ZigZag Education

Politics | AS and A Level | Edexcel | 8PL0/9PL0

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Course Companion
for A Level Edexcel

Component 1: UK Politics

Electoral Systems

2026 Edition

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Contents

Teacher's Introduction

This pack is designed to provide students with a comprehensive educational resource on electoral systems and referendums for AS and A Level Edexcel.

Since devolution in the 1990s, a large number of different electoral systems have been used in the UK. First Past the Post for Westminster elections has been joined by the Additional Member System in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Parliament, and the Single Transferable Vote for the Northern Irish Assembly. The Supplementary Vote has been introduced for mayoral elections around the country. This course companion explains and analyses all of these electoral systems now in use in the UK. Since 1997, there has also been an unprecedented increase in the use of referendums in British politics. The companion has an explanation of the impact of referendums held in the UK, up to and including the June 2016 referendum on British membership of the European Union. Finally, the course companion covers the impact that different electoral systems have had around the country, and how these can be compared, offering a detailed analysis of the different types of electoral system.

The electoral systems module in the 2017 Edexcel specification covers three main topics: different electoral systems, referendums and how they are used, and electoral system analysis. This course companion has a chapter on each section, with the chapters broken up into smaller sub-chapters in line with the specification. The course companion is as comprehensive as possible, and covers key political developments up to and including the June 2017 general election.

Please use this pack in whichever way you prefer. It has been designed either to be worked through in order, or dipped in and out of to support your own lesson structures. The talking points and activities provided are designed to engage students while provoking the critical thought and analysis that will be required in the exam.

Each chapter contains:
- A brief overview and learning objectives for the chapter
- A list of key terms and key words
- Students' notes and analysis of the key events
- 'Talking point' questions designed to encourage discussion in class and develop key analysis skills

Second edition, April 2020
The second edition of this course companion has been updated to reflect recent developments, contemporary debates and new political contexts that have emerged since its initial publication. In relation to Electoral Systems, this includes (but is not limited to) recent election results, developments in devolved governments, the advancement of debates around the use of referenda and electoral reform, and changes in the positions of prominent political figures.

Third edition, October 2022
The third edition of this course companion has been further updated to include developments such as the political context since the 2019 general election and recent changes to the electoral system (pages 6, 7, 37 and 41).

Fourth edition, January 2026
Bringing the companion up to date with changes and reversions of voting systems, such as for mayoral systems and the Welsh Parliament, as well as up-to-date examples including the 2024 elections.

Unit 3.1: Different Electoral Sy

Learning Objectives

✓ Understand what an election is and the main fur... is of an electoral s
✓ Know the features and functions of an e' ... rt, 'ysi.m
✓ Know the different electoral syste ... us ... ...round the UK: FPTP, AMS, S
✓ Be able to compare the ... ... s and disadvantages of these system
✓ Know the main is ... ... by FPTP and understand the case for refor
✓ Be able ... ... e ... PTP as used for Westminster to STV used for the

Key Words

Election	A formal public vote to choose political representatives
Electoral System	The way in which votes are translated into political representatives
Incumbent	The holder of a political office before an election. The incumbent M election, for example.
Constituency	The geographical area in which a political representative is elec constituencies and 650 MPs to represent them in Parliament.
By-election	An election held for a constituency betwee scheduled general
Safe Seat	A constituency in which th e i vr ...ttle chance of the incumbe MPs in a safe sea ... ...ently win by a large majority.
Marginal Se...	... ...y held with a small majority in an election, so in the ... ...could easily be lost
Tactical Voting	Choosing to vote for a party other than the one you most identify with candidate from winning. Can also be done in order to maximise the ch impact in an electoral system unfavourable to your preferred party.
PR	Proportional Representation. Any electoral system where the pr party is closely matched to the proportion of votes cast for them
Party List	A simple electoral system where voters vote for a party and the proportion to the votes won. A type of PR used for European pa
FPTP	First Past the Post. The electoral system used in the UK today, w constituencies and each constituency gets one representative. Th is the candidate who gets the most v...
AMS	Additional Member ... ... An electoral system where some re constituencie ... ... through a party list.
STV	... ...ansferable Vote. A proportional electoral system where representatives who each have to win above a predetermined th
SV	Supplementary Vote. An electoral system where each voter select If no candidate wins above 50% of first preference votes, then the the top two candidates are shared out. Whoever gets the most vo

What is an Election?

An election is the way in which the public pick their representatives in a d[...]
in the UK an election is when eligible people vote for who they want to rep[...]
Parliament. Before we get to the details of how elections work, it is import[...]
functions of elections are.

Elections are first and foremost abo[...]ation. In a representative d[...]
ensure that their voice is be[...] by choosing someone they believe[...]
and electing that p[...] a[...]presentative body. In the UK the main repr[...]
and the p[...]h[...]n to represent the electorate are called Members of P[...]
Parliament[...] are 650) is chosen to represent a **constituency**, and their [...]
think the constituency would approve of. If they fail to do this, then in the[...]
constituents (the electorate in their constituency) may choose to elect som[...]
since the 2015 Recall of MPs Act for a constituency to trigger a **by-election**[...]
offence and 10% of the constituency signs a petition. By-elections can also [...]
deciding to stand down.

If the main purpose of an election is to elect representatives, then the seco[...]
a government. The UK government is not directly elected (like the US pres[...]
instead made up of the largest party in Parliament. It is said that whichev[...]
chosen by the electorate to form a government, and is often described as th[...]
of the time in the UK the government is made up of only one party after th[...]
of the seats in Parliament. When no single party wo[...] the 2010 election, [...]
between the largest party (the Conservatives) an[...]maller party (the Lib[...]
many to question whether the UK h[...]really chosen this governmen[...]
held regularly (usually ev[...] ye[...]rs) is so that the electorate can reject [...]
has underperf[...]

The questi[...]w becomes, how do elections work? Well, there are many [...]
system, and this chapter will take you through the ones used in the UK an[...]
and disadvantages.

What is an Electoral System?

An electoral system is the way in which votes are translated into seats in a [...]
our parliamentary elections we use a system called First Past the Post, wh[...]
constituencies and each constituency elects one MP. The winning candida[...]
votes (more on that later). However, this is by no means the only electoral [...]
other ones used all over the world, and a few other on[...] used in the UK.

Why are there different electoral syst[...]h[...]fferent electoral systems [...]
some of them favour a stro[...] [...]rty government, whereas others e[...]
governments, which [...] [...]re equal representation of voters. As we g[...]
we will al[...] a [...]r relative advantages and disadvantages, and why [...]
for differe[...]ical systems.

There are a number of different ways to judge electoral systems, but the cr[...] systems are judged are:

1. Is equal value given to different votes across the country?
2. Does the proportion of votes roughly match the proportion of seats won?
3. Is there a link between the representatives and the people they are representing?
4. Does the electoral system [...] voter choice of candidates?
5. Can the electoral [...] produce a result that can lead to a gover[...]?
6. Is it p[...] to hold the government to account by changing your representatives?
7. Can voters understand the process of voting and who they are voting [...]

First Past the Post

First Past the Post (FPTP), or **single-member simple plurality**, is the syst[...] elections in the United Kingdom. Let's get a clear picture of how it works.

How First Past the Post works

1. The UK is divided up into **constituencies** that contain roughly the same number of people in each (about 70,000).
2. Voters in each constituency place a cross next to one candidate. The candidate with the highest number of vot[...] s. (Notice there is no particular number of votes [...]
3. In the UK it limits the numbe[...] to one for each constituency. It is a si[...] system to operate, and there is no minimu[...] votes the win[...] get. There are 650 constituencies in the UK an[...] Comm[...] [...]senting them.
4. Becaus[...] candidate only needs to get more votes than any other cand[...] plurality system. A majority system, in contrast, requires the winner t[...]

Advantages of FPTP

☑ **Strong majority governments:** It tends to produce clear winning part[...] governments with working majorities. Only three times since World [...] government been elected, and only once has there been a coalition go[...]

☑ **Constituency link:** The system retains the link between an MP and al[...] their constituents through single-member constituencies. MPs communicate with their constituents through meetings called 'surgeries'. Because MPs are linked to a constituen[...] they can get a much better understanding of local issue[...]

☑ **Simple:** The system is very simp[...] [...]o[...] and the people counting the votes. All voters have [...]k the box of the person they most want to represen[...] [...]ounters have to do is find out who got th[...] most [...]

☑ **Voter** [...]: It has advantages for the elector in that it is based on voting for individuals rather than party lists. They can choose who th[...] want to represent them, rather than the party choosing.

☑ **Public choose the government:** This means that under FPTP it is usu[...] the government, rather than parties choosing the government throug[...]

- ☑ **Fast government formation:** A new government can be formed very q̶
  not use FPTP it often takes a long time for parties to negotiate a coalit̶
  proportional system, and in 2010–2011 it took 514 days to form a gove̶
- ☑ **Stops extremists:** The system tends to keep out extremist parties. The̶y
  mainstream parties in every constituency because their support in ind̶
  always smaller than that of the main parties, even if they are supporte̶
  around the country.
- ☑ **Recall of MPs:** The Recall of MPs A̶ 0̶ llows constituencies to pe̶
  have been charged with a̶ well as this, constituents can choo̶s
  do not agree with̶

Disadvant̶ f FPTP

- ☒ **Disproportional results:** An often-criticised feature is the fact that the̶
  Parliament often bears little relationship to the actual numbers of vote̶
  2024 general election, when the Labour Party won 63% of the seats for̶
  smaller parties that have complained most about these features of the ̶
  Democrats, who in 2005 captured 22% of the votes, but only 10% of th̶
  votes are not concentrated sufficiently to win enough constituencies. I̶
  achieved 37% of the vote and 51% of the seats (331 MPs), compared to̶
  the vote and yet only 0.15% of the seats (one MP).
- ☒ **MPs elected on a minority:** Because MPs only need more votes than a̶
  absolute majority, most are elected with less than 50% of the local vot̶e
  of MPs do not get over 50% of the vote in their constituency. In 2015, S̶
  McDonnell in Belfast South won only 24.5% of th̶ ote and still won t̶
  winning share of the vote in a UK electio̶ d McDonnell won the se̶
  quarters of the voters in his cons̶ y voting for someone else.
- ☒ **Governments elected o̶ in. ity:** No government since 1929 has w̶
  popular vote. Ev̶ Labour's landslide in 2024, they only won 34% o̶
- ☒ **Uneq̶ lu :** Votes are not equally valuable under FPTP. In 2024, R̶
  800,000̶ s per seat won (five seats), and the Greens 450,000 (four se̶
  23,000 (411 seats). The way the votes are distributed across constituen̶
  total number of votes.
- ☒ **Restricts voter choice:** Under First Past the Post, many votes are effec̶
  the candidate with the most votes wins. This means votes for smaller p̶
  discouraging people from voting for who they truly support. Instead, ̶
  voting, backing a candidate they think can realistically win, just to blo̶
  Resultantly, the system limits genuine choice and distorts the link bet̶
  and election outcomes.
- ☒ **Restricts debate:** Because FPTP makes it harder for smaller parties to ̶
  debate in Parliament to effectively only the mainstream parties. This c̶
  on democratic competition. In 2024, 14 partie̶ eats in Parliament̶
  being officially registered in the UK̶
- ☒ **Geography matters:** While ̶ the vast majority of constituencie̶
  number of voters. ̶ ies there are large differences: in North ̶
  consti̶ i̶ nd in Na h-Eileanan an Iar (the Western Isles of̶
  21,000̶ discrepancies are more of an issue with the way constitu̶
  and not with FPTP itself, but they do show how some MPs get elected̶
  It is also the case that in a safe seat, voters who do not support the wi̶
  have no impact in the election.

This diagram will help you understand the way First Past the Post works a
parties that don't have their votes concentrated in particular constituencie

Three imaginary constituencies

1. Con. 500
    Lab. 1,000
    Lib. 300

2. Co. ...
    La. ...00
    Lib. 1,500

3.
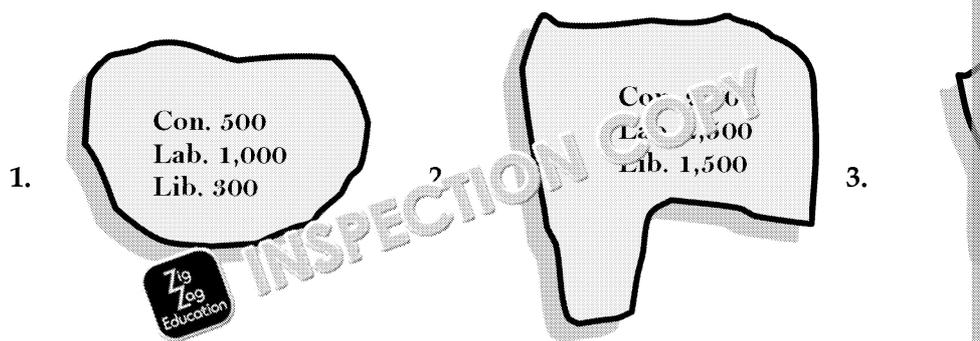
In **constituency 1**, Labour won and, therefore, claimed a seat in Parliamen
won and claimed another seat in Parliament. In **constituency 3**, the Conse
seat in Parliament. Labour have **two seats**, Conservatives **one seat**, and Li
number of votes won by each party. Labour have **4,500**, Conservatives hav
2,300. If those Lib Dem votes had been concentrated in constituency 1, the

> ## Talking Point
> Based on the benefits and drawbacks of FPTP, do you think i
> Westminster elections?

Looking at Other Voting Systems Used in the UK
Now we'll look at other voting systems used in th UK. The secret is to tak
Be sure you understand the basics of ea one. If it makes you feel better, th
different types of possible alt ora systems, and you've only got to know s
Additional Memb r s m (AMS), the Single Transferable Vote (STV) and

Supplementary Vote

Supplementary Vote was previously used for a number of different electio
elect the mayor of London, other elected mayors and the Police and Crime
Act 2022 discontinued use of SV in English elections, to be replaced by FP

It is still useful to understand SV, however.
It is a preferential system, but voters are
limited to only a first and second preference.
SV can only be used in single-member
constituencies.

How SV works
1. Voters have two choices – a first
    preference and a second prefer ce.
2. Any candidate w c e 50% of the
    vote t g h i t preferences wins the seat. If no candidate gets over 5
    top tw ept in the race, and all the other candidates are dropped.
3. There is a second count, with all the second preferences of the losing c
    whichever of the two remaining candidates ends up with more votes w
    necessarily have to get 50% of first preferences, they only have to get n
    preferences than the other remaining candidate.

Vote once in the 1ST column f
Vote up to once in the 2ND c

	Zack Bade
	Kemi Fara
	Ed Starme
	Nigel Dav

An imagined ballot pap

Advantages of SV

☑ **Fewer wasted votes:** The SV system means that fewer voters will be con̲ FPTP. In the 2016 London mayoral election, Sadiq Khan won only 44.2% 56.8% when second preference votes were counted. This indicated that ̲ taken into account than would have been under FPTP.

☑ **Broad support needed:** Under SV the candidates n̲ d to make sure th̲ many people as possible; they must try to ̲ ̲ to ̲ore voters than ̲ candidates winning with a small ̲ ̲ ̲ of ̲pport, but it does not mea̲ as in the second round a̲l ̲ ̲ ̲ ̲eference votes for candidates other ̲ ̲ ̲ ̲ remaining candidates are disco̲ ̲ ̲ In ̲ ̲ ̲ay it promotes centrist politics.

☑ **Simpl̲ ̲rs** simply choose their preferred candidate and their second preference. It is not confusing for voters and does not present a challenge to count.

☑ **Constituency link:** Under SV the candidates are linked to their constituencies. They are elected from a single geographical locat̲

☑ **More choice:** Unlike FPTP, under SV voters can pick their favourite ca̲ reserve or tactical candidate second.

Disadvantages of SV

☒ **Not very proportional.** In the UK, SV was only ever used to elect singl̲ representatives (rather than to make up parliaments) so the fact it is n̲ proportional doesn't really matter. However, the process of having a single winner means that many voters' preferences ̲ill always be discounted, and only the majority will have ̲ ̲ ̲e̲ tation.

☒ **Voters need to vote tactically.** In or̲ ̲ t̲ k̲ ̲w whether their second preferences will be counte̲ ̲ ̲s ̲ed to have some idea of who th̲ top two candidate̲ ̲ ̲

☒ **No m̲ ̲ ̲y ̲ ̲ ̲ ̲** Candidates do not need an absolute majority. Th̲ suppo̲ ̲at the other remaining candidate in the second round.

The table below gives an example of how SV works. In the first round, no ̲ vote. All candidates except for the top two were eliminated, and the secon̲ With all of those counted, Sadiq Khan had more, and he won the mayoral ̲

Party	Candidate	1st Round	%	Tran̲
Labour	Sadiq Khan	1,148,716	44.20%	161̲
Conservative	Zac Goldsmith	909,755	35.00%	84,̲
Green	Siân Berry	150,673	5.80%	
Liberal Democrat	Caroline Pidgeon	120,005	4.60%	
UKIP	Peter Whittle	94,37̲	3.60%	
Women's Equality	Sophie Walker	5̲,̲5	2.00%	
Respect	Geor̲ ̲ ̲ ̲	37,007	1.40%	
Britain First	̲ ̲Golding	31,372	1.20%	
CIS̲	Lee Harris	20,537	0.80%	
BN̲	David Furness	13,325	0.50%	
Independent	Prince Zylinski	13,202	0.50%	
One Love	Ankit Love	4,941	0.20%	

London Mayoral Election 2016, under SV

Party List

Party List is the system used for the proportional 'top-up' seats in the Scot[tish Parliament]
and for the Welsh Parliament (Senedd) elections from 2026. This system w[as used in the]
elections for the European Parliament in 1999. Lists can be national, as in I[srael, or regional, as in the]
European elections. This is often seen as the most proportional system pos[sible, as votes can be]
directly translated into seats.

How the Party List Works

1. Voters choose from a list [dra]w[n] up by the party. The percentage of vo[tes cast for]
   each par[ty is] ge[nerated] [and t]h[en] worked out to match the number of seats giver [to that]
   party.
2. The list[s c]an be either 'open' or 'closed'. On open lists, voters choose t[he individual]
   party candidates they want, and on closed lists they simply vote for a [party]
   and the winning candidates are chosen for them.
3. The votes are counted and seats are apportioned using the D'Hondt m[ethod.]
   Once all the votes have been counted, quotients are calculated for eac[h party]
   using this formula:

$$Quotient = \frac{The\ total\ number\ of\ votes\ received\ b...}{The\ number\ of\ seats\ that\ have\ been\ alloca...}$$

   This is applied until all the seats have been allocated. The D'Hondt m[ethod also allocates]
   seats in the Northern Ireland *executive* (not the assembly) for power-sh[aring.]
4. The seats won by each party will closely mat[ch the] p[ro]portion of vote[s cast. This]
   system is the most proportional possi[b]le [vo]t[ing].
5. In some PR systems a party r[eeds to] a[chi]eve a threshold of a vote before [they get any seats. This is]
   usually to avoid sea[ts being a]warded to extremists.

Advantage[s of the P]arty List

☑ **Propor[tio]nal:** The proportion of seats won closely matches the votes c[ast, more so than in]
   any electoral system.

☑ **Fair:** The system does not favour any one party or candidate, and seat[s as fair as is]
   possible.

☑ **Choice:** A voter can choose any party without fear of their vote being [wasted, although]
   marginal parties may still not get any seats.

☑ **Relatively simple:** In a closed Party List system, all voters have to do i[s select their]
   preferred party.

Disadvantages of Party List

☒ **Constituency link:** There is no link between repre[sen]tatives and any l[ocal area.]

☒ **Choice:** In a closed list system, it is the pa[rt]y w[hic]h decides which ind[ividuals become]
   representatives. This effectively [rem]o[ve]s c[h]oice from the voter and ha[s led to some criticism.]

☒ **Government formation:** I[t is] [ver]y [d]ifficult for majority governments t[o form under these]
   systems. Most [often] [the]n [c]oalition governments will be formed. This [puts government]
   form[ation] [in] t[he] hands of the party leaders rather than the voters.

☒ **Party l[eader]s gaining strength:** The party leaders become more impo[rtant in selecting candidates]
   and in forming governments.

☒ **Complications:** Learning all the candidates in order to choose them in [open lists can be]
   difficult. The way in which votes are converted into seats is also fairly [complex, the D'Hondt]
   method being simple in its results, but difficult in its methodology.

Additional Member System (AMS)

AMS has been used in the elections for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament (replaced by a closed party list system for the 2026 elections), and the Greater London Assembly. The Additional Member System is a mixture of FPTP and the Party List system. It is known as a 'mixed' system because it has features of proportional and majoritarian systems. AMS is more proportional than FPTP, but less so than PR. It is likely to result in coalitions forming, as we have seen in Wales and Scotland since devolution. Although AMS may seem complicated, it is really just FPTP with some additional representatives chosen through a party list.

The S

How the Additional Member System Works

1. Each voter gets two votes. The first is to vote for a constituency candidate. The candidate with most votes in a constituency wins.
2. The second vote is for a party list. These votes are distributed to the parties by the percentage of votes won in a number of giant electoral regions, each with
3. The parliament is made up of some representatives from constituencies AMS systems usually have about two thirds of the parliament elected third by party lists.
4. The Scottish Parliament has 129 MSPs in total. 73 represent individual made up from votes for regional party lists across eight regions, each

Advantages of AMS

☑ **More proportional:** Because AMS is partly elected by a party list it leads results. The proportion of votes cast more closely matches the seats w
☑ **Constituency link:** every constituency still has a representative who is represents area interests.
☑ **Fewer wasted votes:** Because every voter gets one vote for a party list, every voter's interests will be represented in some way, even if their p win in their constituency.
☑ **Representation for smaller parties:** The party lists give an opportunity representation in a parliament. The Scottish Parliament after the 2021 e represented across their 129 seats, each with four or more seats. The only party to gain a significant number of votes without any seats was the Alba Party, which got 1.7% of the votes but no seats; however, even under a purely proportional system they would only have got around two. Thus, the system is fairer to smaller parties than FPTP, but still not completely proportional.
☑ **Relatively simple:** The voter needs to vote twice, once for their preferred constituency candidate and once for their preferred party. It is, therefore, easy for voters to understand compared to some other systems.
☑ **Relatively strong government:** Although AMS often returns coalition return majority governments in the event of high popularity for one p the 2011 election in the Scottish Parliament when the SNP won 69 seats

> **Vote for one candidate on this side**
>
> ☐ Kemi Starmer
> ☒ Nigel Denyer
> ☐ Keir Swinney
> ☐ Carla Farage
> ☐ John Badenoch
>
> *A ballot pc*

Disadvantages of AMS

☒ **Overlapping responsibilities:** As every voter has two representatives, confusion about who they should go to in order to voice their concerns may be at odds over their responsibilities.

☒ **Increased party power:** Political parties decide who goes on the party over who gets elected. It would also be the leaders of the political part coalition in the likely event of no party winning a majority.

☒ **Unstable government:** As is the case with most proportional systems, coalitions, meaning that government are likely to be as stable or as their programme. Coalitions can lead to a crisis of legitimacy as r authorised by the electorate.

☒ **Allows extremism:** Unless there is a minimum threshold of votes need the party (in Scotland there is no threshold, but in the London Asse which has denied seats to the BNP), then extremists can get political r

☒ **Retains safe seats:** The proportion of representatives elected under FP many of the same issues as FPTP has as a system. The problem of safe geography are not eliminated by AMS.

☒ **Complicated counting:** Because the D'Hondt method is used to coun have some unexpected results. The Party List 'tops up' the total seats a constituency seats won. This is how the SNP won 40% of the Party Lis Party List seats, whereas the Conservatives won 23% and got 24 Party

☒ **Lack of choice:** The Party List candidates are decided by the party rat

Party	Constituency			Region	
	Votes	%	Seats	Votes	%
Scottish National Party	1,291,204	47.7	62	1,094,374	40
Conservative	592,518	21.9	5	637,131	23
Labour	584,392	21.6	2	485,819	17
Greens	34,990	1.3	0	220,324	8
Liberal Democrats	187,816	6.9	4	137,151	5
Alba				44,913	1
Others	15,833	0.6	0	93,071	3
Total	**2,706,761**	**100.0**	**73**	**2,712,783**	**100**

Results of the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections.

Talking Point

Do you think the Additional Member System is a co

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

Single Transferable Vote is a system that combines proportionality with a constituency link by having a number of different representatives elected per constituency. Large areas, therefore, elect a small group of representatives to represent them, and these representatives will reflect the di___ ___y of political opinions in an area. STV is used f__r ___ec___g representatives to the Northern I___ d ___sembly (MLAs – Members of the Legislati___ ___ly). In NI there are 18 constituenci__ ___ac___ ___g five MLAs.

How the Single Transferable Vote system works

1. Voters rank their candidates in order of preference, with the knowledg elected. Voters can vote for as many or as few candidates as they wish
2. A quota is worked out to decide how many votes candidates need to g minimum quota, then the bottom candidate is eliminated and second p
3. This is repeated until the right number of candidates go through to fil constituency. This usually means large constituencies with several win
4. If a candidate gets more votes than necessary, then the surplus votes a choice candidates on his/her papers. The main formula for working o 'droop' formula and is:

$$\frac{\text{Votes}}{\text{Seats} + 1} + 1$$

The Advantages of STV

☑ **STV is a proportional syst___ ___ ___ ___ ___ Ni Assembly elections in 2022, the** matched very close___ ___ ___mber of first preference votes each party shows___ ___o___ ___y the percentages of the first preference votes wo

☑ **STV r___ ___ the link to constituencies:** In fact, because voters will hav constituency representing different viewpoints, they can approach the one that they believe represents them best.

☑ **High voter choice:** Voters get to choose who to vote for. They are not limited to one candidate per party, or just a party; they get choice between candidates and parties, and which candidates within a party to vote for.

☑ **Power-sharing:** Because STV is likely to lead to no single party winning, it can help to create a consensus as parties are forced to work together in order to get anything done. This is the ca___ ___ ___ ___en nationalists and unionists in N___ ___ ___ ___reland.

*Arlene Foster an_*
*Deputy F_*

☑ **Voters choose their r___ ___ ___ves:** Parties can stand multiple candi choose who wi___ ___ ___d, as opposed to other proportional systems partie___ ___le ___ho to elect.

☑ **Repres___ ___polarised communities:** Because it allows multiple repres constituency, STV is good for representing both sides in a politically d the one in Northern Ireland. Many constituencies in the NI Assembly nationalist representatives.

☑ **STV reduces the need for tactical voting:** Because a number of differ[ent] able to win, every voter should be able to have at least some represen[...] incentive for negative campaigning. It is not a winner-takes-all system[...] ensure the other parties lose in order for them to win.

Party	Percentage of First Preference Votes	Per[...]
Sinn Féin	29.0	
Democratic Unionist P[arty]	21.3	
Alliance Party of [Northern] Ireland	13.5	
[U]lst[er Unioni]st Party	11.2	
So[cial De]mocratic and Labour Party	9.1	
Tra[di]tional Unionist Voice	7.6	
People Before Profit	1.1	
Green Party	1.9	
Others (including Independents)	5.2	

To[...]

The Disadvantages of STV

☒ **Power-sharing governments can be prone to deadlock:** In Northern I[reland] conflict within the Assembly. The election for the Northern Ireland As[sembly] Féin (who advocate Irish unification) become the largest party for the first time. However, the pro-UK DUP refused to nominate a deputy first minister in protest over post-Brexit trade arrangements, specifically the Northern Ireland Protocol. As a resul[t], no Executive could be formed, and devolved governm[e]nt w[a]s suspended. From M[ay] 2022 until February 2024, Northe[rn Irela]nd was without a functioning government or legislat[ure], ne[a]r[l]y two years of political deadlock. Fro[m] 2002 to 2007 th[e Northern] I[r]eland Executive was suspended for almost five y[ears. H]o[we]ver, it should be noted that the situation in Northern Ireland [is un]usual as power sharing between the two largest parties is mandated as part of the peace process, and so mistrust and suspensio[n] of the Assembly cannot be attributed entirely to the electoral system.

☒ **Could be confusing for voters:** In large multi-member constituencies the ballot paper can become confusing for voters. The counting of vot[e...] meaning that voters may not fully understand the system under which noted that voters sometimes simply list their preferences in the order [...] paper. This is known as 'Donkey Voting'.

☒ **Can lead to very large constituencies:** This might mean that voters d[o...] representatives.

☒ **Can lead to party fragmentation:** Because there is a choice for voters [...] from the same party, STV can lead to party r[...]er opposing one an[...] being internally divided.
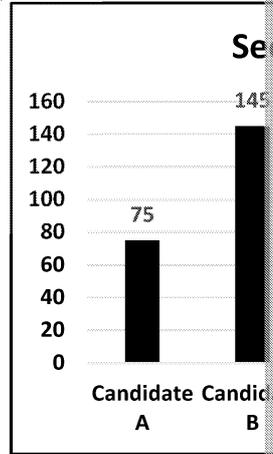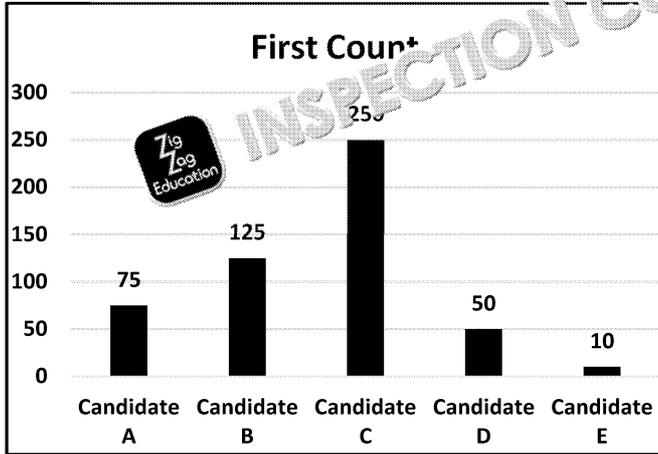
Talki[ng Poi]nt

[...] the preferred system of the Electoral Reform Society. [...] [th]at it should be used for Westminster elections?
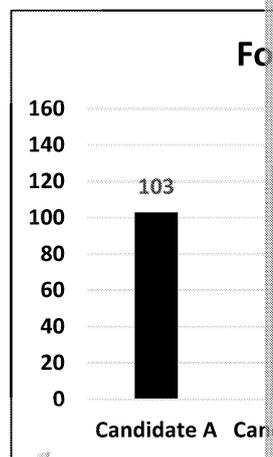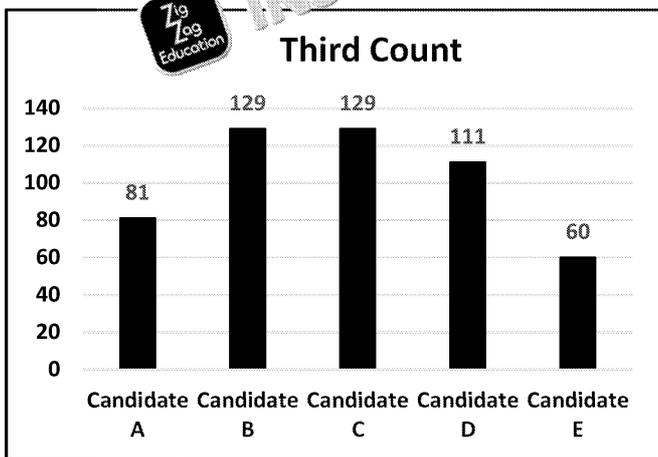
An Example of STV in Action

We will now work through an example of STV in order to help explain ho[...]
example, there are three seats available, and five candidates running for th[...]
vote cast is 510.

Therefore, the quota is: $\frac{510}{3+1} + 1 = 128.5$ (129)

First Count

Candidate A: 75	Candidate B: 125	Candidate C: 250	Candidate D: 50	Candidate E: 10

Se[...]

Candidate A: 75	Candidate B: 145

As we can see, in the first count only one candidate got above the quota. So, Candidate C wins the first seat. Candidate C's surplus votes (all votes over the quota needed) are transferred to the second preferences.

After Candidate C[...]
Candidate B has v[...]
that they are elect[...]
candidate has also[...]
[...]ust be a third co[...]
over the winning [...]
transferred.

Third Count

Candidate A: 81	Candidate B: 129	Candidate C: 129	Candidate D: 111	Candidate E: 60

Fo[...]

Candidate A: 103	Car[...]

After Candidate B's surplus votes have bee[...]
reapportioned, we can see that ther[...] no
winner who has won ov[...] in the
third round. In th[...] nobody gets over
the quot[...] [...]st-performing candidate is
eliminate[...] this case, that will be Candidate
E, and their votes will be reapportioned
according to their preferences.

Candidate D has [...]
129. Now all thre[...]
the counting can s[...]

Alternative Vote (AV)

This was the system that was the subject of a referendum in May 2011, alth
voters decided by a big majority to keep FPTP. 67.9% of voters voted again
system on a turnout of 42%. Under AV, each vote   several choices i
of preference. Anyone with more than 50% o firs reference after the firs
wins. If not, the second choices of   ca   l date with least first preference
redistributed and a secor   t kes place. This goes on, eliminating
candidates   f   es, and redistributing the second preferences un
someone g   % plus 1. In some versions, third and lower preferences w
used if the   and second candidates have been eliminated. This system
for electing the Australian House of Representatives. The system has man
same benefits and issues as SV, but tends to mean that a higher number of
are carried over into the second, third and subsequent rounds because not
minor party candidates are discounted after the first vote.

Second Ballot

A candidate needs 50% of the vote to get through. If there is no winner, th
through to a second ballot, and there is a second vote. The winner only ha
other in the second ballot. He or she will then have at least 50%. This is th
French president, where a second vote takes place two weeks after the firs
in quite volatile first rounds, but a moderate candidate usually wins in the
when moderate Macron beat the more radical rig   n Le Pen.

Talking Point

The Liber   n   rats supported changing to AV in 2011. W
d   supported the change?

Comparing FPTP to Other Systems around the UK

Since the Labour Party came to power in 1997, there have been major chan
systems in the UK. Most elections in the UK had been conducted using the
but in 1999 the elections for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Parliament
year, and the elections for the European Parliament that took place in June
the first two examples, a version of the **Additional Member System** was i
Scotland 73 single-member constituencies under FPTP, and was 'topped u
from party regional lists. For Wales, the corresponding balance was 40 sea
additional seats under the list system. The same system as used in Scotla
following devolution elections held in 2003, 2007 an 20 1, producing a cl
and clear wins in 2011, 2016 and 2021

The Welsh Parliament   ymru in Welsh) opted to employ a 'close
the 2026 d   d   al election, aiming to improve the proportionality
elections.   ng the Additional Member System with a single, fully pr
Members of the Senedd, voters cast a single vote for a political party or an
than voting separately for a constituency representative and a regional list
multi-member constituencies, each electing six Members of the Senedd us

The European elections in June 1999 were conducted for the first time usin[g] Regional List system, which produced multi-member constituencies as th[e] was divided up into new regions to elect the MPs. In addition to these exa[m] the contests for the election of the Mayor of London and the Greater Lond[on] Assembly in 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 were conducted through Suppleme[n] Voting and the Additional Member System respectively. In 2000, this man[age] produce a non-party winner in Ken Livingsto[ne].

STV is used for the Northern I[rela]n[d A]ssembly, for local elections in Scotl[and] and for the election o[f th]e [le]a[der] of the Liberal Democrats.

Both the Li[beral D]emocrats and Greens continue to call for change to the v[oting] manifestos, the Liberal Democrats called for the STV system to be used fo[r] elections, while the Greens supported changing all voting systems in the U[K to] proportional representation.

Electoral systems around Britain

We've already said a lot about voting systems and alternatives to First Pas[t] decide on the strengths and weaknesses of some of these. We've shown th[at] introduced into the UK for elections to the Scottish Parliament, Scottish lo[cal] Northern Ireland assemblies, European elections, and the elections for the [G] and the London Mayor. Local elections and general elections have not yet [c] latter are a cause of argument at present. You can use your knowledge of [o] theoretical advantages and disadvantages, but you're [goi]ng to need to kn[ow] about this properly.

In 1998, the Jenkins Report h[ad pr]o[pos]ed that a hybrid system called AV+ [for] Westminster. That w[ould] m[ea]n that voters would cast two votes, one for a[n] other for a[whi]ch [w]a[s] from an open list of candidates. Most of the MPs w[ould] member co[nstitu]encies under the AV system, and the rest (about 15–20%) [from] lists. The Labour Government was not enthusiastic about following this an[d] were against change altogether. By August 2000, Jenkins himself said that [h]

However, in 2011 the UK electorate was asked in a referendum to decide w[hether] replaced by the AV system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. The Li[b] favour of reform and they were able to insist on a referendum being held a[s] a coalition government in 2010. Their coalition partners, the Conservative[s,] voting system and their campaigning for a No vote helped ensure the pro[posal]

Talking Point

Why are political parties so d[i]v[i]d[e]d [ov]e[r] the issue of electora[l]

FPTP case study: The 2015 general election

One election that resulted in heavy criticism for the FPTP system was that
considered by many reformers to be one of the most unrepresentative elec
British history.

The campaign started officially following the dissolution of Parliament on
2015. As with previous elections, this started the publication of a steady st
opinion polls indicating voting intention. According to the polls there wa
intentions throughout the six-week election campaign. The Conservatives
in the popular vote, but not enough to indicate they would end up with
This is because the size of electorate in each constituency varies and Labour
Conservatives having many more safe seats in the smaller constituencies
votes needed to win, say, 100 seats, is fewer for Labour than for the Conse
polls suggested, however, was that neither of the two parties was heading
another coalition government was on the cards.

All this prompted the media to speculate about the make-up of the next g
with party leaders were often dominated by questions about which other p
with. David Cameron and Ed Miliband both refused to get into a public de
fighting for a majority and were confident of being successful. Leaders of o
open to the discussion. Nick Clegg indicated they were open to joining a c
have to see which of the two main parties had the greater number of seats
with the Conservatives if UKIP were also to be involved. Other senior figu
Party seemed to suggest they were closer to Labour on policy terms, partic
economy. Nigel Farage, the UKIP leader, was prepared to do a deal with t
Labour. Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP leader, called for an understanding with
rejected any such possibility and said she would not have a Labour governm
understanding with the SNP. She did, however, open up the possibility of l
Labour government with t

As results came in it became increasingly clear that the Conservative Party
the seats and David Cameron would stay as prime minister, but this time a
Conservative administration.

The minor parties were experiencing mixed fortunes at the hands of the p
Democrats were seeing their vote squeezed from all sides and looked certa
seats, although not the 49 they actually did. The Greens and UKIP were up
and, while they had the chance to win one or two extra seats, the FPTP elec
from getting more. The main interest was which of the main parties they w
and how this would play out in the many Conservative/Labour marginal c
Caroline Lucas retained her seat, but she remained the Greens' only MP. U
won in a by-election but lost the other, while Nigel Farage and all the othe
elected despite their party taking a % of the national vote.

In Scotland the SNP looked as if they were going to do well, but it was onl
campaign that the polls suggested they were going to do serious damage t
Democrats. On election day they took 40 seats from Labour and 10 from th
took 56 of the 59 Scottish seats on 50% of the vote. The Tories, Labour and
left with one MP each in Scotland despite being supported by the bulk of t

Here was a demonstration of how the FPTP voting system can result in a [text cut off]
overall votes, but this time it was the Conservative and Labour parties wh[text cut off]

In Scotland FPTP resulted in massive overrepresentation of the Scottish N[text cut off]
regional support (and it is geographical support that matters in FPTP) mea[text cut off]
seats despite not having many votes nationally. The tabl[text cut off] below demonstr[text cut off]

In the last few days before polling da[text cut off] u[text cut off]ts began leaning towards [text cut off]
was more likely to end up as [text cut off]ster, either leading a minority Lab[text cut off]
coalition with the Lib[text cut off] rats with possible SNP backing. This view[text cut off]
closeness [text cut off]na[text cut off] polls, with polling in the Conservative/Labour m[text cut off]
Miliband's [text cut off] doing better and highlighting the difficulties that David [text cut off]
putting a coalition together. The general dislike of coalition governments b[text cut off]
2015 election campaign, when the Conservatives warned that if they did n[text cut off]
into coalition with the SNP. It is one of the quirks of FPTP that the votes ca[text cut off]
as in most other systems they most likely would have.

Party	Seats	% of Total Seats	Votes	% of T[cut off]
Conservative Party	330	50.8	11,299,609	
Labour	232	35.7	9,347,273	
SNP	56	8.6	1,[text cut off]54,436	
Liberal Democrats	8		2,415,916	
Democratic Unionist Party		1.2	184,260	
Sin[text cut off]	4	0.6	176,232	
Plaid Cymru	3	0.5	181,704	
Social Democratic and Labour Party	2	0.5	99,809	
Ulster Unionist Party	1	0.3	114,935	
UKIP	1	0.2	3,881,099	
Green Party	1	0.2	1,157,630	

Talking Point

Do you think the 2015 ele[text cut off] gests that electoral reform is [text cut off]
FPTP is supposed t[text cut off] ea [text cut off]jorities in Parliament.

Why have there been Calls for Change?

'I have become convinced of the need for electoral reform in Britain.' Tony

1. In recent years there has been increased concern about the effects of FP[...] our political system. Until 2010 many argued that it seemed to be destr[...] accountability by producing governments wit[...] large majorities in[...] Parliament that it was increasingly una[...] to [...]vide effective scrutiny[...] opposition. Laws were being [...] [...]ber-stamped in the face of pow[...] governments driving [...] [...] through Parliament, using the support [...] party b[...]er [...]

2. The g[...] of third parties, especially from the 1980s, has highlighted [...] appare[...]unfairness of the results. Although relatively successful in ele[...] that use different voting systems, smaller parties have had little succes[...] gaining seats in Parliament.

3. The 1997 Labour manifesto had stated 'We are committed to a referend[...] the voting system for the House of Commons', but the commitment wa[...] kept, despite the introduction of several new systems of voting for vari[...] other elections. FPTP remained the voting system for Westminster and [...] use of systems such as AMS and the list system in other elections sharp[...]

4. The Jenkins Report had come up with a new voting system called AV+ [...] Alternative Vote and FPTP) for Westminster Elections, but the report w[...] despite Blair at the time describing it as 'well-argued and powerful'. A [...] subject of a referendum in 2011 but voters chose to keep the FPTP syste[...] as a condition of the Liberal Democrats form[...] [...]ition governmen[...] Conservatives. Cameron's party, ho[...] [...] against AV and camp[...]

5. In addition to the unfair di[...] [...] of seats to votes, it was known to [...] the popular vote a[...] [...] the majority of seats in the Commons, as [...] and 19[...]

6. Curre[...]oral rules allow bigger parties to spend up to £19.5 million[...] not counting what each of the candidates can spend. Under the current[...] worth smaller parties trying to compete with those amounts, knowing [...] winning many seats if their support is thinly scattered across different [...]

7. The difficulties of FPTP were highlighted in the general election of 2005[...] Blair's Government came to power for a third term with the support of [...] votes. The Labour Party got just over 35% of the vote, but, given that o[...] actually turned out, this meant that the party formed a government wit[...] total possible vote. There were serious doubts about whether governm[...] people any more, many of them coming from MPs and cabinet membe[...] Labour Party itself. The hung parliament produced in 2010 convinced s[...] would not always necessarily produce a strong g[...] ment with a wo[...]

8. A further cause for concern has been that [...] [...] recent elections ha[...] the historical average. It has be[...] [...] that too many similarities bet[...] the realisation that FP[...] [...] smaller parties gaining any real influ[...] for this.

9. The 2[...] [...] election also showed how FPTP can distort represent[...] depen[...]upon how concentrated their support is. UKIP, with nearly [...] with just one MP in the House of Commons, whereas the SNP, with a t[...] ended up with 56 MPs. Clearly the SNP were only standing in Scotland[...] the seats in that country on the basis of obtaining 50% of the total vote [...] seats across the UK, obtained 12.5% of the total vote but just 0.2% of th[...]

Comparing FPTP and STV

Perhaps the best way to understand the differences between two electoral the results that they create. We will compare FPTP and STV as they are use Stormont elections respectively. FPTP and STV are probably the most radi systems used in the UK and produce very different results.

Is equal value given to different votes across the country?

Under FPTP, where votes are received matters a great deal. In safe seats, those who vote against the likely winner have little say in who will be elected. If votes are mainly spread out across the country the party that wins a large number of votes can get no representation and a party that gets few votes, but concentrated in one area, can win seats. This was the position with UKIP and the SNP a where UKIP got nearly 4 million votes and only one seat, whereas the SNP 56 seats.

STV gives more equal value to votes. Because multiple representatives are there are no 'safe seats'. Candidates who vote for losing candidates have t that there is less chance that they will be completely discounted than unde more equal valuing of votes that under STV there is no need for tactical vo vote one way in order to stop another from winning. There are some smal unequal value of votes, such as if the turnout in different constituencies va these situations are not often a problem. Closely related to the idea of equa proportionality.

Does the proportion of votes roughly match the proportion of seats won?

Under FPTP the results can be highly disproportionate, often favouring the in less representation of smaller parties. The prior example of UKIP and the dispropor the system can be to minor parties. On the other end of the spectrum, Labour and the Conservatives tend to be overrepresented. In 2005 Labour won only 35.2% of the vote and 55.1% of the seats. In 2017, when the two largest parties won over 80% of the vote, the results were less disproportionate, because FPTP favours a two-party system.

In the 2024 general election, FPTP favoured Labour, who won a much higher share of seats in Parliament relative to their vote share. In contrast, Reform UK and Greens lost out.
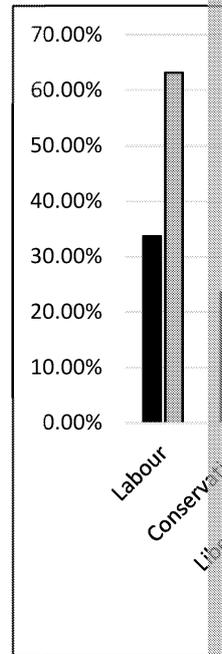
| 70.00% |
| 60.00% |
| 50.00% |
| 40.00% |
| 30.00% |
| 20.00% |
| 10.00% |
| 0.00% |

Labour Conserva Li

Proportionality o

Is there a link between the representative and the people they are repres

In FPTP every constituency gets one MP, and that MP is the one who recei
means that every MP has a strong local link. However, there are some flaw
have a strong local link, but people who disagree with their one MP migh
unable to turn to any other representative. As well as this, FPTP encourag
marginal seats, meaning that constituency interests can be ignored in a 'sa

There is also a constituency link under STV. Every voter is represented by
every voter should be able to turn to an MP they identify with. On the oth
voters are unsure of who to approach, and the large size of the multi-mem
the locality of the politician, because they will often be representing large
geographic areas.

Does the electoral system maximise voter choice of candidates?

Under FPTP, voters are usually given the choice of only one member of
each party in their constituency. They can, therefore, only choose out of a
choice made up of only one member of each party. It would not be
strategically sound for parties to offer multiple candidates as they would
inevitably be taking votes from one another. In some constituencies huge
numbers of different parties can run, but voters must choose one they
believe has a realistic chance of winning or their votes will not be effective.
There can be a very large number of parties competing under FPTP. The
table below shows all of the parties who stood against Rishi Sunak in
Richmond and Northallerton in the 2024 election. Note that, despite the
competition, his majority meant that all choices made from Conservative
were essentially wasted votes.

	Candidate	
Conservative	Rishi Sunak (winner)	
Labour	Tom Wilson	
Reform UK	Lee Taylor	
Liberal Democrats	Daniel Callaghan	
Green	Kevin Foster	
Count Binface Party	Count Binface	
Independent	Niko Omilana	
Independent	Rio Goldhammer	
Yorkshire	Howling Laud Hope	
Monster Raving Loony	Sir Archibald Stanton	
Workers Party	Louise Dickens	
Independent	Angie Campion	
Independent	Jason Bennettd	

Under STV, the choice of candidates is greater than under FPTP. Often mul
party will run, meaning that voters can choose not only between, but also
because more than one members are elected per constituency, it is less likely th
wasted, meaning they do not have to vote in order to make sure their votes
consistently seen as one of the systems that maximises voter choice.

Can the electoral system produce a result that can lead to a government?
This is seen by many as one of the most important benefits of FPTP. Mino
under FPTP, and the hung parliaments of 2010 and 2017 are atypical of the
three hung parliaments after elections in the UK since 1929. Because FPTP
governments it is often seen as giving a clear mandate to govern, and prov
seats in Parliament it needs to govern effectively.

STV, on the other hand, tends to produce coa tic   In the NI Assembly th
governments, but this can be attr   a   he fact that the Good Friday A
St Andrews agreement) r   s e first minister and the deputy first min
parties as p   f t   of cross-community voting. Because STV is mor
lead to m   it ns under most circumstances.

Talking Point

What do you think the most important criteria are when judgi

Is it possible to hold the government to account by changing your repre
This is an important question for any electoral system. FPTP offers a fairly
system, and if enough voters change their mind then it is likely that the in
be elected. The electorate (at least those in marginal constituencies) are ab
with a government and stop them from governing. The exceptions to this
under STV.

Under STV, this might be more difficult. B c is alitions are made by p
they can include parties that th   c   s given very little support to, inc
governing party, even   a great deal of support.

Overall, b   toral systems allow for changes in government and repr
local level). This is essential for a democracy, so it's a good thing that both

Can voters understand the process of voting and who they are voting fo
FPTP is a very simple system. Voters get only one vote, and they give it to
win. The candidate with the most votes wins the single seat that is availab
is easy for voters and counters. On the other hand, learning how to use yo
is no easy task, and has led to many websites popping up that use algorith
could most effectively vote for.

STV is a more complicated system, both for voters and counters. There are
voter, and the votes can take a long time to count. H   er, in principle i
the voter only has to decide their order of pre   c   or candidates. Voter
ensuring that they are using their v   tiv ly, because STV ensures th

Talking Point

N   have compared the two systems, which electoral syste
better: FPTP or STV?

Unit 3.2: Referendums and How Th

Learning Objectives

✓ Be able to explain what a referendum is and i. hat circumstances o
✓ Understand the increased use of refer   ince the 1990s
✓ Know the impact referendums h   d   ritish politics
✓ Know the case for and   ist   se of referendums in a represent

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🔑 K   Vc ds

Referendum	A public vote taken on a single political issue
Direct Democracy	A form of democracy in which the public are consulted dire representatives. Referendums are a mechanism of direct der
Initiative	A petition that can force a referendum if it gets enough signa circumstances that allow for initiatives in the UK.
Turnout	The proportion of the electorate that votes in an election or number of registered voters

What is a Referendum?

In recent years referendum   ve   e an important part of UK politic   understand this, we   o   ow both what a referendum is, and why or   referendu   ou   vote on a single political issue. Referendums are ge   issue of pa   r political significance, such as a major change to the con

Who can vote in a referendum in the UK is decided by the government at   on Scottish independence, for example, only those in Scotland could vote.   exiting the EU, the whole of the UK was allowed to vote (but not Europea   the world, referendums often have a minimum required turnout, or need   the vote in order for the motion to pass (e.g. 60%). Luckily for us students   usually do not have a minimum turnout, and motions are typically adopt   population votes in favour.

In the UK a referendum is non-binding. It is up to Parliament to decide wh   results of a referendum; referendums have no for   o   stitutional powe   parliamentary sovereignty). Referendum   re   hen a government an   necessary. There is no situatior   I   in which a referendum is requir   constitutional changes   ecided with referendums. Parliament h   referendu   p

Referendums are a type of **direct democracy**. They are a way for the public   governance without the need for representatives as intermediaries. Howev   referendums are non-binding, they all need to be passed by Parliament bef   event that they are successful they are implemented by the government (al

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In some democracies there are ways for the public to call for a referendum. Initiatives expand the powers of the public relative to their representatives. can demand a referendum if they get a petition with over 50,000 signatures requirements is met. There is no equivalent to the initiative system for nat

Although referendums have no specific power under UK law, they are po decision has been made by referendum, the public given the governm the result of the referendum, as well as povg on them the responsibil usually uncontroversial, but since the 2016 vote to leave the European Uni responsibility has become more contentious. Some parliamentarians not leave the referendum (because it was non-binding), or there sh or they arg ver the way in which the leave vote should be interpreted.

Referendums are not a traditional part of UK politics, and their use has in years. The question, therefore, becomes, why are they used?

Talking Point

What are the main differences between elections and referen these important?

Why Might a Referendum be Used?

Since the election of the Labour Party in 1997 referendums have become British politics. They are often used to important constitutional changing the electoral system. They can also be used to bring an end to a with mixed results. It is noting that the line between constitutional political d s in the UK, which has no entrenched constitution therefore, cial measures for amendment. All referendums held in th have been held on an issue of constitutional significance, even if the argum used for many of them (in particular the Scottish Independence referendu Brexit) are as much about the economic or political ramifications as they a possible constitutional change.

Referendums have been made to fulfil promises made in party manifestos. devolution referendums were held for Scotland and Wales in the late 1990s party's manifesto is a way of the party signalling that it will seek public su after getting the mandate during an election. In doing this, they are effectiv mandate in the event that the referendum passes, as in the case of devoluti also a clever political move as it does not mean th e will necessarily introducing a referendum as they believe that th e to fight against the referendum rather than during Another advantage of promisi is that it can be later ign ps being politically salient. The 1997 La referendur o ems for the House of Commons after a commiss was never nder Labour. A referendum can also be used as a compro This is how the AV referendum went ahead under the Liberal Democrat – the Lib Dems supported changing the voting system and the Conservatives

Referendums can be held in order to grant further legitimacy to major con
been the case with many constitutional reforms in Britain, especially those
for a government to implement without public approval, such as the devo
referendum can also withhold legitimacy and not allow a proposed reform
referendum on changing the voting system to AV in 2011.

A referendum can also settle an internal party di pu . Both the 1975 vote
2016 vote on membership of the EU h   e   terpreted as attempts by
the issue of Europe within the o   p ties (Labour and the Conservative
these it is undeniable   ties were split on these issues, but wheth
held to un   p   more questionable, not least because it has not h
settle an is can also serve to highlight the divisions in a party if they
a referendum.

On a small scale, referendums can be held for any number of
issues. They are held to legitimise planning decisions, to
decide whether a mayor should be elected, and to decide other
issues in local politics. Although referendums are frequently
used, there is only one situation in which citizens themselves
can call for a referendum in the UK (known as an initiative).
This is when a petition is received by 5% of the registered
voters in a local authority asking for a referendum on having an elected m
all other situations, only elected representatives can authorize the use of a

> **Did you**
> There h
> held in
> than in
> British p
> before

Talking Point

Why do you thi   e   ums have become more common

Referendums in the UK

Referendums held in the UK
1973 – on joining the Irish Republic (Northern Ireland voters only)
1975 – on remaining in the European Community (all UK voters)
1979 – on devolution in Scotland and Wales (Scottish and Welsh voters only)
1997 – on having a Scottish Parliament and separate tax powers (Scottish voters
1997 – on having a Welsh Assembly (Welsh voters only)
1998 – on having a Northern Ireland Assembly (Northern Ireland voters only)
1998 – on having a Mayor for London (London voters only)
2004 – on a regional assembly in the north-east of England (NE voters only; see
2011 – on using the AV voting system for general elections (c l UK voters)
2011 – on giving lawmaking powers to the Welsh As   / Welsh voters only)
2014 – on Scotland becoming an independent c int   cottish voters only; see b
2016 – on remaining in the European U   Un voters)

Between 2004 and 201   proposed referendums on joining the European
European C   uti   voters). Both of these referendums were subsequently
local refer   about issues such as elected mayors.

Some useful points concerning referendums
1. In the UK, governments are not always obliged to follow the result.
2. Referendums can be used by prime ministers to stop arguments in the govern
    and obliging opponents in the cabinet to follow it, e.g. Harold Wilson used t
    referendum to unite the government on the issue of Europe.
3. Governments will sometimes set a minimum quota on votes, below which they
    the answer. This happened with the 1979 devolution ref rendums when the
    electorate.
4. It is the government that will set the word ng of question, and which will u
    stage a publicity campaign to s r r. answer it wants. The Neill Report
    governments should stay e irai i ation to referendums, but this is hardly

Results of ot Welsh referendums 1997
(What con can you draw from the results?)

	Scottish Parliament	With Taxation Powers
YES	74.3	63.5
NO	25.7	36.5
% TURNOUT	60.1	60.1

Look especially at the Welsh result, and at the turnout. Does the referendum real
feelings of the Welsh voters at that time on the issue? Are these examples of **dire**
little about what people really want?

Three Recent Examples of Referendums

Case Study 1: Regional Devolution Referendums

There were three major devolution referendums in 1997 and 1998. These th
moving powers away from Westminster and tow   W les, Scotland and
Northern Ireland referendum was slight' m re plicated as it was ove
Friday Agreement. We will foc s he volution referendums in Scotla

The Labou er. ider Tony Blair that had been elected to Westm
their mani hold a referendum on the issue of devolution. The Scott
was held on th September 1997. It followed a previous referendum in 197
required turnout to be implemented. This time the creation of a Scottish P
63.5% of voters on a turnout of 60%. The vote led to the creation of a Scott
entrenched another layer of government in the United Kingdom. In this ca
for legitimising the creation of a new political system.

The referendum in Wales was held the week after, on 18th September 1997
overall call for devolution in Wales, and the referendum result reflected th
with 50.3% of voters supporting devolution on a turnout of only 50.2%. Th
level of support overall compared to Scottish devolution. However, there
this, and the Welsh Parliament has not suffered a cri   legitimacy since
2011, in a referendum for further devolution p w s, 63.5% of the elect
on a small turnout of only 35.6%).

The referendums o   indicate that referendums can be effective
entrenchir   ti onal change. Without a referendum on these two iss
Agreement possible that the new institutions may have been seen as
have been created.

Case Study 2: Referendums for Regional Governments in England

It can be argued that referendums do provide a very good example of loca[l]
2003, Parliament passed legislation to allow referendums to take place on [w]
be called 'mini' parliaments in certain regions of England. These new elect[e]
have limited powers over issues such as economic development and plann[ing]
culture. The cost to local people would be about the sam[e] as putting five p[er]
There were some conditions, and one of the m[ost] i[mp]ort[a]nt was that Cou[n]
would have to be abolished to make w[ay] [fo]r [a] new layer of local govern[

At this point, the gov[er]n[ment] w[a]s very sure that the referendums would [
three refer[endu]ns [w]e[re] planned – for the North East, the North West, an[d]
Feelings se[emed] to be changing, however, and in July 2004, the governme[nt]
in the North West and in Yorkshire. The government was still certain that [
favour of a regional assembly in the North East, and that referendum wen[t]
The idea was resoundingly rejected by a majority of 78%, despite strong g[o]
idea. Immediately, the government scrapped the idea of holding any more[,]
the whole policy.

Perhaps this demonstrates that however much a government controls the [
wages a campaign for a particular point of view, it is still local decision-m[a]
end. On the other hand, the referendum itself has been criticised for not re[
government, but more of a demonstration against the Labour Governmen[t]
participatory government really produced the answer that everybody wa[n]

Case Study 3: The Scottish Independence Re[ferendum] i[n] 2[0]14

The referendum on Scottish indepen[dence] [de]ve[l]oped out of the
support there had been over t[he] ye[ars] [si]nce devolution, and was
immediately trigger[ed] [by] [th]e [S]N[P]'s result in the Scottish
parliamen[t] [ele]c[tio]n [of] 2011 when they won an overall majority. The
referendum [was] an attempt to settle the issue from the Westminster
coalition led by the Conservatives under David Cameron.

In 2011 the SNP won an overall majority, taking 69 of the 129 seats,
having campaigned on promising a referendum on independence.
There had been an issue over whether the Scottish legislature had the
legal right to run a referendum, since any matter relating to the
constitution lay with the UK Parliament. The Scottish government argued [
an advisory referendum on extending the powers of the Scottish parliame[n]
would have no legal effect on the UK constitution. However, everybody w[
to have a major political effect. The Scottish government was given tempo[
government to run the referendum which allowe[d] [the]m [t]o set the date, de[
wording of the question. The date was s[et] [f]o[r] 18[th] [S]eptember 2014 and the [
18-year-olds.

All three m[aj]o[r] [p]a[r]ties lined up in the 'No' camp with Alistair Da[r]
Chancello[r] [beco]ming the agreed leader. They campaigned under the slog[a
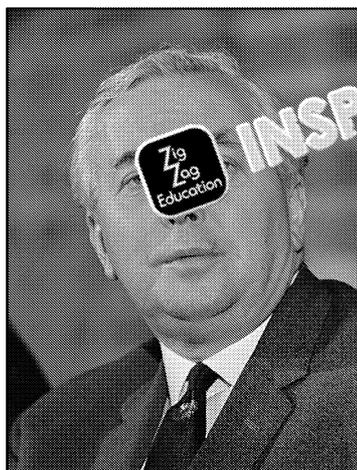emphasis w[as] mainly on the risks Scotland would be running by going it a[
would use.

The 'Yes' camp ran under the slogan 'Yes Scotland'. It was essentially led b Sturgeon, the leader and deputy leader of the SNP. They underlined the p country had complete control over its resources and could make all its own

Opinion polls at the beginning of the campaign showed the 'No' camp wit to narrow, and with just a week left to go the media were reporting a real p snatching victory. The 'No' camp responded by s   g the former Labou Brown in to rally support. He is credited b r ar,   itn articulating the positive case for s   ether and stopping the momentum of the 'Ye'   in the last few days.

The refere   ca paign seemed to engulf the whole nation. The turnou   .6% reflected this. The 'No' vote won by 2,001,926 to 1,617,989.

The referendum had some fairly dramatic immediate results. The SNP did election of 2015, winning nearly all of the seats in Scotland, effectively den historic strongholds.

The effects of the 2014 referendum are still playing out today. Although th 2017 general election, they regained their dominant position in Westminst The UK-wide vote to leave the European Union in 2016 has increased dem on Scottish independence. This is because Scotland voted to remain in the because the UK's membership of the EU was a key argument used by the therefore, that this debate will continue in the coming ye rs.

Case Stud   : h referendum on British R   s   m bership of the European Union C   munities – EC) has been a controversia Britain joined the single market in 1973. Brit the EC in August 1961. In 1963 Britain's me French president Charles De Gaulle, and th blocked, again by De Gaulle, in 1967. Britain 1973. A referendum was held in 1975 under government where 67% voted to remain in t saw the UK integrate further economically a became the EU, and the EU enlarge to inclu particularly after the break-up of the Eastern

Harold Wilson – Labour Party leader and Prime Minister at the time of the 1975 referendum.

In the early years it was politicians on the le opposed UK membership of the EC. It was d Maastricht Treaty in 1992–1993 that modern Euroscepticism became a salient force in British p   s. The issue of Euro Party during John Major's term as PM. In the yea before the 1997 genera Referendum Party came to exist a   in   ssue party campaigning for a membership of the EU. In   th referendum Party won 2.6% of the na After 1997, two po   t ons began to become louder on the issue of B One was t   os eptic party of UKIP, and the other was the Eurosceptic Party. UKI   inued to win votes in elections, reaching their height with where they got 12.6% of the vote, and the 2014 European Parliament electi largest party with 26.6% of the vote compared to Labour's 24.4% and the C campaigned uncompromisingly for a referendum on UK membership of t become a force in electoral politics, exerting pressure on the major parties.

Conservative Party had been something of an ever-present force since the
(leader 2001–2003) and Michael Howard (leader 2003–2005) were promine
Conservative Party had some high-profile defections in 2014 when MPs D
Reckless left to join UKIP. The Conservative Party's pro-EU leader and pri
was coming under increasing pressure to reform Britain's place in the Euro
referendum on membership. In the 2015 Conservative manifesto, a referen
a renegotiation. The renegotiation went on from ???? ?? 6 and Cameron
had hoped to assure. A referendum was called f?? ??? June 2016.

The referendum had an off??? campaign group on each side of the debate.
Britain should lea?? ?? ??ropean Union was called Vote Leave, and was a
including ???? o?. ?he Conservatives, Labour and UKIP. Some major figu
the former ????r of London (and future Conservative Prime Minister) Bo
cabinet member Michael Gove, the only UKIP MP Douglas Carswell, and
There was also an alternative group campaigning
for a Leave vote called Leave.Eu, the group
supported by Nigel Farage. The official campaign
to remain in the EU was called Britain Stronger in
Europe. A Remain vote was supported by
Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron,
Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, and Liberal
Democrat leader Tim Farron. Labour and the
Liberal Democrats were officially backing Remain,
while the Conservatives stayed neutral and UKIP
backed Leave. British withdrawal from the EU
was given its lasting name – Brexit.

| Referendum on the U |
membership of the E
Vote only once by putti
your choice
Should the United Kin
European Union or lea
Remain a membe
Le
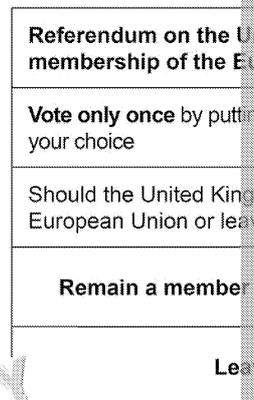
The ballot paper used for

It was a hard-fought campaign ??? ?? h ??es.
Despite the majority of ?? ?? ?? ?? establishment backing Remain (the lea
well as sev??? ?r?? ?? ?nternational politicians and economic groups),
beginning ??? e public could go either way on the issue. The campaign
number of t??vision debates, a leaflet produced by the government backi
distributed around the country, and accusations from the Leave side that F
campaigning on the basis of pessimism, and from Remain that the Leave s
information. One week before the referendum, the pro-Remain Labour MF
by a man associated with far-right organisations. Campaigning was halte
respect, and began again on 19th June.

At the end of the campaign the referendum was won by the Leave side. Th
51.89% compared to Remain's 48.11%, on a turnout of 72.21%. The UK ove
Scotland voted 62% to remain, as did Northern Ireland by 56%. London, a
strongly to remain. Leave voters were in general more likely to be lower e
Remain voters. Areas with large ethnic minority ???? a? ons were also mo
British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar vot?d 5% ?? remain in the EU, and
relationship to Britain came into ??? ti?

There was a dram??? ?? ?? immediate political reaction to the result. The P?
backed Re???? ar??ounced on 24th June that he would resign by October.
Party, Jere???rbyn, faced a leadership challenge after he was accused o
issue. Nigel Farage stood down as UKIP leader on 4th July. The SNP argue
different vote suggested that a second independence referendum was nece

On 13th July after a leadership election, Theresa May (a Remain voter) beca[...] prime minister. May promised to act on the referendum and take Britain o[...] majority in parliament in the 2017 snap general election. This made the pa[...] difficult and also led to her eventual resignation. The referendum has had[...] politics, changing the political geography of the country, as well as the cor[...] Britain once the negotiations are complete. This referendum has, therefore[...] important one in British political history, and it s[...] a[...] if its result will c[...] of British politics for years to come.

┌─ **Talking oint**
│
│ What do you think the next major referendum in the U[...]

The Impact of Referendums on UK Politics

The increased use of referendums has had a profound effect on British politics. Since the June 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union, it seems that it will be the result of a referendum that defines the next stage of the political development of the UK. This in itself demonstrates one of the unique aspects of the impact referendums can have. Because referendums are usually binary options (one option is usually a change, and the other no change), it means that one result can have a major impact on politics, and the other can result in no – or minimal – change.

Constitutional Impact
The referendums that have been h[...] in [...] UK on various constitutional is[...] immediate impact on the [...] [...] al arrangements in the UK. The devo[...] given public [...] [...] ouand, Northern Ireland and Wales resulted in[...] and gover[...] e[...] rging. The effect this has had on the UK constitution i[...] constitutio[...] rangements in place to govern how these devolved institu[...] powers and responsibilities should be. Even the referendums that have not[...] something of a constitutional impact. The result of the AV referendum in 2[...] an elected regional assembly in the North East in 2004 left no doubt that th[...] these changes. They cemented the existing constitutional structure by rejec[...]

Referendums have also changed the way we think about constitutional re[...] constitutional decisions are left up to a referendum now. Despite this, Par[...] to provide referendums on any of these constitutional issues, and there is[...] continue. The 1998 Human Rights Act was brought in without a referendu[...] the House of Lords and the establishment of the Supreme Court in 2009. I[...] had a mixed experience in using referendums to ref[...] he constitution. [...] referendums can add a level of electoral auth[...] [...] constitutional chan[...]

When a constitutional chan[...] [...] have some form of electoral author[...] on extending the p[...] [...] EU) it can lead to public resentment. Many[...] referendu[...] th [...] bon Treaty (some of them more than one, such as I[...] this choice[...] as featured in the debates over EU membership when it[...] the EU has in Britain is not based on any legitimacy granted by the people[...]

This brings us on to the most important constitutional impact of referendu[...] UK politics, Parliament is sovereign; there are no laws that Parliament can[...]

Referendums present a challenge to this authority. A referendum result ca[...]
than a parliamentary decision, and even though there is no constitutional [...]
referendum results are treated as irreversible. Referendums can be an inst[...]
political system without an entrenched constitution.

Political Impact

The increased use of referendums has had a m[...] [...] on the way poli[...]
Let's put aside for a moment the spec[...] p[...] of the Scottish independ[...]
Brexit referendum (both of wh[...] [...] huge and lasting effect on UK pol[...]
impact the *use* of refer[...] [...] had, rather than any specific referendu[...]
used to ad[...] [...] concerns, as with the Brexit referendum. They hav[...]
chip in a c[...] rty coalition, as with the AV referendum in the Conserva[...]
coalition. Finally, a referendum can be called by a government in order to [...]
has been a source of conflict for a long time.

Because a referendum gets so many more votes than any individual MP, i[...]
seen as having greater electoral authority, and thus the power to settle an [...]
who voted to leave the EU was 17,400,000, one of the largest mandates eve[...]
However, whether referendums can really settle anything is brought into [...]
the Brexit referendum who say that the referendum offered a binary optio[...]
solutions. The only votes were to remain and leave; the referendum did n[...]
should leave, or which institutions the UK should stay in, both of which i[...]
debates in British politics.

The Case for and against Referendums

For:

☑ They are a form of [...] [...] ocracy. It can be argued that referendu[...]
   demo[...] [...] y involving the public directly with political issu[...]
   powe[...] the hands of politicians (who are largely not trusted) an[...]
   Direct democracy is the purist form of democratic engagement, and t[...]
   valuable in addressing a democratic deficit in a country such as the U[...]
   representation largely leaves the public out of decisions except at elec[...]

☑ They provide the electorate with the chance to prevent 'elective dictato[...]
   the public directly in political issues and can stop the government from [...]
   disagree with. In an issue such as Brexit, many politicians felt that the U[...]
   public believed it was better to leave – if there had been no referendum [...]
   have kept the UK in the EU against the public's wishes because they w[...]
   considered undemocratic. Referendums can act as a protection against [...]

☑ They provide valuable feedback to politicians between elections. In th[...]
   gets a chance to have their voice heard on polic[...] e every five year[...]
   the government is giving another opp[...] [...] the public to have t[...]
   especially important if a large [...] [...] of things have changed since a[...]
   believes a policy sho[...] [...]. They complement representative [...]
   politician[...] in [...] [...] electorate – they are not intended to repl[...]

☑ Refer[...] s [...] settle an issue that would otherwise still be an unk[...]
   Devol[...] s now an established part of UK democracy because of th[...]
   referendums in its establishment. When a referendum results in a 'no [...]
   it can be particularly effective in convincing the public that the issue s[...]
   However, if a change option is decided, or if another political develop[...]
   can easily come back into the public consciousness.

☑ Referendums enhance citizen participation and education. The public ⟩
participate in another vote, but also to learn about another political iss⟩
was a near-constant presence on television and online during the cam⟩
opportunity to learn about the issue. Therefore, the electorate can bec⟩
educated.

☑ They show that the opinion of the people is valued in a democracy. Th⟩
not presuppose that the public is too ignor⟩ ⟩nderstand what it is⟩
with very complex issues such as ⟩ ⟩ ⟩ership.
Referendums, therefore s⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩of respect
towards the publi⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩e missing in a
repres⟩ ⟩ ⟩ment.

Against:

☒ Referendums in the UK represent a challenge to the principle of parlia⟩
creating an alternative form of authority that is seen as inviolable, refe⟩
sovereignty of Parliament. They also undermine the power of represe⟩
forcing them to enact policies that they personally think are harmful.

☒ Those in power will often frame the question or hold the referendum ⟩
The use of the referendum as a tactical device is problematic for demo⟩
the public is not really exercising its power, but only being used as a t⟩
tend to only force a referendum if there is no chance of them getting o⟩
if they think they are going to win. This is a criticism often made of th⟩
the membership of European institutions referendums in 1975 and 20⟩
to keep their parties together.

☒ Referendums can have a bias against chan⟩ ⟩. ⟩ ⟩est example of this ⟩
in 1959 a referendum of male vot⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩the idea of votes for wome⟩
not get the vote until 197⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩pled with the idea of tyranny of the⟩
referendums ca⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩s instruments to delay progress.

☒ Refer⟩ ⟩s ⟩ ⟩gnore the voice of minority groups. They can
lead to ⟩ ⟩yranny of the majority' by having no mechanism for
protecting minority interests. Because a referendum usually only
offers two options, the opinion of those in the group that loses will
usually be completely ignored. Many have argued that the effect
Brexit has had on EU citizens living in the UK and some UK
citizens living elsewhere in the EU is tantamount to tyranny of the
majority, as these groups are likely the most affected although were
unable to vote on the issue. Referendums can offer a simple answer
to a complex question.

☒ Ordinary people do not have the time and resources to become well
educated on major issues of national importance. Referendums are,
therefore, decided more on the basis of feelin⟩ ⟩ ⟩n ⟩n a careful
consideration of the facts. In a repre⟩ ⟩ ⟩ta⟩iv⟩ ⟩emocracy we elect
politicians precisely becau⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩o⟩ ⟩ave time to learn about all
of these questions, ⟩ ⟩ ⟩ ⟩he public to vote on them is unjustifiabl⟩

☒ Refere⟩ ⟩s ⟩ ⟩ettle issues. The two EU referendums, as well as⟩
an issu⟩ ⟩ritish politics even after the 1975 referendum, prove that ⟩
in the s⟩ort term by a referendum, it does not guarantee that the issue⟩
government could also keep on holding referendums until they get th⟩
two Irish referendums on the Lisbon Treaty are an example of this.

☒ Referendums can entrench or cause divisions. In the case where majo[...]
actually having a referendum on this issue might cause the party to co[...]
general, if the political establishment is not prepared for the result of t[...]
cause political chaos.

☒ By far the most powerful information campaigns will come from the s[...]
referendum. Governments have the most resource[...] This was certainl[...]
referendum, when the government produc[...] [...]fl[...]t detailing the po[...]
could have and why the governm[...] [...] [...] it was better to stay in, [...]
across the UK.

☒ Referendums can [...] [...]fy a complex issue. There is no way that [...]
a sing[...] st[...] [...]d in doing so a referendum can oversimplify a po[...]
it bein[...] cognisable. This can also leave the results up to interpret[...]
referendum and the debates over whether it indicated support for a 'h[...]
May resigned as prime minister in 2019 due to her Brexit Withdrawal [...]
Parliament three times, as the government faced opposition from all s[...]

Talking Point

Based on the arguments for and against referendums, do y[...]
used in the UK?

Learning Objectives

✓ Understand why different electoral systems were ch... ...n for the different...
✓ Understand the impact of the electoral syst... ...e ...pes of governmen...
✓ Understand the impact of electoral ... er... or... ...er choice
✓ Understand the impact of th... ...ct... ...ystem on the party system
✓ Understand majorit... ...and ...oportional systems and the debate betwe...
government

🔑 K... ...ords

A Single-party Majority Government	A government in which one party gets over half of th... assembly) and can form a government on its own. Th... FPTP.
A Two-party Coalition Government	A government in which no party gets enough seats to... own, so they join with another party in order to get a...
A Single-party Minority Government	A government in which no party gets over half the se... chooses to govern alone without a majority. They can... with other parties to help get d... ...ns through the p... Conservative Party di... ...th ... DUP after June 2017...
Majoritarian	An elec... ...al s... ...m designed to make a single-party m... ...ik..y. Majoritarian systems are less likely to ma... ...natch the seats won. FPTP is such a system.
Proportional	An electoral system designed to make the number of s... match the number of votes cast for each party. They do... party majorities. Party list PR is a proportional system.
Mixed Systems	An electoral system designed to take elements from bo... proportional systems, such as AMS.

Why have different electoral systems been introduced?

Now we know that the different electoral systems around the UK result in
government, the question becomes, why AMS in Scotland and Wales and
also have to think about why FPTP is the system use   Westminster ele
administrations, and for the elected mayors,   ar Party under Tony
electoral system should be. Howev r a   he electoral systems have bee
reasons and under differe   s   rcumstances.

Why FPT   e ninster elections?

FPTP is the   tional system used for electing seats to Parliament. It has
ever since there have been elections to Parliament. Although it has change
introduced, most notably the extension of the franchise to include every m
1928, the basics of FPTP have never fundamentally changed. Constituenci
them in Parliament. It has survived in part because it protects the interests
who in turn make sure it is not reformed. Labour offered a referendum on
in their 1997 manifesto, after having been out of power for 18 years, but di
while in power.

There are many issues with FPTP, stemming from the fact that it is dispro
be highly disproportionate when looking at regional votes. In the 2019 ger
was different in each nation: the Conservatives in England, Labour in Wal
the DUP in Northern Ireland. This is part of the r   at other electoral
appropriate in the devolved regions.

FPTP is not favoured by   who are excluded because of it. Minor
FPTP if they   g   cally spread out. In 2015, UKIP and the Greens
the nation   but were largely denied representation due to their vote
diverse. Th   why minor parties favour electoral reform.

Despite the voting patterns in general elections suggesting that voters are
choices, when offered electoral reform for Westminster elections, the elect
2011 there was a referendum held on whether to introduce the Alternative
Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition had proposed it after a vote wa
Democrats' 2010 manifesto. The referendum resulted in a 68% vote agains
on a 42% turnout. This result seems to have cemented FPTP for the time b
simple and familiar over the new and untried. Many of the arguments tha
public to choose FPTP focused on its ability to create strong governments
minor parties consistently campaign in favour of chan   g the system, and
parliaments in recent years, the issue has gair   in nce. Although p
with the 2024 general election produc   ai   lide Labour majority, how
the government will pursue   orm in much of a hurry.

T   g Point

H   FPTP been working in the way it is supposed to
work?

Why AMS for Scotland and Wales?

AMS was introduced as a compromise that Labour had to make in order to win acceptance of its devolution plans. The other political parties in Scotland and Wales (especially the nationalist parties) would be very unlikely to provide backing to devolution if the electoral system used to elect the de‿olved assemblies reduced their chances of holding p‿li‿c‿ ‿o‿er, as FPTP would have done. Remember ‿‿ P ‿‿ays favours the largest parties. AMS was i‿‿o‿ ‿‿ as a compromise, as the Liberal Democrat‿ ‿ ‿ ‿ ‿ould have preferred STV, but Labou‿ ‿ld ‿ ‿ ‿done better out of FPTP. Labour also

The Senedd

wished to ‿‿ ‿the constituency link. AMS is a partly proportional system, and, therefore, was an ideal middle point for the par‿ has played a part in many of the devolved governments since, AMS has al‿ other minor national parties to gain more representation than they usuall‿ elections. The Welsh Parliament voted to change to a 'closed proportional ‿ devolved election, which divides the nation into 16 constituencies which e‿ aims to be more proportional than AMS. Alongside the increase in membe‿ 60 to 96, such a move away from Westminster reflects a growing institutio‿

Why STV for Northern Ireland?

STV was chosen for Northern Ireland Assembly elections after the 1998 G‿ to represent the different parties as fairly as possible. Northern Irish societ‿ the nationalist and unionist camps, often resulting in v‿‿ent confrontation‿ the Good Friday Agreement was that no sing‿ ‿ ‿‿ ‿i‿ ‿hould be able to do‿ Republic of Ireland, and was used w‿‿ ‿ ‿‿‿‿ern Irish parliament exist‿

STV was one of a nu‿‿ ‿‿‿‿‿tutional arrangements constructed in No‿ sharing (a‿ ‿r‿ ‿ ‿ompromise) mandatory. It is also the case that th‿ first minist‿ ‿‿res with equal power and responsibilities despite the na‿ parties. STV has never resulted in single-party dominance in Northern Irel‿ discussed before, Northern Irish government has not always been stable, a‿ periods when a government could not form.

Why SV for Mayors?

The Labour government decided on the electoral system that would be us‿ establishing the elected London Mayor in 2000. SV and AV were both con‿ systems that allow for ranking in elections with a single winner. SV was ch‿ for voters and counters. SV also usually benefits the two major parties (as ‿ through to the second round) whereas AV usually results in the least-wor‿ compromise candidate, who may well have not be‿‿ ‿ ‿ ‿e two main part‿

SV has resulted in most elected m‿‿‿ ‿ ‿ ‿ from either Labour or the Co‿ from other parties or inde‿‿ ‿ ‿n‿‿ ecause all mayors are elected to repr‿ it is difficult t‿ det‿ ‿ ‿ ‿ ‿o‿ representative the results are. Following ‿ ‿c‿‿ns Act 2022 passed under Boris Johnson, the 2024 m‿‿‿‿ elections used FPTP. The government argued this was to reduce the number of void ballots caused by voter confusion, though some critics have suggested the change was politically motivated to favour Conservative candidates, and it was changed back to SV by Labour.

The Impact of the Electoral System on the Government

As we have already seen, the type of electoral system used for an election [ ] both the type of party system that evolves, and the types of government th[ ] systems tend to result in a two-party system and single-party government[ ] more often to multi-party systems and coalition or minority governments.[ ] from all the different governments formed across [ ].

Governments

One of the most importar[ ] [ ]nces of adopting a proportional (or par[ ] system is th[ ] ha[ ] r[ ] results in a single-party majority government. I[ ] Northern I[ ] coalition governments and minority governments have b[ ] governmen[ ]ected using AMS, have had varying degrees of stability (se[ ] lasted approximately as long as governments in Westminster in the same p[ ] using STV in Northern Ireland have often been unstable, but that could be c[ ] Northern Ireland's divided and polarised politics, rather than a result of the[ ]

The fact that more coalition governments have existed in the UK since the [ ] (also more levels of government in general) has had a marked effect on th[ ] interact. Negotiation and consensus between parties are much more centr[ ] devolved administrations than they are in Westminster. A good example c[ ] number of cross-party parliamentary groups that exist in Scotland for issu[ ]

By contrast, even with the lack of single-party dominanc[ ] in Westminster [ ] Westminster remains an institution defined by th[ ] [ ]r[ ]ain parties and th[ ] Governments in Westminster avoid forr[ ] [ ][ ] party consensus in ord[ ] seen by the willingness of Ther[ ] [ ][ ] form a confidence and supply c[ ] with only 10 seats in n[ ][ ] [ ][ ]ter the 2017 election, in order to avoid [ ] the Conser[ ] e [ ] [ ]ent as a minority government with only the slir[ ] is very pos[ ] [ ]at the other parties would not have been open to negoti[ ] the fact that this would give them increased power over policies and the g[ ] Parliament. The 2010–2015 coalition, and the effects it has had on the Libe[ ] that coalitions in Westminster (and the associated level of consensus) are u[ ] common. The parties cannot yet see a definite benefit from governing in c[ ] outweighs simply waiting for another election under FPTP and hoping th[ ]

The type of electoral system definitely affects the governments that can fo[ ] debate on electoral systems about whether **majoritarian** or **proportional** s[ ] debate that we will come back to later in the chapter.

Policies

The different governments that have been for[ ]e[ ] [ ]er different electora[ ] question of what sort of policies di[ ][ ] [ ]ctoral systems result in. The c[ ] have limited powers to im[ ][ ]em[ ]ucies. They have used their powers t[ ] that of Westm[ ]nst[ ] [ ]ib[ ]ral Democrat – Labour coalition in Scotland r[ ] would no[ ] [ ]it[ ]n fees. The fact that Scottish Labour could form a left-[ ] Liberal De[ ]ts meant that they did not have to drift rightwards in ord[ ] Labour Party across the UK did with New Labour under Tony Blair. AMS [ ] allowed Scotland's more left-wing population to be represented in the pol[ ]

Years	Type of Government	Parti
1997–2001	Single-party majority	L
2001–2005	Single-party majority	L
2005–2010	Single-party majority	L
2010–2015	Two-party coalition	Conservatives a
2015–2017	Single-party majority	Conservatives (under Da\ fr
2017–2019	Single-party minority	Conservatives in confide
2019– 2024	Single-party majority	Conservatives (under B and Rishi S
2024–	Single-party majority	L

Table 1: Westminster Governments – Elected using FPTP

Years	Type of Government	Parti
1999–2003	Two-party coalition	Labour and Liberal De\ n
2003–2007	Two-party coalition	Labour and l
2007–2011	Single-party minority	Scottish
2011–2016	Single-party majority	Scottish National Party (\ Sturge
2016–2021	Single-party minority	Scottish National Part\ Greer
2021–	Coalition/Minority	Scottish National Party a agreement 2021–2024); SN

Table 2: Scottish Governments – Elected using AMS

Years	Type of Government	Parti
1999–2000	Single-party minority	Labour – government end
2000–200?	Two-party coalition	Labour and l
2003–20?	Single-party minority	L
2007–20?	Single-party minority	L
2007–2009	Two-party coalition	Labour and Plaid Cymru leader I
2009–2011	Two-party coalition	Labour a
2011–2016	Single-party minority	L
2016–2021	Two-party coalition	Labour and l
2021–	Single-party minority	Labour (with support fro Gething's r

Table 3: Welsh Governments – Elected using AMS

AMS is a partly proportional system, and you can see the impact this has h government that have been produced. Both the Scottish and Welsh govern coalitions and minority governments than Westmi... In fact, the majo 2011–2016 in Holyrood should be seen as something of an anomaly, reflect for a political party under AMS. Northern Ireland has not been included h require coalitions to be fo...

In contrast, FPTP tends to lead to single-party majority government The fact that there have been two hung parliaments (resulting in a coalition and a minority government respectively) is fairly anomalous in UK politics. General elections nearly always return single-party majorities. It is not yet clear whether the prevalence of hung parliaments is a consequence of a changing party system, or a coincidence that does not suggest a wider trend.

Majoritarian and Proportional Systems – The Central Debate

We have now looked at a large number of different electoral systems used
the world. You may have noticed that there are some patterns emerging. O
pattern is the debate over whether the electoral system should produce str
vs more proportional representation of voters. Th__ __ __ __old debate, and c
question of whether a system should be pl __ r__ __ist__ __ajoritarian or proport

A pluralistic majoritari__ __ __ __ __ch as FPTP) is based on the winner-ta
the candid__t__ __h__ __ __ __the most votes in a constituency wins, and no o
constituen__ __ __ __ __turned to office. This tends to mean that at a national lev
proportion__ __ut that the winner wins by enough to secure them a strong
the case in the UK, and can result in some very strong governments from
2024 Labour landslide, Keir Starmer's party won 63.2% of the seats in Parl
33.7% of the vote. Majoritarian systems reward those who win the most vo
majority to govern.

On the other hand, there are proportional systems (STV or Party List PR).
parties and voters equally. As the name suggests, these seek to represent v
number of votes they receive. This results in more equitable representatio
lead to coalitions, as it is unlikely that any single party will get over 50% o
inherently negative, but they are usually less stable than a majority gover
programmes based on what they can negotiate through parliament, rather
implement more radical policies.

The key distinction here is wh__th__ __ __ __ __stem should be based on **single-**
or **equal representatio__ __ __ __ __**. It is not an easy question to answer, an
electoral s__ __s__ __ __ __the world suggests that it is very much a debatab
more comp__ __d is that those who have the power to change a system ar
people who benefit from the current system. There is also the problem of s
proportional nor majoritarian, such as AMS. These can be considered **mix**
aspects from both proportional and majoritarian systems.

> **Talking Point**
>
> Which matters more: fairness in representation or streng

The Effect of Electoral Systems on Political Parties

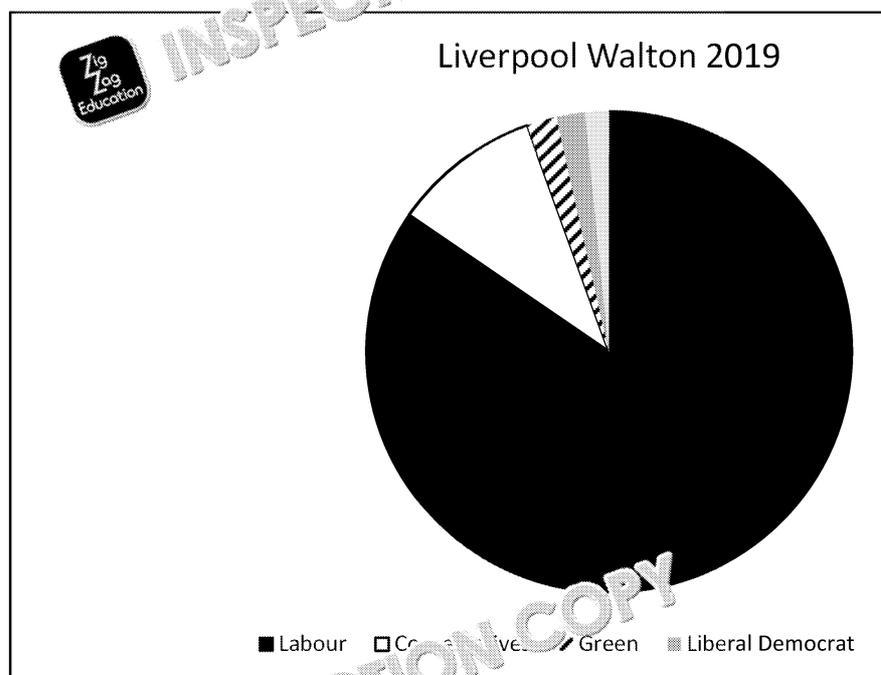The main beneficiaries of FPTP are always the ma__ __ __ __rt__ __s. Because FPTP
that are the biggest in a constituency, the __ __rti__ s__ __ __y to be the biggest acro
to win. It is because FPTP denie__ __ __ __ r__ __sentation to minor parties that
As we have already see__ __ __ __ __FP a party can get a majority in Parliame
half of the v__ __ (a__ __ __ __case with Labour in 2005). In fact this is by far t
an election__ __ne of the major parties will get under half of the votes, but

Having said this, the main two parties are not untouchable under FPTP. T
they can be challenged. The first is that a minor party that has very dense
still be successful. This was the case with the SNP in Scotland, and the Gre

where it receives a much higher proportion of the vote than it does anywh
Conservative vote share is spread out, so they can be threatened by strong
FPTP can also work against the major parties if their vote is too geographi
extreme example of this in the 2019 general election was in the Liverpool W
Labour MP Dan Carden won 34,500 votes while the second-placed Conser
4,000. Because the candidate only needs to win the larg t number of vote
threshold, roughly 30,000 Labour votes in Live   on were not nece
effectively wasted because of Labour'   rity. If these votes had b
country, they could have won   ew more seats.

Liverpool Walton 2019

■ Labour   □ C   ve   ⧫ Green   ▨ Liberal Democrat

*The 2019 general electio   Liverpool Walton constituency. Remember that the Labo
votes than anv   t in, so all their votes over what was needed to beat the Conser*

However,   mall issues that FPTP causes for the major parties should
FPTP greatly favours them. FPTP pushes the party system towards being
parties, especially geographically spread out ones, are completely without
famous example of this is the 4 million votes won by UKIP in the 2015 elec
one seat being won. UKIP got the third most votes of any party, more vote
or the SNP, yet managed to win only one seat to the SNP's 56 and the Libe
makes a two-party system much more likely, even if the balance of other v

The devolved administrations, with their more proportional electoral syst
political parties are more equally treated, and thus the party systems have
parties than under FPTP. Since the introduction of AMS to Scotland, the p
such a way as to make FPTP elections to Westmir   ar very ill-suite
political opinion. In the 2019 general elec i n, h   ay the seats and vote s
was among the least proportio   nr untry. Labour won 19% of the v
whereas the Conservat   5% of the vote and 10% of the seats, and
and 81% of   e   act that there was a split across multiple parties
was entire   le to represent the balance of votes in terms of seats. AM
system of Scotland by allowing voters to become attached to multiple part

You can see from the governments that have formed in Scotland, Wales ar
are at least three parties in the devolved assemblies that have become seri

more proportional a party system is, the more likely it is to allow for a mu
Voters also become more accustomed to voting for minor parties in a prop
do so without the fear that their vote is wasted.

The single most proportional system (Party List Proportional Representatio
using the D'Hondt method, nearly guarantees a multi-party system. There
for larger parties, and no votes are discounted as a if they are for a too-m
receive a really tiny number of votes - so system can count every voter).

The Effect of Electoral Systems on Voter Participation and Engage

As we have already briefly discussed, different electoral systems can have
that voters choose to vote, and even whether they choose to vote at all.

Voter choice is higher under AMS than FPTP because a voter gets to choos
representative, but also a party. They can be assured that at least one of th
in a representative, unless they have very marginal opinions. Voters get ev
because they can choose not only between parties, but also between candi
Because of STV being more proportional there is also even less chance of a
gives more choice by allowing for a secondary choice.

All the systems used in the UK other than FPTP provide more choice. The
pick multiple options, or be safe in the knowledge that their vote is unlike
because the counting systems to do not allow for some votes to be comple

One way to measure voter engagement is their turnout. The turnout in
of registered voters who cast their vote compared to the total number of re
are in general connected to voter turnout figures. Under FPTP, turnout is
which party will win. However, levels of turnout tend to be lower in low-l
opposed to al elections), so it is hard to determine whether turnout h
change in electoral systems.

We can compare the turnout in various types of elections throughout the y[...]
system results in high voter turnout.

Turnout

◆ General Election ▪ Scottish Parliament ● Welsh Parli[...] ▲ Northern Irelan[...]
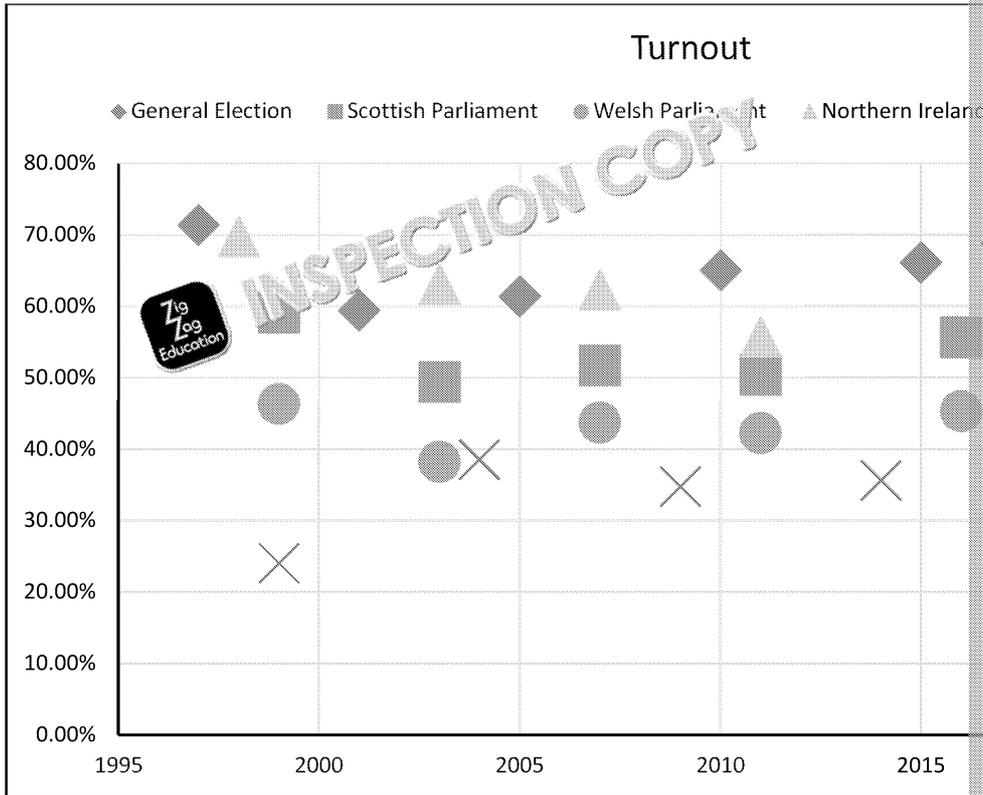
The turnout chart shows that general electior [...] is nearly always hig[...]
other type of election. The only one t'a[...]es close is turnout in the Nort[...]
Assembly elections.

Based on [...] level of importance of an election (where general e[...]
important, [...]U parliamentary elections – rightly or wrongly – are seen [...]
feature determining turnout than the electoral system.

Talking Point

Who benefits the most from FPTP? Why has this mad[...]