

# Democracy and Elections



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## Purpose

To understand why rules are needed; what is a democracy and what it would be like to live in an anarchy.

To learn about the process of elections.

## Entrance of Pupils

*A thought provoking slideshow introducing the theme of 'Democracy and Elections' for the pupils to enter assembly to (10 minutes)*

## Democracy and Elections

The United Kingdom is considered around the world to be a well ordered country.

We have rules about how to go about our every day lives which are well understood. Those rules are called **laws**. They are enforced with penalties if the law is broken. If we didn't have laws, everybody would do as they pleased. It would be chaos called **anarchy**.

In the United Kingdom the huge majority of people obey the laws and go about their business peacefully and happily. Have you every considered, though, who decides what the laws are?

Our country is said to have a **democracy** - that is we **elect** - that means vote for - people to represent us in the place where laws are made. They then take part in the process of making the laws and keeping the country as safe and well run as possible.

So how does it all work?



## **Parliament:**

Our laws are created in London in a place called **The Houses of Parliament.**

This is a building in Westminster where the people's representatives gather and discuss how to make our country the best it can be.

There are two Houses of Parliament.

The **House of Commons** and the **House of Lords.**

People who join the House of Commons are called **Members of Parliament** - often shortened to **MPs.**

The other house is called the House of Lords. Members of the House of Lords are considered to be important in giving advice and consideration to the suggestions for new laws that come from the House of Commons.

There is only one way that someone can join the House of Commons - and that is by being elected to what's called **a seat** - in the House. Whilst there are many seats in the House of Commons - there isn't a particular seat that a person sits on every time they go there - though more of that later.

At the moment, there are 650 seats in the House of Commons. In other words - there are 650 people elected to become MPs and they have the right to take part in discussions about new laws and most of them have the right to vote.



## **Constituencies**

Across the United Kingdom - the whole country is divided up into smaller areas. These areas are called **constituencies** - and each constituency is entitled to vote for a person to represent them in Parliament - their MP.

The 650 constituencies - are based in these areas:

533 are in England  
59 are in Scotland  
40 in Wales and  
18 in Northern Ireland.

## **Elections**

Most MPs are elected to the House of Commons during one of our **General Elections** - though smaller elections can place if an MP resigns or becomes ill and can't carry on doing their job anymore. During a General Election - the whole of the country get ready for the special day - called **Polling Day** - when the big vote happens.

Every constituency has its own election. Residents of the UK register to vote. Their home is in a constituency - so they can vote for whichever people have asked to be considered for the vote.

## **Who Can Stand to be an MP?**

Almost everyone over the age of 18 can stand to become an MP in the constituencies of the United Kingdom though there are small number of people who aren't allowed to. These are members of the armed forces such as army and navy; serving police officers; people who have become bankrupt - ie lost all their money and a number of civil servants who already serve in the House of Lords.

It costs £500 to put your name forward. If you get at least 5% of the vote - then you will get your money back. One person in each constituency is given the job of collecting together all the candidates for election and making sure that the election is held correctly without anyone cheating. Each person who is registered to vote can vote for just one person.



When all of the names who wish to be MP in a given constituency are known - they are placed on the voting paper. There is meeting called **hustings** where members of the public are allowed to ask questions of the candidates - and the candidates can explain why they feel they would make good representatives for the people in that area.

On **polling day** - registered voters go to agreed buildings - called **Polling Stations** - where they can vote. As they enter - they explain who they are. They are checked against the registered voters list and are given a voting paper. They then go to a private voting area and tick a box next to the name of the person they wish to vote for. They then put their voting paper into the sealed voting box.

At the end of the day - when the polls have closed - all the voting boxes from around the constituency are gathered together and the votes are all counted.

This normally takes a few hours since there are usually several thousand votes to be counted.

When the count is completed, the **returning officer** gathers all the hopeful candidates together and announces who has won. The winner for that consistency becomes the new MP for that area and is entitled to join the House of Commons.



## **Political Parties**



In the United Kingdom - there are a number of groups of people who have similar ideas about how to run the country. They have joined together and call themselves a **political party**. Sometime before an election they gather together and agree what they think would be the ideas that should be used to run the country best of all.

The ideas that they agree are put together into a booklet which becomes known as the "**manifesto**". The party tells the people of the country about their manifesto - which in turn lets people know how they would run the country if they were the ultimate winners of the general election.

The main political parties put candidates forward for election in all of the constituencies of the UK - though some parties are based in particular areas - eg Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - and they might only put candidates forward in those areas.

Each political party elects a leader. That leader will become the **Prime Minister** if their party wins the overall General Election. This is how it works:

The main political parties are:

The **Conservative Party** - often called the Tories.

The **Labour Party**

The **Liberal Democratic Party** -

In Scotland there is also the **Scottish Nationalist Party**

Finally there are a number of smaller parties, including parties based in Northern Ireland and Wales.

### **How Do You Win The General Election?**

If a party wins sufficient MP seats - then they will win the General Election. Their leader will become the Prime Minister.

For example, in the General Election held in 2015, the Conservatives won 330 seats, whilst the other parties together had a total of 320 seats. This meant that the Conservatives had a majority (more than the other puts together) and their leader at the time David Cameron - became the Prime Minister.



## Government

Once one of the parties has enough seats - they have enough control to govern parliament and govern the country. They become known as the **Government**. Their leader is called the Prime Minister and they would then set out putting their ideas - their manifesto - into practice and making new laws.

The party who make up the government sit on one side of the House of Commons. That is the left as we usually see it. The party which has the second highest number of seats is called the Opposition. Unsurprisingly - they sit opposite the government during the big discussions that take place. It becomes their job to ask tricky questions of the government to make sure they are doing their job properly.

The Prime Minister is allowed to move into a special house near Westminster - near Parliament. This is called 10 Downing Street - and is thought of as being the Prime Minister's house. They are allowed to live there as long as they remain in the job of Prime Minister. They hold many meetings there too.



Straight after the election, the Prime Minister forms a team of people to run different jobs within the government. The team is called the **Cabinet**. Cabinet meetings are regularly held where the team discuss what's happening around



the country and how they can protect and help the citizens. The team member usually has a large department to run.

- For example the **Minister for Education** has a job to make schools the best they can be.
- The **Health Secretary** keeps an eye on everything to do with hospitals and doctors' surgeries etc.
- The **Home Secretary** looks after law and order, including the police and the courts
- The **Chancellor of the Exchequer** keeps an eye on the nation's money. There are many other jobs in the cabinet too.

### **How Are Laws Made:**

The government set out their ideas for a new law. The ideas are carefully written so that people understand them. They then agree to big discussions in the House of Commons called **debates**. At the end of the debates - they call for a vote to see whether the law will be put forward.

If the law wins the vote at this stage - it is then passed over to the members of the House of Lords who discuss the law in further debates.

They might decide to make suggestions and might advise the government how to improve the law. The law gets passed back to the House of Commons for further discussion.

Further tweaks - called amendments are suggested and sometimes they're made resulting in more discussions and votes until the law-making process is just about complete.

When a law reaches this stage - it is technically presented to the **Monarch** - The Queen - for what is called **Royal Assent**.

There may have been a time in history when the Monarch had a greater say over the laws - but these days - this part of the process is more symbolic of the Monarch's previous role.

After the law receives Royal Assent - it is a new law and is put into practice.



## The Bible Says:

'First of all then, I urge that prayers and thanksgivings be made for all people, kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, godly and dignified in every way.'

**1 Timothy 2: 1-3**

## Let's Pray

Dear God

Give our politicians a just, honest and fair heart to ensure that all that they do is for the good of the country. Give them listening ears to hear the needs of others and give them humility to remember that they were elected to serve.

Amen

## Putting it into Practice

There are a number of important terms that were used throughout the video. Learn the spelling and meaning of them:

Laws	General Election	Labour
Anarchy	Polling Day	Liberal Democrat
Democracy	Hustings	Scottish Nationalist
Elect	Polling Station	Government
Houses of Parliament	Returning Officer	Cabinet
House of Commons	Political Party	Minister
House of Lords	Manifesto	Secretary
MPs	Prime Minister	Chancellor
Constituencies	Conservative	Royal Assent



## Collective Worship and Putting it into Practice for the Rest of the Week

### Day 2

Dear God

Help us to remember than many people in the world are treated unfairly because of a lack of laws or unfair and unjust governments  
Help them to develop democratic systems where each has their say.

Amen

**Think about having or revising a Student Council.**

**Have a discussion about what would be the important aspects that would appear in your Manifesto?**

### Day 3

Dear God

Help me to learn to separate selfish from unselfish wishes.  
Let me think about the needs of others as well as the needs of myself.

Amen

**In small groups, choose who will stand for the role of Student Councillor and produce a manifesto about your group (or party's) important stances.**



#### Day 4

Dear God

Give me the words and voice to speak clearly and ask good questions and the ears to listen carefully to the words and opinions of others.

Amen

Hold a Hustings for the School Council where each person standing gives a one minute speech outlining the important aspects of their manifesto, followed by one minute for questions.

#### Day 5

Dear God

Help me to be strong and true for what is best for the class, putting aside friendships or prejudices.

Amen

Turn one area of your classroom into a polling area where each member of the class can vote for their favoured candidate. This must be based on who had the best manifesto, NOT which group you were in or who is your best friend.

Declare a winner with the most votes!!

