Your notes

GCSE Citizenship Studies: revision notes

# Elections and voting systems

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## Voting in the UK

- At the time of writing, you must be 18 to vote in UK **general elections**. 16- and 17-year-olds can vote in Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd elections, and the UK government has announced plans to lower the voting age to 16 for all UK elections. In Guernsey, the voting age has been 16 since 2007.
- You must be on the **electoral register**. Voters in Great Britain must show photo ID at polling stations for UK **general elections**. You can also vote by post or by proxy.
- **General elections** must be held at least every five years.
- **Turnout** is the percentage of registered voters who vote. It was about 60% at the 2024 **general election**.

## First past the post (FPTP)

- Used for UK **general elections**. Each **constituency** elects one MP; the candidate with the most votes wins, even without a majority.
- Advantages: simple, quick, usually produces a single-party government, and a strong link between MPs and constituencies.
- Disadvantages: seats don't match vote share (in 2024, Labour won 411 seats with about 34% of the vote), smaller parties lose out, and many votes are "wasted". It can create safe seats.

## Other systems

- **Proportional representation** (PR) systems give parties seats roughly in proportion to their votes.
- The Scottish Parliament uses the Additional Member System (a mix of FPTP and party lists). The Northern Ireland Assembly uses the Single Transferable Vote (STV). The Welsh Senedd uses a proportional party-list system.
- PR is fairer to smaller parties but often produces **coalition** governments.

## Referendums

- A **referendum** is a vote on a single issue. Examples: the 2011 vote on changing the voting system (rejected), the 2014 Scottish independence **referendum** (55% No) and the 2016 EU **referendum** (52% Leave).

## Key terms

| | |
|---|---|
| **General election** | An election for all seats in the House of Commons. |
| **Constituency** | An area represented by one MP. |
| **Turnout** | The percentage of registered voters who vote. |
| **First past the post** | A system where the candidate with the most votes wins the seat. |
| **Proportional representation** | Systems giving seats in proportion to votes. |
| **Coalition** | A government formed by two or more parties. |
| **Referendum** | A vote on a single issue. |
| **Electoral register** | The official list of people entitled to vote. |

## Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. How often must UK general elections be held?
2. What voting system is used for UK general elections?
3. What is turnout?
4. What is a disadvantage of first past the post?
5. What is an advantage of first past the post?
6. What is a coalition?
7. Which voting system is used for the Northern Ireland Assembly?
8. What percentage voted Leave in the 2016 EU referendum?

### Answers

1. At least every five years
2. First past the post
3. The percentage of registered voters who vote
4. Seats don't match the share of the vote
5. It is simple and usually gives a single-party government
6. A government formed by two or more parties
7. Single Transferable Vote
8. 52%

## What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Your notes

## Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

## Read the lesson, one step at a time

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