

Unit 1, section 1.3 (elections) background notes

Notes from textbook

First Past the Post (FPTP) is the electoral system used in Britain for elections. Voters get one vote, and they select one candidate to represent them in their constituency. The person with the most votes wins the seat in the constituency, and so the party with the most overall seats wins the election and gets to form a government. FPTP is not proportional, and smaller parties find it difficult to 'break in' to the ranks of the parties and gain votes. Votes are not of equal value—some don't count, in the case of where, say, a Conservative MP is in a 'safe seat'—no votes, even tactical ones, will make any difference. Constituencies are the same, and so there are strong constitutional links, with every constituency having an MP, so people feel represented.

First Past the Post is a **majority** system. An overall majority, (possibly 50% of the vote) is needed to get elected, but Labour in 2005 gained only 35.2% and won...

The Electoral Reform Society publishes a list of all the different voting systems in use (or not, in the case of AV+) in the UK, and where they are used in other places in the world.

The majority system used in the London Mayor's elections was the Supplementary Vote(SV). In this system, voters get two votes: first and second choice.

Alternative Vote is the most common type of majoritarian system. Voters rank the candidates in order of preference—one, two, three, four, five, and so on—and they are redistributed if neither of the candidates on the ballot papers get an overall majority, until one does: but the least preferred candidates are eliminated before this happens.

Alternative Vote Plus is not used anywhere in the world, yet. It is a hybrid system composed of AV and an extra, top-up vote.

Single Transferable Vote (STV) is one of the most complex systems in terms of internal workings. However, for voters, it is quite simple: they just rank candidates in order of preference. STV is used in local and assembly elections in Northern Ireland, and local elections in Scotland.

In a closed Party List, voters select a party, not the candidates, and so have no choice over which come first, or last: they are in the order the party wants them to be in, so they might put better seeming candidates at the top of the list. In an open Party List, voters at least have a choice of preferred candidate. Party List is a proportional system, but there are no constituencies.

Britain remains a two-party system in terms of elections, but a three party system in terms of votes at elections (if we forget about May 2010 when the Coalition was formed).

(For more clear information, see research work earlier in normal notes, particularly ticksheet,

and all the various tables throughout the textbook.)

Definitions

Elections: Every five years in the UK. The people vote for—in principle—who runs the country.

Majoritarian representation: Converts votes in an election into seats in government, awarding the most seats to whichever party received the most votes.

Mandate: The authority to govern granted to the winning party at an election. The mandate suggests that the government may implement the measures in its election manifesto. It also implies that the government has authority to use its judgement in dealing with unforeseen circumstances.

Proportional representation: Converts votes in an election into seats in government in a broadly proportional way.

Electoral reform: A process whereby the electoral system is changed or where there is a campaign for such change.

Party system: The typical structure of parties within a political system.

Strong and stable government: A strong government is one that can confidently lead (say, one that has achieved a clear majority in an election) and is a party on its own who are stable and have little conflict internally.

Other tasks further on background reading notes sheet

- Electoral Reform Society electoral system information researched as part of in-class research.
- I need to find the correct issue of the Politics Review magazine online at a later date—I couldn't, when I looked before...