



# **CITIZENSHIP**

## **Theme B**

### **Revision guide**

**DEMOCRACY**

**AT WORK IN THE UK**

## **Theme B - DEMOCRACY AT WORK IN THE UK**

### **How do we choose our government including the prime minister?**

- We have a **general election** every 5 years.

.....BUT an Early Election can be called if a motion is agreed by two thirds of MPs in the House of Commons. This is what happened in 2017 - a General Election was called early and took place on 8 June 2017.

### **How does an election work?**

- The country is split into 650 areas, called constituencies.
- Each constituency is allowed to elect 1 person to represent them for the next 5 years.
- Elections are now held every 5 years (Fixed Term Act 2011), although we have had a snap general election in 2017.
- The person who wins the election is called an MP (Member of Parliament)
- Members of Parliament belong to political parties. People in political parties share similar ideas on how the country should be run.
- The political party who has got the most MPs becomes the GOVERNMENT. This means that for the next 5 years, they are the strongest political party and can decide which new laws to make.

### **What are the main political parties in Britain?**

- The major parties in the UK are the Conservative party, the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Nationalist party.
- There are 320 political parties registered with the UK Electoral Commission.

In the 2017 election representatives of 8 different political parties won seats in Parliament:

- Conservative party
- Labour party
- Liberal Democrats
- Scottish Nationalist party
- Plaid Cymru (Welsh)
- Sinn Fein (Northern Irish)
- Democratic Unionist Party (Northern Irish)
- Green Party

### **What happened in the 2017 snap General Election?**

- Theresa May, the Conservative Prime Minister, said that she wanted a stronger mandate (i.e. a bigger majority/more seats) to strengthen her hand before the Brexit (leaving the European Union) negotiations started. Theresa May and her advisers may have also believed that Corbyn and the Labour party were weak and that she could 'whip their backside'. Many people thought Corbyn and Labour would have a disastrous election but Corbyn and the party managed to win back over 30 seats from

the Conservative party, for example, the affluent London borough of Kensington voted in a Labour MP for the first time in election history!

- As a result there was a **hung parliament** (the Conservatives had won the most seats but had ended up with significantly fewer than they had before the election. They didn't have a majority to govern (=rule) and so had to enter into an agreement with the DUP in Northern Ireland.

### What is a hung parliament?

- A hung parliament happens when no single party wins a majority.
- A party can stay in power without an absolute majority by trying to forge an alliance (=deal) with a smaller party to create a coalition government.
- Alternatively, it can aim to reach agreements with smaller parties to support it in parliament without going into a coalition government (the Conservative currently have an agreement like this with the DUP in Northern Ireland).
- Remember, there's no such thing as a free lunch! In order to secure the DUP's support the Conservative government promised to give them an extra £1bn in funding.

### How are councillors and MPs elected?

- By people voting in local and national elections.

### What is Britain's voting system called?

- First past the post.

### What does 'First past the post' mean?

- In a general election, the system used in the UK is known as **first past the post**.
- It takes place when a single MP is elected to one constituency. e.g., Jim Fitzpatrick is the MP for Poplar and Canning Town.
- The candidate with the most votes wins the constituency and a seat in Parliament. The candidate who comes second in a constituency wins nothing and their votes don't count.
- The party which wins the most seats in parliament becomes the government.

### Is every vote important?

- Yes and no. In the first past the post system, you only need to win by one vote to get all the power in the constituency.

### How can people vote?

- People can go to a polling station. They go into a booth and put a cross next to the candidate they want to vote for.
- People can vote through the post in a postal vote.
- People can also vote through proxy, where they get someone else to vote for them.

## **Should people vote?**

<b>YES</b>	<b>No</b>
Politics deals with very important issues such as education, money, public services and tax. We live in this country so should decide how these issues are dealt with.	Politics hasn't got anything to do with me.
You have got a chance to change your MP/councillor or government who haven't been very good at leading you.	All the politicians and political parties are the same.
If you don't vote than people you don't like might get elected.	It's a waste of time. My 1 vote won't make a difference.
It's your chance to have a say and get your opinion heard.	Politicians never listen anyway.

## **Who can vote?**

To vote in a UK general election you must be registered (i.e., be on the electoral register). You are:

- 18 years of age or more on polling day;
- a British citizen;
- a citizen of most Commonwealth countries or;
- a citizen of the Republic of Ireland.

## **Who can't vote?**

The law states you will not be able to vote if you:

- are a member of the House of Lords
- are an EU citizen resident in the UK
- are a convicted prisoner
- have been found guilty of corrupt practices in an election in the last five years.

## **How do you know which political party to vote for?**

- Before an election, each party releases a set of promises that they will carry out if they win the election. This is called a MANIFESTO. People read the manifestos and decide which party they agree with.

## **Why do voters vote for political parties?**

As well as reading manifestos, voters decide to vote for a party because of:

- Their social class
- Their age, gender or background
- Important recent issues, e.g., many people won't vote Labour because of the war in Iraq
- How the party is seen in the media
- The newspaper they read—each paper has political bias
- Where they live
- Who their family votes for

**REMEMBER: People often vote for the party rather than the actual candidate.**

### **How do parties try to make sure you vote for them?**

- They send out leaflets with promises on them ( manifestos )
- They go door to door canvassing.
- They hold public meetings
- They attract media coverage. E.g. Appearing in local newspapers or on television.

### **1What have been the voting trends in recent years i.e., turnout?**

Until recently it was less people voting.

In the 1997 election, 71.5% of the public voted.

In the 2001 election, 59.4% of the public voted.

In the 2015 election, of the public voted.

In the 2017 election, 68% of the public voted.

### **What is a referendum?**

A referendum is a vote when all the public aged 18 or over vote on an issue to decide whether or not it should become law e.g., referendum on whether to leave the E.U.

### **Why do people want to become MPs?**

- To make a change in their community.
- To have a say in society.
- To express their views.

### **What do MPs do in Parliament?**

In Parliament MPs:

- Take part in debates
- Represent the interests & concerns of their constituents - to government ministers.
- Vote on new laws
- Sit on legislative or select committees
- Hold a government position such as Home Secretary or Chancellor.

### **What do MPs do in their constituency?**

In their constituency MPs:

- Often hold a 'surgery' in their office, where local people can come along to discuss any matters that concern them.
- Attend functions, visit schools/businesses & generally meet as many people as possible.

### **How many female MPs were elected in 2017 (out of 650 MPs)?**

2017 = 208 female MPs (32% = record)

[2015 = 191 female MPs]

Before 1987 no more than 5% of MPs were female.

## How many ethnic minority MPs were elected in 2017?

2017 = 52 ethnic minority MPs

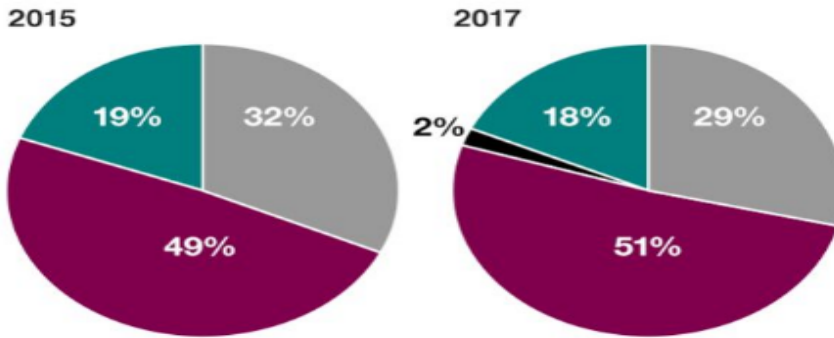
[2015 = 41 MPs]

1987 saw first black MP elected.

## What schooling have MPs had?

School background of MPs, 2015 v 2017

■ Independent ■ Selective ■ Comprehensive ■ Abroad/home schooled



Independent = private schools

Selective = grammar schools

Comprehensive = state schools (local authority schools & academies)

## What happens after an election?

- The votes are counted and the 650 winners of each area go to Parliament to become MPs. They join up with other people in their political parties.
- The party with the most MPs becomes the Government.
- The party with the second most MPs becomes the opposition.

## What is a government?

- The government is also known as the **executive**.
- The government is not the same as parliament.
- The government is broken down into **departments** which deal with particular issues e.g. the home office (oversee police, immigration etc), the foreign office (oversee diplomatic relations, some trade deals etc), the department of health (oversees running of NHS & GPs), the Education department (oversees the school funding & curriculum, unis etc. Decides what stinky little students like yourselves should learn and what qualifications you're expected to take).
- Each department is led by an MP or member of the House of Lords known as **ministers** or **secretaries** (e.g. Defence secretary, Education secretary).

## What is the leader of the government called?

- The Prime Minister- currently Boris Johnson.

## Who is the opposition leader?

- The leader of the party who came second in the election – currently Jeremy Corbyn (Labour).

## What does the Government do?

- The Government runs the country. It suggests new laws (bills).

## What does the opposition do?

- The opposition is the political party with the second most elected MPs. The opposition has got different ideas to the Government and tries to stop the Government's ideas becoming law. The opposition challenges the government and holds it to account.

## What parts of the country does the Government run?

The Prime Minister chooses people to be in the **cabinet**. Each **cabinet minister** is head of one of these parts of the government:

- Money
- Law and Order
- The UK's interests abroad
- Health
- Education
- Trade and Industry
- Transport
- The environment
- Defence.

## How does the government get money?

- Through **tax**. This is money that is paid by the public or businesses.

There are many types of taxes:

- ***Income tax***

This is taken out of people's salaries. The more you earn, the more tax you pay.

- ***Value Added Tax (VAT)***

This is paid when we buy food, clothes, books etc. It's 15%.

- ***Excise duty***

This is paid on a special range of items, many of which aren't good for us. For example, cigarettes and alcohol.

- ***Corporation Tax***

This is paid on the profit made by businesses.

- ***Other taxes***

Tax paid on cars and petrol. Some taxes are paid in the local area, such as council tax and business rates.

## Why do we pay tax?

We pay tax so the Government can give us services. These services are listed above.

Our taxes pay for the police, army, teachers, doctors, social services, roads, street lights.....

## **How does the Government make new laws?**

The Government suggests a new idea they want to become law. This is called a bill.

- Here is how a bill becomes law:

### ***FIRST READING***

The bill is introduced to Parliament

### ***SECOND READING***

A few weeks later, the bill is debated by MPs. A vote is taken and if the majority want it, the bill is passed.

### ***STANDING COMMITTEE***

A group of 16 to 20 MPs look at the bill and make possible changes that came up in the second reading.

### ***REPORT STAGE***

The committee sends the report, with all its changes, back to the MPs. The changes are either approved or ignored.

### ***HOUSE OF LORDS***

The Lords look at the bill. If they disagree with it they send it back to the MPs in the House of Commons.

### ***THIRD READING***

The changed bill is debated in the House of Commons. The bill is debated. Each MP votes on whether to approve the bill or not. The bill is usually approved, as the Government has got the most MPs but sometimes MPs vote against their party!

### ***ROYAL ASSENT***

Once the bill has passed the House of Commons and Lords, it is sent to the Queen to sign it. These days, the Queen can't refuse to sign the bill. Once the bill has been signed it becomes an act of law.

## **What is Parliament?**

- Parliament is known as the **legislature** because it legislates law.
- There are two chambers in Parliament: the House of Commons (elected) and the House of Lords (not elected).
- The House of Commons is made up of 650 MPs.
- The House of Lords is made up of approximately 800 lords.



## What happens in the House of Commons?



Each MP must represent the views of the people in their area (constituency) and their political party.

## Who are the House of Lords?

- The Lords (or peers) who sit in the House of Lords are not elected. Currently, there are about 800 peers. The majority are life peers (former MPs or people appointed for their expertise and experience e.g. Alan Sugar, Doreen Lawrence), bishops and hereditary peers (who've inherited their title from their father). They have less power than MPs as they weren't elected.
- They can postpone a bill (= delay it becoming a law) but they eventually have to allow it through if the idea for the law was in the government's manifesto.

## What happens if the Government makes unpopular laws?

- The public has got a chance to change the Government every 5 years in a general election.

## What was the 2009 scandal about?

- MPs' expenses. Some MPs were prosecuted and sent to prison.
- More recently, some MPs have been accused of sexual harassment in Parliament.

## What is the local council?

- A group of people who are elected to look after the affairs of a town, district or county.

## What is a councillor?

- A member of the local council who has been elected by people in the area.

## How are councillors elected?

- Through local elections in the same way as MPs. The councillors also belong to political parties

### How is the council organised?

- After the election, the political party with the most councillors chooses a leader. The leader then picks a cabinet. Each member of the cabinet will have responsibility for one area of the council's work, e.g., education, social services and leisure.
- The leader and cabinet are chosen from members of the party with the most councillors.
- All the other councillors work under the cabinet in different areas of the council's work.

### Do councillors get paid?

- No. They do a voluntary job. They can claim expenses.

### Why do people want to be councillors?

- They want to make a change in their local area. They want to make sure their area is run in a way they agree with. They want to have their voices heard.

### What does the council do?

- The council is responsible for the running of the local town. Every year the council has a budget and it must decide what to spend its money on.

### How does the local council get money?

- **Council Tax** - - This is paid by everyone who owns a house in the local town. People with bigger houses pay more tax.
- **Money from central government** - - The Government in Parliament gives money to local councils.
- **Business rates** - Local businesses in the town have to pay a tax.
- **Traffic and parking violations**

### What services is the local council responsible for?

Education	Environment
Social services	Planning
Leisure	Fire brigade
Police	Transport
Housing	

### How can you have your voice heard?

- You can vote at election.
- You can talk to your councillor.
- You can look at the council's plans for the future.
- You can go to a council meeting.
- You can go to a cabinet meeting.
- You can visit the council's website and air your views.

### How can you complain to the local council or government?

- You can talk to an ombudsman, whose job is to investigate complaints.
- You can write to the council.
- You can contact the local newspaper to get yourself heard.
- You can start a campaign and protest.
- You can join a pressure group.

## THE UK CONSTITUTION

### What historical document is supposed to signal the start of the British constitution?

- Before **the Magna Carta** the Monarch had complete control over what happened in the country. King John was forced to sign Magna Carta and have over some power to the barons. This was the beginning of the British constitution.

### What is a constitution?

- A constitution sets out how a country is governed.

### What is the British constitution?

- The British constitution sets out how we are **governed**.
- Many countries have a written constitution (like the USA) but **the UK's is not written down**.
- A **constitution** is a set of rules which lay down how much power the government has, when elections must be held and the influence the monarch can have.
- The British constitution has several **sources**, which together tell us how the country should be run.

### **The sources are made up of:**

- Statute law
- Common law
- Treaties
- Conventions
- Traditions

### Is the British constitution set in stone? Can it be changed?

- The British constitution is not set in stone.
- **Each time the law changes, it is incorporated into the constitution.** For example, **membership of the EU** has meant that laws passed by the European parliament affect British Law.

**Devolution** within the UK also changes the way our Parliament works.