



NORWICH SCHOOL

# **A Level Politics**

**Introduction to Component 1  
Democracy and Participation**

# What is politics?

- Politics is ....
- About resolving conflict
- The use of power
- Making policy
- Deciding who should have power/ who should be in office
- What the government does
- Allocation of resources
- Relations between groups
- Rallying support
- Compromise
- The state
- Maintaining order
- Deception?

# What is Politics?

- **Politics** is about how decisions are made and how people believe they should be made.
- Some political scientists argue that politics is mainly about **resolving conflicts**. They claim that the aim of politics is to produce a consensus by resolving conflicts in an acceptable way.
- Other writers claim politics is about the exercise of **power**. There are two ways of exercising power- by threatening or using force (coercion) or by making decisions which people regard as **legitimate**, even if they don't agree with them (**authority**).
- Weber identified three types of **authority- traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority**.

# Politics Intro

- **What is the difference between political power and authority?**
- **Power** is ability to get things done even if forcing people to – reward and punish people.
- **Authority** is ability of governments and individuals to direct others and achieve their goals because majority of people accept that government right to tell them what to do.
- **What is Democracy?**
- Democracy means ‘people power’ with government resting on consent of governed. Lincoln said ‘government of the people, by the people and for the people’.
- In UK democracy, a few govern and the mass of people follow. The electors cast their vote every few years at a designated time.
- Limited democracy – voters are giving away the right of decision making to a small number of elected representatives who make decisions on their behalf – political elitism (few acting on behalf of the many).

# Component 1- democracy and participation

- **Current systems of representative democracy and direct democracy.**
- -The features of direct democracy and representative democracy.
- -The similarities and differences between direct democracy and representative democracy.
- Advantages and disadvantages of direct democracy and representative democracy and consideration of the case for reform.
- **A wider franchise and debates over suffrage.**
- - Key milestones in the widening of the franchise in relation to class, gender, ethnicity and age, including the 1832 Great Reform Act and the 1918, 1928 and 1969 Representation of the People Acts.
- - The work of the suffragists/suffragettes to extend the franchise.  
The work of a current movement to extend the franchise.

# Democracy

- **Current systems of representative and direct democracy-**
- **Features, similarities and differences**
- There are two main democratic systems:
- **direct democracy** – in which individuals express their opinions themselves
- **representative democracy** – in which people elect representatives who take decisions on their behalf.
- Direct democracy originated in ancient Athens, where adult male citizens had the right to take part in decision-making at public meetings. Clearly such a system would not be practical as a regular means of decision-making in a large modern state.
- Representative democracy is the usual form of democracy in the modern world. Representatives do not act as delegates, merely taking instructions from the voters. They are expected to exercise their judgement. If they do not satisfy the voters, they can be held to account and removed at the next election.
- Both systems are based on the concept of majority rule, although a representative system may include more safeguards for minorities.

# Types of Democracy

- **Key terms-**
- Direct and Representative
- **Direct democracy-** all individuals express their opinions themselves and not through representatives acting on their behalf. An example of direct democracy is a referendum.
- **Representative democracy-** a form of democracy in
- which an individual selects a person (or political party)
- to act on their behalf to exercise political choice.
- **Other terms-**
- Pluralist
- Liberal.
- Elite model

# Quick check list of the features of democracy

- **"Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."**
- Political authority based on popular consent.
- Popular consent given via universal suffrage.
- Elections are free and fair.
- Choice- multi-party competition.
- Political tolerance.
- Free press.
- Constitutional commitment to abide by results.



# Representation

- Delegate – does not depart from instructions, e.g. trade unions, diplomats
- Trustee model – Edmund Burke – free to exercise judgement
- Constituency – advance constituency interests
- Party – remain loyal to party & manifesto
- Functional or Descriptive – mirror society

# Advantages and disadvantages of direct democracy and representative democracy

## **Pros/cons Representative Democracy**

- The only practical system in a large modern state, where issues are complex and often need rapid response (e.g. deployment of troops).
- Politicians form parties, bringing coherence and giving people a real choice of representative. Pressure groups form to represent different interests, promoting debate and encouraging pluralist democracy.
- Reduces chances of minority rights being overridden by 'tyranny of the majority'.
- Elections allow people to hold representatives to account.
- Politicians are (in theory) better informed than the average citizen about the many issues on which they must take a view.
- May lead to reduced participation as people choose to hand responsibility to politicians.
- Parties and pressure groups are often run by elites pursuing their own agendas, not truly representing the people.
- Minorities may still find themselves underrepresented as politicians are more likely to follow the views of the majority to secure election.
- Politicians are skilful in avoiding accountability, especially as general elections are five years apart in the UK.
- Politicians may be corrupt and incompetent, may betray election promises or put loyalty to their party before responsibility to the electorate.

# Advantages and disadvantages of direct democracy and representative democracy

## **Pros/cons Direct Democracy**

- Gives equal weight to all votes, unlike a representative system where the varying sizes of constituencies mean that votes do not all have equal value.
- Encourages popular participation in politics by expecting people to take their duties as citizens seriously.
- Removes the need for trusted representatives, as people can take responsibility for their own decisions.
- Develops a sense of community and encourages genuine debate.
- Impractical in a large, heavily populated modern state where decision-making is complicated
- Many people will not want to – or feel qualified to – take part in decision-making, so political activists decide what happens.
- Open to manipulation by the cleverest and most articulate speakers, who will persuade people to support their viewpoint.
- Will of the majority is not mediated by parliamentary institutions, so minority viewpoints are disregarded.

# Representative and direct democracy

- Although both systems are different, there are instances where **direct democracy can be used within a representative system.**
- **National referendums-** A referendum is a direct vote on a single issue, usually requiring a response to a straight yes/no question. The UK has had only three nationwide referendums: on Britain's membership of the European Economic Community (or European Union) in 1975 and 2016; and on whether to change the system of voting for the Westminster Parliament in 2011.
- **The 2015 Recall of MPs Act-** This allows a petition to be triggered if an MP is sentenced to be imprisoned or is suspended from the House of Commons for more than 21 days. If 10 per cent of eligible voters in the constituency sign the petition, a by-election is called. Direct democracy is thus used to hold representatives to account.

# Evaluation of UK democracy

- **Positive features-**
- Elections are free, secret ballot.
- Freedom of expression and association.
- Parties and pressure groups are free to operate.
- Government is bound by the rule of law.
- Government is responsible to parliament.
- Free media.
- Civil service is largely neutral.

# Evaluation of UK democracy

- **Negative features- Case for reform?**
- Electoral system is often seen as unfair.
- A great deal of uncontrolled (prerogative) power lies in the hands of the PM, who is not directly elected.
- There are few controls on PM's extensive powers of patronage.
- Considerable power lies in the hands of unelected quangos.
- Government exercises excessive control over parliament.
- Government is not bound by a superior, entrenched constitution.
- Citizens do not enjoy an entrenched Bill of rights.
- Government is excessively secretive.

# To what extent is the UK a democracy?

- **Democratic**
- Open and organised opposition.
- Political equality.
- Wide range of political parties and pressure groups – avenues for political participation and representation.
- Protection of basic rights and liberties under the rule of law. Civil liberties and rights.
- System of free and fair elections – wide franchise and secret ballot.
- Peaceful transition of power
- Free and open media
- Independent judiciary
- Open government
- Checks and limitations on power of government.
- Increasing use of Referendums
- **Concerns?**
- Low levels of turnouts at general elections and other forms of participation.
- Rise of (often extreme) single-issue pressure groups.
- Transfer of government power from elected bodies towards unelected quangos.
- Absence of bill of rights incorporated within constitution.
- Lords reform stalled and no significant reform of House of Commons.
- Erosion of Civil Liberties since terrorist attacks.
- Use of FPTP to decide general elections in the UK-under-representation of minority views.
- Control of sections of the media by wealthy, unaccountable business interests (Murdoch).

# Broader reform of UK democracy?

- **Here are some broader reforms of the UK democratic system that could be considered.**
- Changing the electoral system for Westminster to one based on proportional representation, so that it more accurately reflects voters' preferences. People who wish to vote for a minority party might then feel that there is more chance of their viewpoint being represented.
- **The 2015 Recall of MPs Act-** This allows a petition to be triggered if an MP is sentenced to be imprisoned or is suspended from the House of Commons for more than 21 days. If 10 per cent of eligible voters in the constituency sign the petition, a by-election is called. Direct democracy is thus used to hold representatives to account.
- Further reform of Parliament, to make its processes more democratic and transparent, and enabling it to bring governments more effectively to account for their actions.
- The transfer of more government powers and functions to local bodies – for example, devolving power to the English regions or to an English parliament.
- However, there is little willingness to undertake reform on this scale. A comprehensive overhaul of the kind that radical reformers want to see seems unlikely



# Democratic deficit

- **Democratic deficit**, an insufficient level of democracy in political institutions and procedures in comparison with a theoretical ideal of a democratic government.
- The expression **democratic deficit** may be used to denote the absence or underdevelopment of key democratic institutions, but it may also be used to describe the various ways in which these institutions may fail to function properly (e.g., lack of transparency and accountability, technocratic decision making, inadequate participation of citizens in policy making).
- Evaluations of the level of democratic deficit focus on the procedural aspects of democracy, reflected in the mechanisms of representation and decision making.
- Therefore, the notion of democratic deficit encompasses distortions in the flow of influence from citizens to government. As such, it is closely associated with the issue of democratic legitimacy.
- ***‘The UK is suffering from a democratic deficit’.***
- **How far do you agree with this statement? In your answer you must refer to at least two elements of democracy and consider this view and the alternative to this in a balanced way. (30)**

# Democratic deficit

- **To what extent is there a democratic deficit in the UK.**
- Democracy in the UK has been **accused or considered to be in 'deficit' for a number of reasons.**
- Declining turnouts at all levels of elections.
- Wider political apathy which renders questionable the democratic framework.
- A deficit in political education as the wider public lack interest and knowledge in the political system.
- The continuation of one House of parliament the House of Lords with democratic credentials.
- An unfair voting system which creates an 'un-democratic' outcome for Westminster elections.
- Pressure groups with 'elite' status who may pursue narrow sectional interests which disadvantage the majority of the population.
- 'Patchy' use of referendums in the UK

# Democratic deficit

- However, it may be argued that there is not a 'democratic deficit' and that democracy is continually evolving to meet the needs of the population.
- Reforms have taken place to develop democracy such as devolution.
- New systems of PR have been introduced.
- Reform of the second chamber is underway.
- Widespread pressure group membership and activity ensure that there is no 'democratic deficit'.
- Human/civil rights are protected and have been developed.
- Turnout, although not high, is in line with many other western democracies (and has been improving).
- Popular and real choice exists at election times for the voting public, coupled with the ability to remove governments.
- Referendums have been held and their overuse could undermine their relevance.

## Other concerns- Evidence of a participation crisis?

- **Turnout?-**
- This is one of the most obvious measures of participation. Falling turnout is important because it means that governments are elected on a reduced share of the popular vote, thus calling the strength of their mandate into question.
- The average turnout at general elections from 1945 to 1997 was 76 per cent. Since then, as Figure 1.2 (below) shows, it has been lower. The percentage for 2001 was the lowest since the end of the First World War in 1918. There has been a modest recovery at the last two general elections, although it is still some way from the levels seen at most post-war contests.
- Turnout is even lower, as a rule, in so-called 'second order' elections, such as those for the devolved bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This may be because voters see these less powerful bodies as unlikely to make a major difference to their lives.

## General election turnout since 1945, by region

<b>Election Year</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>
<b>2017</b>	68.7%		68.6%	66.4%	65.4%
<b>2015</b>	66.1%	65.8%	65.7%	71.1%	58.1%
<b>2010</b>	65.1%	65.5%	64.7%	63.8%	57.6%
<b>2005</b>	61.4%	61.3%	62.6%	60.8%	62.9%
<b>2001</b>	59.4%	59.2%	61.6%	58.2%	68%
<b>1997</b>	71.4%	71.4%	73.5%	71.3%	67.1%
<b>1992</b>	77.7%	78%	79.7%	75.5%	69.8%
<b>1987</b>	75.3%	75.4%	78.9%	75.1%	67%
<b>1983</b>	72.7%	72.5%	76.1%	72.7%	72.9%
<b>1979</b>	76%	75.9%	79.4%	76.8%	67.7%
<b>1974 Oct</b>	72.8%	72.6%	76.6%	74.8%	67.7%
<b>1974 Feb</b>	78.8%	79%	80%	79%	69.9%
<b>1970</b>	72%	71.4%	77.4%	74.1%	76.6%
<b>1966</b>	75.8%	75.9%	79%	76%	66.1%
<b>1964</b>	77.1%	77%	80.1%	77.6%	71.7%
<b>1959</b>	78.7%	78.9%	82.6%	78.1%	65.9%
<b>1955</b>	76.8%	76.9%	79.6%	75.1%	74.1%
<b>1951</b>	82.6%	82.7%	84.4%	81.2%	79.9%
<b>1950</b>	83.9%	84.4%	84.8%	80.9%	77.4%
<b>1945</b>	72.8%	73.4%	75.7%	69%	67.4%

# Participation crisis

- **Party membership?**
- This is another indicator of a participation crisis. Only 1.6 per cent of the electorate now belongs to one of the three main UK-wide political parties, whereas in 1983 the figure was 3.8 per cent.
- However, this differs significantly from party to party.
- **The Conservative Party** had just under 150,000 members by 2016, a significant drop from an estimated 400,000 in the mid-1990s.
- **The Labour Party's** membership increased in the run-up to the 1997 election but fell while the party was in government to around 190,000 members. The election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader has been associated with a remarkable increase in membership, with a total of 515,000 by July 2016 (still the largest political party in Europe).
- **The Liberal Democrats** had about 70,000 members in the early 2000s, falling to 49,000 during the 2010–15 coalition with the Conservatives. In 2016, they had recovered to about 76,000 Members. Another recent trend has been an increase in the membership of some smaller parties. At the 2015 general election a record 29.4 per cent of the vote went to parties other than the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats.

# Participation crisis

- Another recent trend has been an increase in the membership of some smaller parties. At the **2015 general election** a record **29.4 per cent of the vote went to parties other than the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats.**
- **But also consider-**
- Levels of political engagement, use of social media, membership of PGs (pressure Groups) etc.
- **Reform-**
- Some recent reform proposals have focused on increasing turnout at elections by making it easier for people to vote, such as:
- changing the day for elections from Thursday to the weekend, as in mainland Europe
- allowing people to vote anywhere in their constituency, rather than insisting on attendance at a particular polling station
- allowing voting to take place over several days. Two other suggestions are to encourage wider use of postal voting, and to allow electronic voting ('e-voting').
- **Compulsory voting and lowering the voting age?**

# The Franchise

- The only **categories of people who are excluded** from taking part in parliamentary elections are:
- People under the age of 18
- EU citizens (apart from those from the Irish Republic), although they can vote in local elections
- Members of the House of Lords (on the grounds that they have a permanent voice as members of one of the two Houses of Parliament)
- Prisoners (this exclusion is subject to a challenge from the European Court of Human Rights, but to date the government has ignored it)
- Those convicted of a corrupt or illegal electoral practice, who are barred for five years
- People who are compulsorily detained in a psychiatric hospital.



# Compulsory voting

- **For:**
  - 'Solve' problem of low turnout.
  - Non-voting is higher among the w.class than the m.class, compulsory voting would ensure that the needs of all voters were considered.
  - The role of money in elections would be less significant.
  - Political literacy should increase.
  - Minimum part of the public's political responsibilities.
- **Against:**
  - Compulsory voting would result in ill-considered judgements by those not interested in voting.
  - Political process devalued.
  - Impractical to implement.
  - Favour established parties as it devalues political activism.
  - Voters have a right in a liberal democracy not to vote.
  - Does not deal with the root causes of political disaffection.

# Should 16/17 year olds be given the right to vote

- Young people are better informed about Politics, including the use of the internet and social media
- 18-24 group lowest turnout demographic, may encourage more to vote and engage with Politics
- Old enough to join the army and get married
- Progressive nature a balance to the conservatism of older voters
- May be better informed but are they informed enough?
- Complexity of modern politics and economics
- Little stake in society
- Excessive radicalism at the expense of experience and judgement