Democracy in Scotland and the United Kingdom

Higher Modern Studies

**Topic 3: Voting Systems**





**Topic 3: Voting Systems**

This topic covers the impact of voting systems.

You will:

* Be able to describe the voting systems in use in the United Kingdom;
* Evaluate these voting systems and
* Discuss the impact of voting system on election results.

**WHAT IS AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM?**

An electoral system is a democratic system used to elect representatives. Democracy means government by the people, or by their elected representatives (in Greek *demos = people* and *kratos = rule).* An electoral system should therefore reflect the opinions of the people.

Voters in the UK use a range of different election systems in different elections. Historically, the UK has made most use of the First Past the Post system for elections, and this system is still used for English local council elections. More recently, different types of Proportional Representation (PR) systems have been used for Scottish Parliamentary, Scottish local, Northern Irish and European elections.

In this unit, we will be studying four different electoral systems. You must be able to show a good understanding of how each system works and of the effects each system has on the distribution of power within and among parties. You need to be able to describe both the benefits and criticisms of each system. The systems are:

* First Past The Post (used in UK General Elections)
* The Additional Member System (used in Scottish Parliamentary Elections)
* The Regional List System (used in European Parliamentary Elections)
* The Single Transferable Vote (used in Scottish Local Elections)

First Past The Post

First Past the Post (FPTP) is a **SIMPLE MAJORITY SYSTEM**. It is the system that is used in UK General Elections.

How does it work?

FPTP is probably the most simple to use out of all the electoral systems. To vote, all a voter has to do is put an X next to the name of their preferred candidate on the ballot paper.

The candidate with the greatest number of votes (a simple majority) in the constituency wins the seat.

There are currently 650 constituencies in the UK that are contested at each UK General Election (now held every 5 years). Each constituency elects 1 MP to represent them in the House of Commons.

The party that wins the greatest number of seats (not votes) becomes the government (sometimes in coalition with a smaller party if they do not have an overall majority, as was the case in 2010). The party that wins the second greatest number of seats becomes the Official Opposition.

*It is very important that you are able to identify and explain the strengths and weaknesses of each electoral system. You must also be able to refer to examples that back up your arguments.*

**STRENGTHS OF FIRST PAST THE POST**

1. **It is very simple to operate and understand**.

The voter has a clear choice: he or she can vote for only one candidate, by putting an ‘X’ opposite the name of that one candidate. Counting the votes is also very straightforward with the results being known quickly. In General Elections, some constituencies strive to have their results announced by midnight (within 2 hours of the polling stations closing). Usually, it is known which party is going to form the government by the early hours of the next morning. This simplicity may encourage a higher turnout.

1. **It USUALLY produces governments with an overall majority**. (‘Comfortable Government’).

It can be argued that FPTP produces strong governments as the winning party is likely to have an overall majority. This has failed to happen only twice since the Second World War. The February 1974 election returned a minority Labour government. In 2010, the Conservatives failed to win an overall majority and so formed a coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

An overall majority means that the government can pass legislation without having to rely on another party.

3. **Close link between constituent and MP.**

FPTP results in one MP per constituency and therefore promotes close links between the constituents and the constituency MP. Forms of Proportional Representation, like the Single Transferable Vote system (STV), often lead to multi-member constituencies which break this close link, or to representatives without constituencies (the additional members in the Additional Members System), which again weakens the link between representative and constituent. It can be argued that FPTP allows MPs to gain strong local backing from both local party organisations and local voters. This builds up the idea of a ‘personal vote’ for an MP and could mean that the MP can act more independently of central party control.

4. **Clear choice for voter.**

FPTP gives the voter a clear choice between distinct alternatives, each of which is *usually* capable of forming a government without the help of other parties (2010 being an exception to this rule). As the system tends to produce overall majorities, the voter can think in terms of ‘punishing’ a government for poor performance. It produces the idea in voters that they are ‘choosing a government’ and not just a local constituency representative. In 1997, many people were keen to get rid of John Major’s Conservative government. Many of these people voted Labour, the ‘alternative’ governing party.

**WEAKNESSES OF FIRST PAST THE POST**

1. **Many votes are wasted**.

Only one MP is elected in each constituency, so all the voters who did not vote for him or her are not represented. Their votes do not help  elect anybody and so are wasted, they could have stayed at home and the result would not have been altered. This is the main reason why many people believe FPTP is unfair and bodies such as the Electoral Reform Society campaign for change.

In 2005, in the UK, 19 million voters cast ineffective votes - that is 70% of those who voted. A high proportion of these voters are the same people every time, those who live in safe seats and support the opposing party, e.g. Conservative voters in County Durham or Labour voters in much of Surrey.

1. **FPTP is not proportional and does not reflect the wishes of the electorate.**

In 2005, Labour won 35.2% of the total vote cast, but got 55.1% of the seats in Parliament, giving them power to form a majority government. Taking into account the fairly low turnout (61%), only 1 in 5 of the registered electorate actually voted for the Government.

In 2010, the Liberal Democrats gained 23% of the total vote. However, because FPTP is a “winner takes all” system and the Lib Dems came second in lots of constituencies, they only gained 9% of seats in the House of Commons.

Therefore, Parliament is unrepresentative. This is a major criticism because some would argue that there is no direct relationship between the number of votes cast for a particular party and the strength of representation at Westminster.

1. **Voters are represented unequally.**

In 2005, the average number of votes per MP elected was: 26,906 for Labour, 44,373 for Conservative and 96,539 for Liberal Democrats. In other words, because support for the Lib Dems is spread out across the UK, they have a higher average of votes per MP elected.

1. **Concentrated support is vital for a party to produce results**.

In 2005, Conservative support was spread thinly over most of Scotland. They got 15.8% of the vote in Scotland, and only 1.7% of the seats. The Liberal Democrats got 22.6% of the Scottish vote and a similar share of the seats (18.6%) because they had strong support in a few constituencies and minimal support in most of the others.

1. **FPTP leads to tactical voting**

The system leads to many people casting negative votes i.e. voting against the candidate they dislike most rather than for the candidate they like best. E.g. A Conservative supporter living in a marginal Labour seat may vote Lib Dems as they have the best chance of defeating Labour, rather than vote for Conservative whose policies they agree with.

1. **The voting system perpetuates the 2-party struggle**.

It is difficult for smaller parties to gain representation. Support for smaller parties has grown over the years but this support is not translated into seats. As one of the two major parties replaces the other, it sets about replacing the policies of its predecessor, rather than building on those policies. Such changes produce uncertainty and instability.

In 2010, for the first time ever, a Green MP was elected from Brighton into the House of Commons, despite there being considerable support in the country for ‘green politics’ – this illustrates the difficulty of making the electoral breakthrough for parties outside the ‘big two’ (Labour and Conservative).

**Practice** **End of** **Unit Assessment Task:**

The First Past the Post (FPTP) system is used to elect members of the UK Parliament.

* Explain, in detail, at least two key features of the FPTP voting system.
* Analyse the extent to which FPTP provides the fairest system of voting.

The marking instructions for this type of assessment task can be seen on the next page.

**Marking Instructions:**

**Explain, in detail, at least two key features of the FPTP voting system.**

For this part of the task you must explain at least two aspects of a complex political issue.

Your explanation must be supported by points of description.

Each explanation must make at least two developed points which make the political issue clear. Developed points can include, for example:

* additional detail
* examples
* evidence
* reasons
* drawing out implications

**Analyse the extent to which FPTP provides the fairest system of voting.**

For this part of the task your analysis must derive from a body of accurate information.

You must move beyond description and explanation of relevant detail.

You must identify at least two relevant aspects/features and clearly show at least one of the following:

* links between aspects
* similarities and contradictions
* consistency and inconsistencies
* different views/ interpretations
* possible consequences/ implications
* a logical order
* relative importance

The Party List System

**How it works:**

Each party draws up a list of candidates ranked according to the party’s preference. E.g. the party’s preferred candidates will be at the top of the list.

Electors vote for a party, not for a candidate.

If the party gets 30% of the vote then the top 30% of candidates from their list are elected.

There can be a **national lis**t when the entire country is one constituency (as in Israel), or a **regional list** where the country is divided into large multi-member regions (as in Italy).

There are two types of list systems – open and closed lists. In open list systems (as used in Danish Parliamentary elections) voters have at least some influence on the order in which a party's candidates are elected, as they choose a candidate from within a party. The number of votes for a party overall is counted up to determine the number of seats it is entitled to and then the seats are allocated within the party depending on the number of votes each candidate received. This is as opposed to a closed list system (as used in UK European Parliamentary elections) in which the party members determine the order of their candidates in advance and the ordinary voter simply chooses a party.

Most countries that use a list system do so with a threshold – a proportion of the vote that a party must gain in order to be allocated seats in the legislature. These can be set high, so as to exclude minor parties (as in Turkey, which has a 10 per cent threshold), or low, so as to encourage and promote minor parties (as in Israel, which has a 1.5 per cent threshold).

South Africa doesn't have a threshold at all, and in 2004 the African Christian Democratic Party won six seats out of 400 with only 1.6 per cent of the national vote.

**STRENGTHS OF THE PARTY LIST SYSTEM**

1. **The system has a high degree of proportionality.**

List systems guarantee a high degree of proportionality. If a party receives 43% of the vote, then it will get 43% of the seats in Parliament.

1. **It is simple to understand.**

The Party List System is simple for voters to use and understand. They only have one choice to make and that is to decide which party to vote for.

1. **It is fairer to smaller parties.**

Smaller parties are more likely to gain seats under this system. In 2009 the Green Party of England and Wales gained two seats in the European Parliament.

1. **There are no wasted votes.**

Every vote has an equal weighting and there are no wasted votes as every vote counts.

**WEAKNESSES OF THE PARTY LIST SYSTEM**

1. **Lack of link between constituents and Representatives.**

Voters have no choice over the candidates in most lists systems as they only vote for a party. This means that the representatives elected are no longer directly accountable to their constituents and so the representative/constituent link is lost. For example, while many people voted for the SNP in the European election, ordinary voters did not directly elect Ian Houghton MEP or Alan Smyth MEP - they gained their seats in the European Parliament due to being placed number 1 and 2 on the SNP list by members of the SNP.

1. **Parties have all the power.**

Closed party lists offer very little in the way of voter choice: much of the power resides with the members of the party leadership. While parties allow their ordinary members to vote in order to determine the order of the candidates in their list, the leaders of the party can have a major influence in how ordinary members vote by making it clear that they support or do not support a particular candidate. Party leaders can, therefore, stifle independent and minority opinion within their ranks – e.g. it could be made clear that a particularly vocal or independent candidate does not have the support of the leadership and they could, therefore, end up placed lower on the list and those candidates who agree with the party leadership could be given support to ensure they are placed higher on the list. This gives the party leadership a great deal of power.

1. **Under-representation**

Party lists do not help to ensure fair representation for traditionally under-represented groups in society such as ethnic minorities and women. Party leaders are most likely to choose people from a similar background to represent the party. For example, both MEPs elected for the SNP in 2009 were white males.

1. **Leads to coalition governments**

The Party List System is unlikely to produce a majority for one party so coalition governments are likely. Many people believe that coalition governments are weak and that the policies of such governments will be weak and unrepresentative of the views of the people. Sometimes it is difficult to negotiate and achieve compromise, making it difficult to get things done. Finally, it is important to remember that no one voted for a coalition government or their compromise policies.

1. **Unsupported Policies**

Some coalitions may need the support of small parties that got little support in the election. In return for their support, the small parties may expect several of their policies enacted – policies which most voters rejected. For example, it is could be claimed that some arguably fairly extreme right-wing religious parties in Israel, with very little support, can have a huge influence on government policy due to their list system and low threshold.

**THE 2009 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS**

The European Parliament election was held on Thursday 4 June 2009. Most of the results of the election were announced on Sunday 7 June, after similar elections were held in the other 26 member states of the European Union. Scotland declared its result on Monday 8 June, as counting in the [Western Isles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Isles) was delayed due to [observance of the Sabbath](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath_in_Christianity).

In total, 72 [Members of the European Parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_of_the_European_Parliament) were elected from the United Kingdom using [proportional representation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proportional_representation).

Notable outcomes were the significant drop in support for the [Labour Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Party_%28UK%29) (in its 12th year as government of the United Kingdom), who came third, and the [United Kingdom Independence Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_Independence_Party) (UKIP) finishing second in a major election for the first time in its history, coming level with Labour in terms of seats but ahead of them in terms of votes. This was the first time in British electoral history that a party in government had been outpolled in a national election by a party with no representation in the [House of Commons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Commons_of_the_United_Kingdom). Also noteworthy was the election of two [British National Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_National_Party) (BNP) candidates. It was the first time the [Scottish National Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_National_Party) won the largest share of the European election vote in Scotland and it was the first time since the First World War that Labour had failed to come first in a Welsh election.

**2009 European Election Results in the UK**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Party** | **Votes** | **Vote %** | **Seats** | **Seat %** |
| Conservative | 4,198,394 | 27.9% | 25 | 37.7% |
| UKIP | 2,498.226 | 16.6% | 13 | 18.8% |
| Labour | 2,381,760 | 15.8% | 13 | 18.8% |
| Liberal Democrat | 2,080,613 | 13.8% | 11 | 15.9% |
| Green | 1,223,303 | 8.1% | 2 | 2.9% |
| BNP | 943,598 | 6.3% | 2 | 2.9% |
| SNP | 321,007 | 2.1% | 2 | 2.9% |
| Plaid Cymru | 126,702 | 0.8% | 1 | 1.4% |

**Task**

1. What is the difference between a regional and a national party list?

2. What is the difference between an open and closed list system?

3. What is a threshold?

**Practice** **End of** **Unit Assessment Task:**

The Party List system is used to elect members of the European Parliament for the UK.

* Explain, in detail, at least two key features of the Party List voting system.
* Analyse the extent to which the Party List System provides the fairest system of voting.

The marking instructions for this assessment task can be seen on the next page.

**Marking Instructions:**

**Explain, in detail, at least two key features of the Party List voting system.**

For this part of the task you must explain at least two aspects of a complex political issue.

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* links between aspects
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Additional Member System

The Additional Member System (AMS) is used in Scottish Parliamentary Elections. To date, there have been 4 elections to the Scottish Parliament. Elections to the Scottish Parliament are at fixed dates every four years. The last Scottish Parliament election was in May 2011. The next election will be in May 2016 (this term of Parliament having been extended by one year to avoid a clash with the UK General Election planned for 2015).

**How Does AMS Work in Elections to the Scottish Parliament?**

There are 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). 73 of these are elected by the traditional “First Past the Post” (FPTP). To vote under FPTP, the voter simply puts a cross in a box next to one candidate. The candidate with the most votes in the constituency wins. All other votes count for nothing.

The remaining 56 are “additional” members, elected by the voters from “lists” put forward by the political parties. This part of the system is more proportional as voters vote for a party instead of a candidate and seven MSPs are elected in this way for each of Scotland’s eight regions. Seats are allocated in proportion to the votes cast, though how well the party did in the constituency ballot is also taken into consideration.

Therefore, AMS is a hybrid system. It contains an element of FPTP and a proportional element (based on party lists, as in the Party List System). It was assumed it would take exceptional political circumstances for any one party to win an overall majority in the Scottish Parliament under AMS. In the 1999 and 2003 elections, Labour won the greatest number of votes and MSPs but did not have an overall majority. In the 2007 elections, the SNP gained 47 MSPs to Labour’s 46 so also did not have an overall majority. However, exceptional political circumstances occurred in 2011, when a combination of a collapse of the Liberal Democrat vote, following their decision to form a coalition in London with David Cameron’s Conservatives (and unpopular policies such as increasing tuition fees in England, which the Liberal Democrats had explicitly promised not to do), a resurgent SNP campaign and a lacklustre and error-strewn Labour campaign combined to give the SNP the first overall majority in the history of Scotland’s Parliament.

At Scottish Parliament elections each voter has two votes. The first is a vote for a preferred party and is used to elect seven “List” MSPs for each region. The second vote elects the constituency MSP. Each voter in Scotland, therefore, has a total of eight MSPs he/she could contact about issues the Scottish parliament has control over. For example in Stirling the Constituency MSP is Bruce Crawford (SNP) but there are also seven Regional MSPs elected to represent the whole of ‘Mid-Scotland and Fife’, including Murdo Fraser (Conservative).

Voting itself is straightforward. The voter has an opportunity to vote twice placing an “X” next to the party of choice in the “List” election and an “X” next to the candidate of choice in the FPTP election. The voter could walk away after the first vote but most voters take the opportunity to vote twice. Voters can vote for a different party in the List election than the one they voted for the FPTP election. Or, they can vote for the same party in both.

The system of counting is, however, complicated. A complex formula, known as the ‘d’Hondt formula’ is applied to decide how list seats are allocated, taking into account the percentage of votes a party received in the list in a region and the number of constituencies a party won in that region. This makes the counting very difficult to understand for voters and can lead to confusion. In the 2007 election, this came together with a number of other factors to lead to mass confusion amongst many voters and what was perceived as a shambles during the counts across the country. The election in 2007 took place on the same day as the local government elections, which used the Single Transferable Vote system for the first time. The combination of two voting systems that voters were not familiar with led to hundreds of thousands of spoiled ballot papers, mass confusion and a national result not emerging until late afternoon the following day.

**THE 2007 ELECTION**

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The 2007 Scottish Parliament election was a closely fought affair between Labour and the SNP. The smaller parties lost significant numbers of votes because of this.

In the 2003 election, 7 Green MSPs were elected through the List vote, along with 6 Scottish Socialist Party MSPs, 1 MSP from the Scottish Senior Citizens Party, 1 from the Save Stobhill Hospital Party and Independent MSPs Denis Canavan and Margo MacDonald. This was a total of 17 MSPs from small parties/independents and enough to have a significant effect in Parliament.

In the 2007 election only 3 MSPs from smaller parties were elected. These were Robin Harper and Patrick Harvie from the Green Party and Margo MacDonald, an independent candidate. Why did this happen?

Firstly, the 2007 election was perceived to be a “battle” between SNP and Labour. The mass media perpetuated this view and many voters switched from smaller parties to the SNP. In effect, many were voting “against” Labour – these voters did not want Labour to be re-elected and felt that the SNP had the best chance of defeating them. Voters had deserted Labour for a number of reasons – many felt that Jack McConnell had been too friendly with Tony Blair and had not been effective for Scotland for fear of upsetting his party leaders in Westminster. Others felt that Labour in both Scotland and England had made big mistakes – notably the Iraq War. Many also felt that Labour had been in power for 10 years in the UK Parliament and 8 years in Scotland and it was time for a change. The SNP capitalised on this public feeling by running an effective election campaign and ended up winning by 1 seat.

Secondly, the Scottish Socialist Party lost many votes due to a split in the party. Tommy Sheridan, who had founded the left-wing party, resigned as leader in 2004. This resignation was controversial and the News of the World newspaper claimed it was because he had indulged in extra-marital affairs. Sheridan successfully sued the News of the World but fell out with other members of the SSP whilst in court over what time he had left an SSP meeting to allegedly visit a strip club! This led to Sheridan leaving the SSP and forming his own party, Solidarity. Sheridan, a charismatic character who was especially popular in the West of Scotland, had always been seen as the driving force behind the SSP and its new leader, Colin Fox, lacked the recognition and personality to win new voters. Neither the SSP nor Solidarity won any seats in the 2007 election.

**2007 ELECTION RESULTS**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Party | Const. Seats | Regional Seats | + / - | Total |
| SNP | 21 | 26 | +20 | 47 |
| Labour | 37 | 9 | -4 | 46 |
| Cons | 4 | 13 | -1 | 17 |
| Lib Dem | 11 | 5 | -1 | 16 |
| Others\* | 0 | 3 | -14 | 3 |

**THE 2011 ELECTION**

The 2011 Scottish Parliament was held on Thursday, 5 May 2011. The election delivered the first majority government since the opening of Holyrood, a remarkable feat as the [mixed member proportional representation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed_member_proportional_representation) system used to elect [MSPs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_of_Scottish_Parliament) was, according to [Jack McConnell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_McConnell) (the former Labour First Minister), originally implemented to prevent an SNP government achieving a parliamentary majority. The [Scottish National Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_National_Party) won 69 seats, the most the party has ever held at either a Holyrood or Westminster election, allowing leader [Alex Salmond](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alex_Salmond) to remain [First Minister of Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Minister_of_Scotland).

The [SNP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_National_Party) gained 32 more constituencies than in 2007, twenty two from the [Labour Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Labour_Party), nine from the [Liberal Democrats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Liberal_Democrats) and one from the [Conservatives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Conservative_Party). Such was the scale of their gains that, of the 73 constituencies in [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland), only 20 were now represented by [MSPs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_of_Scottish_Parliament) of other political parties.

The [Labour Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Labour_Party) lost seven seats and suffered their worst election defeat in [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland) since [1931](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1931_UK_general_election), with huge losses in their traditional [Central Belt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Belt) constituencies and for the first time having to rely on the [regional lists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Additional_member_system) to elect members within these areas. They did, however, remain the largest opposition party. Party leader [Iain Gray](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iain_Gray) announced his resignation following his party's disappointing result.

The [Liberal Democrats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Liberal_Democrats) were soundly defeated; their popular vote share was cut in half and their seat total reduced from 17 to 5. [Tavish Scott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tavish_Scott) announced his resignation as party leader shortly after the election.

For [Conservatives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Conservative_Party), the election proved disappointing as their popular vote dropped slightly and their number of seats fell by 2, with party leader [Annabel Goldie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annabel_Goldie) also announcing her resignation.

**THE 2011 ELECTION RESULTS**

### Constituencies – 2011 Election

| **Party** |  **Seats** |  **+/-** |  **Votes** |  **%** |  **+/-%** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SNP |  53 |  +32 |  902,915 |  45.4 |  +12.5 |
| Labour |  15 |  -20 |  630,461 |  31.7 |  -0.5 |
| Conservative |  3 |  -3 |  276,652 |  13.9 |  -2.7 |
| Liberal Democrat |  2 |  -9 |  157,714 |  7.9 |  -8.2 |
| Others  |  0 |  0 |  21,480 |  1.1 |  -1.1 |

### Regions – 2011 Elections

| **Party** |  **Seats** |  **+/-** |  **Votes** |  **%** |  **+/-%** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Labour |  22 |  +13 |  523,559 |  26.3 |  -2.9 |
| SNP |  16 |  -9 |  876,421 |  44 |  +13 |
| Conservative |  12 |  -2 |  245,967 |  12.4 |  -1.6 |
| Others |  3 |  +1 |  241,632 |  12.1 |  -2.5 |
| Liberal Democrat |  3 |  -3 |  103,472 |  5.2 |  -6.1 |
| Turnout |  1,991,051 |  50 |  -1.3 |

**PARTIES WHICH DO WELL UNDER AMS**

All the parties perform better under AMS than FPTP, apart from Labour! Why?

The FPTP system suits Labour best. This is because Labour voters tend to be concentrated in urban, inner city areas. Labour supporters live next door to other Labour supporters. Being bunched together in the same constituency makes it easier for Labour to have constituency MSPs elected under the FPTP system.

*Supporters of other parties are more spread out across the country.* They all benefit from AMS for different reasons…

Both of the Green Party’s MSPs were elected through the first, party list, vote. The Scottish Green Party has been successful at exploiting AMS as they only put up candidates for the list election. The Green Party, to date, has not put up candidates in the second, FPTP election. Why not?

The Greens know how the FPTP system works. It knows its voters are spread out and are not concentrated in specific constituencies. The Greens therefore know they have little chance of winning any constituency MSPs. In all likelihood, the party would lose a lot of money in lost deposits too (a candidate must pay £500 to stand in an election and only receives this deposit back if they gain more than 5% of the vote). Instead, it is better for the Greens to concentrate their energies on persuading voters, of all parties, to switch their vote to the Greens in the first “List” vote.

The big winner in AMS has been the SNP. While the SNP has its areas of strong support, for example, in the North East of Scotland, it gained most of its MSPs, until 2011, through the regional vote. This allowed SNP to form the government of Scotland in 2007, for example.

The SNP were also able to skilfully use the Additional Members System to secure their overall majority in 2011. They argued that the ‘List’ vote was effectively a vote for First Minister. There is some truth in this as this part of the vote determines the proportion of seats each party gets. In every election since the formation of the Scottish Parliament, the party with the largest number of seats, majority or not, has been able to secure their leader’s place as First Minister. In this way, the SNP were able to present the list vote as a choice between Alex Salmond and Iain Gray, a contest they believed they would easily win, as borne out by the election results. The effect of this was that voters who had previously used their ‘List’ vote to ‘flirt’ with smaller parties, were less prone to do so, ‘squeezing’ the vote of parties like the Greens. Many voters seemed to have accepted the notion of a straight choice between Salmond (SNP) and Gray (Labour). Indeed, the SNP were so successful in this strategy that they gained EVERY constituency in the North East of Scotland AND managed to pick up an additional list seat, leading some in the party to claim they had ‘broken d’Hondt’ (the formula used to calculate how list seats are distributed in AMS).

At the same time as squeezing the list vote of the smaller parties, the SNP was able to dramatically increase their share of the constituencies, apparently benefiting from the collapse in support for the Liberal Democrats (although some analysis seems to suggest they actually took many of their new votes from former Labour voters too).

Arguably, it was the creation of the Scottish Parliament with the use of AMS that saved the Scottish Conservatives from political extinction. It is one of the great ironies that the Conservatives originally opposed both the Scottish Parliament and its voting system! In 2007, the Conservatives won only 4 constituency seats, but gained a further 13 through the List vote. There is such a strong ‘anti-Tory’ vote in Scotland that in much of the country many voters choose whichever party is most likely to beat them, denying them FPTP seats in UK General Elections. There is, however, still a sizeable core of Conservative support and a proportional system such as AMS allows this to be reflected in Scotland’s Parliament.

**Tasks**

1. Describe how AMS works.

2. In your jotter, draw a graph showing the results of the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections.

3. Why does the Green Party benefit from AMS?

4. Why do the Conservatives perform better under AMS than FPTP in Scotland?

5. Why did some see the SNP as having ‘broken d’Hondt’ in 2011?

**COALITION, MINORITY AND MAJORITY GOVERNMENTS**

In the 1999 and 2003 Scottish Parliament Elections Labour became the largest party in Parliament but without having an overall majority of MSPs. This meant that if the other parties were to “gang up” on Labour and vote against them, a minority Labour government could not pass the legislation it wanted. Parliamentary business may have become paralysed.

Labour therefore took the practical step of forming a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, to ensure the passage of legislation through the Parliament. Most of the Scottish Government (then called the Scottish Executive) ministers, including the First Minister, were from the Labour party but there were several Liberal Democrat ministers with leading posts in Government.

After the 1999 and 2003 elections, Labour could have chosen the second placed SNP as its coalition partner. However, Labour and the SNP are fierce rivals so this was never a real option. The Conservatives were the third placed party but Conservative and Labour are competitors at UK level and it would have caused a great deal of damage to Labour’s reputation to have done a deal with the party that many of their supporters strongly dislike. Enter the fourth placed Liberal Democrats!

The price of this support for Labour was to compromise. Labour were forced to introduce the more proportional STV system for local elections. This cost many Labour councillors their jobs in the 2007 council elections and benefited the Liberal Democrats.

However, the 2007 election produced great changes in the Scottish Parliament. The SNP won 47 seats compared to Labour’s 46 seats. In order for SNP to have an overall majority and be able to pass their legislation with minimum disruption, they tried to form a coalition government.

The SNP’s main policy is that of Scottish independence. They believe Scotland’s Parliament should have all the powers of the parliaments of independent countries, like Ireland, Norway and Denmark. They wanted the Scottish people to be able to have a say on whether they supported this and allow them to vote on it in a referendum. However, every other party in the Scottish Parliament disagreed with people being allowed a choice on this matter and the SNP needed to persuade both the 16 Liberal Democrat MSPs and the 2 Green MSPs to join them in a coalition government with an overall majority. The Liberal Democrats thought about this for a while but then decided against forming a coalition government as they did not want to allow there to be a referendum on the subject of Scottish independence.

As a result, the SNP ruled from 2007 to 2011 with a minority government. Other parties said they would support them but on a policy-by-policy basis. This made it hard for them to fulfil their election promises as it was easy for their legislation to be defeated in Parliament. It did, on the other hand, lead to a compromise style of politics as the SNP knew they would not be able to pass any radical legislation without the support of another party.

Since 2011 the SNP have had a majority in the Scottish Parliament. This means that, not only is every Government Minister an SNP Member but they also have a majority on every committee. Even the Presiding Officer, Tricia Marwick, was elected as an SNP MSP (though she now stands aside from party politics). The AMS system was supposed to make this all very unlikely and the minority parties in the Parliament are finding their lack of power and influence hard to accept, especially after the period of minority government from 2007 to 2011.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of AMS Task**

Take a new double page of your jotter. At the top of one page write a large heading “Advantages of AMS” and at the top of the other write a large heading “Disadvantages of AMS”.

Copy each of the following statements (continued on the next page) under one heading or the other. Each of the statements require you to complete an explanation why they are either an advantage or a disadvantage. You then have to give an example from Scotland to back up your point.

* It is more complex for voters to understand because… For example…
* It is fairer because… For example…
* Election results often form only a basis for negotiation to form a coalition because… For example…
* New and small parties are given a chance because… For example…
* There are fewer wasted votes because… For example…
* Coalitions and minority governments often occur. Many argue these are not stable because… For example…
* Coalition and minority governments are more common. Some argue that these produce more consistent and moderate policies which more closely reflect the public mood and there are less extreme swings because… For example…
* Voters wishes are more accurately reflected because… For example…
* There is a strong link between constituency representative (e.g. constituency MSP) and constituent because... For example…
* Smaller parties may hold the balance of power. Some argue this is undemocratic because… For example…
* In most cases, it is unlikely for a party to gain an overall majority because… The UK is unused to this. For example…

**Practice** **End of** **Unit Assessment Task:**

The Additional Member System (AMS) is used to elect members of the Scottish Parliament.

* Explain, in detail, at least two key features of the AMS voting system.
* Analyse the extent to which AMS provides the fairest system of voting.

The marking instructions for this type of assessment task can be seen on the next page.

**Marking Instructions:**

**Explain, in detail, at least two key features of the AMS voting system.**

For this part of the task you must explain at least two aspects of a complex political issue.

Your explanation must be supported by points of description.

Each explanation must make at least two developed points which make the political issue clear. Developed points can include, for example:

* additional detail
* examples
* evidence
* reasons
* drawing out implications

**Analyse the extent to which AMS provides the fairest system of voting.**

For this part of the task your analysis must derive from a body of accurate information.

You must move beyond description and explanation of relevant detail.

You must identify at least two relevant aspects/features and clearly show at least one of the following:

* links between aspects
* similarities and contradictions
* consistency and inconsistencies
* different views/ interpretations
* possible consequences/ implications
* a logical order
* relative importance

Single Transferable Vote

The Single Transferable Vote system (STV) is used in Scottish local government elections. These are the elections in which councillors are elected to serve on local councils, such as Stirling Council.

How does STV work? Put simply, all a voter needs to do is rank their chosen candidates in order of preference. If the voter does not like a candidate, then they do not vote for them. No votes are wasted.



In more detail….

1. The ballot paper lists the names of the candidates from each party. Voters vote by putting a '1' next to the name of their favoured candidate, a '2' next to the name of their next favoured candidate and so on. They stop allocating preferences when they cannot decide between the candidates – they do not need to vote for them all.

2. At the count, the number of votes which candidates need in order to be elected **(the 'quota') is calculated by dividing the total number of valid ballot papers by the number of people to be elected plus one**. For example, with 100 valid ballot papers and three places to be filled, the quota would be 25.

3. The ballot papers are sorted into piles according to the first preferences – the '1's. If any candidate has more first-preference votes than the quota, they are immediately elected.

4. The next stage is to transfer any surplus votes for these elected candidates, i.e. the difference between their vote and the quota needed to be elected. To avoid the problem of deciding which of the votes are surplus, all ballot papers are transferred but at a reduced value so that the total adds up to the number of surplus votes.

5. After all the surpluses have been transferred; we look to see whether all the places to be elected have been filled. If they have not, then the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded and his or her votes are transferred to the voters' second preferences.

6. This process of transferring surpluses and excluding candidates continues until enough candidates have reached the quota to fill all the places to be elected.

Simple!

**STRENGTHS OF STV**

* **More choice for voters** - STV gives voters more choice than any other system. This in turn puts most power in the hands of the voters, rather than the party heads, who under other systems can more easily determine who is elected, meaning that under STV councillors responsibilities lie more with the electorate (the voters in their ‘ward’ – the area they represent) than those above them in their party.
* **Fewer wasted votes** - Fewer votes are 'wasted' (i.e. cast for losing candidates or unnecessarily cast for the winner) under STV. This means that most voters can identity a representative that they personally helped to elect. Such a link in turn increases a representative's accountability.
* It is also worth noting that when viewed as a group, politicians are largely disliked and distrusted, but when taken individually are fairly well thought of. Increasing the personal attachment between a politician and the people can thus help engender a more harmonious relationship between the voters and their representatives.
* **Balance of candidates** - With STV and multi-member wards, parties have a powerful electoral incentive to present a balanced team of candidates in order to maximise the number of higher preferences that would go to their sponsored candidates. This helps the advancement of women and ethnic-minority candidates, who are often overlooked in favour of a 'safer' looking candidate. For example, 25% of councillors elected in the 2012 Scottish local government elections were women, the highest percentage on record.
* **Choice of Councillors to approach -** STV offers voters a choice of representatives to approach with their concerns post-election, rather than just the one, who may not be at all sympathetic to a voter's views, or may even be the cause of the concern.
* **Reflective Council** – A Council is more likely to be both reflective of an areas views and more responsive to them. Parties are broad coalitions, and can be markedly split on certain key issues. With only one candidate per party in each constituency to choose (as in FPTP), the representatives elected may well not reflect the views of their electorate. Many voters in the UK General Election of 2005 were faced with a dilemma when using the FPTP system, as they wanted to support a certain party, but did not want to support the war in Iraq. STV would have helped them express these views much more clearly.
* **All Councillors have same role** - Under STV, as opposed to hybrid systems such as AMS, all Councillors are elected on the same basis, thus lessening the chances of there being animosity between them.
* **No safe seats** - There are no safe seats under STV, meaning candidates cannot be complacent and parties must campaign everywhere, and not just in marginal seats.
* **No tactical voting or negative campaigning** - By encouraging candidates to seek lower-, as well as first-preference votes, the efficacy of negative campaigning is greatly diminished. There is no need for tactical voting.

**WEAKNESSES OF STV**

* **Enormous wards** - In some areas, such as the Scottish Highlands, STV leads to massive wards, in terms of land mass. This was one of the reasons cited by the Arbuthnott Commission for not recommending STV for non-local Scottish elections. Also, in large multi-member wards, ballot papers can get rather big and confusing.
* **Lengthy counting process** - The process of counting the results takes longer under STV, meaning that results cannot usually be declared on the same night as the vote took place.
* **Complicated Voting** - Some people find voting with anything other than a solitary 'X' too complicated. This can lead to an increased amount of spoilt or voided ballot papers.
* **Expense** - It is expensive for political parties to campaign across the whole country, and parties are already short of funds. Parties low on cash are keener to see some form of state funding, so STV could end up costing the electorate money.
* **Donkey Voting** - A voting system that allows voters to rank candidates is prone to so-called 'Donkey voting', where after the first one or two choices, voters rank the rest of the field arbitrarily.

**Tasks**

1. What is preferential voting?

2. What is a quota?

3. Pick the 3 most convincing arguments for STV and the three most convincing arguments against STV and explain them in your own words.

**Practice** **End of** **Unit Assessment Task:**

Single Transferable Vote (STV) is used to elect members of the Scottish Parliament.

* Explain, in detail, at least two key features of the STV voting system.
* Analyse the extent to which STV provides the fairest system of voting.

The marking instructions for this type of assessment task can be seen on the next page.

**Marking Instructions:**

**Explain, in detail, at least two key features of the STV voting system.**

For this part of the task you must explain at least two aspects of a complex political issue.

Your explanation must be supported by points of description.

Each explanation must make at least two developed points which make the political issue clear. Developed points can include, for example:

* additional detail
* examples
* evidence
* reasons
* drawing out implications

**Analyse the extent to which STV provides the fairest system of voting.**

For this part of the task your analysis must derive from a body of accurate information.

You must move beyond description and explanation of relevant detail.

You must identify at least two relevant aspects/features and clearly show at least one of the following:

* links between aspects
* similarities and contradictions
* consistency and inconsistencies
* different views/ interpretations
* possible consequences/ implications
* a logical order
* relative importance

**Practice Course Assessment:**

*One aim of an electoral system is to provide fair representation.*

**Evaluate** the effectiveness of an electoral system you have studied in providing fair representation.

You should refer to electoral systems used in Scotland, the United Kingdom or both in your answer.

**12 marks**

**Marking Instructions:**

* For 12-mark responses, up to 8 marks will be awarded for knowledge and understanding (description, explanation and exemplification) and 4 marks for demonstration of higher-order knowledge and understanding through analysis **or** evaluation.
* Up to 4 marks can be awarded for a range of relevant knowledge which is accurate, relevant and up-to-date. For four marks you must include at least two relevant aspects with detailed and accurate descriptions — these should include the key aspects of the issue.
* Up to 4 marks can be awarded for quality of explanation/ exemplification of knowledge. For four marks at least two aspects of the question must be included. They must be fully explained and relate closely to the key aspects of the question **and** you must include extended, relevant, accurate and up-to-date exemplification.
* Up to four marks can be awarded for analysis/evaluation. This means comments that identify relationships or implications or make judgements. Four marks can be awarded for one extended, accurate and justified analytical or evaluative comment of an insightful nature which relates closely to the key aspects of the question and is exemplified.
* Where a candidate makes more analytical/evaluative points than are required to gain the maximum allocation of 4 marks, these can be credited as knowledge and understanding marks provided they meet the criteria for this.
* Answers to 12-mark questions should demonstrate at least two relevant aspects of knowledge.
* For full marks (12/12), a response **mus**t include a range of points, have detailed description/explanation, include a range of accurate exemplification and analysis or evaluation.
* For full marks in the KU aspect of the question (8 marks), a response **mus**t include a range of points, have detailed explanation, and include accurate exemplification.
* Maximum of 6 marks available (from 8 for KU) if there is no accurate or relevant exemplification.

**Summary – Electoral Systems**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **System** | **Type of System** | **Used for** | **Representative** |
| First Past the Post | Simple Majority | UK Parliament | MPs |
| Party List System | PR | European Parliament | MEPs |
| Additional Member System | PR | Scottish Parliament | MSPs |
| Single Transferable Vote | PR | Scottish Local Elections | Councillors |