

# Revision Summary Sheet – Democracy, elections and voting in the UK

<b>Members of the UK Parliament (MPs)</b>	Successful candidates who represent this constituency in Parliament	<b>Candidate</b>	A person who asks people to vote for him/her as their representative
<b>Political Party</b>	A group of people with similar ideas who campaign together to win elections	<b>Constituency</b>	An area of the country with around 60,000 voters. Each of the UK constituencies elects one representative to Parliament.
<b>Referendum</b>	A vote which all electors are able to decide a single issue	<b>Direct democracy</b>	A system of decision-making in which all electors have the right to vote on the most important issues
<b>Pluralism</b>	A system of decision-making in which all groups are included.	<b>Franchise</b>	The right to vote for representatives
<b>Electoral Register</b>	A list of all those people who are entitled to vote and have applied to do so	<b>Local authority ward</b>	Just as the UK is divided into constituencies, so local authorities are divided into wards. Electors in each ward vote for candidates to represent them at the local authority's council meetings.
<b>Election manifesto</b>	A document written by members of a political party which states what the party aims to do if it gets power	<b>Sustainable development</b>	Meeting today's human needs while making sure future generations will also be able to meet their needs
<b>Minority government</b>	A government usually made up of MPs from the largest political party in Parliament but one that doesn't command a majority.	<b>Nationalised</b>	Businesses that are owned and run by the State on behalf of the people.
<b>Coalition government</b>	If no single political party has a majority of MPs in Parliament, two or more parties can cooperate to form a government together.	<b>Unionist</b>	An individual or political party supportive of the union of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom
<b>Nationalist</b>	An individual or political party supportive of the idea that the nations of England, Wales and Scotland should be independent states, and that there should be a republic for the whole of Ireland	<b>Power Sharing Agreement</b>	This agreement helped to put an end to many years of conflict in Northern Ireland. Any government has to include Unionists and Nationalists. Elections use the STV to ensure a proportional representation of voters' intentions.

## Classical and Representative Democracy

**Democracy means 'rule of the people.'**

### Classical Democracy

- Began in Athens 2,500 years ago
- Only male citizens who owned land or their own house could vote.
- Athenian citizens held regular meetings at the Assembly to vote on issues.

### Representative Democracy

- Elections are used to choose men and women who will represent their area as a MP in the Houses of Parliament.
- Some decisions are left to a referendum to allow the people to make a decision.

## Features of democratic government in the UK

- **Inclusive Franchise** – All groups can vote if they are citizens of the UK or Republic of Ireland and are on the electoral register. Those who are members of the House of Lords, citizens of EU countries living in the UK, convicted prisoners, are registered with a mental incapacity or found guilty within the past 5 years or corrupt or illegal practices in connection with an election can not vote.
- **Regular, free and fair elections** – Citizens must be able to vote regularly so that representatives can be changed and new policies supported. Elections can only be described as 'free and fair' if each citizen has the right to be an election candidate
- **A secret ballot** – Voters are able to make their decision in private and their vote in confidential.
- **A choice of candidates and political parties** – A range of parties and candidates must be available to choose from.

## The four key values for democracy to work

### Personal freedom

Everyone should be free to put forward their ideas, stand for election and criticise the government. Artists, playwrights and writers should be free to express new ideas and criticise established thinking. A free media should help to communicate ideas, expose any political corruption and hold elected representatives to account.

### Tolerance and respect for diversity

A person's race, gender, culture, religion, political beliefs and sexual orientation should be respected by everyone else. All people's opinions and ideas should be listened to as long as they don't encourage hatred or discrimination against others.

### The rule of law

Law should apply equally to everyone – even to politicians, judges, the police and the very wealthy.

Democracy

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Equal opportunity

Everyone should have the same chance to participate in decision-making, to protest and to become a representative.

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People over the age of 18 can be a candidate in an election. Those elected then represent their Local Authority ward or constituency. Election candidates often belong to a political party. Members of political parties can attend meetings of the party, help raise money to support the party, visit electors and campaign amongst others.

Voting in person		Voting by post		Voting by proxy	
Voting at a polling station.		Vote by post if you are unable to get to the polling station		If you are unable to vote in person, you can apply for someone to vote on your behalf.	
The Conservative Party	 Conservatives	<b>The Green Party</b> 	Background	Founded in 1972 by a group of friends concerned about the effects of population growth on the planet. First Green Party MP elected to Parliament in 2010	<b>The Labour Party</b> 
Background	Founded in 1834. Dominant party of 20 <sup>th</sup> century competing with Labour. Were part of a Coalition with the Liberal Democrats from 2010 - 2015. Famous MPs include Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher.		Policies	Encourages personal freedom and sustainable development. Favours non-violent solutions to conflict. Would scrap UK's nuclear weapons	
Policies	Encourages people to be independent and that private companies should have a leading role in running public services. Reduce welfare spending. Supports strong defence.		Main supporters	From all backgrounds, but mainly young. Support is concentrated in the cities and towns where the party has campaigned successfully.	
Main supporters	Landowners and business owners. Most popular with older voters and people living in rural areas.		MPs and share of the vote (2015 election)	1 MP 4% of the total vote	
MPs and share of the vote (2015 election)	330 MPs 37% of the total vote		Membership	66,000 (Oct 2015) £31 members. (£1 for students)	
Membership	150,000 members (2014) £25 members, (£5 under 23)		MPs and share of the vote (2015 election)	232 MPs 30% of the total vote	
Membership	370,000 (Oct 2015) £46 full members. (£1 for students)		Membership	370,000 (Oct 2015) £46 full members. (£1 for students)	

### The Liberal Democrats



Background	Founded in 1859. One of the two dominant parties in the UK in the 1920s. 1988, Liberals merged with Social Democratic Party to form the Liberal Democrats. Famous Liberals include Lloyd George and William Beveridge.
Policies	Favour more choice and competition, but would regulate business more. Support higher taxes and improved public services. Support greater freedom from censorship and oppose surveillance from the Government. Strongly support EU membership but would not upgrade the UK's nuclear weapons.
Main supporters	Supported by people from a range of different backgrounds. Strongest support in western England and in suburban areas.
MPs and share of the vote (2015 election)	8 MPs. 8% of total vote
Membership	81,000 (Sept 2015). £70 members. (£1 for students)



Background	Originated in 1991 when a university lecturer decided to campaign for the UK to leave the EU. Won the largest number of votes in the 2014 European election and 24 representatives were elected to the EU Parliament. Most famous MP is Nigel Farage.
Policies	Leave the EU and improve trade links with the rest of the world. Reduce immigration, and promote British values and traditions. Has a similar view to Conservatives on the economy, taxes and public services.
Main supporters	Support has proved strongest on the coastal areas of Southern and eastern England. Popular with older voters of white British heritage.
MPs and share of the vote (2015 election)	1 MP. 13% of the total vote
Membership	42,000 (Jan 2015). Member pay £30. (£2 for people under 22)

#### Political parties in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

<u>Scotland</u>	<u>Wales</u>	<u>Northern Ireland</u>
By 2015, the Scottish National Party (SNP) had become the leading political party in Scotland, winning 56 of the 59 Scottish seats in the UK parliament. It also forms the Scottish Government within Scotland's Parliament. The SNP wants Scotland to be independent from the rest of the UK. It favours: higher levels of public spending paid for from taxation, Scotland's membership of the EU and scrapping nuclear weapons.	Plaid Cymru, the Party of Wales, wants independence for Wales. Plaid Cymru has similar policies to the SNP but so far has not enjoyed great success in Wales. It won 3 seats in the UK Parliament at the 2015 general election. Labour is the largest party in Wales and controls the Welsh Government.	Northern Ireland has its own political parties, most of which either support continued union with the UK or campaign for an Irish republic. Until peace talks in 1997, extremists on each side of this debate resorted to violence and terrorism. Since then, disagreements have been dealt with through debate and negotiation. Elections are keenly contested. Up to now, unionist parties have gained more seats in the UK Parliament than nationalist parties. Both sides share power in the Northern Ireland Assembly, but relationships are often difficult and government sometimes breaks down.

#### Key features of UK electoral systems

Different election systems are used across the UK. The general election for the UK Parliament uses a first-past-the-post system where the person with the most votes is declared the winner. This system is also used in English and Welsh local authority elections. Different types of proportional representation are also used in UK elections. These are:-

- Closed party list
- Additional member
- Single transferrable vote.

Proportional representation means that the number of representative elected is more likely to match (be in proportion to) the number of people who voted for them.

<b>Advantages of First-Past-The-Post system</b>		<b>Disadvantages of First-Past-The-Post system</b>	
Simple to understand		A candidate can be elected with support from less than half the voters	
Easy to organise		Voters may feel their vote is 'wasted' if they vote for a party candidate who has little chance of winning	
More likely to lead to a majority government		Can produce a government that over 60% of voters do not support	
People have a single representative in Parliament and so know who to contact with constituency issues		Voters may feel unrepresented if their MP belongs to a political party they do not like.	

<u>Closed party list system (elections to the EU Parliament in England, Wales and Scotland)</u>	Different types of proportional representation are used for some elections in the UK. In this system, people vote for one political party rather than a particular candidate or candidates. Before Polling day, each political party makes an ordered list of people it would like to represent each of the UK's 12 EU parliamentary constituencies. The proportion of a party's vote in a constituency then determines how many people on their list are elected as constituency MEP's
<u>Additional member system (elections to the Welsh Assembly)</u>	Elections for the Welsh Assembly use a first-past-the-post system to elect an Assembly Member for each of 40 constituencies. The total number of votes for each party within each of 5 Welsh regions is then used to choose 20 additional Assembly Members from Party lists. The number of additional regional members a party gets is proportional to their vote in that region. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the election, each voter has two votes</li> <li>• The first vote is a constituency vote for a candidate to become their local Assembly Member</li> <li>• The second vote is a regional vote for a political party.</li> </ul>
<u>Single transferable vote system (elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly)</u>	Elections in Northern Ireland for the Assembly, EU Parliament are local authorities use the single transferable vote (STV). This is also used for local authority elections in Scotland. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Voters rank candidates in order of preference, e.g. 1 for their first choice, 2 for their second choice and so on</li> <li>2. Candidates who get at least 14% of the total vote are elected</li> <li>3. Votes for successful candidates, in excess of the 14% they need for election, are redistributed among the other candidates. If all the vacancies are filled, the process stops.</li> <li>4. If not it moves to stage 3, the least popular candidates are eliminated in turn and the second preferences of their supporters are redistributed,. The process continues until all the vacancies are filled using the voters' third, fourth or other preferences as necessary.</li> </ol>