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I'm not very politically aware. • What we need is a bit more honesty and openness. • No-one won an overall majority. • The party's suffered from a lot of in-fighting. • It's a fine line between smooth and smarmy. • I just keep out of it all. • You're so apathetic! • What bugs me is the amount of money they've wasted. • I'm your typical floating voter. • He comes across as being very down-to-earth. • She never seems to get flustered. • They're so patronising. • He's just power-mad. • I don't like their stance on pensions. • The election was rigged. • Well, in my humble opinion, it's just blatantly unfair. • They need to encourage greater participation. • They treat voters like idiots. • You're such a cynic.

Politics and elections

Conversation

1 Reading and vocabulary: politics and elections in Britain

Read the text and underline the verbs that go with the nouns in red. Translate the whole verb + noun collocations into your language. Then discuss which things in the text are:

- exactly the same in your country.
- similar in your country.
- quite different.

Many people feel the British electoral system is in need of reform. The government can decide to hold a general election any time within five years of coming to power. For the election, the country is divided into 646 areas or **constituencies**. In each constituency, the people who live in that area vote to elect one **MP** to represent them. The party with the majority of MPs forms the government. Where no party wins an **overall majority**, there is a **hung parliament** and the biggest parties form a **coalition**. In the UK, coalitions are rare. This is partly because of the 'first-past-the-post system'. In each constituency, the candidate who wins the most votes becomes the MP and all the other votes that have been cast for other candidates do not count towards the national result. This is why the Labour government in 2001 could win a **landslide victory** with a 166-seat majority, despite having only received 41% of the vote.

One suggested benefit of this system is that people have a more direct relationship with their MP. If you have a problem, you can write to your MP and they are obliged to answer you. They also hold weekly or monthly **surgeries** when you can go and visit them in person. However, some people believe we should adopt a **system of proportional representation** – where the number of MPs each party gets is in direct relation to the total number of votes cast nationally. So, if the Labour party were to poll 51% of the total vote, they would then have 51% of the members in Parliament.

In the UK, there are three main parties: Labour, which was traditionally left wing, but which moved to the **centre** to get elected, the Conservatives (or Tories) and the Liberal Democrats (Lib-Dems). The Tories were most popular in the eighties when Margaret Thatcher was their leader, but after 1997, they were in **opposition**. The party suffered from a lot of **infighting**. The Lib-Dems are the third party. They were traditionally in the centre, but have adopted more **left-wing policies**. There are also a number of Nationalist parties – in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – which want either more **autonomy** or complete separation from England.

2 Listening

You're going to hear four people talking – Harry, Abigail, Miriam and Toby. Listen to the conversation and find out:

- if they are going to vote and if not, why not.
- who they're going to vote for and why.

Discuss who says the following and what they are talking about.

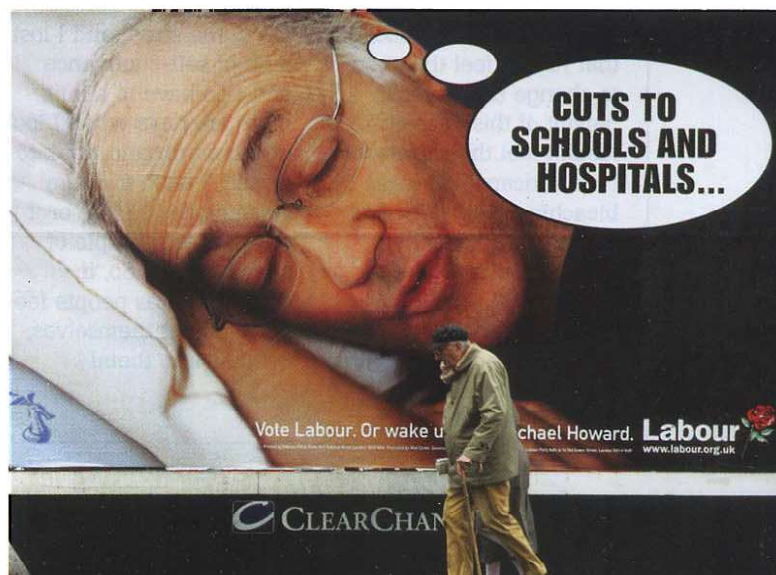
- I caught the end of it.
- It's a fine line between smooth and smarmy.
- It's quite off-putting.
- I've had enough of them.
- They're only involved in a tiny proportion of schools.
- I just don't see it helping integration.
- I find him a bit shifty myself.
- They're a bit lightweight, aren't they?
- He tells it like it is.
- They're never going to get in.
- I keep out of all of it.
- You're such a cynic.

Listen again and check your answers.

3 Speaking

Discuss these questions with a partner.

- A new phenomenon in UK elections is negative campaigning. What do you think of the poster below? Do you find this kind of thing in your country?
- How do you feel about religious schools?
- Do you agree that all politicians are as bad as each other?
- Would you describe yourself as a floating voter?



4 Using grammar: sentences starting with *What*

We often start sentences with **What** followed by verbs to express feelings and opinions. We use it to mean *The thing that*. For example:

- *What annoys me* is the way they treat us as if we couldn't think for ourselves!

Find examples of this structure in the tapescript for Activity 2 at the back of the book.

Complete the sentences with the pairs of words in the box.

annoys + way	concerns + that
drives + how	angers + amount
disturbs + fact	frustrates + lack
bothers + level	disappoints + not
upsets + seeing	

1. What me most is it's not an isolated incident. It's happened time and time again. It's really worrying.
2. What me most about him is the he talks to people. He's really patronising.
3. What me most is the of money they've wasted on useless projects.
4. What me crazy is arrogant they all are. They never believe they're in the wrong.
5. What me is the that you can now be basically detained without trial. They're constantly eroding civil liberties.
6. What me is all these people starving in Africa and knowing our government is doing nothing to help.
7. What me is so much what they've done, but the way it's been presented.
8. What me is the of crime in our cities. There's just so much!
9. What me is the of investment in education. We can't improve our schools as quickly as we'd like without more money.

Write six sentences of your own about the government, your prime minister, the opposition parties, the local council, your city, your country – or anything else you feel strongly about.

Tell a partner and find out if you agree or disagree.

Can you complete these sentence starters about similar things?

- a. What I really like about what they've done is ...
- b. What's great about things here is ...
- c. What's really pleasing to see is ...

5 Talking about politicians

Match the descriptions with the follow-up comments.

1. He seems very down-to-earth. ☐
 2. I get the impression he's very passionate. ☐
 3. He just comes across as being really arrogant. ☐
 4. He's very smooth in front of the cameras. ☐
 5. He's obviously very competent, but he's a bit dull. ☐
 6. He's a complete fascist. ☐
- a. He never listens to other people's points of view because he thinks he knows best.
 - b. He presents a very slick image. You never see him flustered or caught out.
 - c. He's just really right-wing! He wants to curb women's rights and get rid of all the immigrants – that kind of thing.
 - d. He hasn't got the spark or charisma to be Prime Minister.
 - e. You could imagine having a drink with him. He's got no pretensions.
 - f. He genuinely believes in what he's doing and wants to change things.

Now match these descriptions with the follow-up comments.

7. I get the feeling he's very ambitious. ☐
 8. He's very charismatic. ☐
 9. He just seems very honest. ☐
 10. He comes across as being quite shifty in interviews. ☐
 11. He just comes across as incredibly patronising. ☐
 12. He's just a complete hypocrite. ☐
- g. He never gives a straight answer. I just wouldn't trust him.
 - h. He's very straight with people. If he thinks something is bad, he says so.
 - i. He's just power-mad. He's only interested in getting to the top.
 - j. He complains about private schools, but he sends his son to one!
 - k. He talks down to people like they're children.
 - l. He gives some very powerful speeches. He's got this aura of confidence which people find attractive.

Work with a partner. Spend two minutes trying to memorise the descriptions.

Student A: Say one of the follow-up comments.

Student B: Close your book and respond with one of the descriptions.

Now discuss these questions. Try to use some of the language from this activity.

- Are there any politicians or public figures you like or respect? Why?
- Which politicians don't you like? Why?

Reading

1 Listening: voter apathy

Voter apathy is a big problem in many democracies. Do you know what it is?

Listen and complete this introduction to a radio news feature about voter apathy.

Voter apathy has reached (1)
Turnout for the forthcoming election is expected to be the lowest in history with voters staying away from (2) in their millions.
Politicians have come to be seen as remote from the people, self-serving and (3)
As one commentator dryly noted, 'The issue now is not whether politicians lie or not. It's which liar you (4)!' On top of all that, there's also a (5) that it's not really politicians that run the show. They are often seen as puppets with no real power, whilst behind the scenes, big business (6)

2 Speaking

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Is voter apathy a problem in your country? Why?
2. Do you always vote in both local and national elections?
3. What are the consequences of voter apathy – both for society and for individuals who don't vote?
4. Which groups in society do you think are most / least likely to vote?

3 Before you read

You are going to read about some different ways people have tried to combat voter apathy. Before you read, write down three things you think would encourage more people to vote.

Compare your ideas with a partner. Who has the best idea?

4 While you read

Now read the article. As you read, think about these questions.

1. Do any of the ideas mentioned already happen in your country?
2. Would you like to see any of these ideas introduced? Why?
3. What downsides to each idea might there be?

Now discuss your answers with a partner.

5 Vocabulary focus

Match the nouns from the article with each group of collocations.

answer	goal	meeting	policy
election	joke	opinion	vote

1. crack a ... / a dirty ... / a sick ... / the ... fell flat / an old ...
2. cast a ... / get 22 per cent of the ... / the yes ... / a ... of confidence
3. demand an ... / a rambling ... / he never gives a straight ...
4. a cabinet ... / a stormy ... / disrupt a ... / hold a ... / a top-level ...
5. in the run-up to the ... / rig the ... / hold a mock ... / a local ...
6. put forward a ... / adopt a controversial ... / a ... aimed at the young
7. divide public ... / an ... poll / a difference of ... / in my humble ...
8. a long-term ... / an immediate ... / an unrealistic ... / set a personal ...

Now read the article again and find as many verbs / adjectives as you can that collocate with the nouns in the box below.

ways	the party line	system
participation	debates	

How many of the collocations are new for you and your partner? Look up any collocations neither of you know. Then think of when you might use each one.

6 Speaking

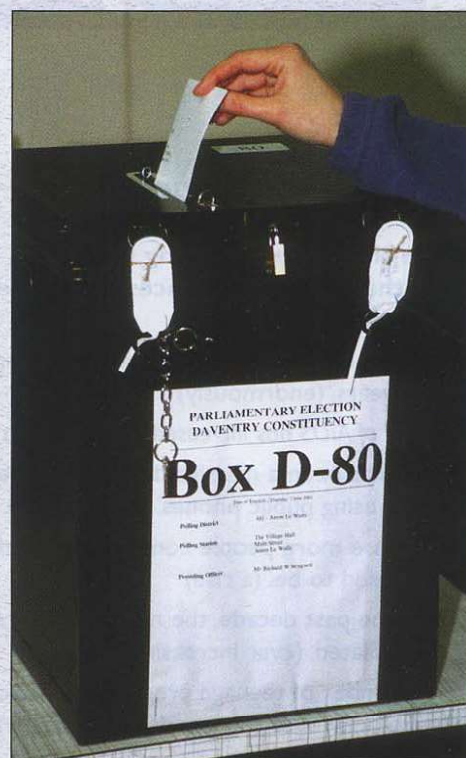
Make sure you understand the words in the box. Then discuss the questions below in small groups.

abortion	infrastructure and technology
civil rights	law and order
education	pensions
Europe	privatisation
foreign policy	the economy
government reform	the environment
health care	war and peace
immigration	welfare and poverty

1. What were the big issues in the last election in your country? Which of these issues were most important for you personally?
2. What kind of stance do the various parties in your country have on these issues?

The politics of persuasion

There's an old joke about voter apathy. A local council in Britain once held a meeting to find ways of combating the problem – and only one person bothered to turn up! To those living under dictatorships, the widespread disillusionment with politicians in many democracies must seem incredible and perhaps even offensive. However, for many – particularly the young – elections hold very little appeal. As a result, a vicious circle develops. If young people don't vote, candidates stop trying to appeal to them. If the candidates then don't appeal to them, they're even more reluctant to vote! Re-engaging with voters and encouraging wider participation in the whole democratic process has become one of the main goals for political parties of all persuasions. Here we explore six key ways in which a higher turnout could be encouraged.



1 Stop the spin!

Many voters claim they stay away from the polls more in anger than in apathy. The modern obsession with image and presentation means most politicians never give a straight answer, always stick to the party line and generally sound like they're endlessly repeating a well-rehearsed script. A bit more honesty, openness and information would go a long way. Most voters want to know about the mistakes as well as the success stories, the problems as well as the plans. They also want politicians to make big, brave decisions rather than always tailoring policies to fit public opinion.

2 Lower the voting age

Politicians often complain that the young seem uninterested in politics – and yet many feel the voting system treats the young like idiots! In Britain, you can smoke, have sex and start paying income tax at 16; you can join the army and die for your country at 17; and yet you can't cast your vote for a party in favour of or opposed to war, abortion, tax cuts, and so on until you turn 18. The young have many responsibilities. Perhaps it's time to start treating them like adults and give them more rights!

3 Pay more attention to civic responsibilities in schools

Some schools hold their own mock elections and encourage debates among pupils. Politicians and lobby groups are also occasionally invited in to address pupils. This can all surely only be for the good. Students could also learn to value their right to vote through studying, for example, the history of the struggles women faced to get the vote.

4 Encourage greater participation in grassroots democracy

Many western democracies actually limit participation in the democratic process to a solitary vote once every four or five years. Referendums on issues of national importance – such as those often held in Switzerland – would be one way of increasing interest. The South American cities of Porto Alegre, Belém and Santo André in Brazil and Villa El Salvador in Peru have gone even further and set up participatory budgets, where anyone and everyone can attend public meetings and vote on how public finances should be spent.

5 Make it easier to vote

Many people don't get round to voting simply because they're too busy. E-voting, SMS-voting and polling stations set up in shops, cafés or even pubs would take this into account and thus encourage greater participation.

6 Scrap the first-past-the-post system in favour of proportional representation

At the moment, a British government that has 38 per cent of the vote in a country where perhaps only 50 per cent of the people voted still has the power to rule! The first-past-the-post system, where the party that wins the most seats wins the election, is blatantly unfair. A system of proportional representation, where parties would be allocated seats according to the percentage of the overall national vote each received, would be far fairer and would ensure every vote cast actually counted!

Writing: Introductions to essays

1 Describing changes

Rewrite the sentences using the words in brackets so that the pairs of sentences mean the same. For example:

There has been an alarming increase in the spread of AIDS in recent years. (enormously)

The spread of AIDS has increased enormously in recent years.

1. There has been a massive decrease in the number of people using public phones. (plummeted)
2. There are more people committing suicide now than there used to be. (a rise)
3. Over the past decade, the number of cars on the road has escalated. (ever increasing)
4. The number of teenage pregnancies has continued to rise steadily over the last decade. (steady)
5. The hole in the ozone layer has doubled in size over the last five years. (twice / ago)
6. Since the 80s, there has been a continuous decline in the birth rate to just 1.3 children today. (slumped)
7. The number of people buying music on CD is falling. (Fewer and fewer)
8. Car crime has fallen over recent years, but violent crime is on the increase. (a drop / going up)

2 Speaking

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Do you think the statements in Activity 1 are true for your country? If not, what changes have occurred?
2. What has caused these changes?
3. What do you think the implications and results of these changes are?



'That's the gist of what I wanted to say, now find me some statistics to base it on'

3 Using grammar: cause or result?

Decide which pattern the verbs in the list fit into:

CAUSE

- a. Migration from the countryside

RESULT

... chronic overcrowding in cities

RESULT

- b. Chronic overcrowding in cities ...

CAUSE

Migration from the countryside

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. bring about | 7. be the result of |
| 2. be brought about by | 8. lead to |
| 3. cause | 9. stem from |
| 4. be caused by | 10. be due to |
| 5. give rise to | 11. play a part in |
| 6. result in | 12. mean |

Now complete these sentences with **ONE** word in each space.

1. The massive increase in state funding of hospitals has a part in the rise in life expectancy.
2. The massive rise in the price of oil is largely the of natural disasters, wars and ethnic conflicts in oil-producing countries.
3. The spread of AIDS has been by poor sex education.
4. The hole in the ozone layer has in increased incidences of skin cancer.
5. Some say the increase in teenage pregnancies is to the break-up of the traditional family.
6. Improving public transport should to a reduction in private car use.
7. The problems that beset the rail network largely from a lack of investment by successive governments.
8. Most of the effects of so-called natural disasters such as droughts and flooding are actually about by corruption and bad government.
9. The internet has given to a number of legal problems particularly around the area of copyright.
10. The rise in house prices in the UK has many young people cannot afford to get on the property ladder.

With a new partner, discuss the questions in Activity 2. Use some of the words above to show causes and results.

4 Vocabulary check

Complete the compound nouns from Activity 3.

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. state | g. skin |
| b. life | h. teenage |
| c. ethnic | i. private car |
| d. oil-producing | j. the rail |
| e. sex | k. natural |
| f. the ozone | l. the property |

5 Introductions

When we write introductions to articles and essays, we often follow this pattern.

1. Describe a trend.
2. Give further evidence / the cause / the result of this trend.
3. Pose one or more questions we aim to answer.

Put these sentences in order to make a good introduction to an essay.

Introduction 1

- a. How has this situation come about?
- b. A recent report has even suggested that the life expectancy of today's teenagers has actually decreased.
- c. And just what can we do to reverse the trend?
- d. Over the past decade, young people have become increasingly unhealthy.

1. 2. 3. 4.

Introduction 2

- a. Indeed, average speeds in the city are lower than they were a hundred years ago.
- b. Is banning city centre traffic the only answer or is there a less drastic solution?
- c. It has become increasingly difficult to move round our cities because of traffic congestion.
- d. But what is to be done about it?
- e. Over the past few years, the number of people using cars has escalated.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Introduction 3

- a. Could the internet be creating new problems which will damage our society rather than improve it?
- b. Increasingly, more and more people are using the internet.
- c. There are obvious benefits, such as e-mail, the ease of buying and selling things, and the free availability of information.
- d. Most people have access through their work and many are connected at home.
- e. Nevertheless, it is worth asking if the internet is wholly a good thing.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

6 Practice

Choose three of the exam questions below. Note down which trend is being discussed in each one. Think about the evidence / the cause / the result connected to each trend. Then decide which questions you will need to answer in the essay.

Now write an introduction for each question you chose. Try not to repeat exactly what is said in the questions.

1. Write a short essay explaining why there is still so much poverty in the Third World and how it could be eradicated.
2. You have recently seen a report suggesting people are unhappier than they used to be. Write an article for a college magazine explaining why this might be and how you could overcome it.
3. 'The main reason for the increase in teenage pregnancy is the loss of family values.' Write an essay saying if you agree and what solutions could be found for the problem.
4. Explain why English has become such an important language to learn and say if you think this is a good thing or not.
5. 'The only way to curb air traffic is to increase prices dramatically.' Write an article discussing the reasons for the increase in air travel, if it should be reduced and, if so, how.
6. 'If we don't do something about global warming now, our children will suffer.' Write an essay saying if you agree with this statement and what, if anything, we should do about it.

Show what you have written to a partner. Which introduction does your partner like best? Why?

7 Planning an essay

Choose one essay to write for homework. Work with your partner and spend five minutes brainstorming ideas for this essay. Think of as many reasons and solutions (or arguments for and against) as you can. Remember that at this stage you don't have to say if you agree with all the ideas.

Change partners. Does your new partner agree or disagree with all the ideas you thought of. Why?

For homework, write your own essay. Before you start, plan your paragraphs.