

The UK Political System



Constituency

The area represented by an MP
(approx 60,000 population)

Member of Parliament

A person who has been elected represent a
constituency in parliament

General Election

In a parliamentary system, a general election is an election in which all or most members of a given political body are chosen. The term is usually used to refer to elections held for a nation's primary legislative body, as distinguished from by-elections and local elections. In the UK, these take place at least every five years.



Houses of Parliament

House of Commons

The House of Commons is the lower house of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The Commons is a democratically elected body, consisting of 650 members (since the 2010 general election), who are known as Members of Parliament (MPs). They have power and are the law makers.



Houses of Parliament

House of Lords

The House of Lords is the upper house of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The Lords share responsibility for making laws and checking government action. Unlike the elected House of Commons, most new members of the House of Lords are appointed.



Becoming a Member of the House of Lords

The majority of the members of the House of Lords are life peers who are appointed by the Monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister, or on the advice of the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

Membership was once a right of birth to hereditary peers but, following a series of reforms, only 92 members sitting by virtue of a hereditary peerage remain.



How many members does the House of Lords have?

The number of members of the House of Lords is not fixed; The Lords currently has around 830 Members, and there are three different types: life Peers, bishops and elected hereditary Peers.



What does the House of Lords do?

Making laws takes up the bulk of the House of Lords time, and Members are involved throughout the process of proposing, revising and amending legislation. Some Bills introduced by the Government begin in the Lords to spread the workload between the two Houses.



What does the House of Lords do?

Lords check the work of the Government by questioning and debating decisions made by Ministers and Government Departments.

There are permanent committees investigating work relating to Europe, science and technology, economics, communications and the constitution. Occasionally one-off committees are set up to deal with issues outside these areas.



Inside the House of Commons

On the left is the opposition.

On the right is the Government and its supporters.

Those in key positions (Government and opposition), sit on either front bench.

PM and leader of the opposition sit in front of the dispatch boxes on the table.



Democracy and Representative Democracy

Democracy involves everyone having their say. Because we can all vote we are a democratic country.

We elect MPs to represent us. They vote on matters in Parliament. MPs usually vote according to what their party's policy is, unless they disagree with it and rebel.



Referendum

When a very important decision on the future of the country is required, a special vote called a referendum is called and every voter can choose. The Government of the United Kingdom has held eleven referendums, the first in 1973; only two of these covered the whole UK.



Future Referendums

The current government has promised a referendum on any further EU treaty that transfers any powers from the UK government to the European Union.

The next referendum due to be held is in Scotland, where the Scottish Government has announced that it plans to hold the independence referendum in the autumn of 2014.



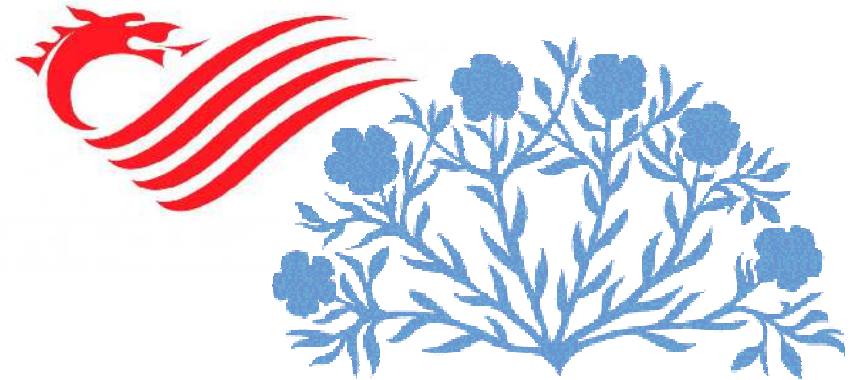
Devolution

Devolution is where power is transferred from a superior governmental body (such as central power) to an inferior one (such as at regional level).

In the United Kingdom, devolution refers to the statutory granting of powers from the Parliament of the United Kingdom to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



Northern Ireland
Assembly



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Voting in the United Kingdom

The British way of counting votes is called: **FIRST PAST THE POST**

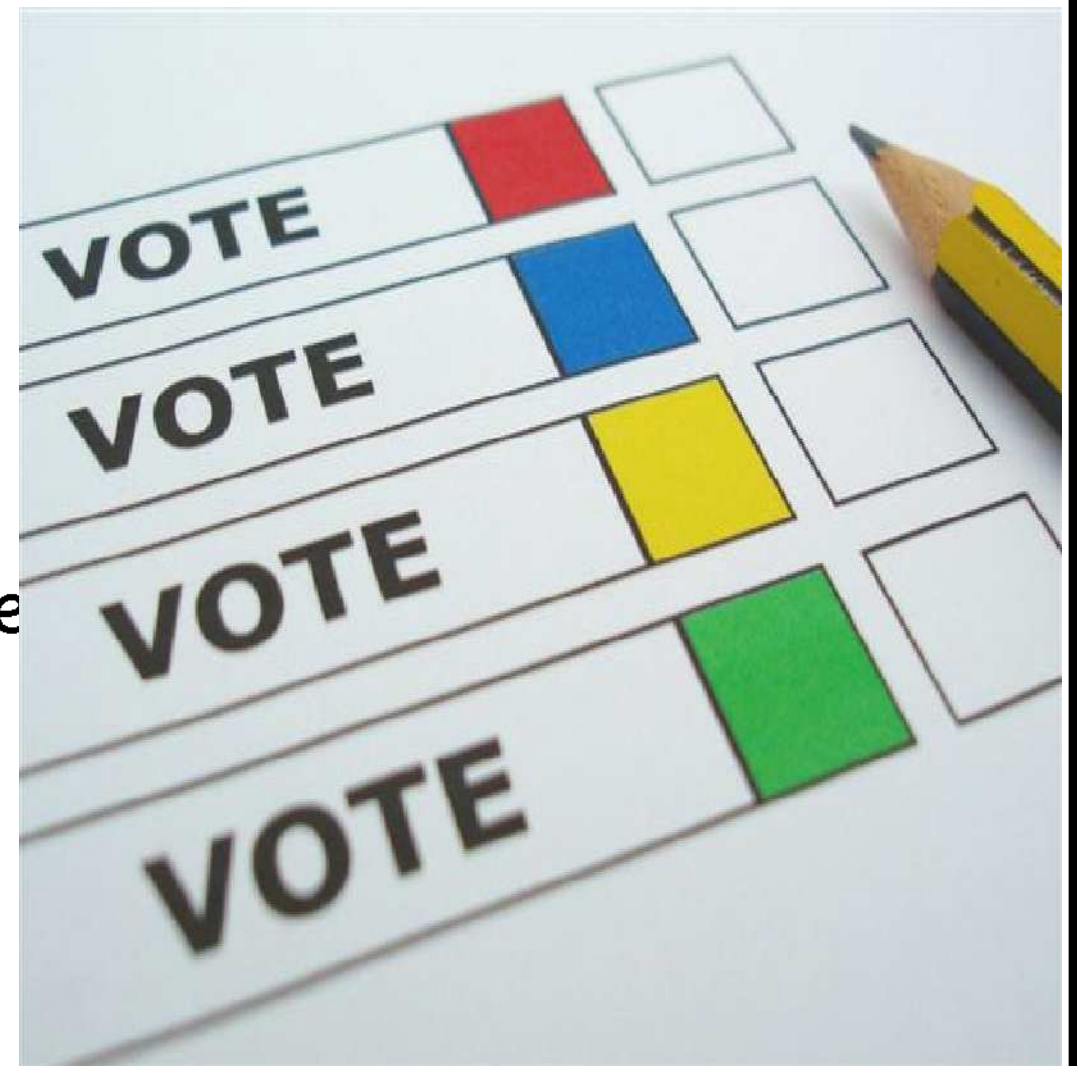
This means that people have one vote in one area (constituency). The candidate with the most votes there gets elected to the House of Commons.

All the MPs in every party are added up to see which has the **MAJORITY**. Sometimes the winning party actually has less votes than the losing one!



A New System of Voting?

P.R. stands for **PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION**. Every vote counts, and the party with the most votes gets a number of seats **IN PROPORTION** to its votes. Both Labour and Conservative oppose PR because they do very well with FPP. Smaller parties like LIBDEMS or Greens want it though.



Encouraging Voters and Voter Apathy

'Apathy' means 'can't be bothered'. At least one in four people in Britain do not vote. There are many reasons for this:

- some say that people are just lazy and new ways to vote like SMS/text, email, digital TV or phone-ins would improve 'turn-out', or having POLLING STATIONS in Tescos or petrol stations.



Encouraging Voters and Voter Apathy

- some say it is because people feel DISILLUSIONED, DISENGAGED and ALIENATED from politics. Why should they vote for parties that don't represent their views?
- Some say voting should be compulsory.
- Some say starting people earlier will help, lowering the age to 16.



How Laws are Made

1. The government puts out a Green Paper which puts forward ideas for future laws.
2. Once the ideas are final a White Paper is published. This lays out the government's policy.
3. To turn policy into law, the proposals are introduced into Parliament in the form of a bill.
4. Once the process has been completed the bill becomes an Act of Parliament and part of the law of the country.