons, or by a coalition of parties

The Government is usually formed by the political party that has won the most seats in the House of Commons at a general election. The head of the government is the Prime Minister, who is responsible for appointing government ministers.

Where there is no single party with a clear majority, a coalition government may be formed. This is a government formed jointly by more than one political party. There will usually still be a Prime Minister, who has the same responsibilities as they would for a single-party government. There may be a Deputy Prime Minister from one of the other parties of the Coalition.



The role of the Prime Minister, cabinet and ministers; the power of the Prime Minister and cabinet

Cabinet is a group of around 20 top-level government ministers, chosen by the Prime Minister, to advise and lead on specific key areas of policy, such as Crime, Health, Education, Defense etc.

They meet every week during Parliament to discuss the most important issues facing the government. In the Cabinet, there are three main Secretaries of states: Home Secretary, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor. Overall, the role of Cabinet is to provide support on key areas of policy and accountability for the workings of government.

Ministers are the MPs and members of the House of Lords who are in the Government. Ministers are appointed by the Prime Minister, and are given responsibility for a specific key area of government policy. Ministers sit on the front benches during parliamentary debates and must answer questions put to them during these debates. There are 120 ministers in total.



The Prime Minister is the leader of the Government and is responsible for selecting the other ministers in the Government. The Prime Minister is also responsible for overseeing the operation of the Civil Service.

The organisation of government administration into departments, ministries and agencies

Government departments decide policy in their particular area, and are separated into ministerial and non-ministerial. Non-ministerial departments are headed by senior civil servants instead of ministers.



There are 25 ministerial departments, including the Treasury, the Department of Justice, the Home Office, the Ministry of Defense and others.

There are 20 non-ministerial departments, such as the Food Standards Agency, HM Revenue and Customs, the Crown Prosecution Service and others.

There are also executive agencies, which do not decide policy, and are overseen by a particular Government department. These executive agencies and other bodies include the British Council, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, HM Prison Service and others.

Role of the civil service.

The Civil Service is responsible for carrying out the practical and administrative work of the Government, as well as helping to shape policy. The Prime Minister oversees the work of the Civil Service.

The Civil Service is politically impartial. Civil servants are accountable to Ministers, who are accountable to Parliament, whose Members are accountable to their constituents.



What are the powers of local and devolved government and how can citizens participate?

What about government at a local level?

Regions and Local Authorities

England is subdivided into nine regions (see right). As well as this, it is further divided into combined authorities which are groups of local authorities working together.

Combined authorities allow a group of local authorities to share responsibility and receive certain delegated tasks from central government in order to deliver things like transport and economic policy more effectively over a wider area.

South East
London
North West
East of England
West Midlands
South West
Yorkshire and the Humber
East Midlands
North East

England has two different systems of local government. One system uses a **county council** set-up, who are responsible for services such as education and waste management. There are also several **non-metropolitan district councils**. These are responsible for services such as housing and local planning. Both of these are elected into position.

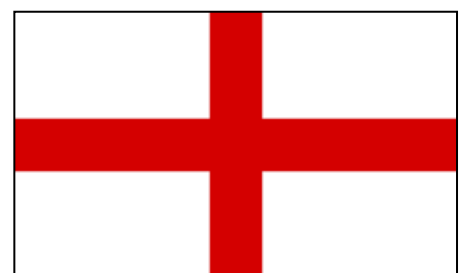
Some areas have only one level of local government. These are called unitary authorities. Alternatively, most of Greater London is governed by smaller London borough councils. The Chairman of a borough council might be called a major – and in some of the largest cities, a Lord Major. Both majors and councillors (who work for county councils) are accountable to the people of their ward who elected them as well as their political party.

Because the City of London and the Isles of Scilly actually pre-date the formation of the current system we call them *sui generis* authorities, (this is Latin meaning they are in a class of their own).

One additional way local government is further implemented, at a level below the metropolitan district councils, is an older system – the **civil and parish councils**. These may look after slightly less immediately important items of business such as organising park tidy-ups, entering 'Best Village in Bloom' competitions and market days. These no longer exist anymore (or play a very limited role) in larger cities like London or Birmingham.

What are English votes for English laws?

English votes for English laws (EVEL) is the system according to which any proposed legislation affecting only England has to have the support of a majority of MPs representing English constituencies. EVEL came about after the devolution of powers to Wales, Scotland and Northern



Ireland meant that MPs from these countries could all vote on matters affecting England only, while English MPs were not allowed to vote on matters affecting those countries only.

The current system in matters relating to England only is that MPs representing English constituencies are given a veto (that is, the power to block legislation). Where new legislation is found to apply to England only, a legislative grand committee of English MPs has to agree to any proposed changes.

Who can stand for election and how are candidates selected?

In order to be eligible to stand for election, candidates must be over the age of 18 and either a British citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, or a citizen of a Commonwealth country with indefinite leave to remain in the UK.



Some people are not allowed to stand for election; for example, people who work in the police force, armed forces, and people who are civil servants or judges are all disqualified from standing. You are also not allowed to stand for election if you are bankrupt.

Candidates have to be nominated for their name to appear on the ballot paper on voting day. This is usually done by the Nominating Officer of the political party with which the candidate is affiliated (or by applying to the relevant government department for independent candidates). Candidates then stand for election as MP of their particular constituency (one of 650 areas into which the UK is divided). Whoever gets the most votes in each constituency is then elected as MP to represent that part of the country in Parliament.

Who can and can't vote in elections, and why?

In order to vote in a general election in the UK, you have to be 18 years or older, and a British, Irish or Commonwealth citizen. You have to be resident at a UK address and not legally prohibited from voting.

Currently, under UK law, prisoners who are currently serving their sentences are not allowed to vote. There are exclusions to this rule: for example, remand prisoners (awaiting trial or sentencing), unconvinced prisoners and civil prisoners are all allowed to vote if they are on the electoral register.



There is debate around whether the right to vote should be extended to all UK citizens, including all prisoners. There is also debate about lowering the voting age to 16, in recognition of all the other activities that 16-year-olds are legally permitted to do, such as get married, have sex, and join the army. However, some believe that the voting age should remain at 18, as it is the age at which one legally becomes an adult.

What is the turnout of general elections? What can be done to increase it?

In the 2017 general election, voter turnout was 68.8%, which is slightly higher than the EU average of 66.1%. Generally, between 1922 and 1997, voter turnout in the UK has been higher than 71%. Voter turnout amongst younger people (aged 18-24) is typically lower than that of adults in the older age groups.

In countries such as Belgium and Luxembourg, voting is compulsory, although even these countries have experienced a fall in voter turnout for European Parliamentary elections. Some people argue that making voting compulsory would increase the voter turnout in the UK, but others point out that, whilst this may be true, it would be too costly to administer and enforce this law.

Proportional Representation or First Past the Post?

Another proposed method for increasing voter participation is Proportional Representation. This is the system under which a party with, for example, 20% of the general vote would gain 20% of the available seats in the election. The current system, referred to as First Past The Post or FPTP, is more of a 'winner-takes-all' system, in which only the candidate with the highest number of votes in a constituency wins that seat.

This can leave people feeling very disaffected: if, for example, they are a supporter of Party X in a constituency where Party Y has held the seat safely for years, the Party X voter may not see any point in bothering to cast their vote, since it is unlikely to affect the result. It is argued that Proportional Representation, or PR, would prevent people from feeling like their vote did not matter. However, critics of PR claim that it encourages splinter parties and unstable government.



Devolution – an established way of implementing localism

Scotland

The Scottish parliament is located in Edinburgh, in an area called Holyrood. You will often hear Holyrood mentioned as another word for Scottish parliament, much like the area Westminster is often used to refer to the English parliament. The Scottish parliament has 129 seats.

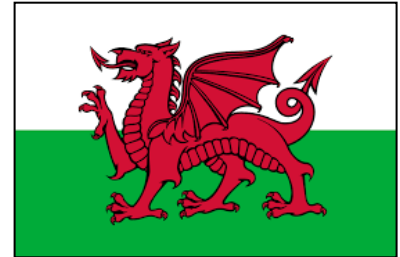


The devolved powers held by the Scottish Parliament include health, local government, housing and arts, among many other areas. Scottish Parliament has passed laws abolishing

university tuition fees, abolishing NHS prescription charges, providing free care for the elderly, imposing a minimum price on alcohol, banning smoking in public spaces and many other laws.

Wales

The Welsh parliament is called the National Assembly for Wales, and is located in Cardiff. It has 60 seats. The Welsh Assembly (as it is also known) has a range of devolved powers, covering issues such as agriculture, transport, taxes, education, laws relating to the Welsh language and many other areas of life.



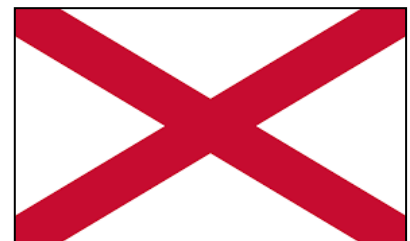
Laws passed by the National Assembly for Wales include the Human Transplantations (Wales) Act, which requires people to opt out of, rather than opt in to, organ and tissue donation in the event of their death.

Another law passed in Wales is the Welsh Language Act of 1993, which officially gives the Welsh language equal importance with the English language in the public sector; the act also permits Welsh to be spoken in courts.

In Wales, NHS prescriptions are free for everybody. There is also no charge for wigs or appliances on the NHS in Wales.

Northern Ireland

The parliament in Northern Ireland is called the Northern Ireland Assembly, and is located in Stormont, an area of Belfast. It has 90 seats. Devolved powers include the ability to legislate on issues such as infrastructure, law, education, and many other matters.



Laws passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly include free NHS prescriptions, a reduction of the legal amount of alcohol allowed when driving, allowing maternity leave to be shared with another person, and banning people under 18 from purchasing or hiring sunbeds.

The difference between the executive, the legislature, the judiciary and the monarchy.

In order to ensure an effective and democratic system of government, and to help prevent corruption, the state's powers are separated into three branches: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. These are sometimes referred to as the 'organs of government'. Each organ, or branch, is accountable to the other two, meaning that no one branch or associated institution can become so powerful as to completely take over or override the other two.

The executive power

This comprises of the Crown and the government, including the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers, as well as the Civil Service. The role of the executive power is to create and carry out government policy, which is formed according to research. Government policy affects many areas of everyday life, such as work, the environment, transport and many others. The executive doesn't make laws, or interpret them, but is responsible for enforcing them. The government is elected in the General Election, which can be called by Parliament. The government is made up of elected Members of Parliament.



The legislative power

Parliament holds the legislative power in the UK. The role of Parliament is to create and amend laws, as well as hold the government to account. In the UK, Parliament is officially made up of 3 parts: the Monarch, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. However, the Monarch's powers are only nominal, meaning that the Monarch doesn't get to take an active role in the law-making; the Monarch (in their constitutional role) opens and dissolves Parliament, and approves bills before they pass into law.



The House of Lords is made up of hereditary peers (who inherited the role by birth rather than being elected to it) and life peers (who have been appointed by the Crown or the Church of England). The House of Commons is comprised of elected Members of Parliament, and has more law-making powers than the House of Lords. The House of Commons and the House of Lords are independent from each other, with the House of Commons being the first chamber and the House of Lords being the second chamber of UK Parliament.

This is sometimes referred to as the bicameral system. Both Houses have to consider and approve a bill before it can become law, which is important as bills affect key aspects of everyday life, such as education, healthcare, and welfare, among others.

The judiciary power

This is made up of judges in courts, as well as those who hold judicial roles in tribunals. Although the judiciary is independent from both the legislative and executive powers, its senior judges are appointed by the Crown. The role of the judiciary is to interpret and resolve matters of law, as well as contribute to the development of the law through these rulings. This is important as its decisions can cause laws to be amended by the legislative powers.

Where does political power reside: with the citizen, parliament or government?

Systems of Voting

First Past The Post

Sometimes shortened to FPTP, First Past The Post is the system used for electing MPs to power in Westminster. In an election, voters in a constituency put a cross next to the name of the candidate they wish to vote for, and those votes are counted up. The candidate with the highest number of votes is then declared the winner, and is appointed to be the representative in parliament for that particular constituency. This process happens in each of the 650 constituencies in the UK.



A key feature of First Past The Post is that it is a 'winner takes all' system. This means that there is only one winner (the candidate with the most votes).

Advantages of FPTP

Because FPTP is conducted in each constituency, it means that extremist parties are very unlikely to be voted into power. This is because extremist parties do not tend to have lots of supporters concentrated in one constituency; their support tends to be more spread across the country, making a win under FPTP unlikely.

Because FPTP is only concerned with the highest number of votes, the winner can be calculated quickly after the voting has closed.

FPTP is a simple and straightforward system, which is accessible to voters and isn't very expensive to run compared to other systems.

Disadvantages of FPTP

Candidates can be elected on extremely small majorities. For example, imagine a result where Candidate 1 got 55% of the vote, and Candidate 2 got 45%. Only Candidate 1 would be classed as the winner, even though Candidate 2 was obviously almost as popular.

Voters can feel disengaged with the voting process, because unless they are voting for the winning candidate, they may feel that their vote will be a waste of time. For example, someone who wanted to vote for Candidate X in a constituency where Candidate Y has been safely in power for the last ten years may not bother to vote at all.

FPTP encourages political parties to pay lots of attention to parts of the country where they think they can win, and to ignore those parts of the country where they think there is no chance of them being voted in.



Proportional Representation

Proportional Representation, sometimes shortened to PR, is a system of voting whereby the results closely reflect the different votes cast by an electorate. This means that, if a political party got 10% of

the national vote, then that party would occupy 10% of the seats in parliament. Countries which use Proportional Representation include Cyprus, Greece, Spain, South Africa and Brazil.

Advantages of PR

PR is seen by many as a fairer system than FPTP, because it doesn't involve any wasted votes. Anyone you vote for under PR is likely to get a proportional share of the power in parliament, depending on how many other people vote for them.

PR gives a much clearer picture of voters' wishes as a nation, and it encourages coalition governments, because sometimes one political party doesn't get enough votes to hold power on its own. Coalition governments can be seen as good because they balance each other and have to co-operate with each other, so they are unlikely to make any big changes.

Disadvantages of PR

Some people see coalition governments as a bad idea, because they are often made without public support. For example, someone who voted for party Q might not have voted for party Q if they'd known that party Q were going to form a coalition with party P after the election.

PR is a more complicated system than FPTP. It takes more time and isn't as straightforward to run.

Extreme parties would gain more influence under PR (see advantages of FPTP above).

PR would weaken the link between a party's candidate and their constituency, because the candidate is no longer tied to that one part of the country.

Political Parties in the UK

The Labour Party

The Labour Party is the main centre-left party of the UK. Centre-left means that their policies are aimed at increasing social equality within the system as it currently is. Centre-left also means that the party opposes the gap between rich and poor in society, and has policies which are designed to decrease this gap and protect workers, such as minimum wage laws, limits to working hours, among others.



The Labour Party is the second largest party in the British House of Commons, with 262 seats. The Labour Party was last in power between 1997 and 2010. It is the second largest party in local government and is also the second largest UK party in the European Parliament.

The Labour Party was formed in 1906 as a socialist party seeking public ownership of industry (rather than private ownership). In the lead-up to the 1997 general election, Tony Blair dropped the commitment to public ownership from the Labour Party's manifesto and created what is referred to as 'New Labour', which was more in favour of market economics and therefore less socialist in its values than the original Labour Party. The Labour Party has, however, returned closer to its original values under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, its current leader.

The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party is the main centre-right party of the UK. Centre-right means that they aim to increase prosperity through policies and laws which support business and capitalism, and encourage economic freedom.



The Conservatives, or Tories as they are also informally known, are the largest party in Great Britain, with 318 seats in the House of Commons. The Conservatives, in coalition with the Democratic Unionist Party, are currently the ruling government in the UK.

The Conservative Party was formed in 1834 by Robert Peel. It soon became a party which supported the British Empire, the Church of England and the Monarchy. Today, the party remains supportive of unionism in the case of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, resigned following the result of the Brexit referendum in 2016, and was replaced by Theresa May.

The Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats, also known informally as the Lib Dems, are the UK's second largest centre-left party after the Labour Party. It was formed from two separate parties, the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party, in 1988. The Liberal Democrats are strongly in favour of the European Union, environmentalist causes, progressive taxation and the use of proportional representation to create a new House of Commons. They also want the members of the House of Lords to be elected, rather than the current system of hereditary peers or life peers. The party has 12 seats in the House of Commons. Between 2010 and 2015, the Liberal Democrats were part of a coalition government with the Conservative Party.



The Green Party

The Green Party is a left-wing party in England and Wales. It prioritises environmentalism, but also strongly supports left-wing social and economic policies, such as public ownership of industries and services, universal basic income, drug law reform, and proportional representation. It was founded in 1973, and currently has one seat in the House of Commons.



The UK Independence Party

The UK Independence Party, more commonly referred to as UKIP, is a right-wing party. It was founded in 1991 as a single-issue party, which aimed to gain the UK's independence from the European Union. As well as being highly Eurosceptic, the party is in favour of lowering immigration and reducing the impact of multiculturalism, which it sees as a negative thing. UKIP currently has three representatives in the House of Lords.

Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru is a left-wing political party which aims for Wales to be independent from the UK, and wants Wales to be a state within the European Union. Plaid Cymru has four MPs in the UK Parliament, as well as 12 out of 60 seats in the Welsh Assembly. Plaid Cymru seeks to secure investment in hospitals, schools, roads and railways in Wales.

The Scottish National Party

The Scottish National Party, or SNP as it is commonly known, is a centre-left party in Scotland. The SNP's main goal is for Scotland to become independent from the UK. It is

currently the largest party in the Scottish Parliament, with 69 out of 129 seats. As well as its commitment to Scottish independence, the SNP is strongly in favour of scrapping the UK's nuclear weapons.

Democratic Unionist Party

The Democratic Unionist Party, often referred to as the DUP, is a unionist party in Northern Ireland (which means it's a party in favour of Northern Ireland remaining as part of the UK, as opposed to Northern Ireland reverting to being part of the Republic of Ireland). Founded in 1971, it is now the fifth largest party in the House of Commons, and is currently supporting the Conservative Party, following their election to a minority government in 2017. The DUP is a right-wing and socially conservative party, being opposed to same sex marriage and abortion amongst other things.

How do others govern themselves?

Democracy and Politics around the world

The European Parliament

What are European Parliamentary elections?

EU citizens have the right to elect the politicians who represent them in the European Parliament. The European Parliament is an institution (made up of elected representatives) which defends the interests of EU citizens in the EU decision-making process. Every 5 years, EU citizens are able to vote for their chosen MEPs (Members of European Parliament). In 2014, there were also elections for the post of President of the European Commission (the person in charge of proposing and carrying out EU policies).

Does each country have the same amount of MEPs?

No. The number of MEPs depends on the size of the population of each country (rather than the size of the geographical area of the country). Currently, the lowest number of MEPs per country is six (in Malta, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Estonia), and the highest number of MEPs per country is 96 (in Germany).

How does it work?

Some form of proportional representation is used when electing MEPs. This means that if a party gets 20% of the votes, it will also win roughly 20% of the available seats. This way, both larger and smaller political parties have a chance of having representatives elected to the European Parliament. Individual countries are free to decide on the various other aspects of the electoral procedure, such as whether or not to split the country into electoral districts.

When do people vote?

Different countries in the EU have different traditional voting days. For example, the UK and the Netherlands usually vote on Thursdays, whereas most other countries in the EU

have their elections on Sundays. As long as the elections are all within a four-day span of each other, the countries can decide for themselves when to hold the election.

Who runs for MEP?

Elections are contested by a country's main political parties, but once MEPs are elected, most MEPs choose to join transnational political groups. Most national parties have links to a European-wide political party.



Some examples of European-wide parties are:

- Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party
- European People's Party
- Party of European Socialists
- European Democratic Party
- European Free Alliance
- European Green Party
- Party of the European Left
- Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists
- European Christian Political Movement
- Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy
- Alliance of European National Movements
- Alliance for Peace and Freedom



Democracy vs Dictatorships

Here's one comparison of a democratic system and a dictatorship.

Democracy: The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The United Kingdom is a democracy, which means that its citizens are free to participate in elections to decide on their leadership. Elections are held at least once every five years, and there are a range of political parties representing different political views to choose from.



Citizens in a democracy such as the UK also have the right to freedom of speech (unless they are inciting violence or hatred), as well as freedom of the press. Life in a democracy such as the UK is also characterised by freedom of expression, including freedom to choose which (if any) religion to follow.

Workers in the UK are also free to organise into unions in order to protect their interests,

with the leaders of these unions often being democratically elected by the members of the organisation. Furthermore, if a UK citizen wishes to protest against something (including government policies), they are free to arrange a demonstration of peaceful protest. Citizens will only be arrested if they are suspected of committing a crime, and if they are arrested, they have the right to a fair trial.

Dictatorship: The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea

Unlike countries such as the United Kingdom, and despite its official name (see above), North Korea is not a democratic society. Instead, North Korea is a totalitarian state, which means that it asserts complete control over its subjects' political, cultural and social lives.



Anybody who tries to assert their rights in North Korea faces the possibility of extreme punishment, torture and even death. The North Korean government, headed by Kim Jong-un, has repressed many of the freedoms which citizens of a democracy often take for granted.

For example, freedom of the press is not permitted in North Korea, meaning that there are no independent media, so only state-approved channels are allowed to broadcast information. Organised political opposition is banned, meaning that there is no official alternative system of government offered to the people of North Korea.

There is also no religious freedom, with the state clamping down on any form of organised religion, which it sees as a potential challenge to its dominance. Christians are especially persecuted in North Korea: at least 200,000 North Korean Christians having gone missing since 1953.



In North Korea, freedom of speech, information and movement are all very limited. For example, North Korean landlines and mobile phones cannot make international calls, and anyone wishing to travel within the country has to obtain permission. It is illegal for a North Korean person to leave the country without obtaining permission from the regime. Arrests are often arbitrary, and torture is rife within the country.

How can citizens try to bring about political change?

How citizens can contribute to parliamentary democracy and hold those in power to account.

Citizens can contribute to parliamentary democracy by exercising their democratic right to vote in elections. They can also write to their MPs, who are their representatives in Parliament. They can also attend public hearings, which are gatherings intended to canvas public opinion on matters relating to policy.

How digital democracy, social media and other measures are being developed as a means to improve voter engagement and the political participation of citizens:



Social media can be used in order to engage voters, for example by sharing online petitions and information amongst networks of friends and colleagues. Political parties may also choose to target their adverts at particular demographics on social media. For example, in the USA, the Trump campaign spent upwards of \$2 million on targeting people who had shared characteristics with Trump voters. A great many key political parties and senior figures have a social media profile, meaning that they can be interacted with by members of the public. However, abuse has become a serious problem, with leading political figures such as Diane Abbott receiving racist and sexist abuse on a regular basis.



The different forms of action citizens can take to hold those in power to account for their actions

As well as contacting the political figures themselves on social media (see above) and writing to their MP (see above), citizens have access to the voting records of MPs as well as their attendance at Parliament and expenses claimed. Citizens can access annual reports by government departments. Online petitions can be signed if citizens wish to bring a particular matter to the attention of Parliament.

How the citizen can contribute to public life by joining an interest group or political party

A citizen can pay to become a member of a political party. Around 1 in 50 people in the UK is a member of one of the three main political parties. Membership in a party can be passive or active: passive is where the member has signed up in order to express support, and may receive information about what the party is doing. Active membership involves not only joining the party, but also attending meetings, rallies, campaigning, knocking on doors in the local neighbourhood at election times, and so on.

Standing for election

A person may stand for election if they are over 18 years of age, and either a British citizen or citizen of a Commonwealth country or the Republic of Ireland.

People wishing to be candidates for election must be nominated by ten parliamentary electors of the constituency that they wish to stand in. If they want to stand for a particular party, they have to have authorisation from that party; otherwise, they will be classed as an independent candidate. They must pay a £500 deposit when they apply – this is returned if the candidate gets over five per cent of the total votes cast.

Campaigning

A citizen may campaign by sharing promotional material online; delivering leaflets through letterboxes; making videos; volunteering to go knocking on doors to persuade people to vote at election times; displaying a sign for their chosen political party outside their house or in their car; accompanying a candidate standing for election on their campaign trail; holding or attending meetings in the local community, and many other activities.



Advocacy

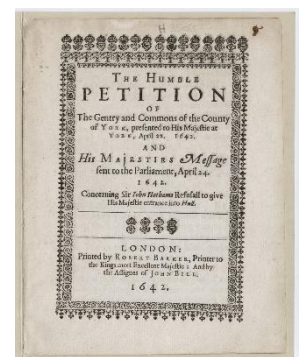
A person may advocate for a political party or cause through media campaigns, public speaking events, commissioning or publishing research on the matter of interest, and raising awareness through co-ordinated public events. A person may join an advocacy group. Advocacy groups are groups which aim to influence policy decisions through a variety of methods such as research, polls, campaigns and publicity events.

Lobbying

Lobbying can be done by individuals (e.g. writing to MPs or organisations). It can also be done by organisations, such as advocacy groups or pressure groups, who may lobby Government in order to influence legislation or policy.

Petitions

Petitions can be created and signed online. Once a petition gains 10,000 signatures, it will get a response from Government. A petition gaining 100,000 signatures will be debated in Parliament.



Joining a demonstration

A person who wishes to raise awareness of an issue or who wishes to protest against a policy may organise a public demonstration. They must inform the police of this 6 days before the event if the demonstration involves a march. They must give details of the date and time as well as the intended route of the march.

Marches and protests which have already been organised can be joined. A person interested in joining an existing march or protest can find out more by researching the group involved online.

volunteering

Someone who is interested in a particular cause or political party can offer their time and services - for example, stuffing envelopes with campaign leaflets ready to be sent out. Individuals may have specific skills which they can offer, for example graphic design or PR strategies. Others may choose to volunteer on the front line, knocking on doors and speaking to potential voters near election time. An individual may choose to volunteer their time as a member of a committee or other group.



The roles played by public institutions, public services, interest and pressure groups, trade unions, charities and voluntary groups in providing a voice and support for different groups in society

Public institutions support different groups in society through the provision of public services such as emergency services, healthcare, education, social care, housing and refuse collection. They provide a voice for people through the opportunity to feed back on their services, as well as being informed by the needs of their service users.



Interest and pressure groups provide a voice for people who share a concern about a particular issue or area. This may be a local or national level. They provide the opportunity for those affected by the particular issue to have their voices heard by participating in conversations in awareness-raising events and other areas.

Charities offer a very similar service for people whose lives are affected by the charity's particular area of speciality. They offer advice and support as well as the opportunity to become members and join campaigns.

[illegible]