Contents

Coverage of core and non-core political ideas
are available in other textbooks to complete
your study for Components 1 and 2. Go to
www.hoddereducation.com/government-politics

Get the most from this book

This new edition of our bestselling textbook covers the key content of the Pearson Edexcel Government and Politics specification for teaching from September 2017. This book does **not** cover the Core Political Ideas content for Component 1 or the non-core political ideas content for Component 2 which are compulsory elements of the Pearson Edexcel Government and Politics specification.

Special features

Objectives
A summary of the learning objectives for each chapter.

Key terms and Useful terms
Concise definitions of key terms (in the specification) and useful terms (for understanding) where they first appear.

Synoptic/topic links
Links between concepts that occur in more than one area of the specification or textbook.

Case study
Outlines of key events and examples that relate to the course content.

Summary
A summary at the end of the chapter against which you can check your knowledge.

Key terms in this chapter
A summary of key terms used throughout the chapter.

Further reading

Study tip
Revision advice such as common mistakes, pitfalls and key points to remember.

Knowledge check
Short questions to assess comprehension of the subject.

Discussion point
Interesting questions to be used as the basis for class discussions or homework.
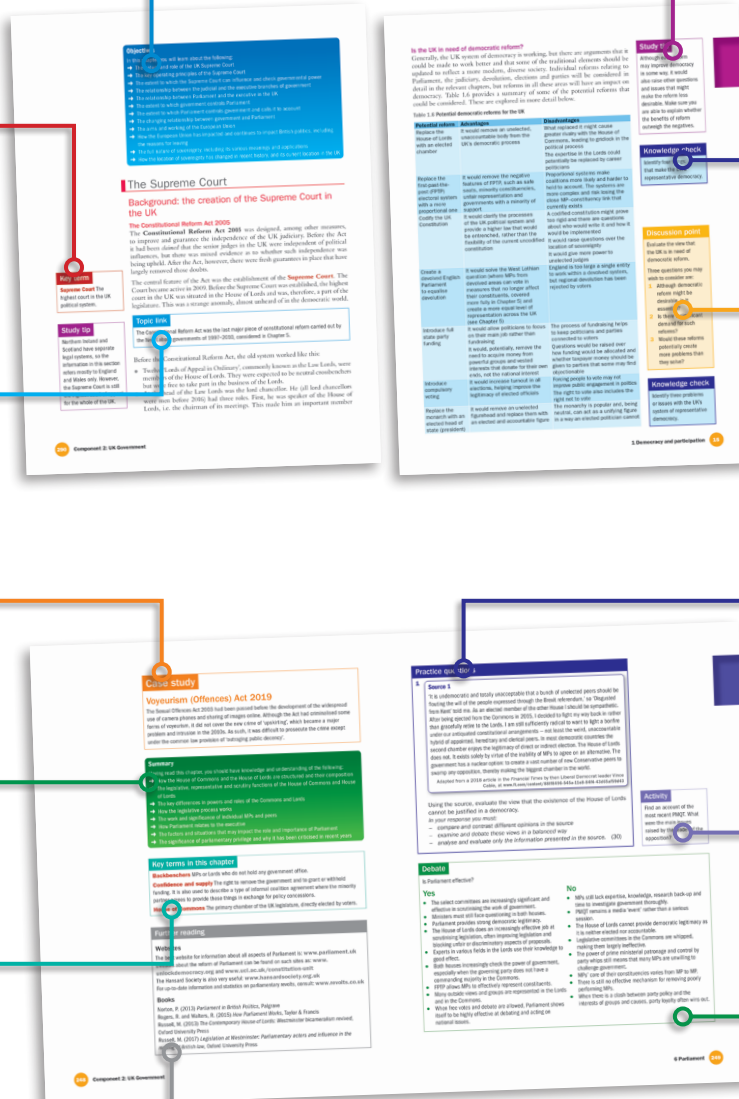
Practice questions
Revision questions at the end of each chapter. Answer guidance available online: www.hoddereducation.com/EdexcelUKPolitics7E.

Activity
Short tasks designed to research or utilise data that will help extend your application of material

Debate
The two sides of a controversial question set out to hone evaluation skills.

Democracy and participation

The concept of democracy is fundamental to an understanding of politics as it underpins all the other concepts, ideas and topics you will be studying. Yet it is a concept that sparks fierce passions, debates and conflicting attitudes. Take, for example, the debates over Brexit. On the one hand, you had people arguing that the democratic 'will of the people' needed to be respected, as the result of the 2016 referendum indicated the people wanted to leave the EU. On the other hand, you had people arguing that it was up to Parliament to decide, and that MPs should vote in the 'national interest' and choose to remain in the EU. Western democracies like the UK boast of their democratic institutions and accuse totalitarian regimes like North Korea of being undemocratic dictatorships, yet North Korea, like many Communist states, calls itself a '*Democratic* People's Republic'. How can there be such disagreement over a term that is so central to politics?

Democracy simply means 'rule by the people'. It comes from the Ancient Greek *demos* (the people) and *kratia* (rule or power), but who the people are and how the will of the people should be translated into action is a matter of fierce debate. In Ancient Athens, democracy meant not only that the people were directly consulted on issues, but that office holders were directly chosen by the people and therefore were held accountable to them too. So the people represented themselves and managed the state as a collective, with no professional politicians. In fact, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato saw democracy as undesirable and worried that mob rule by the uneducated masses would be damaging and could lead to anarchy and chaos, a view that persists even today in many debates about democracy.

An anti-lockdown protest held in Trafalgar Square, September 2020

Democracy is just a word, but how that word is interpreted and how it is applied to modern politics determines much of the decision-making and many of the political systems that affect all our lives. Democracy today is largely seen as a 'good thing', but people still dispute its meaning and how it should be applied, as evidenced by the heated debates over the Covid-19 lockdowns and government responses.

At its heart, democracy is about the process and means of translating the will of the people into coherent plans and action, but how this is brought about and how it works in the real world is fluid and ever-changing, which is why it is important to start by getting to grips with what democracy means in practice.

Objectives

In this chapter you will learn about the following:
➜ The meaning of the term 'democracy' and the current systems of representative and direct democracy
➜ The advantages and disadvantages of representative and direct democracy
➜ The case for reform to improve democracy
➜ The nature of political participation in the UK and how it has evolved
➜ The development of the franchise in the UK and current issues concerning the future of suffrage and voting
➜ The role of group activity within a democracy, including pressure groups, lobbyists and think tanks
➜ The general nature of political influence in the UK
➜ The nature and context of rights in the UK and their relationship to obligations
➜ Issues concerning rights in the UK, including how effectively they are protected
➜ The claims of collective rights versus individual rights

Current systems of democracy

We normally divide the concept of democracy into two main types: **direct democracy** and **representative democracy**.

Direct democracy

Direct democracy was how the idea was first conceived in ancient Greece, mainly in the city state of Athens in the fifth century BCE. Hence it is sometimes described as 'Athenian democracy'.

What made Athens a democracy was the idea that every tax-paying citizen would have one vote of equal value to all others and all citizens were able to contribute to a decision. Therefore, the assembled free citizens would make important decisions directly, fairly and equally, such as whether the state should go to war or whether a prominent citizen who had committed anti-state acts should be exiled. After Athenian democracy declined in the fourth century BCE, direct democracy, with a few exceptions, disappeared as a democratic form until the nineteenth century.

Today, direct democracy has returned in the form of the referendum, now relatively common in Europe and some states of the USA (referendums and their use will be covered in more detail in Chapter 3). However, direct democracy today should be seen as an addition to representative democracy rather than a separate system, one that can add great **legitimacy** to the decisions made by politicians. Some decisions are considered so vital, and also so unsuitable for representatives to make them,

Key terms

Direct democracy All individuals express their opinions themselves and not through representatives acting on their behalf. This type of democracy emerged in Athens in classical times and direct democracy can be seen today in referendums.

Representative democracy A more modern form of democracy, through which an individual selects a person (and/or a political party) to act on their behalf to exercise political choice.

Legitimacy The rightful use of power in accordance with pre-set criteria or widely held agreements, such as a government's right to rule following an election or a monarch's succession based on the agreed rules.

that they are left to the people. However, the size and nature of modern politics would make the regular use of direct democracy impracticable and so it cannot be considered as an alternative to representative democracy in the twenty-first century.

Direct democracy has its critics as well as its supporters. Table 1.1 summarises the main advantages and disadvantages of direct democracy.

Table 1.1 Direct democracy — is it desirable?

Advantages	Disadvantages
It is the purest form of democracy. The people's voice is clearly heard	It can lead to the 'tyranny of the majority', whereby the winning majority simply ignores the interests of the minority and imposes something detrimental on them
It can avoid delay and deadlock within the political system	The people may be too easily swayed by short-term, emotional appeals by charismatic individuals
The fact that the people are making a decision gives it great legitimacy	Some issues may be too complex for the ordinary citizen to understand

Representative democracy

Representative democracy is the most common model found in the democratic world today.

In a representative democracy the people do not make political decisions directly; instead, they choose representatives to make decisions on their behalf. The most common way of choosing representatives is to elect them through a formal, competitive election process. Indeed, if representatives are not elected in a vote with some degree of choice, it calls democracy into question. Elections are therefore what we first think of when we consider representation.

In addition to choosing representatives, representative democracy ensures that those elected to positions of power and responsibility must be held to account by the people. **Accountability** is essential if representatives are to act responsibly and in the interests of the people and prevents one party from becoming an elective dictatorship. At election time both individual representatives, such as MPs in the UK, and the government as a whole are held accountable when the people go to the **polls**. During the election campaign, opposition parties highlight the shortcomings of the government and offer their own alternatives. At the same time, the government will seek to explain and justify what it has done to try and be re-elected. Similarly, individual representatives will be held to account for their performance: how well they have represented their **constituents** and whether their voting record meets the approval of those same constituents. Of course, MPs are often faced with a dilemma of how best to represent their constituents, voting either for their constituents' wishes or according to their own conscience. For, as the eighteenth-century

Useful terms

Accountability Where those who have been elected in a representative democracy must be made responsible for their policies, actions, decisions and general conduct.

Polls Another term for elections; polls simply establish the number of people who support a particular person, party or issue.

Constituents The ordinary voters who elect a particular representative, usually based on residence in a particular geographical area.

Voters queuing to vote at a polling station

Conservative thinker Edmund Burke wrote (at a time when all MPs were men), 'your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion'. We shall explore this dilemma in greater detail later.

Accountability is less certain between elections, but those in power can be held to account regularly through investigations, media scrutiny and individual representatives asking questions on behalf of their constituents. Individual representatives are normally safe until the next election, though the growing use of recall petitions to remove MPs has provided another layer of accountability.

As representatives in a democracy are elected and accountable, we now need to understand the concept of representation in general. It can have different forms and meanings.

Different types of representation

When people consider representation, they usually think of someone who will express the concerns and needs of the local community, acting as a 'spokesperson' or champion for the area that elected them. Representation can take different forms, however, which can have implications for interpreting and evaluating the strength of representative democracy in the UK.

Social representation

Social representation implies that the characteristics of members of representative bodies — whether national parliaments, regional assemblies or local councils — should be broadly in line with the characteristics of the population as a whole. In other words, they should be close to a *microcosm* of society as a whole and 'look like' that society. For example, just over half should be women, a representative proportion should be drawn from minority ethnic or religious groups, and there should be a good range of ages and class backgrounds in representative bodies. Of course, this is difficult to achieve, and the UK Parliament certainly falls short. This is explored further below when we discuss the state of representative democracy in the UK specifically, as well as in Chapter 6.

Study tip

Democracy underpins everything in UK politics, so it is vital that you are comfortable with the functions and different types of democracy as these will help you evaluate all other aspects of the course.

Synoptic link

The main representative body in the UK is Parliament, so understanding how different types of representation impact on Parliament will help explain how democratic and effective Parliament is at carrying out its representative role, as outlined in Chapter 6.

Representing the national interest

Though representatives may be elected locally or regionally, if they sit in the national Parliament, they are expected to represent the interests of the nation as a whole and do what they believe is right, rather than what the people may want. Sometimes this may clash with the local constituency they represent, so they have to resolve the issue in their own way. For example, an MP representing a constituency near a major airport may be under pressure to oppose further expansion on the grounds of noise and pollution, but they may see it as in the **national interest** to expand that airport.

Constituency representation

The locality that elects a representative in UK national politics is known as a constituency. The idea is that people in a geographical area will have similar social and economic concerns that a representative will speak about in the elected body. The main focus, therefore, is on local issues. Such representation can imply three things:

1 It can mean representing the interests of the constituency as a whole, such as funding for local services, or whether a new railway or airport should be built in the area.
2 It can also mean representing the interests of individual constituents. This is often described as the **redress of grievances**. In this case, a representative will champion a constituent who feels they have been treated unfairly by the tax office or local hospital for example, or who needs help with an overseas issue.
3 Finally, it can simply mean that a representative listens to the views of their constituents when deciding about a national issue. This can lead to another dilemma. What happens if the elected representative does not personally agree with the majority of the constituents? This becomes a matter of conscience that has to be resolved by the individual concerned.

Party representation

All modern democracies are characterised by the existence of political parties. Furthermore, the vast majority of those seeking and winning election are members of a political party. It is unusual in modern democracies to find many examples of independent representatives who do not belong to a party. Parties have stated policies. At election time these are contained in a list of party promises called a manifesto. It follows that members of a party who are seeking to be elected will campaign based on the party's manifesto. This means that they are representing their party and the voters understand this.

Occupational or social representation

Some elected representatives represent not only their constituency or region, but also a particular occupational or social group. For example, those who support and

are supported by trade unions often pursue the cause of groups of workers; others may represent professions such as doctors or teachers. This function can also apply to social groups such as older people, those with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community or low-income groups.

Causal representation

Where representative bodies are not representing people so much as ideas, principles and causes, this is called causal representation. In a sense this represents the whole community, in that the beliefs and demands involved are claimed to benefit everyone, not just a particular group in society. Typical causes concern environmental protection, individual rights and freedoms, greater equality and animal rights. Though elected representatives often support such causes and principles, most causal representation is carried out by pressure groups.

As we can see from the points above, the type of representation being followed by an MP is often down to a combination of factors and may depend on the nature of the issue being presented. To evaluate the nature of representation in the UK, you need to consider the advantages and disadvantages of representative democracy as outlined in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 The advantages and disadvantages of representative democracy

Advantages	Disadvantages
Representatives can develop expertise to deal with matters the public does not have the time or knowledge to deal with	Representatives may not act in the best interests of their constituents
Representatives can be held to account for their actions at election time	It can be difficult to hold a representative to account between elections
Representatives have the time to deal with a variety of complex matters, leaving the public free to get on with their own lives	Allowing voters to delegate responsibility to representatives can lead to the public disengaging from social issues and other responsibilities
In a large modern country, it is the only practical way to translate public opinion into political action	Representative bodies can be unrepresentative and may ignore the concerns and needs of minority groups

Debate

Is direct democracy a better form of democracy?

Advantages of direct democracy

- It is the purest form of democracy. It is the voice of the people.
- Decisions made directly by the people have more authority.
- Decisions made by the people are more difficult for future governments to change or cancel.
- Direct democracy can help educate the people about political issues.

Advantages of representative democracy

- Elected representatives may have better judgement than the mass of the people.
- Elected representatives may be more rational and not swayed by emotion.
- Representatives can protect the interests of minority groups.
- Elected representatives may be better informed than the general public.

Look over the points for both sides of the debate and consider which side of the debate you believe to be stronger by comparing the relative advantages of the two forms of democracy and deciding why one form, overall, would be better.

The nature of representative democracy in the UK

Having explored the concept of representative democracy, we can now consider how representative democracy operates in the UK and evaluate how effective it is.

The whole administration of representative democracy is regulated by the Electoral Commission. This body ensures that representation is fair, that all those entitled to vote can register to vote and that the political parties do not have any undue influence through spending. It can be said that representation in the UK today is broadly uncorrupted, fair and honest, at least when compared with the past. However, there have been some notable exceptions to this, with some peers and MPs breaking the rules and acting dishonestly. These ideas will be explored in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 4.

Levels of representation in the UK

First, we can see that the people are represented at different levels of government. Table 1.3 demonstrates how this works in the UK.

Table 1.3 Levels of representation

Level	Jurisdiction
Parish or town councils*	The lowest level of government. They deal with local issues such as parks and gardens, parking restrictions, public amenities and small planning issues
Local councils	These may be county councils, district councils or metropolitan councils, depending on the area. They deal with local services such as education, public transport, roads, social services and public health
Combined authorities	Where groups of two or more local councils in England join together to share resources and have increased powers devolved to them from central government. These may be presided over by an elected mayor, such as in Greater Manchester, or not have a mayor, such as the combined authority in West Yorkshire
Metropolitan authorities*	This is big city government, such as in London. These bodies deal with strategic city issues such as policing, public transport, arts funding, environment, large planning issues and emergency services. They normally have an elected mayor and strategic authority
Devolved government	The governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. They have varying powers, but all deal with health, social services, education, policing and transport. All three have elected representative bodies (an assembly in Northern Ireland, Parliaments in Scotland and Wales)
National government	This is the jurisdiction of the UK Parliament at Westminster and the UK government

* In England and Wales only

We can see that all citizens of the UK are represented at three levels at least and that many enjoy four or five levels of representation. It is also clear that representation has become increasingly **decentralised** with the advent of devolution, and the delegating of increasing powers to city administrations.

Forms of representation in the UK

Having established at what levels of government we are represented, we can now examine what forms of representation flourish in the UK.

Constituencies

It is a cornerstone and an acknowledged strength of representative democracy in the UK that every elected representative should have a constituency to which they are accountable and whose interests they should pursue. These constituencies may be quite small, such as a parish or a local ward, or they may be very large, like those for the Northern Ireland Parliament or the Greater Manchester area (see Figure 1.1), but the same principle applies to all. This principle is that individuals

in the constituency should have their grievances considered, that the interests of the *whole* constituency should be given a hearing in a representative assembly, and that the elected representative is regularly made accountable to their constituency. The levels of constituency in the UK, from smallest to largest, are shown in Table 1.4.
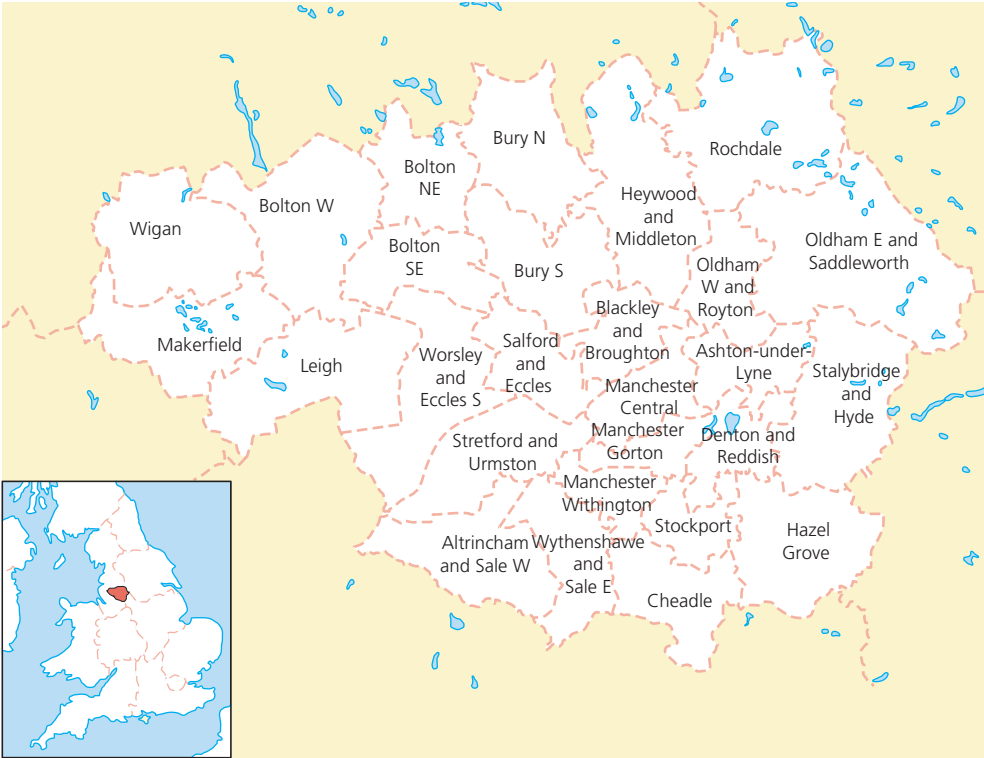
Figure 1.1 The parliamentary constituencies in the Greater Manchester area as of the 2019 general election

Table 1.4 Levels of constituency in the UK

Level	Representatives
Ward or parish	Parish and local councillors
Parliamentary constituency	MPs
City region	Assembly members
Metropolitan authority	Elected mayors
Devolved assembly constituency	Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), Members of the Senedd in Wales (MSs) and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in Northern Ireland

Parties

In the UK, political parties play a central role in representation. This is for two reasons:

● First, political parties have evolved out of ideological principles and are therefore united by a set of core beliefs and principles at the heart of the party, such as conservatism for the Conservative Party, socialism for the Labour Party and liberalism for the Liberal Democrats. This means that, at their heart, members of UK parties have a shared ideology and set of beliefs, whereas in some other countries, such as the USA, parties arose in reaction to particular events or conflicts, so they are looser confederations with a shared label but large differences in principles.

● Second, it is usually the case that one single party governs in the UK, which is rare compared with many of the democracies across Europe. There have been exceptions: between 2010 and 2015, when a coalition ruled; and from 2017 to 2019, when the Conservatives formed a minority government with support from (but not coalition with) the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), a small party that represents the unionist side of the political debate in Northern Ireland. However, the *norm* is for single-party government. Since the 80-seat majority secured by the Conservatives in December 2019, the UK has returned to its more 'normal' position of single-party government.

Government representation

The people are also represented by the elected government. As we shall see again below, it is a mark of a true democracy that the winning party or parties should govern on behalf of the whole community and not just those sections of society that typically support it. While it is true that there is a tendency to support some groups more than others, this does not alter the fact that the elected government represents the whole nation.

Pressure groups

Pressure groups in the UK are representative bodies in two main ways:

1 Some groups have a formal membership and represent their 'section' of society by promoting policies that benefit them. This applies to sectional pressure groups such as the British Medical Association (BMA) and the National Farmers' Union (NFU).
2 Other groups are engaged in causal representation. Here they represent a set of beliefs, principles or demands that they believe will benefit the whole community, such as Friends of the Earth (environmental causes) and Liberty (human rights campaigning).

All pressure groups represent people in various ways. Having pressure groups is part of a **pluralist democracy** and a healthy **civil society**. The role of pressure groups in the UK is explored more fully later in this chapter.

How democratic is the UK?

If we are to attempt an assessment of democracy in the UK, we need to establish what we mean by the term 'democracy'. More precisely, we should ask two questions:

1 What constitutes a democratic *political system*? A word of caution is needed before this assessment. Democracy is a contested term. There is no single, perfect definition. Therefore, the elements described below add up to a guide, a collection of the most commonly accepted features of a democracy by western, liberal standards.
2 What constitutes a democratic *society*? This is a broader question and is explored below.

The UK's system of liberal democracy

When we talk about democracy in the UK, we are often referring to the concept of a **liberal democracy**. This goes back to the seventeenth century and thinkers like John Locke, who believed that governments ruled by the consent of the governed and that a social contract existed between the people and those in power. This was

a radical idea for the time as it rejected the idea of absolute monarchy and the divine right of kings, which suggested leaders only answered to God. Instead, leaders should answer to the people. In addition to this, to help to ensure the people would be free to live their lives and to prevent the government from becoming too powerful, a series of limitations should exist to restrict the power of the government in order to create a free society. This liberal form of democracy provides the key features of the UK's democratic system today, given below (summarised in Figure 1.2).
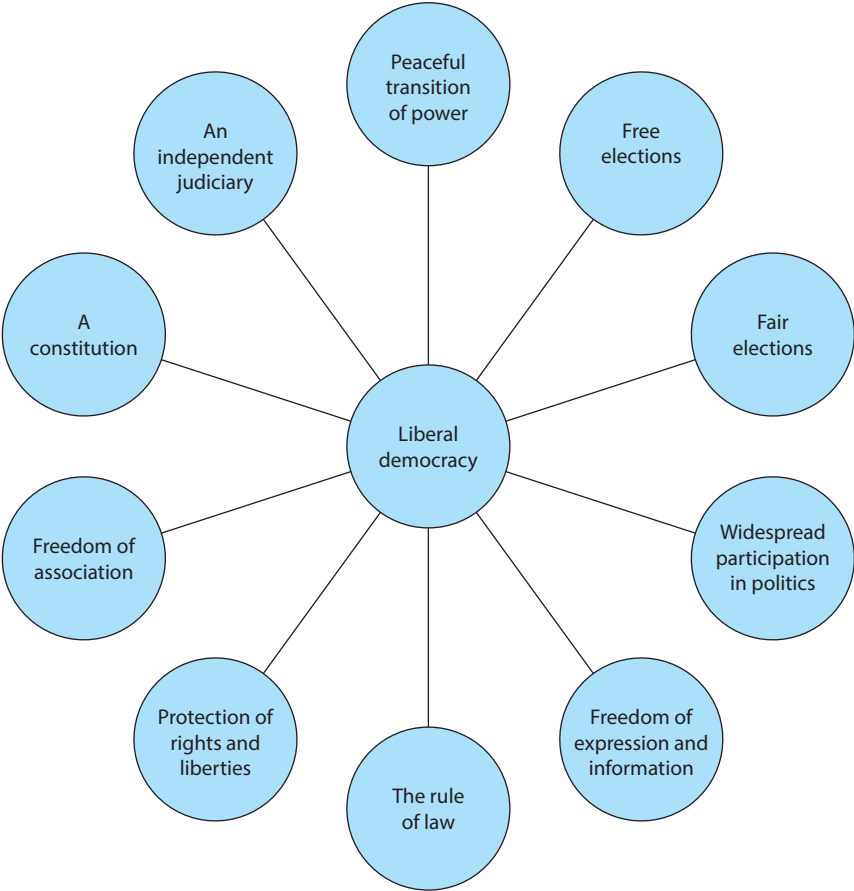
Figure 1.2 The features of a liberal democracy

The peaceful transition of power

This is a feature that is often taken for granted in democracies, but it is not guaranteed in many societies. It means that those who lose power by democratic means accept the authority of those who have won. If they do not, politics breaks down and non–peaceful conflict is likely to ensue. This helps to ensure that democracy can hold governments to account and ensures the legitimacy of those who have won an election.

Free elections

Elections are a cornerstone of democracy. Without them it is impossible to imagine democracy working in any meaningful way. Indeed, it is probably the first thing we look for when assessing whether or not a system is democratic. The description 'free' means that all adults (however that is defined) are free to vote and to stand for office. This is described as '**universal suffrage**'. If significant groups are excluded, then elections are not truly free and democracy is flawed. Elections also need to be

Useful term

Universal suffrage The idea that all people who are recognised as adults have the right to vote, regardless of any social or economic considerations.

free to ensure that everyone can exercise their right to vote without fear, threats or intimidation. One way of achieving this is through the **secret ballot**, while rights to vote must be strictly enforced by the courts in order to ensure people are not unfairly denied the right to vote. If a secret ballot and a strict adherence to these rights are not in place, votes can be bought and sold and voters can be coerced into voting a certain way, or not voting at all.

Fair elections

This is a more difficult criterion. In the strictest sense, this means that everyone has one vote and all votes are of equal value. It also suggests that there are safeguards in place to avoid electoral fraud and **ballot rigging**. However, what fairness means is open to some debate; what may appear fair to some will appear unfair to others. A candidate who wins the most votes can be said to have won the election fairly, but if they gained only 25 per cent of the total votes cast, then it could be seen as unfair as 75 per cent of voters did not choose that candidate. Such debates surround the UK's various electoral systems and whether or not they are fair systems. These different interpretations are explored more fully in Chapter 3, but it is worth remembering that they underpin the very concept of democracy in the UK and why there are so many debates over how democracy works in the UK.

Widespread participation in politics

It is important for the health of a democracy that a large proportion of the population participates in politics. A well-informed and active population can prevent government becoming too dictatorial, and without the people participating in the political process there is a breakdown in communication between the government and the governed. This is why the issue of political participation is so important and will be explored later in this chapter.

Freedom of expression and information

One of the fundamental features of a democracy is the right of the people to express their opinions and criticise the government. This is known as a civil liberty and means that people cannot be arrested or persecuted for expressing negative opinions of those in power, their policies, or their competence. There should also be free access to public information to enable the people to check the government and consider how well it is governing. Few governments enjoy being criticised or scrutinised, but this is what marks out a democracy compared with a dictatorship, where public discussion and evaluation of the government are banned or restricted. This requirement implies free media and no government censorship or interference. The development of the internet has helped as it allows free access for all, though whether or not the information provided is accurate leads to questions about its validity. This issue has become more stark in recent years with the rise of fake news and growing popularity of conspiracy theories, which have made it harder for people to take publicly expressed views as being based on fact or truth.

Freedom of association

Linked to freedom of expression is freedom of association. In terms of politics, this means the freedom to form parties or pressure groups, provided their aims and methods are legal. Parties and pressure groups are such vital vehicles for representation that if they did not exist, or were suppressed, democracy would be almost impossible to sustain.

Protection of rights and liberties

Linked to freedom of expression and association is the idea that the rights and liberties of citizens should be firmly safeguarded. This implies that there should be some kind of enforceable 'Bill of Rights' or 'Basic Laws' to protect rights and liberties in such a way that the state cannot erode them. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is just such an example, as is the US Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments of the USA's Constitution. In the UK, the Human Rights Act performs this role, while the Equalities and Human Rights Commission operates in England and Wales to promote and protect human rights.

The rule of law

The rule of law is the basic principle that all citizens should be treated equally under the law and that the government itself should be subject to the same laws as its citizens. It is linked to the concept of limited government and ensures that no one, even those in power, can break the law and if they do, they will be held to account on the same basis as anyone else.

Independent judiciary

The existence of the rule of law implies one other feature: an independent judiciary. It is a key role of the judiciary in a democracy to ensure that the rule of law is upheld. For this to happen, the members of the judiciary (the judges) must be independent from government and the process of politics. In this way they ensure that all individuals and groups in society are treated equally under the law and that the government does not exceed its authority. It also means, of course, that the rights and liberties of citizens are more likely to be upheld.

A constitution

Democracy is at risk if there are not firm limits to the power of government. Without these, there is a possibility that government will set aside democratic principles for its own purposes. We accept this may happen in times of warfare and emergency, but not normally. The usual way to set the limits of government power is to define them in a constitution that is enforced by the forces of law. This is known as constitutionalism and all democracies have a constitution.

How democratic is the UK political system?

Having established the features that make the UK a democracy, we are now able to assess the extent to which the UK political system is democratic and then to consider how it might be reformed.

Table 1.5 shows a 'balance sheet' considering whether the UK has a healthy democratic political system. However, there remain a few serious flaws. Collectively, these are described as a '**democratic deficit**'. The main examples of the UK's democratic deficit can be summarised as follows:

- The first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system for general elections produces disproportional results, renders many votes wasted and elects governments with a relatively small proportion of the popular vote. It discriminates against small parties with dispersed support.
- The House of Lords has considerable influence but is an unelected body.
- The sovereignty of Parliament, in theory, gives unlimited potential power to the government.

Synoptic link

Constitutions, discussed in Chapter 5, are inherently bound up with democracy. Any democratic reforms would also be constitutional reforms and most constitutional reforms have an impact, for better or worse, on how democracy operates in the UK.

Study tip

There is no right or wrong answer to the question of how democratic the UK political system is, but you will need to look at the arguments and consider what your judgement might be and why, as this is what you will need to explain in your exam-style answers.

Key term

Democratic deficit A flaw in the democratic process where decisions are taken by people who lack legitimacy, due to not having been appointed with sufficient democratic input or not being subject to accountability.

- The powers of the prime minister are partly based on the authority of the unelected monarch.
- The European Convention on Human Rights is not binding on Parliament, so individual rights and liberties remain under threat.

Table 1.5 How democratic is the UK political system?

Democratic feature	Positives	Negatives
Peaceful transition of power	The UK is remarkably conflict-free	Short-lived disputes have arisen when the results were not clear, in 2010 and in 2017, leading to some claims of a lack of legitimacy
Free elections	Nearly everyone over 18 can vote There is little electoral fraud and there exist strong legal safeguards	Some groups, such as prisoners and effectively the homeless, are denied their right to vote and new voter ID laws are believed to have added to the disenfranchised The House of Lords is not elected at all, nor is the head of state (monarch)
Fair elections	There are proportional systems in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and other devolved and local bodies	The first-past-the-post system for general elections leads to disproportionate results and many wasted votes Governments are often elected on a modest proportion of the popular vote
Widespread participation	There is extensive membership of pressure groups, which are free and active. There is also a growing level of participation in e-democracy	Since 2001 voter turnout in general elections has been, on average, lower than in previous elections, while party membership, especially among the young, has generally been in decline. Despite some increases in party membership after 2015, it is still below levels experienced in the 1950s
Freedom of expression	The press and broadcast media are free of government interference. Broadcast media maintain political neutrality. There is free access to the internet	Much ownership of the press is in the hands of a few large, powerful companies such as News International, the owners of which tend to have their own political preferences Some information available on the internet is false and detrimental There is some debate over how independent the BBC is and attempts by politicians to influence its reporting
Freedom of association	There are no restrictions on legal organisations People may organise and instigate public protests	The government has the power to ban some groups based on the potentially unfair perception of their activities. Public meetings and demonstrations can be restricted on the grounds of 'public order'
Protection of rights and liberties	The country is signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the courts enforce it The House of Lords advocates for rights	Parliament is sovereign, which means rights are at the mercy of a government with a strong majority in the House of Commons The ECHR is not binding on the UK Parliament
The rule of law	Upheld strictly by the judiciary The right to judicial review underpins this The judiciary is independent and non-political	The monarch is exempt from legal restrictions There is statistical evidence to suggest social and economic standing impact severity of sentencing
A constitution	Parliament and the courts ensure the government acts within the law The Human Rights Act (see below in this chapter and in Chapter 8) acts as a restraint on the actions of the government, and constitutional checks exist to limit the power of the government	There is no codified UK Constitution so the limits to government power are vague Parliamentary sovereignty means the government's powers could be increased without a constitutional safeguard The prerogative powers of the prime minister are extensive and arbitrary

Is the UK in need of democratic reform?

Generally, the UK system of democracy is working, but there are arguments that it could be made to work better and that some of the traditional elements should be updated to reflect a more modern, diverse society. Individual reforms relating to Parliament, the judiciary, devolution, elections and parties will be considered in detail in the relevant chapters, but reforms in all these areas will have an impact on democracy. Table 1.6 provides a summary of some of the potential reforms that could be considered. These are explored in more detail below.

Table 1.6 Potential democratic reforms for the UK

Potential reform	Advantages	Disadvantages
Replace the House of Lords with an elected chamber	It would remove an unelected, unaccountable body from the UK's democratic process	What replaced it might cause greater rivalry with the House of Commons, leading to gridlock in the political process The expertise in the Lords could potentially be replaced by career politicians
Replace the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system with a more proportional one	It would remove the negative features of FPTP, such as safe seats, minority constituencies, unfair representation and governments with a minority of support	Proportional systems make coalitions more likely and harder to hold to account. The systems are more complex and risk losing the close MP–constituency link that currently exists
Codify the UK Constitution	It would clarify the processes of the UK political system and provide a higher law that would be entrenched, rather than the flexibility of the current uncodified constitution	A codified constitution might prove too rigid and there are questions about who would write it and how it would be implemented It would raise questions over the location of sovereignty It would give more power to unelected judges
Create a devolved English Parliament to equalise devolution	It would solve the West Lothian question (where MPs from devolved areas can vote in measures that no longer affect their constituents, covered more fully in Chapter 5) and create a more equal level of representation across the UK (see Chapter 5)	England is too large a single entity to work within a devolved system, but regional devolution has been rejected by voters
Introduce full state party funding	It would allow politicians to focus on their main job rather than fundraising It would, potentially, remove the need to acquire money from powerful groups and vested interests that donate for their own ends, not the national interest	The process of fundraising helps to keep politicians and parties connected to voters Questions would be raised over how funding would be allocated and whether taxpayer money should be given to parties that some may find objectionable
Introduce compulsory voting	It would increase turnout in all elections, helping improve the legitimacy of elected officials	Forcing people to vote may not improve public engagement in politics The right to vote also includes the right not to vote
Replace the monarch with an elected head of state (president)	It would remove an unelected figurehead and replace them with an elected and accountable figure	The monarchy is popular and, being neutral, can act as a unifying figure in a way an elected politician cannot

Political participation in the UK

The term 'participation' covers a variety of forms of political activity. Most citizens participate in politics in one way or another. However, there are two variables involved:

● What kind of participation?
● How intensive is that participation?

The first question can be answered by detailing the various ways in which it is possible to participate in political processes. The second can be answered by placing these forms of participation into some kind of order that expresses the degree to which they require intense activity. They are described below in order of intensity.

1 **Standing for public office** This is the most intensive. Many local councillors are part-time, but they do have to give up a great deal of their lives to attending meetings, campaigning, meeting constituents, reading information and making decisions. It goes without saying that full-time politicians have to immerse themselves in the job. Even those who stand for office unsuccessfully have to devote a considerable amount of time to the effort of trying to get elected.

2 **Active party membership** Many people join political parties, but only a minority of these are active members, also called 'activists'. Activists are fully engaged with the party they support. This may mean attending local meetings of the party, voting for officers, campaigning in the community and canvassing at election time to try to ensure as many party supporters vote as possible.

3 **Active pressure group membership** Like party activists, these pressure group supporters may be full members, helping to raise both money and awareness of the cause they support. Often this means attending or even organising demonstrations and other forms of direct action.

4 **Passive party or group membership** This means being enough of a supporter to join the party or pressure group, but taking relatively little active part. Such members often confine their activities to helping at election times or maybe signing a petition.

5 **Digital activists** Since the growth of social media and the internet, this has become a common form of participation. It requires only that the individual takes part in campaigns and movements that happen online. In other words, participation is possible without leaving one's home. It normally involves such activities as signing e-petitions, joining social media campaigns, expressing support for a cause on social media, etc.

6 **Voting** Voting is the most fundamental and yet the least taxing form of political participation. It has become especially convenient with the growing use of postal voting. Even with local, regional and national elections, plus referendums, most citizens have to vote only once a year at most.

We have seen above that high levels of participation in political processes are essential to a healthy democracy. If citizens are passive and do not concern themselves with politics, the system becomes open to the abuse of power. In other words, popular political participation helps to call decision-makers to account and to ensure that they carry out their representative functions.

The ways in which people participate are changing. Some also claim that political participation is in decline, especially among the young. Both these phenomena are examined below. The way in which participation has changed has consequences for how democracy operates in the UK, while a decline in participation can undermine the very practice of democracy itself.

Changing forms and levels of participation

The 2001 general election saw a turnout of only 59.4 per cent, a historic low, 12 per cent below what it had been in 1997 and 18 per cent below that of 1992. Coupled with declining membership of political parties, this led to a concern that the UK was experiencing a '**participation crisis**'. This may have reflected a situation where New Labour was so dominant that there was little real competition, or it may have been an early indication that methods of participation were changing. Nevertheless, as widespread participation is so integral to the functioning of a healthy democracy, any sense that there might be a crisis could lead to a democratic deficit where the legitimacy of those in power and the ability of the public to hold them to account are seriously undermined, leading to accusations of an **elective dictatorship**. As such, issues with participation need to be carefully considered.

Political parties

In the 1940s and 1950s membership of all political parties rose to over 3 million, mostly Conservatives. If one were to add trade union members affiliated to the Labour Party, this figure would be several million higher. Of course, those high figures did not mean that the mass memberships were politically very *active*, but they gave an indication of mass engagement with politics at some level. Since that time, there has been a steady decline. Figure 1.3 demonstrates this decline, while Table 1.7 shows party memberships in 2022.
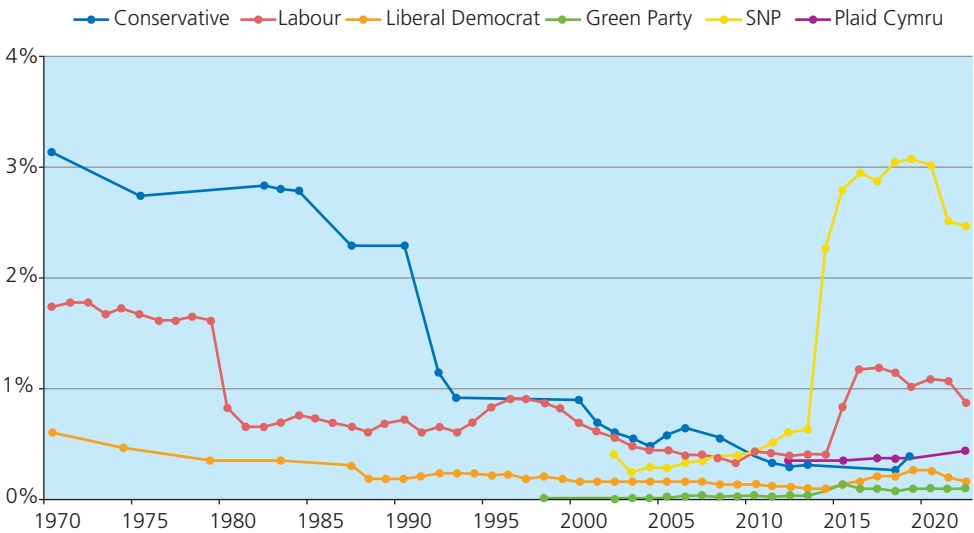
Figure 1.3 The decline in party membership (% of electorate)

Note: figures for the SNP and Plaid Cymru, respectively, show the percentage of the Scottish and Welsh electorates only.
Source: House of Commons Library briefing SN05125

Table 1.7 Party memberships in 2022

Party	Membership size	As a percentage of the UK electorate
Conservative	172,000	0.4%
Labour	432,000	0.9%
Liberal Democrats	74,000	0.1%
SNP	104,000	0.2% (2.5% of the Scottish electorate)
Green	54,000	0.10%
Plaid Cymru	10,000	0.02% (0.4% of the Welsh electorate)

Source: data from 'Membership of political parties in Great Britain', research briefing by M. Burton and R. Tunnicliffe for the House of Commons Library, published 30 August 2022

It is clear that parties are no longer the main vehicle by which most people wish to participate in politics. There are, however, exceptions:

● There was a surge in Labour Party membership in 2015 when, under new rules established by the then leader, Ed Miliband, it was possible to join the party for just £3 (normal subscriptions to a party are much higher). This was to enable a wider section of Labour supporters to vote in leadership elections.
● Following the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence, membership of the Scottish National Party (SNP) surged, and it claimed to have over 100,000 members in a population of only just over 5 million.
● There was an increase in membership of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the run-up to the 2015 general election. Nearly 50,000 had signed up to the party by the time of the election, making UKIP the fourth-largest party in the UK in terms of membership, though since 2016 UKIP as a party has collapsed. After the 2015 election and in the run-up to the 2017 and 2019 elections, membership of the Liberal Democrat and Green parties rose.

These three examples that buck the trend of declining party membership suggest that people still see parties as a vehicle for political action if they are proposing some kind of *radical* change or alternative. When it comes to more conventional politics and established parties, however, membership is continuing to decline, especially in years without a general election.

Voting

The act of voting, in an election or a referendum, is the least intensive form of participation and the most infrequent, yet it is also the most important for most citizens. The level of turnout (what proportion of registered voters actually votes) is therefore a good indicator of participation and engagement with politics. If we look at general elections, the trend has been mixed in recent years. Figure 1.4 shows the turnout at general elections since 1979.
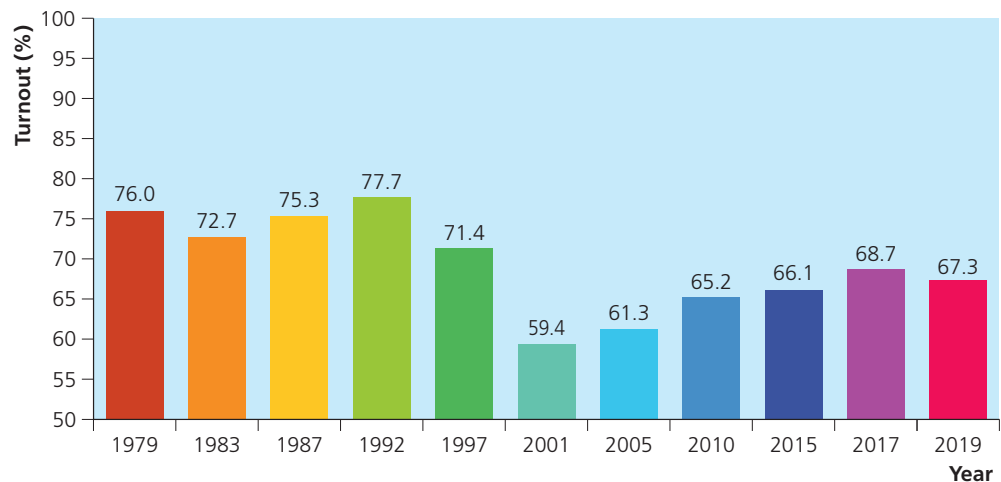
Figure 1.4 Turnout at UK general elections, 1979–2019

We can see that there is a general trend of falling turnout, though there has been a recovery since the historic low of 2001, a trend that was extended into the 2017 general election, but fell back slightly in 2019. The figure of two-thirds could be viewed as disappointing, but also not serious in terms of democratic legitimacy. It is useful to compare turnout in the UK with that of other democracies. Figure 1.5 shows figures for recent general elections in other countries.
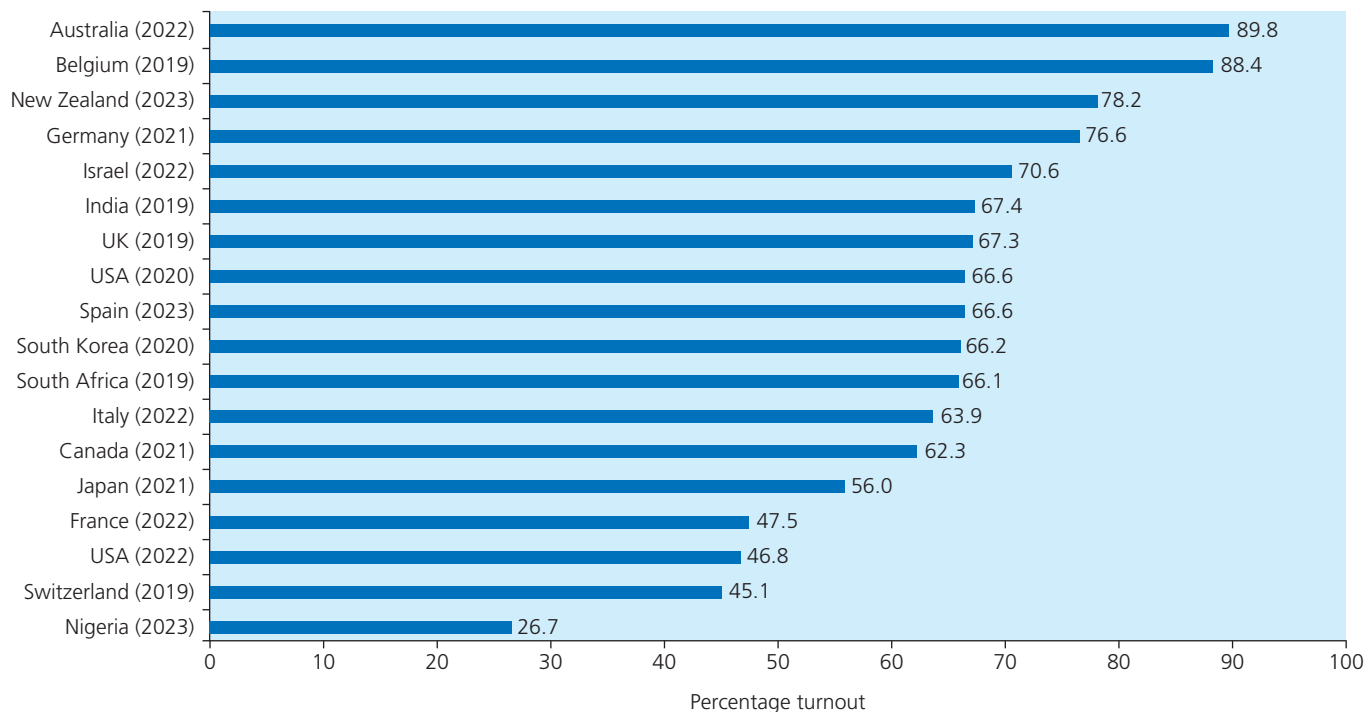
Figure 1.5 Comparative general election turnouts

Figure 1.5 shows that the UK stands a little above the middle of the 'league table'. This reflects the wider picture. While it is interesting that the USA displays some of the lowest turnout figures in this selection, and one of the lowest in the democratic world, it is worth remembering that in its figures the USA includes all possible voters, while in the UK turnout is based only on those who have registered to vote.

Discussion point

Evaluate the view that the level of participation in UK general elections is a problem for UK democracy.

You may wish to consider the following issues:
1 Why participation in elections is important in a democracy.
2 The possible reasons for a decline in election turnout.
3 How far issues with participation have affected the workings of government (if at all).

Discussion point

Evaluate the view that turnout in UK general elections suggests there is a participation crisis.

Three questions to consider are:
1 How does the figure from 2019 compare to the pre-2001 historic average?
2 How does the figure from 2019 compare to the historic low of 2001?
3 How does the UK compare to other democracies?

Topic link

The reasons for variations in turnout, as well as the impact on the outcome of elections, are explored in Chapter 4 on voting behaviour.

Turnout in referendums is rather more volatile in the UK. Table 1.8 shows turnout in a number of key referendums.

Table 1.8 Referendum turnouts in the UK

Year	Subject of referendum	Turnout (%)
1997–98	Devolution to: Scotland Wales Northern Ireland	 60.4 50.1 81.0
1998	Should London have an elected mayor?	34.1
2011	The introduction of the AV electoral system	42.2
2014	Scottish independence	84.6
2016	British membership of the EU	72.2

We can see that referendum turnouts vary from 34.1 per cent concerning local government in London, up to 84.6 per cent in the Scottish independence referendum. Turnout is, of course, a reflection of how important voters consider an issue to be. Voters are certainly becoming more used to having a say on single issues and it is noteworthy that in the two most high-profile referendums, EU membership and Scottish independence, turnout was higher than in recent general elections.

Should compulsory voting be introduced?

One potential reform to the democratic process would be to make voting compulsory. Compulsory voting exists in about a dozen countries, though in many it is possible to 'opt out' of voting before the election and so avoid a fine. In some countries the government does not enforce compulsory voting, though it exists in law. In Australia, compulsory voting is enforced and a fine can be levied. Voters there do not have to vote for any candidate(s) but must attend the polling booth and mark a ballot paper in some way. Some 'spoil' the ballot paper to avoid a fine. The turnout in Australia, not surprisingly, is above 90 per cent, and it is 90 per cent in Belgium for similar reasons. In Italy, voting was compulsory until 1998 when turnout was typically close to 90 per cent, but since voting has been no longer compulsory turnout has fallen (63.9% in 2022). So, there can be no doubt that compulsory voting has a dramatic effect on turnout. The relatively low turnouts at UK elections, especially at local and regional levels, have led to calls for compulsory voting. The arguments for and against are well balanced.

Debate

Should the UK introduce compulsory voting?

Arguments for

- It may force more voters, especially the young, to make themselves more informed about political issues.
- By increasing turnout, it would give greater democratic legitimacy to the party or individual(s) who win an election.
- By ensuring that more sections of society are involved, decision-makers would have to ensure that policies address the concerns of all parts of society, not just those who typically vote in larger numbers.
- It can be argued that voting is a civic duty so citizens should be obliged to carry out that duty.

Arguments against

- It is a civil liberties violation. Many argue it is a basic right not to take part.
- Many voters are not well informed and yet they would be voting, so there would be ill-informed participation.
- It would involve large amounts of public expenditure to administer and enforce the system.
- It would favour larger parties against small parties. This is because less-informed citizens would vote and they may have heard only of better-known parties and candidates.

Consider the idea of 'should' and whether compulsory voting 'should' be introduced to help steer you to your overall evaluative judgement about which side is more convincing. Remember that in making your judgement you should address the question asked, not just give an assessment of good and bad ideas from each side.

Attention tends to centre on young voters in the UK because they typically vote in smaller numbers than older people. Turnout figures at UK general elections among the 18–24 age group are typically about 35 per cent, while over 80 per cent of the over-60s tend to vote. This may result in governments favouring the older generation against the young when setting policy. However, civil rights campaigners are against compulsory voting, while the Conservative Party is unlikely to support it as, currently, younger people tend to be more left-wing than older people, so forcing the young to vote would favour Labour and other left-of-centre parties.

Digital democracy

E-petitions are a fast-growing form of participation, gaining greatly in popularity since official government petitions were introduced with the requirement that any petition gaining 10,000 signatures would receive a government response and any receiving 100,000 signatures would be considered for a parliamentary debate. Indeed, they have become so common that the term '**e-democracy**', which also covers remote or online voting, has come into use. Such petitions are part of the wider spread of digital democracy, where campaign groups use social media and the internet to promote their causes.

E-petitions have the advantage of requiring little effort and it is immediately apparent how much support a particular issue may have. Combined with the use of social media, they can very rapidly build interest in an issue, causing a bandwagon effect. They are often criticised as a form of participation as it requires so little effort to take part and there is no guarantee that participants know much about the issue. Nevertheless, they are becoming an established part of modern democracy and do, from time to time, have some influence, perhaps most notably when they led to the re-opening of the investigation into the Hillsborough football stadium tragedy. Mostly though, they fail to achieve more than a debate.

Table 1.9 includes some of the most important e-petitions of recent times, and demonstrates how much impact they have had.

> ### Useful term
>
> **e-democracy** A name used to describe the growing tendency for democracy to be carried out online in the form of e-petitions and other online campaigns.

Table 1.9 E-petitions in the UK

Year	Subject	Signatures	Outcome	Platform
2007	Against a plan to introduce charges for using roads	1.8 million	The government dropped the plan	Downing Street site
2011	Calling for the release of all documents relating to the Hillsborough football disaster of 1989	139,000	Following a parliamentary debate, the papers were released, and a new inquest was launched	Downing Street site
2016	Should there be a second EU referendum?	3.8 million	A parliamentary debate was held on the issue but no second referendum was allowed	Parliamentary site
2019	'Don't put our NHS up for negotiation'	169,836	The government responded by saying, 'The Government has been clear: the National Health Service (NHS) is not, and never will be, for sale to the private sector. The Government will ensure no trade agreements will ever be able to alter this fundamental fact'	Parliamentary site
2020	End child food poverty — no child should be going hungry	1 million	Debated in Parliament but the aim of expanding lunch provisions during the school holidays failed. However, in response, the government did announce over £400 million in funding for the next 12 months to support low-income families with the cost of food and bills	Parliamentary site

The importance of social media is also growing. A campaign on a current issue can be mounted in just a few hours or days. Information about various injustices or demands for immediate action over some kind of social evil can circulate quickly, putting pressure on decision-makers and elected representatives. Sites such as 38 Degrees and Change.org help to facilitate such social movements. Typical campaigns concern proposed hospital closures, opposition to road-building projects, claims of miscarriages of justice in the courts and demands for inquiries into the behaviour of corporations.

In party politics, social media has become a particularly important tool for campaigning in elections. While political adverts appearing on radio and television are prohibited in the UK, there is no such regulation on social media platforms that operate internationally, so there has been a rise of party campaign videos and adverts that can be shared on social media to influence voters, circumventing the controls in place in the UK and allowing parties with more resources to advertise more freely. Parties also use data gathered from social media accounts to help target specific voters with specific issues that resonate with them. They focus on key voters in key constituencies, wasting fewer resources on voters who are unlikely to vote or who will not be persuaded, though also ignoring large sections of the population. Social media is therefore changing the way in which political parties campaign and speak to voters, in ways that might be more democratic, as it allows more personalised campaigning that is relevant to key voters, but also in ways that are likely to benefit the wealthier parties and avoid the scrutiny of the Electoral Commission in trying to ensure elections are fair (covered in more detail in Chapter 3).

Pressure groups

As membership of and activism in political parties have declined, they have been partly replaced by participation in pressure groups. Many millions of people have formed pressure groups. Groups like trade unions and professional associations have been particularly prominent. For many, such participation may be minimal, but some are activists in these organisations and help with political campaigning. The position with promotional groups, on the other hand, is changing. These groups rely on mass activism. In other words, they rely on mass active support rather than a large but passive membership. This kind of participation is growing in the UK. The range and activities of pressure groups are explored later in this chapter.

The conclusion we are likely to reach is that political action is more widespread than ever before. It may be less intensive, and it may place less of a burden on people's time, but the fall in voting turnout and party membership has been largely overtaken by the growth of alternative forms of political participation. Therefore, far from being in 'crisis', participation is simply evolving and adapting to modern society.

Suffrage

The term '**suffrage**' refers to the right to vote in free elections, also referred to as the '**franchise**'. The question of how people without the right to vote are able to persuade those in power to give them the right to vote is a fascinating one, most famously embodied by the campaigns to secure equal voting rights for women. During the nineteenth century, fearing the violence that had erupted in the French Revolution of 1789, British governments gradually extended the franchise to more

Activity

Access the 38 Degrees and/or the Change.org site and select two local and two national campaigns included on the site.
- Describe the nature of the campaigns.
- Describe the methods being used to further those campaigns.

Key term

Franchise/suffrage
Franchise and suffrage both refer to the ability/ right to vote in public elections. Suffragettes were women campaigning for the right to vote on the same terms as men.

groups, from property owners, to skilled men, to most men, to all men and some women, until finally in 1928 all men and women aged over 21 got the right to vote on the same basis, or universal suffrage was achieved. In 1969 the age requirement was lowered to 18 to reflect changing expectations of adulthood in the UK. The main stages in the extension of the franchise in the UK are shown in Figure 1.6.

Third Reform Act 1884
The franchise is extended to most working men. About 60% of all adults (over 21) have the right to vote.

Representation of the People Act 1948
Until this Act some universities returned their own MP. This meant some people, who were members of the universities, had two votes — one for the university member and one for the constituency where they lived. So the principle of 'one person, one vote' is now finally established in the UK.

Second Reform Act 1867
This Act extends the right to vote again, though it only doubles the electorate to about 2 million. Women, the propertyless and tenants of very cheap properties are excluded.

Representation of the People Act 1918
Most adult men are given the right to vote, plus women over 30 who are either married or a property owner in their own right or a graduate.

Representation of the People Act 1969
The voting age in the UK is reduced from 21 to 18.

Ballot Act 1872
This introduces the secret ballot. The main result is that votes can no longer be bought by corrupt candidates and voters are free to make up their own minds.

Representation of the People Act (Equal Franchise Act) 1928
This extends the franchise to all adults over 21, including women.

Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Act 2016
In 2014, for the first time in UKhistory, 16- and 17-year-olds are allowed to vote in the referendum on Scottish independence. Under the 2016 Act, this is extended to all elections in Scotland, but not to UK general elections or referendums. The Welsh Senedd introduced similar rules in Wales in 2020.

Great Reform Act 1832
A limited but symbolically important development. The franchise is extended to new classes of people including shopkeepers and small farmers and anyone whose property attracts a rent of at least £10 per annum. The proportion of the adult population granted the franchise is now nearly 6%, a rise from about 4%. Women are not allowed to vote.

Figure 1.6 Timeline of the expansion of suffrage in the UK

The last great struggle over suffrage was to give women an equal right to vote with men. The first petition to give women the right to vote was presented to Parliament in 1866 but was largely ignored. At the same time, the Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage was established, which inspired other local societies to form across the UK. These local movements would unite in 1897 under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), also known as the Suffragists.

The NUWSS was open to all and was internally democratic, practising peaceful campaigning to put pressure on those in power through letter-writing, producing material for publication, organising petitions and holding peaceful marches and protests. By 1914 the NUWSS had 100,000 members

Suffragettes protesting in London in 1912 as part of the campaign to win women the right to vote

across 400 branches. Even after women aged over 30 got the right to vote in 1918, the NUWSS, renamed as the Fawcett Society, continued to campaign for equal rights to vote between men and women, which was achieved in 1928.

Useful term

Suffragettes Campaigners in the early part of the twentieth century advocating votes for women, who used both parliamentary lobbying and civil disobedience as their methods.

Despite the work of the NUWSS, some women felt the pace of change was too slow, leading to the creation of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), or the **Suffragettes**, in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, inspired by the Suffragette movement in the USA. Initially it was based in Manchester, but in 1906 moved to London. Unlike the NUWSS, the WSPU was only open to women, was not internally democratic, and was focused on 'deeds, not words', using violence and illegal methods to publicise the issue of female suffrage and to put external pressure on those in power (see Table 1.10 for a comparison of the two groups). Methods would include members disrupting political party meetings, chaining themselves to railings, attempting to blow up buildings, destroying letters in post boxes and going on hunger strike while in prison. They also sold badges, games and posters to help draw attention to their cause and adopted the three colours of purple, white and green to create an early form of branding for the movement.

The violence adopted by the WSPU certainly drew attention to the cause and the government response to suppress them did win some public sympathy. However, the violence also cost them support, with some believing that giving women the right to vote would suggest the government had given in to terrorist actions, and that the violence somehow proved women were incapable of sensible thought. This alienated many moderate supporters, both men and women.

It was the work of women during the First World War and the fear of a resumption of the violence of the WSPU that ultimately persuaded Parliament in 1918 to give women over the age of 30 the right to vote. This was enough for the Pankhursts, and they disbanded the organisation soon after.

Knowledge check

What were the key differences between the Suffragettes and the Suffragists? What methods did each group use?

A protest for women's rights, showing the legacy of the Suffragettes, with their purple, white and green colour scheme still in use

Table 1.10 Suffragists and Suffragettes compared

Suffragists	Suffragettes
Membership open to all	Membership for women only
Internally democratic	Run by the Pankhursts only
Peaceful methods of protest	Violent and illegal methods
Attempted to work with the government	Attempted to intimidate the government
A national organisation of committees	London-centred (after 1906)

Modern campaigns for suffrage

Although the UK has had universal suffrage since 1969 for everyone over the age of 18, there are still some groups that are excluded from voting:

- those under 18 (although 16- and 17-year-olds can now vote in local elections in Wales and Scotland)
- prisoners (although Scotland now allows some prisoners to vote in Scottish elections)
- those sectioned under the **Mental Health Act 1983**
- peers currently serving in the House of Lords (peers not sitting in the Lords are permitted to vote).

In addition, the homeless are effectively prevented from voting as they lack a permanent address. Following the **Elections Act 2022**, there has also been a debate about whether the requirement to provide a photo ID when voting has effectively disenfranchised those who do not hold a valid ID, or did not realise one was needed.

Votes at 16

Although 16- and 17-year-olds were given the right to vote in Scottish elections after 2014 and to vote in elections to the Welsh Senedd in 2020, the issue has not been settled in the UK overall. It seems inevitable that 16- and 17-year-olds will one day gain the right to vote. However, this may have to wait until a party comes to power that feels it will benefit from younger people having the vote.

Debate

Should 16- and 17-year-olds be given the right to vote?

Some might say yes because they think …

- With the spread of citizenship education, young people are now better informed about politics than ever before.
- Voting turnout among the 18–24-year-old age group is very low. This may encourage more people to vote and become engaged with politics.
- The internet and social media now enable young people to be better informed about politics.
- If one is old enough to serve in the army or pay tax, one should be old enough to vote.
- The radicalism of younger people could act as a useful balance to the conservatism of some older voters.

Some might say no because they think …

- Sixteen- and 17-year-olds are too young to be able to make informed decisions and are now required to be in some form of education until 18.
- Many issues are apparently too complex for younger people to understand.
- Not all people in this age group pay tax so they are seen to have a lower stake in society.
- Younger people can be excessively radical as they have not had enough life experience to consider issues carefully.

When considering this debate, really focus on the idea of 'should' and why 16- and 17-year-olds really must be given the right to vote (or not). While there may be many good reasons for giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote, this is not quite the same as judging whether or not it needs to happen.

A modern campaign to extend the franchise: Votes at 16

Votes at 16 is a coalition of a number of different groups that believe the franchise should be extended to 16- and 17-year-olds across the UK in all elections. It was officially founded in 2001 under the direction and coordination of the British Youth Council. As of August 2023, the group had 3015 registered supporters and worked with organisations such as the British Youth Parliament, the Electoral Reform Society and the National Union of Students (NUS) to lower the voting age.

The campaign uses a variety of methods, including:
- producing and publishing information through its website, including a manifesto outlining its aims and reasons
- providing templates and advice on how to email local MPs to raise the issue in Parliament
- providing information and advice on how to raise awareness and campaign locally, in schools and universities
- providing advice on how to lobby MPs
- organising an initiative called 'adopt a peer' to encourage members to contact and lobby specific members of the House of Lords.

Although the overall aim of lowering the voting age to 16 has not yet been achieved for general elections, the campaign has seen some success in moving the opinion of some political supporters and gaining wider support:
- Lowering the voting age to 16 was official party policy in the 2019 manifestos for Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party.
- A 2019 Westminster Hall debate was held to discuss the issue thanks to a Private Members Bill, though a vote was not held.
- Before the 2019 election, seven Conservative MPs publicly endorsed lowering the voting age to 16 (though five of those no longer sit in the Commons).
- The voting age for elections to the Scottish and Welsh parliaments has now been lowered to 16.
- In 2014, the voting age was lowered to 16 for the Scottish independence referendum.
- In 2018, an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was founded to support lowering the voting age.

The history of the campaign shows gradual but steady progress, moving towards lowering the voting age to 16. As a modern campaign, it has benefited greatly from the wider range of elected bodies in the UK and the increased use of referendums, certainly when compared with the campaign for women's suffrage in the early twentieth century. This has allowed the campaign to persuade different parties that hold real power and has seen a lower voting age implemented in parts of the UK, which has helped prove the ability of 16- and 17-year-olds to vote appropriately.

The campaign has also been hindered by politics; with age now the main dividing line in UK elections (see Chapter 4), the addition of about 1.5 million young voters who are overwhelmingly anti-Conservative could provide a significant boost to the more left-leaning parties that endorse the campaign. However, this makes it less likely that a Conservative government will favour such reform, so it is unlikely national reform will be achieved until after the next general election at the earliest.

In many ways, the work of the campaign is in facilitating and enabling those who wish to campaign, by providing the necessary advice and strategy guidance to run a successful, individual campaign, rather than running a large national campaign itself. In this way, the campaign relies on an active membership to achieve its goals.

Study tip

You are required to know the work of a modern campaign to extend the franchise, and you may be required to reference this as an example in an exam answer.

Activity

To help develop your knowledge and understanding of the Votes at 16 campaign, spend some time visiting the group's website and reading its manifesto, as well as reading the 'Votes at 16 Debate' published in *Parliamentary Affairs* in June 2021.

Group activity

Pressure groups

A pressure group can be defined as a membership-based association whose aim is to influence policy-making without seeking power. Pressure groups have a variety of aims and employ different methods, but they all have in common a desire to influence government without becoming government themselves. If a pressure group decides it wishes to exercise power, it becomes a political party. This happened when the trade union movement helped to form the Labour Party in the early twentieth century and when UKIP began to put up candidates at parliamentary elections after 1993.

The functions of pressure groups are as follows:

- To represent and promote the interests of certain sections of the community who feel they are not fully represented by parties and Parliament.
- To protect the interests of minority groups.
- To promote certain causes that have not been adequately taken up by political parties.
- To inform and educate the public about key political issues.
- To call government to account over its performance in particular areas of policy.
- On occasions to pass key information to government to inform and influence policy.
- To give opportunities to citizens to participate in politics other than through party membership or voting.

In addition, pressure groups are a vital part of democratic and pluralist society, ensuring an active and informed citizenry, offering the public choices and options that may not be recognised by the political parties, and raising awareness of issues to ensure all sections of society are heard and considered in the political process.

Classifying pressure groups

It is usual to classify pressure groups into two main types to help us understand how they operate. These are **causal groups** and **sectional groups**.

Causal groups

Causal groups seek to promote a particular cause, to convert the ideas behind the cause into government action or parliamentary legislation. The cause may be broad, as with groups campaigning on environmental or human rights issues, or narrow, as with groups promoting local issues such as the protection of green spaces or opposition to hospital closures. Prominent examples of causal groups operating in the UK include:

- Greenpeace
- Friends of the Earth
- Liberty
- Unlock Democracy
- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)
- Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

Useful terms

Causal group An association whose goal is to promote a particular cause or set of beliefs or values. Such groups seek to promote favourable legislation, prevent unfavourable legislation or simply bring an issue on to the political agenda.

Sectional group An association that has an identifiable membership or supporting group. Such groups represent a section of society and are mainly concerned with their own interests.

Sectional groups

These groups represent a particular section of the community in the UK. Sectional groups are self-interested in that they hope to pursue the interests specifically of their own membership or of those they represent.

Some sectional groups may be hybrid in that they believe that by serving the interests of their own members and supporters, the wider community will also benefit. For example, unions representing teachers or doctors argue that the interests of their members are also the interests of all of us. Better-treated and better-paid teachers and doctors and medical staff mean better education and health for all, they argue.

Prominent examples of sectional groups are:

- Age UK
- British Medical Association (BMA)
- Taxpayers' Alliance
- The National Education Union (NEU)
- The MS [Multiple Sclerosis] Society.

The features of causal and sectional groups are summarised in Table 1.11.

Table 1.11 Features of pressure groups

Causal groups	Sectional groups
They are altruistic in that they serve the whole community, not just their own members and supporters	They are largely (not always) self-interested in that they serve the interests of their own members and supporters
They tend to concentrate on mobilising public opinion and putting pressure on government in that way	Although they seek public support, they tend to seek direct links with decision-makers (insider status)
They tend to favour public demonstrations, internet campaigns and sometimes civil disobedience	They often take the parliamentary route to influence
They seek widespread support	They usually have a formal membership

Insiders

We can also classify pressure groups as 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. This distinction tells us a good deal about their methods and status. Insider groups are so called because they have especially close links with decision-makers at all levels. The main ways in which insider groups operate include the following:

- They seek to become involved in the early stages of policy- and law-making. This means that they are often consulted by decision-makers and sometimes can offer expert advice and information.
- Some groups employ professional lobbyists whose job it is to gain access to decision-makers and make high-quality presentations of their case.
- Government at different levels uses special committees to make decisions about policy. Some groups may find themselves represented on such bodies and so have a specially privileged position. The National Farmers' Union (NFU) and the Institute of Directors (IOD) have advised government on these committees, as have trade unions and professional bodies representing groups of workers and members of the professions.

- Sectional groups may be called to testify before parliamentary committees, both select and legislative. Although they attend mainly to give advice and information, it is also an opportunity to have some long-term influence.

Outsiders

Outsiders are those groups that do not enjoy a special position within governing circles. This may be because decision-makers do not wish to be seen to be too close to them or because a group itself wants to maintain its independence from government. More radical groups, such as the Animal Liberation Front, which has a history of using illegal or violent protests to raise awareness of its aims, may find governments do not wish to be associated with them. The typical characteristics of outsider groups are listed below.

- They are usually, but not always, **promotional groups**. Sectional groups with identifiable memberships and support groups are a useful ally in policy-making, but promotional groups have less certain legitimacy.
- Their typical methods include public campaigning, in recent times often using new media to reach large parts of the population very quickly. They seek to influence not through direct lobbying or ministerial contacts, but by demonstrating to government that public opinion is on their side.
- Outsiders do not need to follow standards that the government will find acceptable, so have greater freedom in the choice of methods they use and are more likely than insider groups to use measures like civil disobedience, mass strikes and publicity 'stunts'.

Study tip

Though it is useful when studying groups to categorise them, most groups do not fit neatly into these definitions and there is often a degree of overlap, or their status may change depending on the government or issue at hand. As such, when using these categories, try to refer to them as 'usually' or 'often' rather than in absolute terms.

Methods used by pressure groups

Access points and lobbying

The ways in which groups seek to promote their cause or interests depend to some extent on the access points they have available to them. Insiders who are regularly listened to by decision-makers sit on policy committees at local, regional, national and even international level, such as through the United Nations (UN). Even at the local level, groups seek to foster special relationships with councillors or with the mayoral office to help provide them with opportunities for **lobbying** those with power. Of course, if groups do not have such access points available to them, they must look elsewhere for their methods.

Public campaigning

Groups without direct access to government tend to mobilise public demonstrations of support to convince the government to listen to them. Public campaigning ranges from organising mass demonstrations, to creating and publicising e-petitions, to using celebrities to gain publicity, to acts of civil disobedience. Some examples of such campaigns are described in Table 1.12.

Useful term

Lobbying An activity, commonly used by pressure groups, to promote causes and interests. Lobbying takes various forms, including: organising large gatherings at Parliament or council offices; seeking direct meetings with decision-makers, including ministers and councillors; and employing professional organisations to run campaigns.

Table 1.12 Campaigning methods

Group	Aim(s)	Methods
Just Stop Oil	To prevent the UK government from issuing new licences for fossil fuel production	Blockading oil facilities Members gluing themselves to public places, including the M25, and throwing soup at portraits in the National Gallery Disrupting major sporting and cultural events, such as the British Grand Prix and the Chelsea Flower Show Slow marches in London
British Medical Association	To demand an increase in pay to compensate for an effective real value loss in wages of between 27% and 35% since 2008	In 2023, junior doctors voted for a five-day strike, followed by a 48-hour strike by consultants, which took place in January 2024
The Stop the War Coalition (2003)	To demonstrate public hostility towards the proposed invasion of Iraq	A large-scale public walk through London and speeches held in Hyde Park denouncing the proposed action
The Fawcett Society	To legislate an end to the gender pay gap	Publishing a report into legislation to deal with the gender pay gap in October 2020 Publicising a national 'Equal Pay Day' each year Persuading key politicians to wear a 'This is what a feminist looks like' T-shirt
The Players Panel	To limit or overturn proposed 2023 legislation to introduce tighter restriction on gambling in the UK	Encouraging people who registered on its site to write to their MP voicing their opposition to the proposed measures, using a template and targeting specific aspects of the proposed White Paper

Study tip

When answering questions about pressure groups, use real-world examples. Be sure to learn the characteristics, experience and aims of a range of groups and try to ensure they are as recent as possible: the Suffragettes may be a great example, but they stopped operating 100 years ago!

Other methods

These can include the following:

- It is common for groups to make financial grants to political parties as a means of finding favour for their cause or interest. Trade unions have long financed the Labour Party. Many business groups and large companies send donations to all parties, but mostly to the Conservative Party. In this way they hope to influence policy.
- Some groups gain personal support from a member of Parliament. Most MPs and peers promote the interests of one group or another, raising issues in debate or lobbying ministers directly. They are sometimes able to influence the content of legislation, proposing or opposing amendments, if they sit on legislative committees.
- Media campaigns can be important. Groups may hope that the press, TV or radio will publicise their concerns. Although the broadcast media in the UK is politically neutral, some programming may publicise an issue to the benefit of the cause. For example, the ITV drama *Mr Bates vs the Post Office* focused government attention on the wrongful prosecution of post office workers in a way not achieved by other methods. Press advertising can also be used.
- Groups use direct action to try to influence government, such as public demonstrations or strikes that are officially organised but cause mass disruption. An example is the threat of strikes by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) over the proposed use of driver–only trains.
- Some groups have resorted to illegal methods. This is often a last resort when all else has failed, but they are also useful as a means of gaining publicity. Just Stop Oil has gained much publicity by disrupting high–profile sporting events and forcing road closures on motorways.
- On some occasions a pressure group can pursue an issue through the courts by requesting a judicial review if it feels government or a state body has acted contrary to the rule of law and has discriminated against a group in society.

England's Ben Stokes (centre) grabs a Just Stop Oil protester while Jonny Bairstow (right) carries another protester off the field during the second Ashes test match at Lord's, 28 June 2023

Factors in the success and failure of pressure groups

Why are some pressure groups more successful than others? This is an important question because it can go some way to explaining the direction of policy. To some extent the fortunes of pressure groups change with time and with changes in government, but there are also several permanent factors, which are considered in Table 1.13.

Table 1.13 Factors affecting the success and failure of pressure groups

Factor	Success	Failure
Size of membership	The more supporters a group has, the more pressure it can place on decision-makers. Politicians do not like to fly in the face of public opinion because they regularly face the need for re-election	Smaller groups can be overlooked or 'drowned out' by the campaigns of larger groups. They find it harder to raise funds and achieve their goals with fewer participants.
Finance	Wealthy groups can afford expensive campaigns, employ lobbyists, sponsor political parties and purchase favourable publicity	Groups with less funding struggle to organise effective campaigns, hire lobbyists and fund the production of leaflets, websites and other research, and therefore struggle to make their voices heard
The strategic position of a particular sectional group	A group that is seen as important to the economy or a key service can put greater pressure on the government. Companies and industrial groups have a great deal of leverage because they are vital to the economy, as do NHS workers	Groups that are not seen as important can easily be ignored, especially if they are competing against a strategically important group; the Occupy movement failed in part because it was up against the strategically important finance sector
Public mood	The combination of public sentiment and strong campaigning can be successful in bringing an issue to the attention of decision-makers as politicians are more likely to support a popular cause	Public mood can turn politicians against certain groups, either for the issue they champion, such as prisoner or terrorist rights, or because the methods they use alienate public opinion
Attitude of the government	Groups are far more likely to achieve success if the government of the day is sympathetic to their cause and position	If the government of the day is determined to follow a particular course of action that a group opposes, it is very unlikely that they will be able to change the government's decision, notably seen in the failure of the 2003 Stop the War Coalition

ASH

Name of group

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)

Founding and objectives

- Founded in 1967 by academics and interested parties.
- Its objectives include the spreading of knowledge about the harmful effects of tobacco use and pressing governments to adopt policies and laws to reduce tobacco use.

Methods

ASH conducts research and shares existing research into the effects of tobacco with governments and the public. For example, it has sponsored research into the effects of passive smoking and also e-cigarettes. It is largely an insider group, concentrating on lobbying law-makers and governments. It mainly uses scientific data to underpin its case.

Successes

There are many examples of success, including:

- restrictions on advertising tobacco products and tobacco sponsorship

- health warnings on cigarette packs
- persuading government to increase tax on tobacco to deter consumers
- restricting point-of-sale advertising and promotion
- campaigning for the law banning smoking in public places
- persuading government to develop a law banning smoking in cars carrying children
- persuading the government to consider adding messages to quit smoking inside packets of cigarettes.

Failures

ASH would like to go further on smoking bans and is now concerned about the effects of vaping. As yet, it has not succeeded in changing government policy in these areas.

Why is it successful?

It helps government to make policy by providing evidence and information. It acts responsibly and has built up a network of supporters within government and Parliament.

RMT

Name of group

National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT)

Founding and objectives

- Founded in 1990 through the merger of two groups: the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the National Union of Seamen (NUS) to create a single transport-industry trade union.
- Its objectives include the promotion of better pay and conditions for its members, including shorter hours and safer working environments.

Methods

The RMT negotiates contracts with major transport companies (e.g. Transport for London) on behalf of its members. It lobbies governments for better legislative protections and workers' safety. It also organises and conducts strikes to pressure employers to meet its demands, which can be effective due to the dominance of the RMT in key sectors, such as Tube drivers in London. The RMT also runs its own credit union to help support its members financially. Mostly affiliated with the Labour Party, the RMT has, in the past, put up candidates for election and endorsed other parties that it feels better represent its members' interests.

Successes

There are many examples of successes, including:

- In 2016, the RMT secured a £500 consolidation payment to all operational staff following the introduction of the Night Tube service.
- The RMT has helped members bring legal cases following injury and wrongful termination, including a £55,000 payment to a member who lost the tip of an index finger in an industrial accident.
- Securing bonus payments for workers during the 2012 Olympics.
- Improving safety standards on offshore oil platforms, as well as on trains and ferries.

Failures

Despite long-running campaigns against the closure of many ticket offices on the Tube network, the offices have been closed. The government remains committed to removing guards from trains, which the RMT has vehemently opposed on the grounds of safety. In addition, not all its campaigns for higher wages and better conditions meet with similar levels of success, particularly in areas away from London where the transport network is not such an integral part of the local economy.

During 2023, the RMT carried out a number of strikes to see improved pay awards, but did not receive an improved offer.

Why is it successful?

The RMT is the main union representing workers on the London Underground, a strategically important transport network. Strikes can have a direct impact on the economy as well as potentially embarrassing the government of the day, for example the threat of strikes during the 2012 Olympics, which would have led to major disruption and possible international ridicule.

Pressure groups, society and democracy

The UK is a representative democracy. Political parties, social media and pressure group activity are the main components of a *pluralist democracy*. This term refers to the idea that there are multiple means by which different groups and sections of society can have their voices heard and that they have opportunities to influence government at all levels.

Pressure groups also form an important channel of communication between government and the governed. Citizens often feel that their influence through elections, referendums and political parties is too weak. Parties cannot represent a wide enough range of interests and causes, while elections and referendums are relatively infrequent. It is, therefore, important that there are alternative means by which citizens can constantly communicate with government. Pressure groups supply that link. Without them, citizens might feel powerless and ignored, which is a dangerous situation for a democracy.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch at Euston Station, London, during a rail workers' strike in June 2023

Debate

Do pressure groups enhance or threaten democracy?

Ways in which they enhance democracy

- Pressure groups help to disperse power and influence more widely.
- Pressure groups educate the public about important political issues.
- Pressure groups give people more opportunities to participate in politics without having to sacrifice too much of their time and attention.
- Pressure groups can promote and protect the interests and rights of minority groups.
- Pressure groups help to call government to account by publicising the effects of policy.

Ways in which they may threaten democracy

- Some pressure groups are considered elitist and tend to concentrate power in too few hands.
- Influential pressure groups may distort information in their own interests.
- Pressure groups that are internally undemocratic may not accurately represent the views of their members and supporters.
- Finance is a key factor in political influence, so groups that are wealthy may wield a disproportionate amount of influence.
- The use of civil disobedience, particularly illegal actions, can undermine the freedoms and rights of other citizens.

Make a clear judgement about which side of the argument has more weight. Pressure groups can both enhance and threaten democracy, but you must consider which side of the debate is more convincing and why.

Other collective organisations

Pressure groups are not the only external influence on decision-makers. '**Think tanks**', **lobbyists** and corporations (large businesses) are organisations that seek to influence policy and decisions. Although these organisations may adopt some of the methods of regular pressure groups, they tend to act in slightly different ways and operate in ways that mark them out as separate from ordinary pressure groups.

Think tanks

The term 'think tank' originated during the Second World War as a military term to describe bodies that developed strategy and ideas. Today they are considered public policy research organisations. Their main role is to carry out research and develop policy ideas that can then be adopted by political parties and governments. In this sense, think tanks carry out one specific role of a pressure group in order to influence those in politics. Think tanks are usually founded to research and develop ideas in specific areas, such as education, healthcare, social justice or economic matters. Usually, they are funded by endowments from wealthy patrons or businesses, but they may also be funded by public donations or be affiliated to an academic institution, such as a university.

In carrying out the work of policy research, think tanks have replaced one of the traditional roles carried out by political parties. This is advantageous as it means policies can be considered and developed away from public scrutiny and can be tested before a party might adopt them as official policy. It also saves the party time and resources as it can 'delegate' the role of policy formulation. Of course, many think tanks are founded with a clear aim or objective in mind, and so may produce research to support a particular point of view that may not be in the public interest. Indeed, think tanks often produce research to help support the demands of their donors.

One example of this is the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), a free-market think tank with close links to the Conservative Party — Liz Truss, Priti Patel, Kwasi Kwarteng and Dominic Raab were all former employees and Kwarteng's failed mini-budget of 2022 was heavily in line with the ideas of the IEA. The IEA is critical of government measures to reduce or restrict harmful activities, such as smoking bans, sugar taxes and restrictions on fast-food advertising, and has also called for the NHS to be replaced by a private, insurance-based system. One of its main donors is British American Tobacco, which raises questions about whether or not the public policy research being carried out is in the interests of the public or of the donors.

However, think tanks can play an important role in a democratic society. In February 2020, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research scrutinised the government's Budget, raising questions about the viability of its growth targets that were widely reported in the media. The competing views and range of ideas and opinions publicised by think tanks help to promote a pluralist and well-educated society.

Some prominent examples of think tanks are listed below.

Neutral think tanks:

- ResPublica — general policy issues
- Chatham House — international affairs
- Centre for Social Justice — policy on welfare issues
- Demos — current political issues
- National Institute of Economic and Social Research — economic issues

'Left-wing' think tanks:

- Fabian Society — issues concerning social justice and equality
- Institute for Public Policy Research — various left-wing policy ideas

'Right-wing' think tanks:

- Adam Smith Institute — promoting free-market solutions to economic issues
- Institute of Economic Affairs — another free-market group with close ties to the current Conservative Party
- Centre for Policy Studies — promoting ideas popular in the premiership of Margaret Thatcher

'Liberal' think tanks:

- Centre for Reform — dedicated to promoting the values of the Liberal Democrats
- Reform — concerned with policies on welfare, public services and economic management

Lobbyists

'Lobbying' is the act of trying to persuade those in power to follow a particular course of action. In a sense, anyone in the UK can lobby, by writing to their MP, signing a petition or demonstrating, to try to persuade those in power of the validity of their views. In this way the act of lobbying is fundamental to a democratic society.

'Lobbyists', however, are distinct organisations or individuals that sell expert knowledge of the political process to those who can afford to hire them. Lobbyists and lobbying companies, sometimes referred to as public relations groups, usually employ people with close relationships with those in power (often former advisers or staff for politicians) and with expertise in which bodies, committees and groups they target. They create strategies for their clients to access the political process. In this sense, they are selling insider status.

At a basic level, lobbyists provide clients with a 'map' giving them advice to follow in order to achieve their goals, effectively providing clients with a political blueprint to help put pressure on those in power. This could be anything from a charity seeking additional government funding or trying to persuade the government to adopt a new strategy, to businesses trying to secure exemptions from certain laws or taxes that might affect them. For example, in January 2022, following a government announcement to introduce tougher gambling restrictions, 'The Players Panel' was set up. This was an initiative launched by Entain (the corporation that owns betting company Ladbrokes) in conjunction with CT Group, a political consultancy (lobbyist firm) run by Lynton Crosby, former advisor to prime ministers Theresa May and Boris Johnson. In response to a 2023 government White Paper proposing to increase restrictions on gambling for greater safety, 'The Players Panel' launched a campaign encouraging those who had registered on their website to write to their MPs opposing these restrictions. The group offered templates and advised its members to target the culture secretary, Lucy Frazer. Although this was condemned by Carolyn Harris, chair of the cross-party parliamentary group on gambling harm, it demonstrates the way in which lobbyists work for the interests of those that have hired them in order to influence parliamentary legislation.

At a more advanced level, lobbyists arrange events for their clients to have an opportunity to meet with those in power, often through corporate hospitality, for example offering political figures free tickets to sporting or cultural events at which they will be sat next to clients who have paid for the privilege. At the highest level, lobbyists attend private

meetings on behalf of their clients to try to directly persuade those in power. This is why people with direct personal contact or high status are often hired by lobbyists to help gain this access. During the Covid-19 pandemic, former prime minister David Cameron was hired by Greensill Capital to lobby then chancellor Rishi Sunak to change the rules around access to a government loan scheme, which would then enable Greensill to join the Covid Corporate Financing Facility. Although unsuccessful, it highlights how former politicians can be used as lobbyists.

Lobbyists gain access and help their clients achieve their goals. While they try to persuade, they are not always successful, and politicians consider many factors before making decisions. In fact, sometimes by helping organisations access those in power, lobbyists can improve legislation by offering advice and perspectives that may otherwise have been missed. However, the perception remains that lobbyists, in selling their services, benefit those with money, often at the expense of the public interest, which undermines the concept of a pluralist society. It also undermines confidence in politics in general and raises questions about who politicians serve, especially as organisations spend an estimated £2 billion a year on lobbying in the UK.

Prominent examples of lobbyists in the UK and the areas they represent include:

- The Cicero Group — financial services, infrastructure companies, energy and transport
- Frédéric Michel — News International
- Adam Smith — former special adviser (SpAd) who lobbies for the gambling company Paddy Power
- PLMR — PR and marketing agency specialising in political lobbying and media relations
- CT Group — run by former political adviser Lynton Crosby
- Hanbury Strategy — specialises in political communication for anyone who faces a current political risk or issue, though the client list is not made public

Corporations

Large corporations such as Google, Starbucks, Virgin, Meta (formerly Facebook) and Amazon are so big and influential that they qualify as a kind of sectional pressure group on their own. In several cases, these corporations have an income far larger than many countries and can use this financial power, together with their importance to consumer demand, employment and taxation, to resist government demands and put pressure on governments to achieve their goals. Since 2021 Facebook has, for example, lobbied to resist changes proposed by the UK government to enable the police to access personal information in order to identify and prosecute those using the platform for illegal activity. In this instance, Facebook claims to be defending individual freedoms, but critics argue it is providing a platform that enables and protects serious criminal behaviour. Major corporations also seek to emphasise the positive role they play in the national economy, using this to gain rebates or assurances from the government. This has been a major activity for Nissan and Ford, which have used their position as major employers in key parts of the country to gain assurances over trade and other protection from the government. As they employ high numbers of people and account for a large proportion of economic activity, corporations have a *strategically* important place in the economy. This gives them great insider influence and they effectively have their own 'in-house' think tanks and lobbyists (usually their public relations department), thereby avoiding the need to hire lobbying companies.

One example of the success of corporations in lobbying the government is successful resistance to calls for such companies to pay more in UK taxes on their profits

(Starbucks, Google and Microsoft being prominent examples). Elsewhere, alcoholic drinks manufacturers have campaigned against price controls proposed to reduce excessive drinking. In a similar way, the confectionery industry has resisted and toned down attempts by the government to reduce the sugar content of its products in an anti-obesity drive. Though the government was able to introduce an additional levy on soft drinks containing sugar, soft drinks manufacturers have been able to resist growing demands for other restrictions, such as a higher levy or restrictions on advertising. Meanwhile, major gambling companies, such as Ladbrokes, have used their wealth to establish the Players' Panel think tank, in order to create a public debate around potential restrictions on gambling and use this to pressurise the government.

The power and importance of corporations is such that their representatives are often called to give evidence to select committees and attend hearings on matters of national importance, giving them clear access to political power and opportunities to defend their actions or promote their own interests.

Rights in context

Human rights, civil rights and civil liberties

Human rights, covering the two different concepts of **civil liberties** and **civil rights**, have a long tradition in the UK, though a wider international aspect was developed in response to the horrors of the Second World War and the establishment of the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. The terms 'civil liberties' and 'civil rights' are often used interchangeably, but they mean slightly different things, focused on the role of the state.

- Civil liberties refer to the protections citizens have against government and the state.
- Civil rights refer to those rights that are *guaranteed* by the state. In other words, they are rights and freedoms in relation to the state itself.

Prominent examples of each are listed in Table 1.14.

Table 1.14 Civil rights and civil liberties in the UK

Civil liberties	Civil rights
Freedom of speech	Right to life
Freedom of assembly	Freedom from discrimination
Freedom of the press	Right to exercise your vote
Right to trial by jury	Right to equal treatment
Freedom of religious worship	Right to an education

Human rights combine both civil rights and civil liberties and should be:

- absolute — meaning they cannot be compromised or diminished in any way
- universal — meaning they are applied to everyone
- fundamental — meaning they are an essential part of life and cannot be removed for any reason.

The development of rights and formal equality in the UK
Early rights
The first set of civil liberties introduced to the UK was in 1215 in Magna Carta. This was the first attempt to limit the power of the monarch (the government of its day)

Useful term

Common law Traditional conceptions of how disputes should be settled and what rights individuals have. Common law is established by judges through judicial precedents when they declare what traditional, common law should be. It is sometimes described as 'judge-made law'.

Study tip

Remember that the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) has nothing to do with the European Union. It is a product of the Council of Europe. Therefore, the ECHR continues to apply in the UK.

Synoptic link

The Human Rights Act, which brought the rights enshrined under the European Convention on Human Rights into statute law that could be addressed by UK courts, establishes many essential rights (e.g. the rights to life, family life and education, and the right not to be tortured) that are intended to restrict the actions of the government in relation to the people. Such restrictions, which have been challenged by governments in recent years, are considered more fully in Chapter 8.

and ensure protections against arbitrary rule. Magna Carta included the right to trial by jury and that the monarch could only impose taxes with the consent of the people.

In 1689, under the influence of key thinker John Locke, Parliament drafted a Bill of Rights, another set of civil liberties designed to protect the people of England from a potential military dictatorship when they offered the throne to William of Orange. It ensured that the monarch could not take England into a foreign war without its agreement and that the people were free from 'cruel and unusual punishments'.

Common law rights

The traditional status of rights in the UK has been that every citizen was assumed to have rights unless they were prohibited by law. These rights were sometimes referred to as residual rights or negative rights. For example, it was assumed that people had freedom of movement unless there was some legal obstruction, such as if a person was convicted of a crime and sentenced to custody.

In addition, rights were sometimes specifically *stated* as a result of a court case when rights were in dispute. In these cases a judge would decide what was the *normal* or *traditional* way in which such disputes would be settled. Having made this decision, the judge would declare what they understood people's rights to be. In doing so the judge was declaring **common law**.

Let's take the example of a married or cohabiting couple. If they were to split up, there might be a dispute as to how to divide their possessions, in other words what *rights* the couple had against each other. If there were no statute law to cover the situation, a judge would have to state what the common law was. Once a judge had declared what the common law was under a particular circumstance, they had created a judicial precedent. In all similar cases, judges had to follow the existing judicial precedent. A great body of common law and common law rights was created over the centuries.

The Human Rights Act 1998

The main terms and status of the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) are described in Chapter 5; here we offer a brief description. The HRA brought into effect the European Convention on Human Rights, which was established by the Council of Europe in 1950. The UK helped to draft the Convention but did not accept it as binding on its government until 1998.

Traditionally, the UK relied on a series of negative rights, meaning people were allowed to do anything as long as it was not expressly forbidden by law. This meant these rights existed in the absence of law and were therefore very difficult to enforce and people's protections were limited. With the introduction of the Human Rights Act, which came into force in 2000 by making the European Convention on Human Rights a statute law, these negative rights were supplanted by positive rights that had to be legally protected and respected, giving the courts an important means of protecting the rights of citizens and the ability to act as a check on the government. This marked, perhaps, the most significant development in the long history of the development of rights in the UK.

The HRA establishes a wide range of rights to replace the patchwork of statute and common law rights in the UK. It is binding on all public bodies other than the UK Parliament (and it is politically binding on Parliament even if not legally binding; Parliament will rarely ignore it). It is also enforced by all courts in the UK, so that laws passed at any level should conform to its requirements.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000

Historically, citizens in the UK had no right to see information held by public bodies, whether it related personally to them or not. By the end of the twentieth century,

however, it was clear that the UK was out of step with much of the modern democratic world in this respect. In many countries, including the USA, legislation had been passed, first to allow citizens to view information held about them — for example, by the tax authorities, or social security or schools — and then to let them view information held by these bodies that it would be in the public interest to see. Governments were too secretive, it was widely contended, and this was a barrier to making them accountable. The Labour government that came to power in the UK in 1997 therefore decided to redress this situation through the **Freedom of Information Act 2000**.

Since the Act was passed it has proved an invaluable tool for social and political campaigners, for MPs and for the media, allowing them to discover information that was never available in the past. It has helped to improve such services as the health service, the police, the civil service and educational establishments by shedding light on their activities and helping to promote reform. Perhaps most famously, it was through a Freedom of Information Act request that the *Daily Telegraph* was able to reveal and publicise the MPs' expenses scandal of 2009.

The Equality Act 2010

There had been two parliamentary statutes prior to the Equality Act that established **formal equality** in the UK. The **Race Relations Act 1965** outlawed discrimination of most kinds on the grounds of a person's race or ethnicity. The **Equal Pay Act 1970** required employers to offer equal pay to men and women doing the same job. Important though these developments were, they failed to establish equality in the full sense of the word and missed out important groups in society who have suffered discrimination, notably those with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, under the management of Harriet Harman, a Labour minister at the time, the **Equality Act** was passed in 2010.

The Equality Act requires that all legislation and all decision-making by government, at any level, must take into account formal equality for different sections of society. Put another way, the Act outlaws any discrimination against any group. Equality is required and discrimination is outlawed on the following grounds:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

In theory, *any* kind of discrimination is unlawful under the Act, but in practice it tends to apply to the following circumstances:

- Employment and pay
- Government services (local, regional, national)
- Healthcare (physical and mental)
- Housing (sales or renting)
- Education
- Financial services
- Policing and law enforcement

Equality of the kind described above is especially important in relation to group politics and a healthy pluralist democracy. By establishing equality, both formal and informal, between different groups and sections of society, it is more likely that their demands and interests can be taken into account.

Rights and responsibilities

Rights in the UK

In law, within the UK, all citizens have equal rights. This was a principle of UK law long before the 2010 Equality Act, but the Act consolidated it. This means

that no individual and no group can be discriminated against as far as the law is concerned. As a result of the Act, people can now go through the courts to bring a case if they feel they have been discriminated against in any way, providing greater access to rights protections in the UK, thereby helping to develop the UK's democratic system.

Having these rights only matters if they are effectively protected, however. While the Human Rights Act, the Equality Act and the Freedom of Information Act have made rights enforceable, there are also weaknesses. The main issue is that the UK Parliament remains sovereign. In practice this means that Parliament has the ultimate power to create rights or to take them away. In other words, it is not possible in the UK to create a codified set of rights that is binding on successive Parliaments. Furthermore, the rights pressure group Liberty has pointed out that legislation alone does not guarantee rights. It is ultimately up to Parliament to ensure they are protected.

The passage of the Human Rights Act did *appear* to establish binding rights in the UK, but this was an illusion. The UK Parliament can, and occasionally has (for example, over anti-terrorism laws), ignored the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). That said, Parliament remains reluctant to contradict the ECHR and all other public bodies must abide by its terms. It must also be said that the UK retains an international reputation for respecting human rights. Compared with many countries in the world, the UK is seen as a haven for citizens' rights.

It is also true that rights in the UK can be suspended under special circumstances. All countries have such a provision, as it is necessary in times of crisis or emergency. Perhaps the best example occurred in the 1970s when the UK government introduced internment in Northern Ireland. Internment is the imprisonment, without trial, of suspected terrorists. This was done in Northern Ireland in response to **The Troubles**. In the early part of the twenty-first century, too, Parliament allowed the government to hold suspected terrorists for long periods *without trial* (though not indefinitely) as a result of the Islamist terrorist threat after 9/11. More recently, in 2020, for public health reasons, various rights relating to associating with other people, meeting with family members and freedom to move around the country were suspended and restricted by law to help combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 1.15 compares the strengths and weaknesses of rights protection in the UK.

Table 1.15 Rights in the UK: strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
There is a strong common law tradition	Common law can be vague and disputed. It can also be set aside by parliamentary statutes
The UK is subject to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)	Parliament remains sovereign and so can ignore the ECHR or can even repeal the Human Rights Act
The judiciary has a reputation for being independent and upholding the rule of law, even against the expressed wishes of government and Parliament	There is increasing political pressure on government to suspend laws or ignore rulings relating to a variety of political issues, such as terrorist behaviour or the rights of asylum seekers
The principle of equal rights is clearly established	What equality means can be subject to interpretation and see some groups coming into conflict over the enforcement of their rights, for example, religious groups and LGBTQ+ groups

Civil liberties groups

The UK also has a variety of civil liberties groups that seek to champion and defend civil rights and liberties in the UK and internationally. In many ways, such groups act like pressure groups, allowing members to join and participate in demonstrations and activities which they believe in and support. Such groups tend to go beyond the traditional pressure group model and also work as think tanks and lobbyists, conducting research into rights issues, producing evidence and reports about rights abuses, trying to persuade those in power to champion a particular case or amend legislation, or even speaking up in support of an issue on the international stage and bringing legal challenges on behalf of those who have had their rights denied.

Such groups have existed for a long time in the UK, but the introduction of the Human Rights Act and other key pieces of legislation have given them important tools with which to promote and defend civil rights and liberties in the UK. The growth of judicial review in the twenty-first century has allowed these groups to become even more influential as well as helping to promote the wider rights culture that they desire. Sometimes, the decisions, actions and organisation of these groups can become controversial, but generally they are seen as a positive force for promoting and defending civil rights and liberties, as the following case studies show.

Case study

Liberty

Name of group

National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL), rebranded as Liberty in 1989.

Founding and objectives

- Founded in 1934 with the aim of challenging government measures to restrict freedoms in the UK and combat the rising threat of fascism.
- Its objectives are to fight to protect and uphold civil rights and liberties across the UK and to develop a wider 'rights culture' across society.

Methods

Liberty uses a number of methods. It carries out research and investigations into rights abuses and restrictions and seeks to publicise these through media campaigns. It uses both mainstream traditional media and social media to spread awareness and develop support. It also supports and brings legal challenges against rights abuses, challenging what it regards as unfair or unjust laws that restrict civil liberties, such as a recent legal challenge to lockdown restrictions, as well as providing legal advice and support to cases of discrimination against LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights and disability rights.

Liberty also works with the government and Parliament to advise on legislation and ensure they comply with the Human Rights Act. As well as media campaigns, Liberty regularly organises petitions (increasingly online), protests and public demonstrations to raise awareness of issues and to demonstrate public support, and it offers pledges to help develop a rights-based society.

Successes

There are many examples of success, including:
- In July 2023, Liberty was part of a group of 290 organisations that signed a Joint Civil Society Statement on the **Illegal Immigration Act 2023**, explaining why it believed the Act was in violation of key human rights.
- In June 2023, Liberty launched a legal challenge to the home secretary's use of secondary legislation to introduce new powers to restrict protests.
- In 2022, Liberty provided a briefing on the Bill of Rights to advise MPs during the Second Reading stage in the House of Commons. In 2023, the government announced it was not going to move forward with the proposed Bill of Rights.
- In 2020, Liberty brought a case under the Human Rights Act to successfully pressurise Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council into removing parts of the Public Spaces Protection Order that had been used to criminalise rough sleepers and beggars.
- In August 2020, Liberty won a Court of Appeal ruling against the legal framework used by South Wales Police when employing facial recognition technology.

Failures

- Liberty has failed, so far, in its campaign to achieve a ban the use of facial recognition across the UK, which is still used by many security organisations, including the Metropolitan Police.
- Despite organising online petitions and campaigns against lockdown restrictions in 2020 and 2021, the government continued to impose such restrictions on people's freedoms in the name of public health.
- In October 2019, the Court of Appeal rejected an application by Liberty to bring a legal case that would have prevented a no-deal Brexit from the European Union.

Why is it successful?

Liberty is both a non-profit organisation that operates like a think tank, and a membership association, like a causal pressure group. That, and the fact that it is well established, gives it a large membership base, which it can call on when organising campaigns and demonstrations while also employing legal expertise and experience to bring legal challenges to the courts. Since 2000, it has been able to use the Human Rights Act to bring legal challenges in UK courts. From 2003 to 2016 it also benefited from a charismatic leader, Baroness Shami Chakrabarti, who had close ties to the Labour Party and was able to raise the public profile of the group.

Case study

Amnesty International

Name of group

Amnesty International

Founding and objectives

- Founded in London in 1961 by barrister Peter Benenson, who claimed he was inspired by an account of two Portuguese students who had been sentenced to seven years in prison for drinking a toast to liberty.
- Amnesty International operates as a global campaign group or an international non-governmental organisation (INGO). It protests wherever it believes justice, freedom, truth and liberty have been denied. In addition to exposing and ending abuses, it aims to educate society and mobilise the public to create a safer society.

Methods

Amnesty International's main focus has been on raising public awareness of human rights abuses and other infringements of civil liberties, while also mobilising public support to put pressure on government to act and support reform. Traditionally this would be done through a letter-writing campaign — local branches and smaller groups are tasked with writing to an 'at-risk individual' to show support as well as writing letters to the government concerned or to other governments in the hope that they will pressurise the offending government into taking action.

Today, the group uses email and Twitter (currently known as 'X'), such as the hashtag #FreeNazanin, which it used to pressurise the British and Iranian governments into releasing the British-Iranian author Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. Amnesty International gives advice and produces template letters and emails for people to fill in themselves to add their voice. It also organises petitions, public demonstrations and vigils to raise awareness and put pressure on governments, and carries out extensive research and publishes reports to highlight issues and educate the public as well as public officials. Perhaps its most important method is in coordinating its 7 million members to ensure its campaigns are focused and targeted to increase pressure.

Messages of support for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe painted on stones and laid outside the Iranian embassy in London, June 2019

Successes

There are many examples of success, including:

- In March 2022, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was freed from Iranian imprisonment and returned to the UK. Alongside other organisations, Amnesty had long used its campaign methods to secure her release.
- In 2020, Amnesty may have contributed to changes to Covid-19 lockdown laws by having supporters petition the government to ensure emergency laws protected the most vulnerable, including those living in poverty, with disabilities or with abusive partners.
- In 2018, the UK Supreme Court declared Northern Ireland's near total ban on abortion services incompatible with the Human Rights Act. Amnesty's Northern Ireland office gathered evidence from those impacted by the ban, facilitated the ruling and applied pressure on the UK government to act and impose reforms on abortion laws if the Northern Ireland Assembly did not. After legal challenges, the UK government went ahead with this in June 2022. Amnesty worked by keeping the issue in the public domain and mobilising its supporters to put pressure on the government, as well as by providing reports regarding a 'postcode lottery' in Northern Ireland due to the failure of new laws to be implemented across the region.

Failures

- Although Amnesty International has continued to produce reports and raise public concerns about the UK government's plans for the Illegal Immigration Bill, the government remains committed to passage of the Bill.
- The UK **Public Order Act 2022** was passed despite Amnesty's opposition to it. Amnesty had been critical of this legislation, producing reports and using petitions and its status to persuade Parliament to reject the Bill on the grounds that it would give the police too many powers to restrict the right to protest.
- Despite Amnesty arranging 38,000 members in an online action and repeated calls for the international community to do something, Amnesty has been unable to prevent the Chinese government from detaining Uighur, Kazakh and other Muslim groups living in Chinese territory.
- Following two suicides in 2018 by Amnesty International employees, both citing work-related issues, a 2019 report revealed that Amnesty had a toxic workplace culture, with multiple reports of racism, sexism, bullying and harassment.
- By October 2019, five of the seven board members had resigned with 'generous' redundancy packages, further undermining the integrity of the organisation.

Why is it successful?

Amnesty International is successful due to its large international membership base and close relationship with other international organisations and governments. Its role in coordinating targeted efforts helps facilitate those who wish to fight for human rights in a way that is more likely to achieve success. The organisation also has strong financial resources, which enable it to carry out detailed research and produce respected and recognised reports, as well as employing full-time staff across the globe to investigate and run its campaigns. Despite recent controversies, Amnesty also benefits from strong global recognition, having developed strong ties to many western governments, including the UK, and as a result of winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. It also enjoys considerable celebrity support.

Responsibilities of citizens

With rights come responsibilities. The responsibilities of citizens have never been codified in the UK, but there is no doubt that they exist. With the increasing amount of immigration into the UK, the issue of what duties or obligations citizens should have, especially new or aspiring citizens, has become more acute. It has been argued that rights can only be earned if they are matched by responsibilities, though this principle has never been firmly established. We can, however, identify a few citizens' responsibilities that are widely accepted, and responsibilities that may exist but could be disputed. These are shown in Table 1.16.

Table 1.16 Citizens' responsibilities

Clear citizens' responsibilities	Disputed citizens' responsibilities
To obey the laws	To serve in the armed forces when the country is under attack
To pay taxes	To vote in elections and referendums
To undertake jury service when required	To respect the rights of all other citizens
To care for their children	To respect the dominant values of the society

It should be noted that the clear responsibilities are enshrined in law. If a citizen does not accept those responsibilities, they run the danger of prosecution. The responsibilities that are in dispute may well be enforceable, but many citizens will question them.

Collective versus individual rights

Although today it is widely acknowledged that the establishment and protection of individual rights are vital in a modern democracy, it also has to be accepted that the community *as a whole* has rights too, as do various *sections* of society. Problems can arise where the rights of individuals clash with the collective rights of the community or sections of the community. Very often there is no solution to these conflicts, but politicians are called upon to adjudicate. Occasionally, too, such conflicts may end up in the courts for resolution. Table 1.17 shows some examples of these kinds of clashes.

Table 1.17 Individual rights versus collective rights

Individual rights	Conflicting collective rights
Freedom of expression	The rights of religious groups not to have their beliefs satirised or questioned
The right to privacy	The right of the community to be protected from terrorism by security services that may listen in to private communications
The right to own private property, including land	Public rights, enjoyed by ramblers, to walk across and access private property on public trails
The right to demonstrate in public places (rights of association and free movement) and thus cause disruption	The right of the community to their own freedom of movement
The right to strike in pursuit of pay and employment rights	The right of the community to expect good service from public servants who are paid from taxation

Case study

Campbell v *Mirror Group News Ltd*, 2004

In 2001, the *Mirror* newspaper published pictures of supermodel Naomi Campbell leaving a clinic that dealt with narcotic addictions. This triggered a legal case that decided whether the right to privacy outweighed the newspaper's right to freedom of expression.

Campbell did not deny the allegations made by the paper that she was a drug addict or that she was seeking treatment, but chose to sue the owners for publishing the photographs, on the grounds that these breached her right to privacy. She stated it drew attention to the location of the clinic and would act as a deterrent to her, and others, using the clinic for future treatment.

The Mirror Group claimed it had the right, under freedom of expression, to publish the pictures as they helped to illustrate the published article and that, as Campbell had previously denied taking drugs and was a public figure, it was in the public interest to publish the supporting evidence.

Initially the High Court ruled in favour of Campbell. However, the Court of Appeals overturned the decision, ruling that the photographs did not breach the right to privacy. This led to the case being settled in 2004 by the Law Lords, at that time sitting in the House of Lords.

The Law Lords had to balance the demands of Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (the right to privacy) with Article 10 (freedom of expression). They had to consider both aspects and the potential impact of the ruling. First, they had to determine whether the right to privacy had been breached by the publication of the photographs and, if the right to privacy had been breached, whether ruling against their publication would have been detrimental to the *Mirror*'s freedom of expression. In a divided opinion, the Law Lords ruled, 3:2, that in this case, the right of Naomi Campbell to privacy outweighed the Mirror Group's right to freedom of expression, so resolving a conflict that had arisen between differing rights contained within the Human Rights Act.

Summary

Having read this chapter, you should have knowledge and understanding of the following:
- ➜ What democracy is and how democracy in its various forms works in the UK
- ➜ The distinctions between direct and representative democracy and their relative advantages and disadvantages
- ➜ The extent to which the UK is truly democratic and whether or not it is in need of reform
- ➜ The nature of political participation in the UK, whether there is a participation crisis and possible ways in which it could be combated
- ➜ The nature of representation in the UK
- ➜ The nature of suffrage, how it developed in the UK and the issues surrounding changes to the franchise
- ➜ The nature and activities of pressure groups and other organised groups in the UK
- ➜ Issues concerning the operation of pressure groups and other organised groups in the UK
- ➜ The general nature of political influence in the UK
- ➜ The nature of rights in the UK and how they are protected
- ➜ The conflicts between collective and individual rights

Key terms in this chapter

Democratic deficit A flaw in the democratic process where decisions are taken by people who lack legitimacy, due to not having been appointed with sufficient democratic input or not being subject to accountability.

Direct democracy All individuals express their opinions themselves and not through representatives acting on their behalf. This type of democracy emerged in Athens in classical times and direct democracy can be seen today in referendums.

Elective dictatorship A government that dominates Parliament, usually due to a large majority, and therefore has few limits on its power.

Franchise/suffrage Franchise and suffrage both refer to the ability/right to vote in public elections. Suffragettes were women campaigning for the right to vote on the same terms as men.

Legitimacy The rightful use of power in accordance with pre-set criteria or widely held agreements, such as a government's right to rule following an election or a monarch's succession based on the agreed rules.

Lobbyist A lobbyist is paid by clients to try to influence the government and/or MPs and members of the House of Lords to act in their clients' interests, particularly when legislation is under consideration.

Participation crisis A lack of engagement with the political process by a significant number of citizens, by choosing not to vote or not to join or become members of political parties or not to offer themselves for public office.

Pluralist democracy A type of democracy in which a government makes decisions as a result of the interplay of various ideas and contrasting arguments from competing groups and organisations.

Representative democracy A more modern form of democracy, through which an individual selects a person (and/or a political party) to act on their behalf to exercise political choice.

Think tank A body of experts brought together to collectively focus on a certain topic(s): to investigate and offer solutions to often complicated and seemingly intractable economic, social or political issues.

Further reading

Websites

The most important think tank and campaign organisation concerning democracy in the UK is possibly Unlock Democracy. Its site contains discussion of many issues concerning democracy: www.unlockdemocracy.org
The main rights pressure group is Liberty. Its website discusses current issues concerning rights: www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk
The two main websites for campaigning on local and national issues are:
- 38 Degrees: http://home.38degrees.org.uk
- Change.org: www.change.org

There is also the website of the Constitution Unit, which includes reports and research into democracy and rights in the UK, including a report by a citizens' assembly into democracy in the UK: www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/deliberative-democracy/democracy-uk-after-brexit/citizens-assembly-democracy-uk
This is a selection of interesting pressure groups (websites can be easily accessed through a search engine):
- Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)
- Age UK
- British Medical Association
- Friends of the Earth
- Just Stop Oil
- National Union of Students

Civil liberties groups to research include:
- Amnesty International
- Freedom Association Ltd
- Liberty
- The Prison Reform Trust
- Stonewall
- Stop the Traffik

On the issue of rights in the UK, other than the groups listed above, it is worth looking at the website of the UK Supreme Court: www.supremecourt.uk

Books

Cartledge, P. (2016) *Democracy: A life*, Oxford University Press
Cole, M. (2006) *Democracy in Britain*, Edinburgh University Press
Crick, B. (2002) *Democracy: A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press
Eatwell, R. and Goodwin, M. (2018) *National Populism: The revolt against liberal democracy*, Pelican
Hazell, R. and Morris, B. (eds) (2021) *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy*, Hart
Runciman, D. (2017) *The Confidence Trap*, Princeton University Press
Runciman, D. (2019) *How Democracy Ends*, Profile Books

Practice questions

1

Source 1

A
Our democratic system is in urgent need of renewal. Power is too far away from people. We need the power to make changes in our lives and our communities. But too often we don't know who can help. Parliament and elections are stuck in the past. Under the current electoral system too many voters are simply ignored. No one knows what the rules of our democracy are. They should be set down properly, so that everyone can understand and follow them. Today, we're all connected, but our democratic system lags far behind the technology and its promise of participation.

Adapted from a letter published in the *Guardian* online, 4 November 2019, entitled 'A plan to fix Britain's broken democracy', by Dr Wanda Wyporska, Jonathon Porritt, Neal Lawson and nine others, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/04/a-plan-to-fix-britains-broken-democracy

B
Although there are critics of the UK's democracy, there is actually much to be proud of in the way the UK conducts itself. Every 5 years, at least, there are free and fair elections to the House of Commons, as well as a whole host of second-order elections

to devolved bodies and local government institutions, providing strong accountability and offering choice to voters.

The growth of the media and ease of access – thanks to the expansion of the internet and increasing opportunities to broadcast on television – have created a host of competing platforms that contribute to lively and better-informed political debate. Despite some legal restrictions, the freedom of assembly and right to protest is well respected and protected by laws, while the recent increase in strikes shows that the power of trade unions and other organisations to put pressure on those in power is far from limited. Compared to many democracies around the world, this puts the UK in pretty strong shape.

A political commentator writing in 2024

Using the sources, evaluate the view that the UK system of democracy is not fit for purpose.

In your response you must:
– *compare and contrast different opinions in the sources*
– *examine and debate these views in a balanced way*
– *analyse and evaluate only the information presented in the sources.* (30)

2

Source 2

We feel dissatisfied with how democracy is working in the UK today because there is a lack of honesty and integrity in politics, combined with a lack of clear and unbiased information from both the government and the media.

We feel frustrated about how democracy is working in the UK today because there is a disconnect between people and the system. We do not feel listened to and there is no clear way to have influence. We need to feel that change can happen and that different voices are taken into account.

We feel disappointed with how democracy is working in the UK today because there are not enough 'ordinary people' in parliament and government, and no matter which party is in power, a big part of the population is likely to be dissatisfied due to the nature of the current voting system.

We feel hopeful about how democracy is working in the UK because there are laws that protect our rights to vote and be represented.

We feel hopeful about how democracy is working in the UK today because it is a democracy and we do have a vote. Because of this, governments do change and come to an end.

We feel optimistic about how democracy is working in the UK today because our democratic system is better than in many other countries. Here we can all participate in, and talk freely about, our democracy without fear of facing consequences. Also, everyone can influence change via voting, standing for Parliament, joining a political party of their choice, initiating petitions, etc.

Adapted from a selection of statements made by participants in the Citizens' Assembly on Democracy in the UK as part of the Second Report of the Democracy in the UK after Brexit Project, published by the Constitution Unit and Involve, April 2022, www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/sites/constitution_unit/files/report_2_final_digital.pdf

Using the source, evaluate the view that there is more to be hopeful of than concerned about in the UK's current democratic system.

In your response you must:

– *compare and contrast different opinions in the source*
– *examine and debate these views in a balanced way*
– *analyse and evaluate only the information presented in the source.* (30)

3 Evaluate the view that the UK is suffering from a serious voter participation crisis.

You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way. (30)

4 Evaluate the view that organised groups provide more harm than benefit to the UK political system. In your answer you must refer to at least three different types of organised groups.

You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way. (30)

5 Evaluate the view that the right to vote in the UK requires no further need of reform. In your answer you must refer to at least **one** campaign to extend the franchise.

You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way. (30)

6 Evaluate the view that rights are not effectively protected in the UK.

You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way. (30)

Answer guidance available online: **www.hoddereducation.com/EdexcelUKPolitics7E**

Political parties

In January 2019, a new political party was launched, the Brexit Party. Its aim was to ensure that Brexit would be delivered by the government. It organised members, provided an organisation for a membership that felt the political parties in Westminster were not delivering on the referendum result of 2016, and fielded candidates in all levels of elections, winning the most seats in the 2019 European Parliamentary election, and fielded candidates in 273 seats in the 2019 general election. Following Brexit, and when the UK officially departed from the EU in 2020, the party changed its name to the Reform Party, then in 2021 it was rebranded as Reform UK. Reform UK is a recent example in a long list of political parties that have arisen in UK politics over the centuries to organise supporters, represent different groups within society, recruit members, contest elections and field candidates. As such, Reform UK, like all political parties, helps to ensure that the UK continues as a functioning democracy. All parties in the UK rely on the strength of their leadership to develop policy ideas, seek office in council elections and devolved bodies, as well as trying to secure MPs to Parliament, and these ideas will be explored throughout this chapter.

Reform UK leader Richard Tice (centre) and joint deputy leaders Ben Habib (left) and David Bull (right) at the party's annual conference, October 2023

Parties are integral to the functioning of democracy in the UK, yet they are also controversial, seen as undermining the national interest as competing groups seek to promote the interests of party politics above reasoned and democratic debate. Rivalries between parties can lead to democratic debate and discussion, with competing ideas presented to the public to offer genuine choice based on ideological commitments to make the nation all that it can be. However, partisan rivalries can also descend into something like a sporting fixture, with the goal becoming winning for the team rather than presenting a vision for the nation. While political parties may create problems, it may be more accurate to say that party politics is what enables politics to happen in the modern world with a functioning democracy.

Objectives

In this chapter you will learn about the following:
➜ The nature of political parties and what their functions and features are
➜ How to distinguish between the terms 'left-wing' and 'right-wing'
➜ How parties are funded and the nature of the political controversy over party funding, including proposals for reform
➜ The origins of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties and the core beliefs of the three parties
➜ The current policies of the three parties
➜ The nature and impact of emerging and minor parties in the UK
➜ The nature of the term 'party system' and other party systems that exist within the UK
➜ Factors that affect party success

Principles of political parties

Features of parties

At its most basic level, a political party is an organisation of people with similar political values and views, which develops a set of goals and policies that it seeks to convert into political action by obtaining government office, or a share in government, or by influencing the government currently in power. It may pursue its goals by mobilising public opinion in its favour, selecting candidates for office, competing at elections and identifying suitable leaders.

Although we might argue about this definition, or add to it, it is a good enough summary that describes most organisations that we consider to be parties.

This definition also helps us to identify the features of political parties in the UK (see Figure 2.1):

- The members of parties share similar political values and views.
- Parties seek either to secure the election of their candidates as representatives or to form the government at various levels (local, regional, national).
- They have some kind of organisation that develops policy, recruits candidates and identifies leaders.

This is not a long list as the nature of political parties can vary in different parts of the democratic world. Typical variations in the features of parties include the following:

- Some are mass membership parties with many members (UK Labour Party); others may have a small leadership group who seek supporters rather than members (the main US parties).

- Some parties may be highly organised with a formal permanent organisation (German Christian Democrats); others have a loose, less permanent organisation (US parties that only organise fully during elections).
- Some parties may have a very narrow range of values and views and are intensely united around those views (the former Brexit Party); others have a very broad range of views and values, and so may be divided into factions (the UK Conservative Party).
- Some parties focus on gaining power (main parties in the UK); others recognise they will not gain power but seek to influence the political system (Green parties).
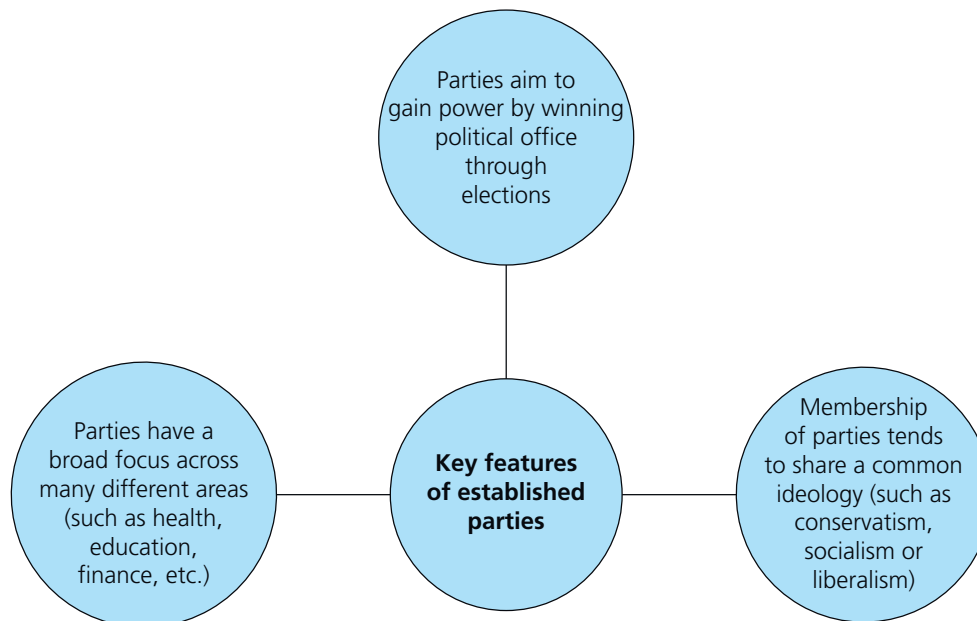
Figure 2.1 The key features of established political parties in the UK

Functions of parties

Topic link

Parties used to create policy themselves, but increasingly they have delegated this role to think tanks, as outlined in Chapter 1.

Making policy

Perhaps the most recognisable function of a political party is the development of **policy** and political programmes. This is a role that becomes especially important when a party is in opposition and is seeking to replace the government of the day. Opposition parties are, therefore, in a fundamentally different position from the party in power.

When a ruling party controls the government, its leadership is the government; there is virtually no distinction between the two. Therefore, the policy-making function of the ruling party *is the same* as the policy-making function of the government. It involves not only political leaders but also civil servants, advisory units and committees, and private or special advisers (SpAds). Of course, the rest of the party, backbench MPs and peers, local activists and ordinary members, have some say through policy conferences and committees, but their role remains very much in the background. Most policy in the ruling party is made by ministers and their advisers.

Useful term

Policy A set of intentions or a political programme developed by parties or by governments. Policies reflect the political stance of parties and governments.

Boris Johnson promoting the 2019 Conservative manifesto

In opposition, the leadership of a party is not in such a pre-eminent policy-making position. True, the leadership group will have most influence, the leader especially, but it is when in opposition that the general membership of the party can have most input into policy-making. Through various conferences and party committees, the membership can communicate to the leadership which ideas and demands they would like to see as 'official' policy and that therefore could become government policy one day. This kind of influence occurs at local, regional and national level.

The policy-formulating function is also sometimes known as **aggregation**. This involves identifying the wide range of demands made on the political system by the party membership, the mass of individuals in society and many different groups, and then converting these into programmes of action that are consistent and compatible. Aggregation tends to be undertaken by the party leadership group as these are the people who may one day become ministers and will have to put the policies of the party into practical government.

Representation

Parties claim to have a representative function. Many parties have, in the past, claimed to represent a *specific* section of society. For example, the UK Labour Party was developed in the early twentieth century to represent the working classes, especially trade union members. The Conservative Party of the nineteenth century largely existed to protect the interests of the landed gentry and aristocracy. Today, all the main parties argue that they represent the *national* interest and not just the interests of specific classes or groups. So, when we suggest that parties have a representative function, we mean that they seek to ensure all groups in society have their interests and demands at least considered by government. In reality, though, we understand that parties tend to be prejudiced towards the interests of one section of society or another, based on their core values and ideologies.

One new phenomenon that has emerged, and which needs to be considered as far as representation is concerned, is the emergence of **populist** parties. Populist

Sir Keir Starmer, in opposition, launching his 'Five Missions for a Better Britain' policy agenda in 2023

parties tend to emerge rapidly (and often disappear equally quickly). Typically, they represent people who feel they have been ignored by conventional parties, in other words that they are *not* represented *at all*. The appeal of populist parties is usually emotional or visceral and plays on people's fears and dissatisfactions. They generally take root among low-income groups, who feel they have been left behind. Generally, populist movements tend to be defined by what they are opposed to (rather than what they favour) and often focus on opposition to big government, taxation, big business and established politics, such as the Reclaim Party (established in 2020).

We are also seeing the rise of 'issue parties' that represent a particular cause. Green parties are the best example, but increasingly we are also seeing new parties dedicated to advancing women's rights in parts of Europe. Having said this, most contemporary parties in modern democracies still lay claim to representing the national interest.

Selecting candidates

Parties spend a great deal of their time and effort selecting candidates for office at all levels. They need to find prospective local councillors and elected mayors in those localities where such a position exists (notably London and other major cities), and members of the Welsh and Scottish parliaments, the Northern Ireland Assembly and, most prominently of all, the UK Parliament. This is mostly done at local and regional level, through party committees staffed by activists. The national party leaderships do have some say in which candidates should be chosen, but it is in this role that local constituency parties have the greatest part to play.

Identifying leaders

Parties need leaders and, in the case of the main parties, this means potential government ministers. They therefore have procedures for identifying political leaders. It is here that the established party leaders play a key role. For the ruling party, the prime

minister completely controls the appointment of ministers. In opposition parties, the leader chooses a smaller group of 'frontbench' spokespersons who form the leadership. But despite the dominance of party leaders in this field, potential leaders cut their teeth to some extent in internal party organisations and committees. The formal organisations of parties give opportunities for members to be 'trained' as leaders.

The issue of political leadership was thrown into focus within the Labour Party in 2015–16 and the Conservative Party in 2022. Following the Labour Party's 2015 election defeat, the former leader, Ed Miliband, resigned. This left behind a power vacuum. In finding a successor, the party ran into a huge controversy. The party membership voted overwhelmingly to elect Jeremy Corbyn. However, Corbyn's political views were far to the left of most of the Labour MPs and peers. He was the party leader until 2020, but many of the Labour MPs in Parliament refused to acknowledge him as *their* leader.

In 2022, the Conservative Party also faced controversy. After a series of scandals, and having been undermined by members of his own government, Boris Johnson felt obliged to resign under pressure from his own MPs, despite his popularity among the party membership. The party membership then elected Liz Truss over Rishi Sunak to be the new Conservative leader and prime minister. After just 49 days as prime minister, Truss had lost the support of her MPs and stepped down. She was to be replaced by Sunak, without the membership having a vote, raising questions about the role of the party members in choosing their leader.

Examples of key features of the three main parties are provided in Table 2.1, with some of these features being dealt with in more detail later in the chapter.

Table 2.1 Key features of the three main parties as of 2023

Feature	Conservative Party	Labour Party	Liberal Democrats
Leader	Rishi Sunak	Sir Keir Starmer	Sir Ed Davey
Current pledges	Halve inflation and ease the cost of living crisis Reduce the national debt to secure public services Reduce NHS waiting lists and speed up access to treatment	Make the UK a 'clean energy superpower' Secure the highest sustained growth in the G7 Reform the justice system	Provide mortgage grants of £300 a month Cut household energy bills by taxing oil and gas companies Tax water companies to clean up sewage spills
Number of MPs	349	198	15
Number of peers	269	175	80
Number of MSPs (Scotland)	31	22	4
Number of MSs (Wales)	16	30	1
Number of London Assembly Members	9	11	2
Number of local councillors*	5588	6460	2984
Party membership in 1979**	1,120,000	666,000	145,000
Party membership in 1992	500,000	280,000	101,000
Party membership in 1997	400,000	405,000	87,000
Party membership in 2005	258,000	198,000	73,000
Party membership in 2019	180,000	485,000	115,000
Party membership in 2023	172,437	399,195	90,000

* Figures cover the total number of county, district, metro, London and unitary authority councillors from the whole UK

** The Liberal Democrats did not exist in 1979, so figures are for the Liberal Party

Source: House of Commons Library

The Liberal Democrats use a slightly different system that involves more of the grassroots party membership in the nomination process. In the leadership elections of 2019 and 2020, candidates had to be an MP and were required to have the support of 10 per cent of Liberal Democrat MPs (which essentially meant one other MP in the two most recent contests) and the support of at least 200 members spread across at least 20 different local parties, to ensure widespread support across the party for any candidate. Once nominations close, the candidates campaign and are elected by all members of the party on a one member, one vote basis.

The Liberal Democrats use the alternative vote system, which should ensure a majority. However, in 2019 and 2020, the contests were between just two candidates anyway (Jo Swinson and Ed Davey in 2019, and Ed Davey and Layla Moran in 2020, after Jo Swinson lost her seat in the 2019 general election). In both contests the choice was between the two sides of the party, as Davey represented the more centrist, 'Orange Book' group of Liberal Democrats (see Table 2.10), while Swinson and Moran represented the more socially liberal and progressive wing of the party.

Ed Davey, leader of the Liberal Democrats

Contesting elections

At election time parties play a critical role. Apart from supplying approved candidates, the party organisations form part of the process of publicising election issues, persuading people to vote and informing them about the candidates. Without the huge efforts of thousands of party activists at election time, turnout at the polls would be lower. Representatives of the parties are also present when the counting of votes takes place, so they play a part in ensuring that the contests in elections are fair and honest.

Synoptic link

In the UK, to become the head of government, the prime minister, you also need to be party leader. Therefore, the support of the party is crucial in maintaining the power of the prime minister. This idea is explored in more detail in Chapter 7.

Topic link

The way in which parties contest and promote elections is explored in Chapter 4.

Political education

It is not only at election time that parties have an educative function. They are also continuously involved in the process of informing people about the political issues of the day, explaining the main areas of disagreement and outlining their own solutions to the problems they have identified. Part of this process involves educating the public about how the political system itself operates. This can most clearly be seen in the way the Green Party raised awareness about environmental issues, while UKIP made the role and position of the EU a source for debate. Labour also raised awareness of the

issues of the cost of living crisis and zero-hours contracts, which have introduced these ideas to members of the public who are not directly affected by them.

This function is becoming less important. To some extent the media and think tanks have taken over in supplying information to the public, but the growth of the internet and social media has also marginalised the parties. Pressure groups, too, play an increasing role in informing the public. Even so, parties do present the electorate with clear choices in a coherent way.

Reinforcing consent

Finally, parties also have a 'hidden' function, but a vital one, nonetheless. This can be described as 'the mobilisation and reinforcement of consent'. All the main parties support the political system of the UK, which is parliamentary democracy. By operating and supporting this system, parties are part of the process that ensures the general population consents to the system. If parties were to challenge the nature of the political system in any fundamental way, this would create political conflict within society at large. Parties that challenge the basis of the political system are generally seen as extremists and only marginal elements in the system.

The funding of UK political parties

How parties are funded

The position on party funding is a complex one. This is because UK parties have multiple sources of finance. The main ways in which parties are funded are as follows:

- Collecting membership subscriptions from members
- Holding fundraising events such as fetes, festivals, conferences and dinners
- Receiving donations from supporters
- Raising loans from wealthy individuals or banks
- The self-financing of candidates for office
- Up to £2 million per party available in grants from the Electoral Commission (see below for details)
- Money granted to opposition parties in the Commons and Lords

It is immediately apparent that the larger parties have better access to funds than their smaller counterparts. While the Conservative Party attracts large donations from wealthy individuals and businesses (other parties do too, but on a much smaller scale), Labour receives contributions from trade unions. These amounted to nearly 60 per cent of the party's total income in 2014–15. This figure, though, has reduced as the rules for union donations changed, essentially making it easier for individual union members to opt out of contributing to the party. In 2017, Labour saw its share of funds from trade unions drop to just over 11 per cent of its total income. They have started to rise again since 2019 to more than a third (Electoral Commission).

Smaller parties, by contrast, usually have no such regular sources of income. Add to this the fact that they have small memberships and we can see their disadvantage. It is understandable that donors are less likely to give money to parties whose prospects of ever being in power are remote. Those donors who do give to small parties are essentially acting out of idealism rather than any prospects of gaining influence.

The funding of parties was regulated by the **Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000**. Among other regulations, this made the following stipulations:

Study tip

When answering questions on parties, do not confuse *features* with *functions*. Features are the main characteristics of parties, while functions concern their roles and objectives.

- People not on the UK electoral roll could no longer make donations (so reducing foreign influence).
- Limits were placed on how much could be spent on parliamentary elections.
- Donations over £500 had to be declared.
- Donations over £7500 were to be placed on an electoral register.

This regulation stressed transparency rather than any serious limits on the amounts being donated. State funding was rejected as a solution at that time, and election spending controls were extremely generous.

These regulations were further developed in the wake of the MPs' expenses scandal with the **Political Parties and Elections Act 2009**, which gave the Electoral Commission the power to investigate and impose fines, restricted donations from non-UK residents and imposed tighter regulations in the run-up to elections.

Why party funding is controversial

Before looking at the issues surrounding party funding, we should consider how much parties actually receive. Table 2.2 shows the income of significant UK parties.

Table 2.2 Party funding in the first quarter of 2023 for significant UK parties

Party	Total reported (£)	Donations accepted (excl. public funds) (£)	Public funds accepted (£)	Total accepted (£)
Conservative and Unionist Party	12,277,478	12,143,082	134,396	12,277,478
Green Party	215,704	168,926	46,778	215,704
Labour Party	5,893,841	4,407,459	1,435,826	5,843,285
Liberal Democrats	1,669,749	1,335,433	302,044	1,637,477
Plaid Cymru — The Party of Wales	30,467	0	30,467	30,467
Scottish National Party (SNP)	291,339	4000	287,339	291,339
Total	20,378,578	18,058,900	2,236,850	20,295,750

Source: Electoral Commission

The figures in Table 2.2 illustrate clearly that funding favours the two biggest parties, putting small parties at a great disadvantage when it comes to fighting elections, so creating political inequality. Beyond this, the question of party funding has a number of issues that are even more serious. The controversies include the following:

- Funding by large donors represents a hidden and unaccountable form of political influence. Parties are not allowed to change specific policies or propose legislation as a direct result of donations, but donors must expect some kind of political return for their investment. This might be true of trade unions and the Labour Party, and of business interests and the Conservatives.
- Aspects of funding may well verge on being corrupt — morally, if not legally, at least. Some donors may expect to receive an honour from party leaders, such as a peerage or knighthood, in return for their generosity. This is sometimes known as 'cash for honours'. It cannot be proved that it exists, although between 2006 and 2007 the issue was investigated by police. While it was not taken further by the Crown Prosecution Service, suspicions remain.
- The steady decline of party memberships has meant that parties are even more reliant upon donors, which further opens up the possibility of corruption and the purchasing of political influence.

The Electoral Commission, which monitors the income of political parties in the UK, has reported examples of large donations to parties. Some interesting examples are these:

- In the first quarter of 2023, the Conservatives received a single donation of £5 million from billionaire Mohamed Mansour. The total donations reached more than £12 million.
- In the same time period, Labour raised £5.8 million for all donors, with its single biggest donation coming from the Unite Union, for £725,250.
- In the final quarter of 2022, Labour outraised the Conservatives, attracting just over £5 million in donations, £2 million of which was a single donation from billionaire Lord Sainsbury.
- Also in 2022, Peak Scientific (a gas producing company) donated £200,000 each to Scottish Labour and Scottish Conservatives with the express aim of helping them to defeat the SNP.
- In 2021, the Conservatives received 39 of the top 50 donations, but the single largest donation was £1.5 million, donated by Jeremy Hosking to Lawrence Fox's new Reclaim Party.
- Between the 2017 and 2019 general elections, total party donations were over £201 million, but between the 2019 election and the end of 2021, total party donations were just over £31 million.

So, such individual donations are not only seen as undemocratic forms of influence, but often carry some other kind of controversy. Similarly, trade union donations to Labour have been criticised on the grounds that members of unions are not given a clear enough choice as to whether their subscriptions should be spent in that way, though this may be a less valid criticism than before the rule change in 2017. It is also said that Labour is unduly influenced by union leaders because so much of its income comes from them.

Former prime minister Gordon Brown pictured with Lord Sainsbury (right), who donated a total of £16 million to the Labour Party between 1996 and 2007

Alternative funding structures and restrictions

There is a strong case for saying the way in which parties are funded in the UK is undemocratic and in need of reform, a conclusion reached by the Phillips Report of 2007 entitled 'Strengthening Democracy: Fair and Sustainable Funding of Political Parties'. The report suggested that state party funding based on vote share or membership size would make party politics in the UK fairer and more democratic.

The problem, however, is that there is no agreement about what to do. There are four basic solutions:

1 Impose restrictions on the size of individual donations to parties. To be effective, the cap would have to be relatively low.
2 Impose tight restrictions on how much parties are allowed to spend. This would make large-scale fundraising futile.
3 Restrict donations to individuals, i.e. outlaw donations from businesses, pressure groups and trade unions.
4 Replace all funding with state grants for parties, paid for out of general taxation.

Case study

Being held to account

In 2016, Labour was fined £20,000 by the Electoral Commission for breaching finance rules. The investigation was launched after £7614 was found to be missing from the party's election return for the costs of Ed Miliband's stone with his policies carved into it, dubbed the 'tombstone' by his opponents. The investigation went on to identify 24 other undeclared election expenses, totalling £109,777.

At the time, Bob Posner, the Commission's director of party and election finance, said: 'The Labour party is a well-established, experienced party. Rules on reporting campaign spending have been in place for over 15 years and it is vital that the larger parties comply with these rules and report their finances accurately if voters are to have confidence in the system.' In a statement, the Commission said it was pushing the government for an increase in the maximum £20,000 penalty available to it for a single offence 'to an amount more in proportion with the spending and donations handled by large campaigners'.

In 2017, following some rule changes, the Conservative Party was fined £70,000 for breaches in its expenses reporting for the 2015 general election. The Commission found that the Conservatives had failed to correctly report £104,765 of campaign expenses and incorrectly reported a further £118,124. Commission chairman Sir John Holmes said the Tories' failure to follow the rules 'undermined voters' confidence in our democratic processes' and said there was a risk that political parties were seeing such fines as 'a cost of doing business'.

The Conservative Party was also fined again in December 2021. The fine of £17,800 was for failing to fully report a donation from Huntswood Associates Limited, which included £52,801.72 towards the costs of refurbishing 11 Downing Street.

Activity

Do some research into the 2019 general election. Were any accusations made or fines imposed over party funding or spending?

Study tip

When you are asked about party funding, make sure your examples are referring to donations made to the party itself and not to individual politicians. Many recent scandals have been about gifts to individuals for their personal campaigns, not to a party for the organisation's activities.

As we have seen, there already is some state funding of parties in the UK. All main parties receive funds from the Electoral Commission. These are called policy development grants (PDGs) and can be used to hire advisers on policy. Over £2 million is available for this purpose. Table 2.3 gives the figures for allocation of PDGs in 2021.

Table 2.3 Policy development grants, 2021

Party	Value of grants (£)
Conservative Party	490,000
Democratic Unionist Party	155,000
Labour Party	451,000
Liberal Democrats	451,000
Plaid Cymru	151,000
Scottish National Party	182,000
Social Democratic and Labour Party	84,000
Total	**1,964,000**

Source: Electoral Commission

In addition there is **Short money**, which is distributed to all opposition parties to fund their parliamentary work in the House of Commons, and **Cranborne money**, which does the same for opposition peers in the House of Lords. The aim of this money is to help fund opposition parties in their role of scrutiny, as the government of the day has the support of the civil service to help prepare for parliamentary statements.

Short money heavily favours large parties because it depends upon how many seats parties have won at previous elections as well as how many votes they received. Thus, in 2022–23, Labour received more than £6.5 million, while the SNP only received £1.1 million (see Table 2.4 for a fuller breakdown). So, state funding of parties already exists. The real question, though, is whether *full* state funding should *replace* private donations altogether.

Table 2.4 Short money allocations, 2022–23

Party	Total (£)
Democratic Unionist Party	200,000
Green Party	180,000
Labour Party*	6,800,000
Liberal Democrats	930,000
Plaid Cymru	100,000
Scottish National Party	1,100,000
Social Democratic and Labour Party	110,000
Sinn Féin	170,000

* Labour's total includes £904,000 funding for the office of the leader of the opposition

Source: House of Commons, HR and Finance

Much of the debate about party funding relates to state financing. This remains the only solution that could create more equality in the system. As long as funding is determined by 'market forces', it is likely that the large parties will be placed at a significant advantage. However, although several political parties favour state funding, there is little public appetite for it. Taxpayers are naturally reluctant to see their taxes being used to finance parties at a time when attitudes to parties are at a low ebb.

Therefore, while there are merits to the idea of introducing full state party funding, it seems unlikely that this will arrive in the UK in the near future. The other popular policy idea is to eliminate the abuses in the system. This involves full transparency, limits on how much business and union donors can give, and a breaking of any link between donations and the granting of honours. The limitation of individual donations is a strong possibility. Greater transparency has largely been achieved, but the problem of 'cash for honours' or the suspicion that large organisations can gain a political advantage through donations persists. Action may well centre on a 'deal' between Labour and the Conservatives. Labour might sacrifice some of its trade union funding in return for caps on business donations. However, the Liberal Democrats, with their unwavering support for state funding, are likely to have to remain on the sidelines for the time being.

Debate

Should UK parties receive full state funding?

Arguments for

- It would end the opportunities for the corrupt use of donations.
- It would end the possibilities of 'hidden' forms of influence through funding.
- It would reduce the huge financial advantage that large parties enjoy and give smaller parties the opportunity to make progress.
- It would improve democracy by ensuring wider participation from groups that have no ready source of funds.

Arguments against

- Taxpayers might object to funding what can be considered 'private' organisations or parties with views they find offensive.
- It would be difficult to know how to distribute funding. Should it be on the basis of past performance (in which case large parties would retain their advantage) or on the basis of future aspirations (which is vague)?
- Parties might lose some of their independence and would see themselves as organs of the state.
- State funding might lead to excessive state regulation of parties.

Having considered the merits of the arguments, you need to decide which side is more convincing. This may be because the single most convincing argument is on one side, or because of the overall weight of the arguments on one side.

Established political parties

Right-wing and left-wing politics

The terms '**left wing**' and '**right wing**' should be treated with some caution. Although they are commonly used in everyday political discussion to describe an individual's or a group's political stance, they are not very precise expressions.

Key terms

Left wing A widely used term for those who desire change, reform and alteration to the way in which society operates. This can involve radical criticisms of capitalism made by modern liberal and socialist parties.

Right wing Reflects support for the status quo, little or no change, stressing the need for order, stability and hierarchy. It can involve support for capitalism by modern conservative parties.

It is usually best for the sake of clarity to avoid using these terms, because they are so vague. It should also be noted that left and right descriptions of politics (see Figure 2.2) vary considerably from one country to another.

| Communism | Socialism | Liberalism | Conservatism | Fascism |

Figure 2.2 The political spectrum, from left wing to right wing

Nevertheless, we can construct a scheme that gives a reasonable picture of the left–right divide in the context of UK politics. Many issues do not fall easily into a left–right spectrum, such as environmental issues, but we can usefully consider economic issues and social issues to illustrate the distinctions. These are shown in Table 2.5. The spectrum could refer to any dividing issue in politics, but typically we tend to use it to refer to the role of the state, with the left preferring a larger role for the state and the right preferring a smaller role.

Table 2.5 The left–right divide in UK politics

	Left	Centre-left	Centre	Centre-right	Right
Economics and trade	State economic planning and nationalisation of all major industries State regulation of large industries that exploit consumers or workers Relaxed approach to government borrowing; much state investment in infrastructure	Elements from both centre and left	Largely free-market economy with some state regulation Pragmatic approach to government borrowing to stimulate economic growth	Elements from both centre and right	Strong support for totally free markets No state intervention in the economy
Income and employment	Redistribution of income to create more economic equality Strong trade unions and protected rights for workers Protectionism for domestic industries Anti-EU	Elements from both centre and left	Pro-free trade Mild redistribution of income, with some poverty relief Pro-EU and in favour of the so-called 'soft Brexit' option	Elements from both centre and right	Very low levels of taxation Avoidance of excessive government borrowing to stimulate growth Protectionism for domestic industries Free labour markets, with weak protection for workers Anti-EU and in favour of the so-called 'hard Brexit' option

	Left	Centre-left	Centre	Centre-right	Right
Social issues	Strong support for the welfare state Stress on equal rights and protection for minority groups Positive attitude to same-sex marriage and surrogate motherhood Liberal attitude to crime and its remedies	Elements from both centre and left	Welfare state to concentrate on the most needy Support for multiculturalism Mixed attitudes to crime — typically a liberal attitude to minor crime but a hard line on serious crime The state should promote individualism	Elements from both centre and right	A more limited welfare state, with caps on the total amount of benefits available to families and tougher criteria for the claiming of benefits Anti-immigration — support for strict controls Opposed to multiculturalism Traditional attitude to moral issues and relationships Stress on patriotism and national interest

The origins and development of the Conservative Party

Conservatism in the UK has its origins in the conflict that raged during the seventeenth century over the monarchy. Those who supported royal authority (as opposed to Parliament) were known as royalists, but eventually came to be known as 'Tories'. During the seventeenth century, it became clear that the supporters of Parliament and democracy in general (mostly known as 'Whigs') were gaining the upper hand over royalists. However, a new conflict began to emerge as the Industrial Revolution gathered pace during the nineteenth century.

With industrialisation and the growth of international markets, the capitalist middle classes began to grow in size and influence. Their rise challenged the traditional authority of the aristocracy and the landed gentry, the owners of the great estates whose income was based on rents and the products of agriculture. The middle classes were represented largely by the Whigs and the landed gentry by the Tories, who were beginning to be described as 'conservatives'. They resisted the new political structures that were growing up and wished to 'conserve' the dominant position of the upper classes they represented.

As the nineteenth century progressed, conservatism began to develop into something closer to the movement we recognise today. Sir Robert Peel (prime minister 1834–35 and 1841–46) is generally acknowledged as the first Conservative Party prime minister. He and Benjamin Disraeli (prime minister 1868 and 1874–80) formed the party, basing it on traditional conservative ideas which then evolved over the next century towards the modern Conservative Party. The party's main objectives were to prevent the country falling too far into inequality, to preserve the unity of the kingdom and to preserve order in society. It was a pragmatic party, which adopted any policies it believed would benefit the whole nation.

The political background to the Conservative Party is best understood by considering two traditions. The first is often known as 'traditional conservatism', dating from the origins of the party in the nineteenth century, which would develop into '**one–nation** conservatism'. The other tradition emerged in the 1980s. It is usually given one of two names — '**New Right** conservatism' or 'Thatcherism', after its main protagonist, Margaret Thatcher (prime minister 1979–90).

Traditional conservatism leading to one-nationism

Originating in the late part of the eighteenth century, traditional conservatism developed as a reaction against the newly emerging liberal ideas that were the inspiration behind the revolutions in North America (1776) and France (1789). Conservative thinkers such as Edmund Burke (1729–97) became alarmed at the rise of ideas such as freedom of the individual, tolerance of different political and religious beliefs, representative government and a laissez-faire attitude towards economic activity (that is, the state avoiding significant interference in the way in which wealth is distributed in society). Conservatives believed that such a free society, with so little control by government, would lead to major social disorder.

Thereafter, conservatives continued to consistently oppose the rise of any new ideology, so, later in the nineteenth century, the rise of socialism was opposed. This anti–socialist position remained in place until the 1980s, when it reached its height under Margaret Thatcher.

However, conservatism is not merely a reaction to any dominant ideology; it acknowledges that society must evolve and conserve the best elements of the past. In this sense the Conservative Party looks to enact limited reforms to release the pressure building for a major upheaval or radical movement, as occurred during the French Revolution. The key principles of the one–nation conservatives are outlined in Figure 2.3.
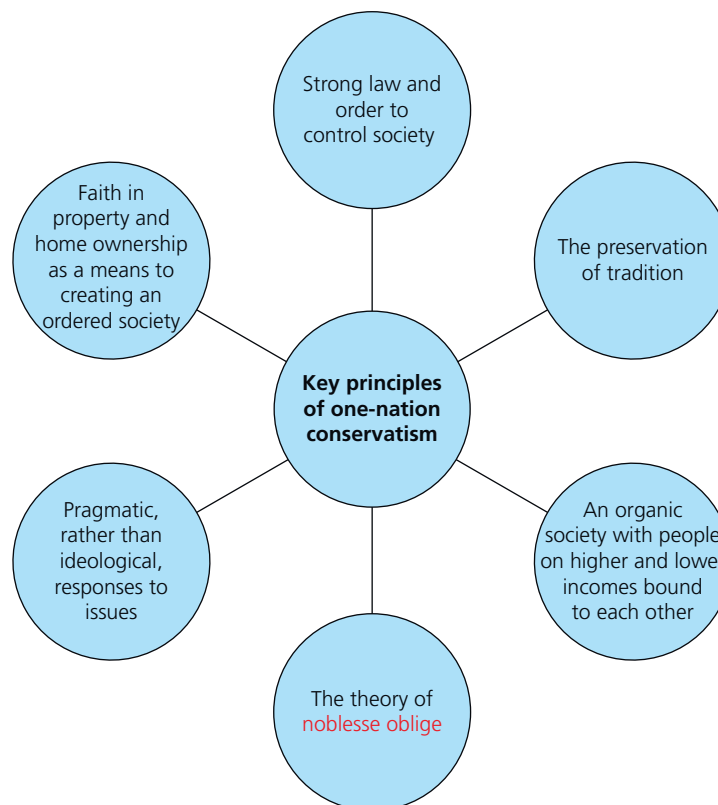
Figure 2.3 The key principles of one-nation conservatives

Useful terms

Noblesse oblige Those of a higher social standing (i.e. the nobility) have a moral duty or 'obligation' to help those of a lower social standing who, through no fault of their own, have fallen on hard times or found themselves in a difficult situation.

New Right conservatism (Thatcherism)

The term 'New Right' was used to describe a set of political values and ideas, largely emerging in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, which were adopted by many conservatives throughout developed economies. The New Right is actually made up of two competing

strands, neo-conservatism, which believes in a strong and traditional state, and neo-liberalism, which believes in free market economics. These two strands were, in many ways, a reaction both against the socialist ideas gaining ground in countries across Europe, Asia and South America, and against traditional conservative values that were seen as too weak to deal with contemporary economic and social policies. Although the neo-conservative idea of a strong state and the neo-liberal support for free markets may seem contradictory, Margaret Thatcher created an amalgamation of the two, leading to what has been termed 'Thatcherism', which has been described as 'free markets: strong state' and is different from other instances of the New Right around the world.

As the New Right is made up of two aspects, which most, but not all, conservatives of the New Right subscribe to, it is important to understand the key principles behind each strand.

Principles of neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism is associated with the economic and social philosophers Friedrich Hayek (Austrian, 1899–1992) and Milton Friedman (American, 1912–2006). The main beliefs of neo-liberalism are outlined in Figure 2.4.
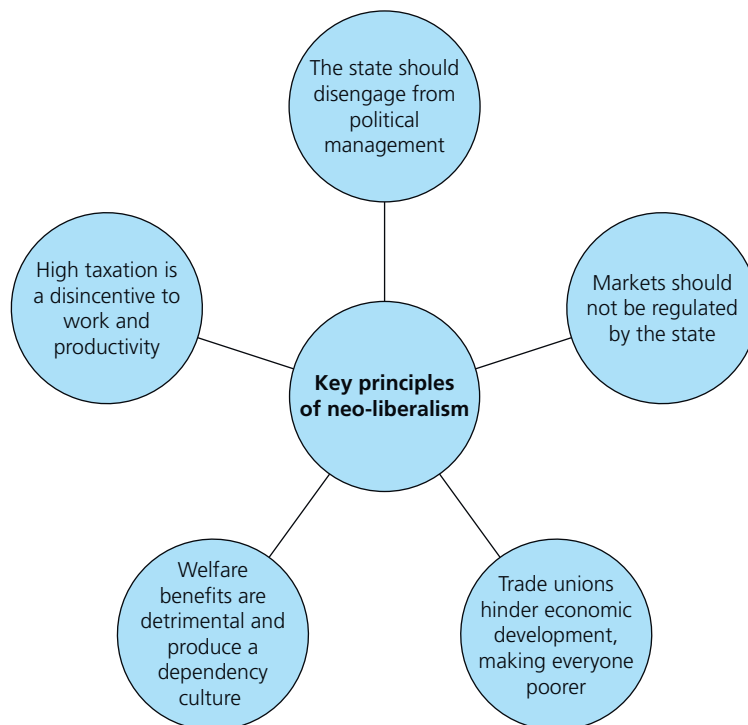
Figure 2.4 The key principles of neo-liberalism

In practical terms, neo-liberal politicians within the modern Conservative Party propose reducing direct taxes, privatising industries run by the state (such as transport and energy), reducing welfare benefits so that they are only a 'safety net', and curbing the powers of trade unions. In addition, they propose allowing the economy to find its own natural level, even during recessions, rather than the state actively trying to control economic activity.

Principles of neo-conservatism

Ironically, while neo-liberalism proposes the *withdrawal* of the state from economic activity, neo-conservatism proposes a strong state, albeit a small one, yet both are

considered part of the same New Right movement. There is a tension between them in that neo-liberalism proposes a very free society and this opens up the possibility of disorder. Neo-conservatives, therefore, seek to maintain authority and discipline in society. The main beliefs of neo-conservatism are outlined in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5 The key principles of neo-conservatism

Activity

Research the following people and outline what part they played in the development of the New Right:
- Sir Keith Joseph
- Enoch Powell
- Sir Geoffrey Howe

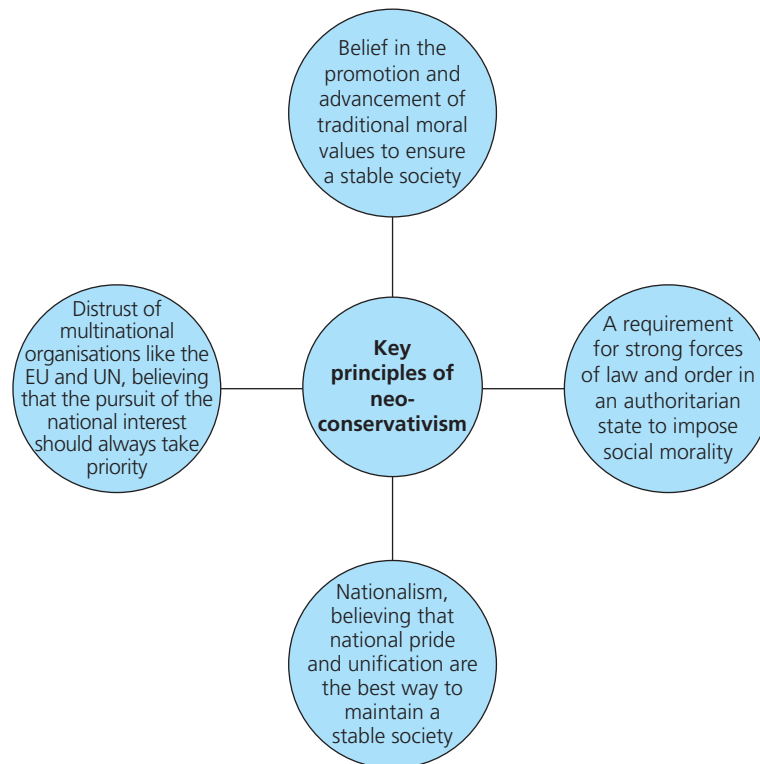We can see that neo-conservatism has much in common with traditional conservatism in that it promotes traditional 'national' values and sees order as a key value to be maintained by the state. However, while most conservatives accept that different lifestyles should be tolerated, neo-conservatives seek to impose a single national culture on society.

Conservative ideas and policies today

The economy

When the Conservative Party returned to power in 2010, it was faced with an economic crisis, specifically a huge, growing budget deficit arising from the bailout of banks in 2008 and the fact that successive governments had been spending considerably more than their taxation receipts. The national debt was huge, standing at £1.13 trillion in March 2010. This led to the party adopting a rigorous approach to economic management. Above all, its economic policy was dominated by the aim of eliminating budget deficits (i.e. having a balanced budget) and reducing the national debt.

Under Theresa May, after 2016 the goal of a balanced budget was abandoned. It was seen as unattainable and as inhibiting economic growth. However, party policy remains pragmatic and cautious about the economy — public expenditure must be kept under careful control, but not at the expense of social unrest or failing to undertake necessary government action. This was why, in 2020, the Conservative Party authorised unprecedented levels of national borrowing to fund the Covid-19 lockdowns. It was a pragmatic response to maintain stability and ensure businesses and employment could survive.

The party retains a neo-liberal position in its attitude to markets. This was one of the reasons for many neo-liberal figures in the Conservative Party supporting leaving the EU, to end EU regulation of the UK economy, and the thinking behind the 'mini-budget' of Liz Truss. The party believes government policy should always promote free markets and free trade, though as economic policies under Rishi Sunak have shown, not at the expense of a stable economy. To this end, it is also determined to curb the power of trade unions to keep labour markets free.

The attitude of the Conservative Party to taxation is partly neo-liberal and partly one nation. On the one hand, personal and company taxation should never be excessively high as this inhibits enterprise and wealth creation (a neo-liberal view). The party seeks to reduce corporate taxation as much as is feasible. On the other hand, the party recognises that if taxation on lower incomes is too high, it risks creating higher levels of poverty and dividing the nation (a one-nation view). Wage rises as a result of inflation mean that more people than ever before are now in the 40% tax bracket, so taxation, in terms of money generated from income, has actually reached the highest post-war levels under the Conservative Party and the burden of tax has shifted towards middle-income groups.

Law and order
The party retains the view that prison and stern punishments are the best deterrent against crime, and sentencing policy should be in the hands of an elected government and not unelected judges. The party is opposed to 'liberal' ideas about crime and punishment and opposes such proposals as the legalisation of drugs.

Conservatives stress the need for security and see it as the first duty of government to protect its citizens. In the fight against terrorism, therefore, they accept that civil liberties (privacy, freedom of movement and expression) may have to be sacrificed. For this reason, in both the 2017 and 2019 Conservative Party manifestos, the party pledged to alter the Human Rights Act to ensure it could deal with national threats such as terrorism, prioritising social stability and safety above individual rights. Between March 2020 and March 2021 the Conservative government also limited various freedoms to ensure the success of lockdown measures during the Covid-19 pandemic, and then in 2022 it introduced the 'Rwanda Plan' to provide a strong legal deterrent to migrants making illegal channel crossings.

Welfare
Modern Conservative policy concentrates on the need to ensure that welfare benefits are not a disincentive to work. The government has introduced: a stricter system of means testing to prevent unemployment being seen as a preferable option; a living wage (or minimum wage) as a greater reward for work at lower levels of pay; and an overall cap on total welfare benefits for families.

Party policy is committed to maintaining the welfare state, and safeguarding the NHS and the education system. However, the party believes that these two services should be subject to competition and market forces, and that private-sector enterprises should become involved in the provision of services. This, it believes, can increase efficiency so that services can improve without increasing expenditure on them.

Foreign affairs
Conservatives support the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the UK's close alliance with the USA. However, they also believe that the UK's best national interests lie in retaining an independent foreign policy. They believe that the country should intervene in foreign conflicts if it is in the UK's interests or if

there is a moral reason, as shown with the support given to Ukraine since 2022. The party is committed to retaining the UK's independent nuclear deterrent in the form of Trident submarine-based weapons. After considerable internal conflict, the party decided to reduce the UK's contributions to international aid.

External influences

The Conservative Party has had a long history of being the party of business. Groups that represent business interests often exert a powerful influence over Conservative Party policy-making and direction. Most notable are the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), which works to promote British business interests, and the British Banking Association (BBA), which notably persuaded the former Conservative prime minister David Cameron not to impose fines and increased controls on banks following the financial crash of 2008. Yet both the CBI and BBA warned against Brexit, which shows the limits of external influences.

The Conservative Party also has a history of being influenced by major press barons, dating back to the pre-war figures of Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere.

In the 1980s, Rupert Murdoch (then owner of News International, which owned the *Sun* and the *Times*) was a key supporter of Margaret Thatcher and helped to shape the anti-union stance of the Conservative Party as he fought the printing unions. Meanwhile, in 2001, the then owner of the *Daily Telegraph*, Conrad Black, was made a Conservative life peer having been nominated by then leader William Hague, while Viscount Rothermere IV, owner of the *Daily Mail*, has continually been an active supporter of the Conservative Party. It is therefore not surprising that so much of the printed media in the UK supports the Conservative Party and the press barons expect the party to support many, if not all, of their positions.

Table 2.6 summarises the current Conservative Party policies.

Table 2.6 Current Conservative policies

Policy area	Right tendency	Centre-right tendency
Economic management	Support for free trade and deregulation of business; lowering of taxation on all with trade agreements negotiated on a bilateral basis	The economy should be managed to ensure society does not become divided, nor the markets volatile, with support for furlough and lower rates of taxation for the poorest
Social justice	Support for a traditional, Christian-centred society based on individual value, and clear hierarchies and social structures	Ensuring the provision of a safety net during the Covid-19 crisis, a desire to 'level up' society, the idea of social mobility Support for more progressive ideas, such as same-sex marriage
Industry	Extensive privatisation of all areas Decrease union protections Limited government intervention	Government investment in infrastructure, like HS2 and new airports to facilitate private industry Financial support for struggling businesses to prevent economic hardship Acceptance of some necessary state services that can work with the private sector
Welfare	Seeks to reduce, if not end, welfare provisions, including proposals to privatise parts of the NHS More stringent tests of welfare recipients	Support for the NHS as part of the national identity The need for welfare provision, but with a purpose to encourage people into work for social stability
Law and order	Support for strong law and order to ensure that society operates in a traditional, well-ordered way	Support for law and order, but also for individual freedoms and liberties Law and order should not be imposed in a draconian way

Policy area	Right tendency	Centre-right tendency
Foreign policy	Focus on British nationalism, and opposed to membership of supranational organisations like the EU Support for a strong and independent military capacity.	Favours international cooperation to facilitate free trade and to intervene in foreign disputes that may not directly impact UK interests, such as international aid and peacekeeping services as part of supranational organisations
Environment	Opposition to environmental policies that may hinder business At the extreme end, may be climate change deniers	Support for environmental initiatives and a focus on reducing the UK's carbon footprint
Constitutional reform	Opposition to progressive reforms Support for traditional systems and laws, including the monarchy, the House of Lords and the abolition of the Human Rights Act	Seeks to 'fix' problems left over from previous reforms, rather than removing those reforms

Conservative Party factions

Although we tend to think of political parties as being unified and cohesive, they are often split into different **party factions**. This division could be over a principle or political idea, such as the division between one–nation Conservatives and New Right Conservatives, or it may be over an issue, such as between Conservative pro–Europeans and Eurosceptics, particularly the European Research Group which held significant power under Theresa May and contributed to her parliamentary defeats and eventual resignation in 2019.

Since 2019, we can also identify emerging factions, with a group of libertarian MPs who voted against lockdown measures and other measures that restricted individual choice and freedom, seeing it as part of an over–powerful state. Meanwhile, MPs from the 'red wall' constituencies have focused on pushing for government action in a 'levelling up' agenda. This highlights how factional divisions evolve as issues and circumstances change and explains why parties are continually evolving. Since 2022, divisions have seemingly centred on the personalities of leaders, with distinct pro– and anti–Johnson figures remaining in the party.

The key Conservative Party factions are outlined in Table 2.7.

> **Useful term**
>
> **Party faction** A distinct group within a political party, whose views vary significantly from the main party policies. Often factions are to the left or right of the party's position. Some factions have a formal membership and organisation, while others are loose and represent little more than a policy tendency.

Table 2.7 Conservative Party factions

Faction	Core ideas	Key members
Cornerstone	Traditional values: Christian, nationalist and focused on family values Reactionary, opposed to social reforms such as same-sex marriage and legal abortion	Edward Leigh Jacob Rees-Mogg
Conservative Way Forward	Thatcherite, neo-liberal Retention of free markets through low taxation and deregulation Opposed to trade union power and welfare provision	Gerald Howarth Liam Fox
Tory Reform Group	One-nation conservatives, seeking national unity and believing that too much economic inequality is divisive	Ken Clarke (now in the Lords)
European Research Group (ERG)	Euroscepticism and the removal of the UK from EU membership	Past members included Suella Braverman, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Michael Gove

The origins and development of the Labour Party

Until the twentieth century the working classes (many of whom did not gain the right to vote until 1884) were largely represented by a collection of MPs and peers from both the Liberal and Conservative parties. When trade unions became legalised towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, the working class finally had organisations to represent their interests. It was therefore logical that the unions should begin to put up candidates for election to the UK Parliament. But the unions were not a political party and did not seek power. A new party was needed. In fact, two parties of the left emerged.

Creation of the Labour Party

The main Labour Party was created in 1900 and was very much an offshoot of the trade union movement. It was funded by the unions and many of its members were union leaders and members. Before that, in 1893, a socialist party had already been founded, known as the Independent Labour Party (ILP). In 1906, the ILP formed an agreement with the Labour Party. The two parties agreed not to put up parliamentary candidates against each other in the same constituencies. However, this agreement was short-lived and they began to go their separate ways.

The ILP was a genuinely socialist party, committed to the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a workers' state, albeit by peaceful, democratic means. The Labour Party, by contrast, was a more moderate socialist party that simply wished to improve the conditions of the working class and to control the excesses of capitalism — the state would seek to reconcile the conflicting interests of the working class with those of their employers. Labour was a more moderate form of socialist party, generally known for democratic socialism — that is, socialism that worked within a democratic framework. By 1970, the ILP had ceased to exist as a separate party and since then it has acted more as a faction within the Labour Party.

Many of the characteristics of the early Labour Party can still be seen today. The party continues to be financed largely by trade unions, and union leaders play a major role in the party organisation. Many of the ILP faction were responsible for the election of Jeremy Corbyn, a prominent left-winger, as party leader in 2015. Some of them still promote the ideas that formed the basis of the ideology of the old ILP.

Labour since the Second World War

The 1945 general election was something of a turning point for the Labour Party as it achieved full majority control of the Commons for the first time. From then on Labour became the UK's second major party and regularly competed with the Conservative Party for power. However, in the 1980s the party suffered two huge

defeats at the hands of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party. This ultimately resulted in a party split. Some left to form a new party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP); some, led by Michael Foot and Tony Benn, wished to return to Old Labour values and move further to the left; others, led by Neil Kinnock and John Smith, saw the future of the party lying in more moderate policies, towards the centre of politics. Under the leadership of Kinnock and then Smith, the party began to be reformed. Then, after John Smith's sudden death in 1992, Tony Blair became leader, closely supported by Gordon Brown, Robin Cook and Peter Mandelson. Under Blair, the party was rebranded as 'New Labour' and its policies were characterised as the 'Third Way'. Blair led the party to three election victories, in 1997, 2001 and 2005.

Labour and the unions

As we saw above, the Labour Party was formed out of the trade union movement. Until the 1960s, the Labour Party and the trade union movement were seen as indistinguishable, or as two sides of the same coin, the party acting as a mouthpiece or political arm for the unions. During this time, many Labour MPs had come to politics through union support and union politics. The trade unions, by requiring all members to enrol and pay a membership subscription to the Labour Party, exercised considerable financial influence and control over the party. During the Attlee years of 1945–51, the Labour government introduced many reforms that the unions demanded and would help to establish the power of the unions in UK industry for years to come, including legislation around strikes and pay.

However, during the 1960s, the differences between the trade unions and Labour politicians began to grow. As the process of deindustrialisation occurred and the UK economy began moving away from heavy industry, full employment became much harder for politicians to achieve. Inflation, caused in part by pay increases and protections for UK industry, also made it difficult for the Labour Party to support all the demands of the unions. Increasingly, the union leaders became political figures and would challenge the Labour Party leadership. The question, asked by the Conservatives throughout the 1970s, was who governs: the unions or the elected politicians?

Until the 1980s, Labour Party leaders were elected from among the MPs and only MPs could vote, but the Labour Party Constitution and any Labour Party policy had to be approved by the party itself. The union leaders had a block vote, meaning the leader would cast the votes for all their members, so the leaders of the largest trade unions dominated discussions and decisions on party policy. This made it increasingly difficult for more moderate, social democrat members to exert influence. It was one reason for the Labour Party moving to the left during the 1980s and maintaining its commitment to nationalisation (covered in Clause IV of the Labour Constitution) and full employment, at a time when the economy was changing and these ideas were becoming less popular. In 1981, Labour also introduced an electoral college system for leadership elections, which would allocate a third of the votes to the unions, with their leaders exercising a block vote, a third to MPs and a third to party members. This meant some party members received multiple votes (as MPs, members of a union and/or members). As union members were also party members, this increased the control and power of the unions in determining the party leadership and direction of the party and was one reason for the social democrats leaving the Labour Party.

In the 1980s, as the power and reputation of the traditional unions declined, and the Conservative government introduced tighter controls and regulations on unions, so their membership and funds declined, reducing their overall influence. Following

the humiliating defeat of 1983, the Labour Party began to take on the unions, with leader Neil Kinnock publicly chastising the worst excesses of union behaviour and his successor John Smith removing the block vote. Tony Blair then persuaded the membership to remove Clause IV from the Labour Constitution and sought new forms of funding from business and other non-union sources. Although the unions remained closely associated with the Labour Party, their strength and influence during the New Labour era was substantially reduced.

Since 2010, despite Ed Miliband replacing the electoral college with a straightforward one member, one vote system, the unions have seen an increase in their influence over the post-New Labour party. Although they do not control the votes of their members, an endorsement of a candidate for leadership or for particular policies can have a powerful influence over their membership. Their support helped to secure victories for Ed Miliband and Jeremy Corbyn over more centrist candidates. Keir Starmer has had to work hard to win over union support since his election as leader in 2020. Union funds have also played an increasingly important part in Labour Party finances, while under Corbyn, union leaders, particularly of the powerful UNITE union, worked closely with the Labour leadership and influenced policy decisions and key appointments to the party hierarchy. Although Starmer has sought to reduce union influence on party policy, some unions have threatened to withhold funding, and he continues to have to try to gain their support, showing the unions still play a key role in Labour Party politics.

Core values and ideas of the Labour Party

As we have seen, Labour's story can be divided into two parts. The first, the **Old Labour** period, runs from the early days until the 1990s. The second, the **New Labour** period, runs from the early 1990s until the present, when the party may well be splitting once again.

Old Labour

Critics loosely describe the traditions of the Labour Party as 'socialism'. This is an illusion; Labour was never a socialist party. It did not propose a workers' state and has never attempted to abolish capitalism. As mentioned above, it is better thought of as a democratic socialist party. The best way to understand the Old Labour tradition is to look at its general values and then at its actual policies, focusing on the period from 1945 to 1983.

Old Labour values

- An essential value is *equality*. Labour used to support redistribution of income to reduce the worst inequalities. A better characterisation of equality for Labour is 'social justice'. Labour has also always supported formal equality, i.e. equal treatment under the law.
- Old Labour supporters tend to see society in terms of *class conflict*, arguing that the interests of the two great classes (working and middle class) cannot be reconciled, so governments must favour the interests of the disadvantaged working class.
- Recognising that total equality was not feasible, Labour championed *equality of opportunity*, the idea that all should have equal life chances no matter what their family background.
- *Collectivism* is a general idea shared by socialists of all kinds. It is the concept that many of our goals are best achieved collectively rather than individually. It

includes such practical applications as the welfare state, trade unionism and the cooperative movement.

- Old Labour saw common ownership mainly in terms of public ownership of major, strategic industries, run by the state on behalf of the people, with the idea of nationalisation of key industries.
- *Trade unionism* is also important. Old Labour recognised that workers were weak compared with employers. Support for powerful trade unions was, therefore, vital in restoring the balance of power between employers and workers.
- Old Labour believed that the central state could play a key role in controlling economic activity and in securing social goals. This may be described as *statism*. By placing such responsibilities in the hands of the central state it ensured equality of treatment for all.
- Finally, *welfarism* is important. This is the idea, associated with collectivism, that every member of society should be protected by a welfare system to which all should contribute.

Old Labour policies and actions

Old Labour had two main periods of power during which it could convert some of its values into practical reforms. These were 1945–51 and 1964–79. In those periods, at various times, Labour converted values into political action in the following main ways:

- The welfare state, including the National Health Service, was created in the 1940s.
- Trade unions were granted wide powers to take industrial action in the interests of their members.
- Major industries were brought into public ownership (nationalisation) and state control in the interests of the community and the workers in those industries. Among the industries nationalised were coal, steel, shipbuilding, rail and energy.
- Taxes on those with higher incomes were raised in order to pay for welfare and to redistribute income to the poor.
- Comprehensive education was introduced in the 1960s to improve equality of opportunity.
- Discrimination against women and minority ethnic groups was outlawed in the 1960s and 1970s. Equal pay for women was introduced.

New Labour

From 1994 to 2010, Tony Blair and his cohort of leaders, supported by the economic philosopher Anthony Giddens, creator of the 'Third Way', developed a new set of moderate policies, often described as New Labour.

New Labour values

New Labour was opposed to the ideas of Labour's 'hard left' and sought instead to find a middle way (the 'Third Way') between socialism and the free-market, neo-liberal ideas of the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher. Its main values were as follows:

- New Labour thinkers rejected the socialist idea of *class conflict*, arguing that all members of society have an equal right to assistance from the state.
- The party accepted that *capitalism* was the best way of creating wealth, so markets should remain largely free of state control.

- Nevertheless it was recognised that capitalism could operate against the interests of consumers, so it should be regulated, though not controlled. The state should be an *enabling state*, allowing the economy to create wealth and giving it support where needed, but the state should not, on the whole, engage in production itself.
- New Labour de-emphasised collectivism, recognising that people prefer to achieve their goals individually. *Individualism* was seen as a fundamental aspect of human nature.
- *Equality of opportunity* was stressed. Education and welfare would create opportunities for people to better themselves.
- *Communitarianism* is the concept that although people are individuals with individual goals, we are also part of an organic community and have obligations and duties in return for our individual life chances. This is a weaker form of collectivism.
- The party recognised that the UK was deeply undemocratic and that rights were inadequately protected. It therefore was committed to *political and constitutional reform*.

The Labour Party launches its 'New Labour' manifesto for the 1997 general election

New Labour policies and actions

New Labour was known as much for what it did *not* do as for what it *did* do. Despite calls from trade unions to have their powers — largely removed in the 1980s — restored, Labour governments refused. Similarly, pressure to bring privatised industries back under state control was resisted. Blair and his chancellor, Gordon Brown, also resisted the temptation to restore high taxes on the wealthy and on successful businesses to pay for higher welfare, preferring to use public borrowing to facilitate their policies. At first, when the UK experienced an economic boom in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the extra spending could be sustained, but when the economy slowed down after 2007 the debts mounted up.

New Labour's political programme included the following policies:

● huge increases in expenditure on the NHS
● similarly large investment in education, especially early years education
● reductions in corporate taxation to encourage enterprise
● an extensive programme of constitutional reform including the Human Rights Act, devolution, freedom of information and electoral reform in devolved administrations
● through the tax and welfare system, various policies to reduce poverty, especially child and older age poverty
● encouraging employment by introducing 'welfare to work' systems.

Labour ideas and policies today

Labour policy is still evolving following the dramatic split in the party in 2015–16 and the legacy of Jeremy Corbyn. It is therefore advisable to view party policy from the point of view of the two wings of the party, the left and the centre–left. Table 2.8 explains the main tendencies in a number of key policy areas.

Table 2.8 Current Labour policies

Policy area	Centre-left tendency	Left tendency
Economic management	A pragmatic view including targets to reduce public-sector debt	Expansionist: high public expenditure should be used to promote investment, improve public services and create jobs
Social justice	Some adjustments to taxation to promote mild redistribution of income from high- to low-income groups	Radical tax reforms to promote significant redistribution of income from rich to poor
Industry	Industry to remain in private hands and be regulated by the state	Large infrastructure industries to be brought into public ownership (nationalised) Strong regulation of private-sector industries and finance
Welfare	Supports a strong welfare state and well-funded health service and education However, welfare benefits to be capped to ensure work pays and prevent abuse of the system	Strong support for the NHS and state education Abolition of university tuition fees More generous welfare benefits to help redistribute real income
Law and order	A mixture of authoritarian measures and 'social' remedies to crime	Emphasis on social remedies to crime
Foreign policy	Retention of a UK independent nuclear deterrent Strong support for NATO and the alliance with the USA	Largely 'isolationist', favouring non-intervention in world conflicts Abolition of the independent nuclear deterrent
Environment	Strong support for environmental protection and emissions control	The same as the centre-left
Constitutional reform	Some reforms are supported, including an elected second chamber and a proportional electoral system	More radical reforms, possibly including abolition of the second chamber and more independence for local government

Knowledge check

Which policies of the current Labour Party may be considered as 'Old Labour' policies?

Labour Party factions

As with the Conservative Party, the Labour Party is made up of various factions that compete for control of the party. They have been particularly important when it comes to leadership contests, as shown following Jeremy Corbyn's resignation in 2019. Under Jeremy Corbyn, the far left of the Labour Party came to dominate at most levels of the party structure, and its 2019 election manifesto was heavily influenced by this faction of the party. When it was rejected by the public in the 2019 general election, Corbyn chose to stand down as leader of the party.

In the ensuing leadership contest, the choice centred on the far–left candidate Rebecca Long–Bailey and the soft–left candidates Keir Starmer and Lisa Nandy. Starmer won the contest in April 2020 with 56.4 per cent of the vote.

As a soft–left Labour politician, Starmer falls somewhere between the far left and the Blairite factions of the party. Starmer is believed to be someone who can steer Labour more towards the centre ground of politics while attempting to retain the support of the far left. In October 2020, he showed his willingness to tackle the issue of antisemitism in the Labour Party by suspending his immediate predecessor as leader of the party and figurehead of the left–wing, Jeremy Corbyn, for his reaction to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission's report into antisemitism in the party during his leadership. Corbyn claimed in a statement that 'the scale of the problem (of antisemitism in the Labour Party) was…dramatically overstated for political reasons by our opponents inside and outside the party, as well as by much of the media'.

The key Labour Party factions are outlined in Table 2.9.

Table 2.9 Labour Party factions

Faction	Core ideas	Key members
Momentum	Far left wing, seeking wealth redistribution through taxation, public ownership of key industries and the abandonment of the nuclear deterrent	John McDonnell Rebecca Long-Bailey
'Blairites'/Social Democrats	Centrist, key supporters of New Labour and the Third Way, as described above	Yvette Cooper Hilary Benn Stephen Kinnock
Blue Labour	Focused on working-class issues and employment Socially conservative, believing in traditional 'British values', anti-large-scale immigration, pro-free markets, but with protection for UK industry from foreign competition	Maurice Glasman Rowenna Davis Frank Field

The origins and development of the Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats as a party is the product of an amalgamation of two parties in 1988. These were the Social Democratic Party, which had split off from the Labour Party and contained a group of moderate social democrats who felt that Labour had moved too far to the left, and the Liberal Party, which was a century old at that time.

- The Liberal Party had existed since 1877. It emerged as a coalition between Whigs and radicals. Its first leaders were Lord Palmerston and William Gladstone. The party was as important as the Conservatives until the 1920s, when it began to decline. By the end of the Second World War it had been eclipsed by the Labour Party. Until the 1990s it then played a very minor part in UK politics and returned only a handful of MPs to the UK Parliament. Despite its period in the political wilderness, the Liberal Party had become a home of radical political ideas under the leadership of Jo Grimond from 1956 to 1967, many of which were ultimately adopted by the two main parties.
- The SDP was formed in 1981. It soon began talks with the Liberal Party. The problem for the two parties was that they were competing for the same voters. At the 1983 general election the Liberals and the SDP made an electoral pact whereby they would not put up candidates against each other. The pact was known as the Alliance. However, the plan failed and the two parties won fewer than 30 seats between them at that election and again in 1987. The decision was taken, therefore, to merge completely and the Liberal Democrats were born in 1988.

The Liberal Democrats reached the height of electoral success in 2005 when it won 62 seats. It was in 2010, however, that the real opportunity came. With no party winning an overall majority, the Liberal Democrats had a choice of whether to join with Labour (which had just been rejected by the voters), join the Conservatives (which sat on the opposite side of the political spectrum on many issues) in a coalition, or refuse to participate in the government, losing any opportunity to influence events first-hand and leaving a vacuum of power at a time of major financial crisis. With no 'good' options, the party's leader, Nick Clegg, chose the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats found themselves in government for the next 5 years.

From left to right, Chief Secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander, Prime Minister David Cameron, Chancellor George Osborne and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg attend a meeting at 10 Downing Street ahead of the coalition government's first Budget, June 2010

During the coalition years, the Liberal Democrats argue that they were able to act as a positive influence in government, injecting many of their own 'green'

policies, introducing the pupil premium to support funding in schools and taking millions of low-income people out of paying tax altogether, as well as preventing the Conservative government from implementing, according to Liberal Democrat supporters, more extreme and less acceptable policies. Despite these arguments for success in the coalition era, what might have proved to be a resounding breakthrough turned into a disaster for the party. The electorate decided to punish the Liberal Democrats for broken promises (mainly over a commitment not to raise university tuition fees, a commitment it dropped straight away) and working with the Conservative Party, which alienated many ex-Labour supporters who had voted Liberal Democrat to prevent a Conservative victory. As a result the party won only eight seats at the 2015 election. Nick Clegg resigned as leader and was replaced by Tim Farron, and the Liberal Democrats were once again a minor party, as it had been for 60 years between the 1930s and the 1990s.

Early in 2019 it looked as though the Liberal Democrats might be recovering and becoming a major force again in UK politics. Under the leadership of Vince Cable, in the European Parliament election held in June 2019, the party secured 19.6 per cent of the national vote and won 16 seats, second only to the Brexit Party and ahead of the other main parties, with Labour securing 13.6 per cent of the vote and 10 seats, while the Conservatives achieved 8.8 per cent of the vote and 4 seats. By October 2019 the Liberal Democrats had increased their number of MPs to 21 thanks to gaining four seats in the 2017 general election and then accepting a slew of former Conservative and Labour MPs, who had defected from their original parties. Despite this increase and claims from new leader, Jo Swinson, that the Liberal Democrats could be the next party of government, the party was again rejected when it came to the 2019 general election — it was reduced to 11 MPs, with Jo Swinson losing her own seat to the SNP.

Knowledge check

Why did the Liberal Democrats lose so many seats in 2015?

Core values of Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats are not just a liberal party. As the party's title suggests, it also espouses social democratic values and ideas. Its values come, therefore, from a mixture of the two traditions. The social democratic values are largely those described above in the section on New Labour. Here we look at the liberal side of its position. The main liberal values adopted by the party include the following:

- *Liberty* is the core liberal value. Of course, complete freedom is not feasible in a modern society, so liberals confine themselves to believing that the state should interfere as little as possible in people's private lives. Privacy, freedom and individual rights must, they insist, be protected. The stress on liberty was a feature of nineteenth-century fundamentalist liberalism, often associated with **classical liberals**. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, liberals expanded their ideas outside the protection of liberty and began to accept a wider role for the state in promoting welfare and social justice. These were known as new or **modern liberals**.
- Liberals also pursue *social justice*. This means three things. First it means the removal of unjustifiable inequalities in incomes in society, second it means equality of opportunity, and third it means the removal of all artificial privileges to which people might be born.

- *Welfare* is now a key liberal value. The liberal view is that people cannot be genuinely free if they are enslaved by poverty, unemployment or sickness, or the deprivations of old age. State welfare, therefore, sets people free.
- Liberals are highly suspicious of the power of government. They therefore believe that the power of government should be firmly controlled. The main way in which this can be achieved is by limiting the power of government via a strong constitution. This is known as *constitutionalism*.
- Liberal Democrats are *social reformers*. They strongly support the rights of women, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and the LGBT+ community. They have also been strong supporters of same-sex marriage.
- The party has always been concerned with the causes of *human rights* and *democracy*, so it has supported constitutional reform. This aspiration is often described as *liberal democracy*.
- *Multiculturalism* is a key theme among liberal values. Different cultures and lifestyles should be welcomed and granted special rights. This links to the liberals' *pluralist* outlook on society.
- A modern value concerns the *environment*. Liberals believe that human life will be enriched by a healthy physical environment and by biodiversity.

It should be stressed that many of these so-called liberal values are also held by many members of other political parties, notably those on the centre-left. Indeed, many of them have become core British values. For example, the ideas of John Maynard Keynes in economic policy and William Beveridge in developing the NHS and welfare state, both of whom were prominent Liberals in the middle of the twentieth century, still exert a strong influence on many current politicians from all parties, as well as the modern Liberal Democrats. What distinguishes liberalism from other political traditions is that liberals place these values higher than all others. For example, the rights and liberties of individuals are so precious that they should be sacrificed only in exceptional circumstances.

Liberal Democrat ideas and policies today

The party is still trying to recover from its poor performances in the general elections of 2015, 2017 and 2019, and the loss of its leader to electoral defeat. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the Liberal Democrat leadership contest was delayed and the party was run on a temporary co-leadership basis, leaving it in an uncertain position with a lack of clear direction. At the end of 2020 Ed Davey was elected as the leader and he has been attempting to steer the party in a new direction.

The economy

Liberal Democrat economic policy is not especially distinctive. However, it does propose the rebalancing of the UK economy so that wealth and economic activity are spread more widely round the country. On the whole, Liberal Democrats are pragmatic about economic management. For example, government budget planning should not operate in such a way as to favour one section of society over another. Thus, in times of economic recession, the poor in society should be protected and the wealthy should bear the brunt of tighter economic policies. Taxation should always be fair, based on ability to pay, and should redistribute real income from rich to poor. To this end, in 2019, the party introduced a policy of a 1p-in-the-pound tax increase to help fund the NHS and a policy of free childcare for all two- to four-year-olds.

Law and order

Two principles characterise Liberal Democrat policy:

- Wherever possible, the law enforcement system, including prisons, should seek to rehabilitate offenders as much as punishing them. Liberal Democrats believe that most crime has social causes and these causes should be attacked.
- The system of law and order must not become so over-authoritarian that human rights are threatened. There must be a balance between civil liberties and the need for peace and security.

The European Union

The Liberal Democrats would have preferred the UK to stay in the EU. Despite initially accepting the result of the 2016 referendum, although wanting the UK to remain as part of the single market, in 2019 the party reversed its position and pledged to revoke Article 50 and stop Brexit. Since then, the party has accepted the fact of the UK leaving the EU but aims to improve relationships and make trade and movement easier between the UK and EU.

Welfare

Education and health are key priorities for the Liberal Democrats. It believes spending on both should be protected and increased whenever the quality of services is threatened, leading to a 2019 pledge to increase the number of teachers in England by 20,000. The party believes the benefits system should be designed to encourage work and should be fair, favouring those who cannot support themselves. Poorer older people and single parents should be especially supported.

Foreign policy

Though the Liberal Democrats support NATO and its aims, the party is suspicious of excessive interference by the UK in conflicts abroad. It would abandon the renewal of the Trident nuclear submarine missile system. It strongly supports the use of international aid. Wherever possible, international conflicts should be settled through the United Nations rather than through direct military intervention.

Liberal Democrat factions

It may seem odd to describe a party with only 11 MPs after the 2019 election as having factions, but the Liberal Democrat party still had a membership of over 106,000 as of 2019, the largest in its history, and the factions that existed before 2015 still exist across the party and shape the leadership contests within Parliament. The main factions are outlined in Table 2.10.

Table 2.10 Liberal Democrat party factions

Faction	Core ideas	Key members
Orange Book Liberals	Traditional liberal values of free markets and the withdrawal of the state from excessive interference Focus on individual liberties	Ed Davey
Social Liberals	Policies concerning social justice, with wealth redistribution from rich to poor through taxation and welfare provision Focus on progressive social issues	Tim Farron Jo Swinson Layla Moran

Table 2.11 Key policies from the 2019 general election manifestos

Policy area	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat
Economy	No income tax, VAT or national insurance rises	Raise minimum wage to £10/hour Nationalise key industries Scrap charitable status for private schools	A penny income tax rise for the NHS Tax frequent flyers Freeze train fares Give zero-hours workers a 20% rise
Law and order	Hire an extra 20,000 police officers by 2022	Restore prison officer levels to 2010 levels End private prisons in the UK	Legalise cannabis
Welfare	Increase the number of nurses by 50,000 Pensions to rise by 2.5% a year Spend £6.3 billion on 2.2 million disadvantaged homes Continue the rollout of Universal Credit Create 250,000 extra childcare places	Increase the health budget by 4.3% Stop state pension age rises Introduce a national care service Scrap Universal Credit Introduce free bus travel for under-25s Build 100,000 council homes a year	Free childcare Recruit 20,000 more teachers Build 300,000 new homes a year
Foreign affairs	Leave the EU in January 2020 Introduce a points-based immigration system	Hold a second referendum on Brexit Give EU nationals the right to remain	Stop Brexit Resettle 10,000 refugees a year

Emerging and minor UK political parties

The growth of other parties in the UK

Although UK politics is usually dominated by two main parties, other parties play an important role in UK democracy. None of these other parties has managed to break through like Labour did in the 1920s, but in their own ways they have all had some influence in the British political system. From the creation and administration of devolved institutions, to Brexit and the **co-option** of environmental ideas by the more established parties, alternative parties have shaped and developed the political debate in the UK. Perhaps most importantly, they exist to provide the electorate with more choice during elections.

Scottish National Party

As the fortunes of the UK's traditional third party, the Liberal Democrats, have declined since the 2010 general election, those of the Scottish National Party (SNP) have blossomed. The SNP won enough seats in the 2007 Scottish parliamentary election to form a government. The party has formed the government of Scotland ever since. At Westminster, by contrast, it made little headway until 2015. Then, in the 2015 general election, the SNP won 56 of the 59 Westminster seats on offer in Scotland, partly due to the collapse in popular support for the Scottish Labour Party, partly for its perceived success in running Scotland since 2007 and partly due to the boost it received from the close independence referendum result in 2014.

Although it may be tempting to assume that the SNP, as a nationalist party, is right wing, much of its success has been as a result of left-wing policies on social services and key areas like the NHS and education, which enabled it to capture disillusioned Labour voters in 2015. With questions emerging over the leadership, direction and status of the party in late 2023 and early 2024, it will be interesting to see what happens to the SNP in relation to Labour and other parties in future elections. It was an extraordinary result. Scottish voters were disillusioned with the main UK parties, while many were interested in greater autonomy or even independence for Scotland. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the SNP was in persuading David Cameron to allow a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 and acquiring greater levels of devolved responsibility in the **Scotland Act** of 2016. Although the party lost 21 of its Scottish seats in the 2017 general election, it recaptured most of them in 2019, returning to 48 seats and entrenching its position as the third major party in Westminster as well as the dominant party of Scotland.

Humza Yousaf, leader of the SNP

> **Synoptic link**
>
> The status and importance of the SNP are directly related to the issue of devolution, covered in Chapter 5.

UK Independence Party

In politics, parties always need to be careful what they wish for. The UK Independence Party (UKIP) was launched as a party in 1993, in reaction to the development of the EU (see Chapter 8 for more on this process). Under the leadership of Nigel Farage, UKIP made its great electoral breakthrough in the 2015 general election. The party had already made progress in local elections and elections to the European Parliament, but this was the first time it had made a major effort in a general election. However, the outcome of its success was rather different from that of the SNP. UKIP won 12.6 per cent of the popular vote, but because its support was so dispersed, this was converted into only one parliamentary seat. Thus, UKIP made an impact and took many votes away from the other main parties, but as a group it remained on the fringes of the political system.

The public support and threat to the major parties were enough, however, to convince David Cameron to pledge to an in/out referendum in 2016. UKIP not only got the referendum it wanted, but it also got the result it had been campaigning for. Yet, having achieved its greatest triumph, the party then lost its purpose. In the 2017 general election the party's vote slumped, it lost its only parliamentary seat, and its leader, Paul Nuttall, resigned. The party seemed to be on the verge of extinction and in 2019 sank to just 0.1 per cent of the vote share. After losing nearly all its local council seats, UKIP has pretty much ceased to exist as a political party.

The relative fortunes of the SNP and UKIP in 2015 are useful examples of the impact of the FPTP voting system in giving an advantage to those parties with concentrated geographical support and a disadvantage to those that have widespread but shallow levels of support. The importance of electoral systems is covered in Chapter 3.

Green Party

The Green Party had a similar experience to UKIP, though on a smaller scale. The Green Party's share of the vote rose from 1 per cent in 2010 to 3.8 per cent in 2015. The party won just one seat, Brighton Pavilion, where Caroline Lucas, co-leader of the party at the time, remains popular. Although the Green Party has failed to make a major electoral breakthrough, Lucas has become a vocal and popular MP who has given her party a major platform in Parliament, while the adoption of more environmental policies by the major parties can, in part at least, be seen as a reaction to the growing support for the Green Party.

Although Lucas is the most visible figure of the Green Party, she is not the current leader, as the party tends to rotate its leadership often and practices a policy of shared leadership, with Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay leading the party since October 2021. With Caroline Lucas' 2023 announcement that she will not stand again, it will be interesting to see if the Green Party continues to hold the constituency of Brighton Pavilion.

Democratic Unionist Party

Due to its unique situation and history, Northern Ireland has developed its own party system. The vote there is largely split between nationalist parties that want Northern Ireland to join with the Republic of Ireland, and unionist parties that want Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK. The existence of different parties in Northern Ireland shows how different parties can allow different parts of the UK to follow their own paths and deal with their own problems. These issues are covered more in Chapter 5 on devolution.

On its own, Northern Ireland does not have enough MPs to make a crucial difference in Westminster votes, but the fiercely unionist Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), with 10 seats, was able to have tremendous influence in politics during Theresa May's time as prime minister as it made a supply-and-demand agreement that helped her government to survive, for a time at least, and ensured its voice had to be heard. Since 2019, the party has been reduced to 8 MPs and, despite vocal opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocols, has seemingly failed to exert much influence over national politics.

What does this reveal to us? While the UK remains dominated by the two main parties, several other parties are now making an impact, in terms of running parts of the UK through devolved institutions, parliamentary seats, votes or policy-making.

Synoptic link

UKIP was bound up with Euroscepticism. In order to understand its beliefs and objections, you will need to have a good idea about how the institutions of the EU work and the nature of sovereignty in the UK, both of which are covered in Chapter 8.

It is especially true that in the national regions voters are offered a greater choice of party. In Scotland, for example, five parties have significance and offer a realistic choice. These are the SNP, Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats and Green Party. In Wales, four parties compete for significant influence, while in Northern Ireland the electoral system guarantees that at least five parties have a share in government.

Policies of the SNP and the Green Party

SNP

The Scottish National Party is a centre-left party. Its main policies are as follows:

- There should be a second independence referendum with the overall objective of complete independence for Scotland as a sovereign state within the EU.
- For as long as Scotland remains within the UK, there should be constitutional reforms such as an elected second chamber, the introduction of proportional representation for general elections and votes for 16-year-olds.
- The party is social democratic and supports social justice. It supports the idea of the living wage and plans to close the attainment gap. It also aims to appoint a 'Just Transition Minister' and develop policies to make it easier for people who identify as trans.
- The party is opposed to the UK retaining independent nuclear weapons and favours the cancellation of Trident.
- The party has abolished university tuition fees paid by students within Scotland. It sees education at all levels as a key component of equality of opportunity. It has reintroduced the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for students above the age of 16. This has been abolished in England.
- Environmental protection is a key policy. SNP policies are almost as strong as those of the Green Party.
- The party supports the welfare state and would protect generous state provision of health, education and social security benefits. In its 2021 manifesto, it pledged to increase funding and recruitment of staff for the NHS as well as doubling Scottish Child Payments.
- The party is also staunchly pro-EU and has been vocal in opposition to Brexit.

Green Party

The Green Party obviously has environmental concerns at the centre of its policies. In other areas it has a left-wing stance. Among its radical policies in the 2019 manifesto were the following:

- Large numbers of new, low-cost, environmentally friendly homes should be financed or built by government to solve the housing crisis.
- There should be massive new investment in public transport.
- University tuition fees for students should be abolished.
- There should be an extensive programme of constitutional reform to make the UK more genuinely democratic.
- There should be a wealth tax on the top 1 per cent of the income ladder, a living wage of £10 per hour and a special tax on large banks making excessive profits.
- In 2019, the party adopted a policy to introduce a universal basic income of £89 per week.
- The party is opposed to the maintenance of Trident and the use of all nuclear power.
- The party supports the legalisation of cannabis.

UK political parties in context

Party systems

A **party system** describes the features of a political system in relation to the parties that operate within it. The term 'system' describes both how many parties there are and how many of those parties make a significant impact. The party system can help us understand how a political system works and it can also help us to explain change. Most importantly, the party system is so called because it relates to the connection between the parties and governmental power, especially how many parties have a realistic chance of being influential and politically significant. This has been especially true in relation to the UK in recent times. Descriptions of different kinds of party system are provided below.

Table 2.12 illustrates where the various party systems can be found and some of their features.

Table 2.12 Examples of party systems

Party system	Countries	Features
One-party system	China, Cuba, North Korea	All three countries describe themselves as communist states. The Communist Party is the only legal party
Dominant-party system	Scotland (SNP)	The SNP holds nearly all the UK parliamentary seats and has governed Scotland since 2007, holding many more seats than any other party in the Scottish Parliament
Two-party system	USA	Democrats and Republicans hold virtually all elected positions at all levels of government in the USA
Two-and-a-half-party system	Canada	The Liberal Party of Canada and the Conservative Party of Canada form the two dominant parties, with the New Democratic Party emerging as a serious third party
Multi-party system	Italy, Germany	Italy has so many parties it is remarkably unstable. Governments regularly tend to collapse Germany has a four-party system with the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats dominating, but they have to form coalitions with either the Greens or the Free Democrats. The afD (Alternative for Germany) party also has 94 seats

One-party system

This is where only one party is allowed to operate. This is normally associated with highly authoritarian regimes and we would not consider them to be democratic in the generally accepted sense of the word.

Key term

Party system The way or manner in which the political parties in a political system are grouped and structured. There are several variants that could apply to the UK; these include one-party, dominant-party, two-party, two-and-a-half-party and multi-party systems.

Dominant-party system

Here we are referring to democratic systems that do allow parties to operate freely, but where only one party has a realistic chance of taking governmental power. Such systems are highly stable, though there is a lack of accountability and competition.

Two-party system

Only two parties have a realistic chance of forming a government. It implies that two parties win the vast majority of the votes at elections and most of the seats in the representative assemblies of the state.

Two-and-a-half-party system

These are systems where there are two main parties that contest elections but also a sizeable third party. Usually, these third parties can be seen as holding the balance of power between the two main parties, much as the Liberal Democrats did in 2010 in the UK. Countries like Canada and Australia appear to fit this model.

While the UK could be seen as a two–and–a–half–party system, it is rare that the third party actually forms part of the government. This means it is not entirely accurate to consider the UK in this way, despite the presence of the Liberal Democrats and then the SNP as sizeable third parties.

Activity

Research the most recent elections in the following regions of the UK. In each case, decide what kind of party system the region seems to have:
- Scottish Parliament
- Welsh Parliament
- London (mayor and Greater London Assembly)
- Northern Ireland

Multi-party system

These are common in Europe and growing more so. As the name suggests, there are several parties competing for votes and power. There is no set number to define a multi–party system, but the key is that more than two parties have a realistic chance of being a part of the government and governments tend to be made up of coalitions. Although these systems can look a lot more fragile and unstable than dominant or two–party states, there is actually far less volatility as many of the same parties regularly find themselves in government, time and again.

Topic link

Party systems should not be looked at in isolation from the electoral systems used in various countries, as there are strong links between electoral and party systems. This section should therefore be read in conjunction with the material in Chapter 3, which describes various electoral systems and their impacts. Generally, first-past-the-post tends to create a two-party system (e.g. the USA) and proportional representation tends to lead to a multi-party system, while majoritarian and hybrid systems tend to be more unpredictable in the party system they create. This means that while it can be helpful to consider a link between electoral systems and party systems, there is a lot more to it than a simple case of the electoral system causing the party system.

The party system in Westminster and beyond

The dominance of two parties in the UK has varied over the long term. Table 2.13 illustrates the dominance of two parties in terms of *seats* in the period 1979–2019. However, Figure 2.6 demonstrates that two–party dominance in terms of *votes* remained less pronounced until such dominance was restored in June 2017, and appears to have remained in 2019.

Table 2.13 Two-party dominance in the UK, 1979–2017

Election year	Conservative seats	Labour seats	Largest third-party seats	% of seats won by two main parties
1979	339	269	11	95.8
1983	397	209	23	93.3
1987	376	229	22	93.0
1992	336	271	20	93.2
1997	165	418	46	88.4
2001	166	413	52	87.8
2005	198	356	62	85.6
2010	307	258	57	86.9
2015	331	232	56	86.7
2017	318	262	35	89.2
2019	364	203	48	87.2

Source: House of Commons Library

That other parties have been unable to convert their increasing proportion of votes won into significant numbers of seats is almost wholly due to the electoral system, which discriminates against them. The UK remains a two–party system in terms of *seats* but is a multi–party system in terms of *votes*. As Figure 2.6 shows, however, two–party dominance showed signs of returning in 2017 and in 2019. The impact of the first–past–the–post system is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Looking at the different regions of the UK, we see a similar model of one–party dominance or two–party competition. Since 2007 the SNP has dominated elections to the Scottish Parliament, making Scotland a dominant–party system. There are opposition parties, but neither the Conservatives nor Labour have had a realistic prospect of forming a government since then, despite the use of the additional member system. Since devolution was introduced to Wales, Labour has always been the main party, sometimes securing a majority, sometimes working in a coalition and sometimes as a minority government, again suggesting a dominant–party model. London mayoral elections have been dominated by the two–party system, with only Conservative and Labour candidates ever finishing in the top two, although elections to the Greater London Assembly are more mixed. Northern Ireland has its own party system, which appears at first to be multi–party, with several parties being required to form a coalition to create a government, but the system is dominated by the DUP and Sinn Féin, suggesting a two–party dominance. Therefore, the UK can be described as a multi–party system (many parties competing to gain power), but in terms of electoral results the UK elections reveal a dominant or two–party system at work.
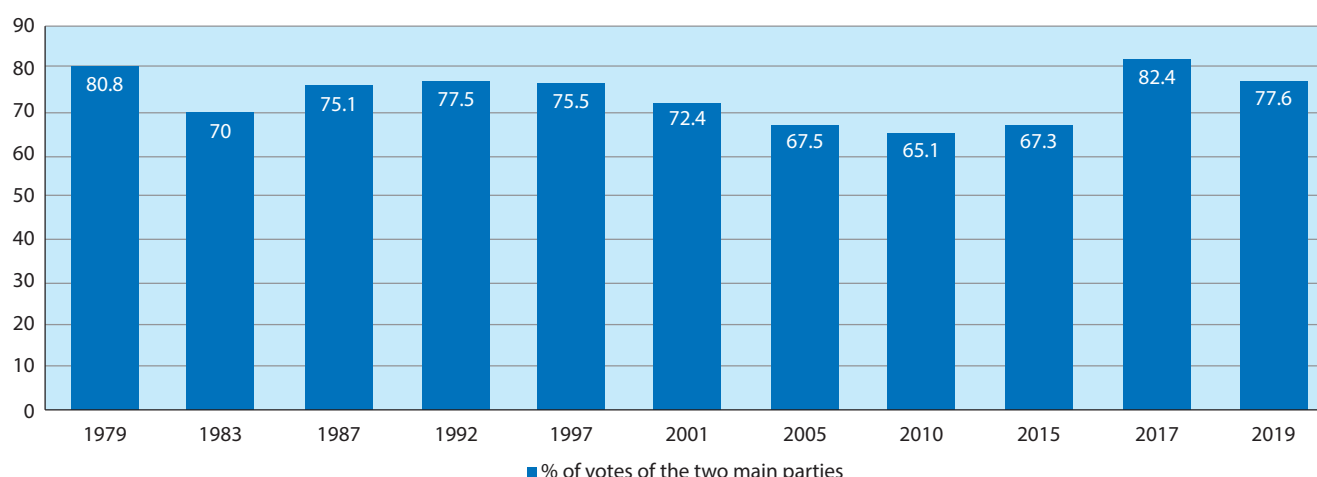
Figure 2.6 Vote share of the two main parties combined

Factors that affect party success

Here we briefly examine three aspects of parties that go some way to determining why they may succeed or fail: leadership, unity and media exposure. We should first, however, consider why small parties have so much difficulty achieving a breakthrough. This is shown in Table 2.14.

Table 2.14 Why small parties find it difficult to make an impact and how they can nevertheless succeed

Why small parties fail	How small parties can succeed
They lack funding	They may find wealthy benefactors to support them, as occurred with UKIP after 2010 and the Reclaim Party in 2022
The electoral system may discriminate against them	In devolved regions, proportional representation helps small parties If a party can develop concentrated geographical support, it can break through in a region, such as the SNP
They lack media exposure	A strong, charismatic leader may help to gain public support, as occurred with Caroline Lucas for the Green Party and Nigel Farage for UKIP and the Brexit Party
They lack organisation in communities	They may gain widespread popular support with populist ideas, as UKIP achieved They can build good community teams and successfully compete in local government elections, which then helps them in subsequent general elections
People consider voting for them to be a wasted vote	In proportional systems, fewer votes are wasted

Leadership

This is crucial. Voters respond to the quality of the individual who leads a party and who therefore, in the case of the two main parties at least, is a potential prime minister. The qualities that voters generally prefer include:

- experience
- decisiveness
- ability to lead
- media image
- intelligence
- apparent honesty.

There have been leaders who may be seen to have damaged the prospects of their party, such as Gordon Brown, Ed Miliband, Nick Clegg and, in 2019, Jeremy Corbyn, and others who may be seen to have enhanced their party's fortunes, such as Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and Boris Johnson (at least until they fell from grace). However, it was among smaller parties that leadership became important in 2015. Nicola Sturgeon, then SNP leader, made a hugely favourable impression in TV debates, as did Nigel Farage of UKIP and the popular and strong leader Charles Kennedy, who took the Liberal Democrats to their most successful result in 2005. Farage ensured that his party was constantly in the news, while Sturgeon enjoyed very positive public approval ratings in the opinion polls.

Leaders do not win or lose elections, but from 2010 to 2019, and in elections to devolved assemblies, there is no doubt that party fortunes were influenced by the performance and image of their leaders.

Unity

It is often said by political commentators that a disunited party has no hope of being elected. The facts appear to bear this out. Some examples in both directions can illustrate this:

- In the 1980s, the Conservative Party united around the leadership of Margaret Thatcher while Labour was split between its left and right wings. In fact, the party did literally split in 1981. This resulted in two huge victories for the Conservatives at the 1983 and 1987 general elections.
- In 1997, Labour was an almost totally united party around the banner of New Labour under Blair. The Conservatives under John Major had been wracked by internal division, mainly over the UK's position in Europe. The result was a crushing victory for Labour.
- In 2015, the united Conservative Party dominated the disunited Labour Party. However, in the 2017 general election campaign, Labour succeeded in uniting around a radical manifesto, which resulted in a dramatic improvement in its fortunes.
- In 2019, having suspended moderate Conservatives from the party and required all candidates to sign a pledge to back getting Brexit done, the Conservative Party was able to unify around the central issue of Brexit while the Labour Party found itself divided over the issues of Brexit, antisemitism and the radical nature of its manifesto.

The evidence is therefore compelling that the commentators are right: united parties always have a huge advantage over disunited parties.

The media

Whatever the true policies of a party are, the electorate is often influenced by the image of the party as portrayed in the media, especially newspapers. Research suggests that newspapers only reinforce existing political affiliations and do not change minds, but there remains the probability that their campaigns may well persuade people to vote for the party 'their' newspaper supports. Some wavering voters may also be swayed.

There is usually a correlation between the political views of the readership of a newspaper and the political stance of the paper itself. However, this may be because readers tend to buy newspapers with whose views they agree. Yet, in the 2017 general election most newspapers backed the Conservatives, mainly because their owners backed Conservative policies, but to little avail, as the party lost its Commons majority following a Labour resurgence.

Television and radio broadcasters, such as the BBC and ITV, must be neutral and balanced by law. Nevertheless, TV does give exposure to party leaders. TV debates have had an impact on the fortunes of the parties. In 2010, for example, Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg's performance in the TV debates was widely praised. Partly as a result, the Liberal Democrats did well enough to form a coalition with the Conservatives. In 2015, by contrast, Labour leader Ed Miliband performed poorly and this was a factor in Labour's failure to win the election. Equally, in 2017, Theresa May's refusal to participate in televised debates and Jeremy Corbyn's good performance helped to shift the media perceptions of the two leaders.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Prime Minister Boris Johnson debate live on ITV during the 2019 general election campaign

There has also been a growth in the role of social media, with Twitter (currently known as 'X') and other platforms becoming essential for parties to promote themselves and critics to attack politicians they oppose. Social media allow politicians and political actors to speak directly to the public, bypassing many of the rules about media coverage. However, social media are difficult to control and their effects and importance difficult to quantify. Perhaps more worryingly, social media can be used to target voters in intrusive and forceful, even ethically dubious ways, as highlighted by the reports surrounding the collection of personal data from millions

of Facebook users by Cambridge Analytica in 2018. Data was taken not only from those who had agreed to take their survey but also from their friends and contacts on Facebook to utilise and sell for political advantage.

The media are not decisive, nor is leadership and nor is a party's level of unity, but, taken together, they *are* influential. However, it is still the performance of the government and the policies of the opposition parties that determine the outcome of elections.

Debate

How influential are the media in determining party success?

The case that media are influential

- The media are the prism through which public perceptions of the parties are created.
- The winning party usually has the support of most print newspapers.
- Since 2010, the leadership debates have become key moments in general election campaigns.
- Parties are increasingly developing resources to use social media to influence voters as well as utilising social media to collect data and target voters in increasingly sophisticated ways.
- Leaders spend time cultivating positive media images.

The case that media are not influential

- Influential media tend to reflect, rather than lead, attitudes to parties.
- Despite nearly all print newspapers opposing him, Jeremy Corbyn performed well in the 2017 general election.
- There is little evidence to suggest that leadership debates have affected public perception or changed minds.
- Social media tend to act as an echo chamber and rarely change opinions or attitudes towards parties.
- Other factors, like leadership and policies, may be more influential.

It is worth considering the long- and short-term influence of the media, and how far the media can actually change perceptions in the short term and long term.

A summary of the role of parties in the UK

How well do parties enhance representative democracy?

Political parties play many key roles in the UK's representative form of democracy:

- They are vital in the selection of candidates for office. Without parties, candidates would campaign as individuals, which would make it difficult for voters to understand what collective policies might result from their decisions.
- They mobilise support for political *programmes*, not just individual policies. This is known as aggregation. Without such aggregation, politics would become incoherent.
- Parliament itself relies on party organisations to operate in an effective way. The parties organise debates and ensure that ministers are called to account. They also organise the staffing of parliamentary committees.

However, parties can also distort representation. The governing party is always elected without an overall majority of the national vote and yet it claims to have the mandate of the people. The 'winner takes all' nature of party politics may result in government that is too partisan and does not seek a consensus of support for policies. The coalition government between 2010 and 2015 was a rare example of parties cooperating with each other.

Parties also tend to reduce issues to false choices, such as 'binary' decision–making, by claiming that one type of decision is either wholly wrong or wholly right. This is rarely the case.

A consideration of the role of positive and negative aspects of parties in representative democracy is given in Table 2.15.

Table 2.15 The role of parties in the UK's representative democracy

Positive aspects	Negative aspects
They provide open opportunities for people to become active in politics, and they are inclusive and make few demands on members	Adversarial party politics is negative in that it denies the creation of consensus and reduces issues to false, simplistic choices
They make political issues coherent and help to make government accountable	Parties claim legitimacy through their electoral mandate even when they are elected to power with a minority of the popular vote
They help to make elections and the operation of Parliament effective and understandable to the public	Parties can become elitist so that small leadership groups dominate policy-making to the detriment of internal democracy
They identify, recruit and 'train' people for political office and leadership	They limit the pool of talent for political leadership to members only

Summary

Having read this chapter, you should have knowledge and understanding of the following:
➜ What political parties are and do, and why they are so central to an understanding of how government and politics work in the UK
➜ How parties are funded, the main issues concerning party funding and what proposals for reform have been offered
➜ How political parties and their leaders fit into the left–right spectrum in UK politics
➜ How the main political parties developed historically and what are the main ideological principles behind them
➜ The nature and impact of smaller parties in various parts of the UK
➜ The nature of the different party systems that exist within the UK, why they differ and the significance of those differences
➜ In what ways and to what extent small parties make an impact on UK politics
➜ The main reasons why some parties are successful and others are less successful

Key terms in this chapter

Classical liberals Classical liberalism is a philosophy developed by early liberals who believed that individual freedom would best be achieved with the state playing a minimal role.

Left wing A widely used term for those who desire change, reform and alteration to the way in which society operates. Often this involves radical criticisms of capitalism made by modern liberal and socialist parties.

Modern liberals Modern liberalism emerged as a reaction against free-market capitalism, believing this had led to many individuals not being free. Freedom could no longer simply be defined as 'being left alone'.

New Labour (Third Way) A revision of the traditional Labour values and ideals represented by Old Labour. Influenced by Anthony Giddens, the 'Third Way' saw Labour shift in emphasis from a heavy focus on the working class to a wider base, and a less robust alliance with the trade unions.

New Right There are two elements — (i) the neo (or new) conservatives who want the state to take a more authoritarian approach to morality and law and order, and (ii) the neo-liberals who endorse the free-market approach and the rolling back of the state in people's lives and businesses.

Old Labour (social democracy) Key Labour principles embodying nationalisation, redistribution of wealth from rich to poor and the provision of continually improving welfare and state services, which largely rejected Thatcherite/free-market reforms or a Blairite approach.

One nation A paternalistic approach adopted by conservatives under the leadership of Benjamin Disraeli in the nineteenth century and continued by David Cameron and Theresa May in the twenty-first century, that richer people have an obligation to help poorer people.

Party system The way or manner in which the political parties in a political system are grouped and structured. There are several variants that could apply to the UK; these include one-party dominant, two-party, two-and-a-half-party and multi-party systems.

Right wing Reflects support for the status quo, little or no change, stressing the need for order, stability and hierarchy; generally related to conservative parties.

Further reading

Websites

Information about all political parties can be found on their websites. This is also true of important party factions:

- Conservative Way Forward: www.conservativewayforward.com
- Cornerstone Group: http://cornerstonegroup.wordpress.com
- Tory Reform Group: www.trg.org.uk
- Momentum: www.peoplesmomentum.com

Information about party regulation and funding can be found on the Electoral Commission site: www. electoralcommission.org.uk

More information is on the UK Parliament site: www. parliament.uk

Books

Bale, T. (2016) *The Conservative Party: From Thatcher to Cameron*, Polity Press

Cole, M. and Deigham, H. (2012) *Political Parties in Britain*, Edinburgh University Press

Cook, A. (2012) *Political Parties in the UK*, Palgrave Macmillan

Davis, J. and Rentoul, J. (2019) *Heroes or Villains: The Blair government reconsidered*, Oxford University Press

Driver, S. (2011) *Understanding British Party Politics*, Polity

Kogan, D. (2018) *Protest and Power: The battle for the Labour Party*, Bloomsbury Reader

Thorpe, A. (2016) *The History of the British Labour Party*, Palgrave — up-to-date but goes back to the origins of Labour

Practice questions

1

Source 1

A

In Britain political giving is a minority pursuit. British parties are reliant on a very small number of donors. In the first quarter of 2023 the Conservatives took in more than £14 million, from a handful of super-wealthy individuals. While the unions remain the bedrock of the Labour Party's finances, Keir Starmer has been aggressively targeting private donors. There are signs that Labour's 'Rose Network' — similar to the Tory 'Leaders Group' where for £50,000 donors get regular off-the record-meetings with senior ministers — is beginning to bloom. Accepting private donations leaves parties open to charges of hypocrisy, cronyism, or worse.

Adapted from an opinion piece by Peter Geoghegan, published in the *Guardian*, 10 July 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jul/10/british-political-giving-rich-abuse-tory-labour-election

B

Representatives of big business do not need to donate in order to exercise undue influence over government policy. Demands for the state to fund political parties would only institutionalise the dominance of the established parties and make them even more insulated from any need to engage with their grassroots. There is nothing untoward about trade unions — that is, civil society organisations that represent the interests of millions — exercising influence within political parties. The problem with state funding is that it would make party elites all too 'independent' without union donations. Labour's leadership would no longer depend upon its capacity to generate active political support or upon maintaining any relationship with its social and political base. State funding would also make all political parties less independent of the state and there would certainly be an outcry the first time an 'extreme' party got its hands on public cash.

Adapted from 'Why state-funded political parties would be a disaster for our democracy', published on the openDemocracy website in 2012

Using the sources, evaluate the view that there should be full state funding of political parties.
In your response you must:
– *compare and contrast different opinions in the sources*
– *examine and debate these views in a balanced way*
– *analyse and evaluate only the information presented in the sources.* (30)

2

Source 2

The idea of a stable two-party system has been increasingly questioned amidst growing speculation that periods of minority or coalition government may have become the norm in a context of declining support for the two major parties. Both the Conservatives and Labour face ongoing challenges from insurgent parties, like the Brexit Party, and from threats of internal party splits. The British party system is changing all too rapidly with both major parties departing from what was previously perceived to be the 'centre

ground'. With the Conservatives drifting to the right and Labour to the left, real opportunities have emerged for so-called 'third' parties to take advantage. Such opportunities have also been aided by the introduction of proportional representation voting systems outside of general elections. This has enabled impressive electoral successes for UKIP, the SNP and the Brexit Party. In the midst of this level of unprecedented political turmoil, it is tempting to suggest that the UK party system is no longer recognisable.

Despite this, the decline in electoral vote share for the two main parties has not been mirrored by a decline in their relative parliamentary or executive dominance. Since [the Second World War], 2010 is the only occasion that another party was part of a government and at the 2015 general election, the Conservatives returned to power with a majority government, with the Liberal Democrats being severely punished for their part in the previous five years. Whilst UKIP had achieved the third highest number of popular votes at that election at 12.6 per cent, the first-past-the-post system did not translate this in terms of parliamentary representation. The snap election of 2017 may have led to the Conservatives losing their majority, but the actual share of the votes for the two main parties dramatically increased during that election — with the Conservatives and Labour taking over 82 per cent of the popular vote and gaining nearly 90 per cent of parliamentary seats.

Adapted from 'Is the Party over for Britain's two-party system?' by Dr Alex Oaten and Dr Peter Kerr, published on the UK in a Changing Europe website in July 2019, https://ukandeu.ac.uk/is-the-party-over-for-britains-two-party-system/

Using the source, evaluate the view that the UK is best described as a two-party political system.
In your response you must:
– *compare and contrast different opinions in the source*
– *examine and debate these views in a balanced way*
– *analyse and evaluate only the information presented in the source.* (30)
3 Evaluate the view that the Labour Party remains committed to its traditional values and beliefs.
You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way. (30)
4 Evaluate the view that serious divisions exist between the Labour and Conservative parties over the economy, law and order, and foreign affairs.
You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way. (30)
5 Evaluate the view that the abilities of the leader are the most important factor in determining a political party's success.
You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way. (30)
6 Evaluate the view that parties other than the Conservatives and Labour play a meaningful role in UK politics.
You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way. (30)

Answer guidance available online: www.hoddereducation.com/EdexcelUKPolitics7E