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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 pathetic! • 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.

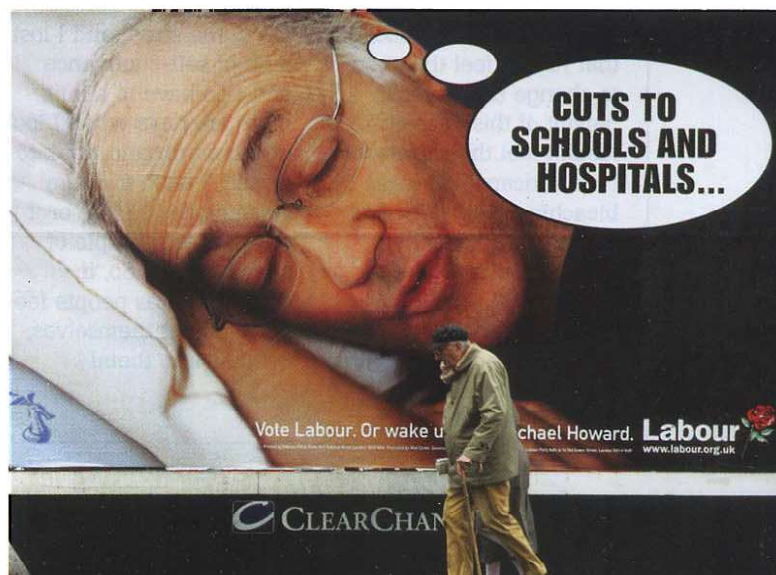
- I caught the end of it.
- It's a fine line between smooth and smarmy.
- It's quite off-putting.
- I've had enough of them.
- They're only involved in a tiny proportion of schools.
- I just don't see it helping integration.
- I find him a bit shifty myself.
- They're a bit lightweight, aren't they?
- 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?