Politics (AS) Revision

1.1 - Democracy

Forms of Democracy

Direct Democracy – This is where the power to make decisions lies with the people. The earliest accepted form of this democracy was in *Ancient Greece whereby the people (although only the Men) would gather, listen to speeches from leading citizens and then vote upon the issue. The majority vote was accepted.* Clearly however, this form of democracy is not applicable with today's society as many more decisions must be made and the voting population is much larger. This does not mean, however, that Direct Democracy is not possible and in many countries it is used in the form of **REFERENDUMS**. *Switzerland for example has had more than 550 referendums since 1848.*

**The arguments FOR and AGAINST Direct Democracy are relatively interchangeable with those For and Against Referendums

Representative Democracy – The Representative system of Democracy evolved when it was realized that it was not feasible for so many people to meet to vote on issues at regular intervals. Political Philosophers also noted that most of the voters where illiterate and ill-educated and incapable of making an informed decision on matters of importance. There was also fear that the views of the minorities would be swamped out by the masses. The solution was to allow the people to vote on a Representative to take their views and get them represented in Parliament. This had the additional plus that the people who stood for election were, in general, better informed about political issues than the common Man. *This system is used currently in the UK. The country is split into 650 different constituencies (soon to be 600) and each constituency elects one MP in a ballot during an election. The winning MP is sent to Parliament to represent the people who live in his constituency during voting on issues etc, etc.*

A Liberal Democracy – This is not so much a type of democracy but instead is used to 'rate' democracies. *A Liberal Democracy is one where the Government is; held accountable to its decisions (Iraq), there are free and fair elections (all citizens over 18 have the right to vote and there is an independent electoral commission who ensure they are fair), there is a peaceful transfer of power if a government has to hand power over (no violence recorded), information is freely available to the citizens (free press and free publishing), the rights and liberties of citizens are recognized and protected (EU convention on Human Rights), a variety of beliefs, opinions and lifestyles are tolerated providing they do not threaten the state and the powers of the government are controlled and limited by either law, elected institutions or both (in 2005 parliament denied the government's request to be able to detain terror suspects for up to 90 days without trial).* The UK falls into this bracket, as do most western democracies.

A Referendum is *"A popular vote where the people are asked to determine an important political or constitutional issue directly".* Referendums may be held for a whole variety of reasons such as:

- **The inability of a Government to decide on an issue**: *1975, Labour asked "Do you think the UK should stay in the European Community". 67% voted YES.*
- **To ensure the affected people consent to the law**: *1998 vote to approve a London Mayor. 72% voted YES.*
- **To resolve issues between parties/factions**: *2010 AV Vote sorted the argument between the pro-reform Lib Dems and Anti-reform Conservatives.*
- **A referendum entrenches the law, preventing it from being attacked by future governments:** *e.g. It would now be very hard for the Government to remove the Scottish Parliament without another Referendum as the Scotts voted in favor.*

A summary of the arguments for and against Referendums.	
Arguments for:	**Arguments against:**
- They are one of the most direct forms of democracy which are available in modern society. - People are more likely to respect and follow decisions if they have been made by the whole population. It gives the law legitimacy. ***This is especially important in places like Northern Ireland in 1998 where they needed strong support for the Good Friday Agreement. 70% YES was deemed enough.*** - It prevents government from making unpopular decisions. ***Shown by the strong NO vote in the 2004 North-East England regional government referendum.*** - Helps the government resolve difficult issues such as the *1975 EU referendum.*	- Some issues are too complex for people to understand. ***For example had the Government held a referendum on whether they should ratify the EU bill on a financial transaction tax in 2011, not many of the public would have been able to make an informed and educated decision on the matter.*** - Allows heavy media influence, ***for example in the 2011 AV-referendum the SUN was very negative towards the idea of AV.*** This may influence voter decisions. - Tyranny of the Majority – ***for example in 1979 in the Welsh referendum on the Wales Act 20% of the voters voted YES, but this was the minority so it is likely that these people's views will be largely ignored.***

Criticisms of the UKs democratic system

The UK's democratic system is not without its faults and has been criticized on a variety of grounds over the years. These arguments include:

1) There are a number of important, non-elected institutions within the governments of the UK. **The most notable examples of this is the House of Lords, which is not currently elected by the people in a vote, yet still hold the power to block or suggest amendments to policy areas.** The House of Lords does not have democratic legitimacy or a mandate from the people so many argue that they should either be elected or not have this power, claiming that it is undemocratic and does not promoted political participation.

2) Secondly, the electoral system used in the UK is the recipient of much criticism. A more detailed explanation can be found in section 1.2, but in summary **- it frequently allows governments to be formed with less than 50% of the popular vote (e.g. Labour in 2005 received 35% of the vote, yet obtained 55% of the seats)**, which arguably discourages political participation.

3) The UKs political system is dominated almost entirely by the three main parties which hold just over 90% of the seats between them. This is seen to limit adequate democratic representation within the UK as minor parties are marginalized and underrepresented in regional assemblies and governments. **e.g. UKIP gained just under 1,000,000 votes in the 2010 election (around 3% of the total vote) yet they obtained no seat in parliament and are therefore not representing the 3% of the population who voted for them.**

4) The power which the UK democratic system lends to pressure groups has been criticized also. A more detailed explanation can be found in section 1.3, but in summary - The leaders of pressure groups are not elected or accountable, pressure groups are not normally under public scrutiny, they lack internal democracy and those who are rich are able to gain an unfair advantage.

5) The membership to the EU has been criticized as many decisions are now made in the EU government and the UK electorate has little democratic control. The UK government also has few powers to override the EU on issues. **e.g. The EU charter on Human Rights contains a passage granting all prisoners voting rights, and the UK government and people do not want this, yet they can be sued unless they grant it.**

1.2 – Elections

In the UK there are many types of elections:

General Election: This must be held at least every 5 years, although it may be called earlier if the government wishes it to be so. In this election, each of the UKs 650 constituencies vote on which representative they want to send back to the House of Commons to represent them. Currently the voting is conducted under First-Past-The-Post.

Bi-election: When an MP resigns or dies, a replacement must be found and an election is held in the old MPs constituency.

Regional Assembly: In the Scottish Parliament, Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies elections are held at fixed times to elect the MPs for these Assemblies.

European Parliament: These have been held every 5 years since 1979 and occur in the whole of Europe. In the UK the country is split into 7 and each region elects a number of MEPs to go to the EU parliament.

The functions of elections

Elections have 3 main functions **Representation, Choosing the Government and Participation:**

1) **Representation –** Elections exist to allow the electorate to choose representatives to make political decisions on their behalf. In the UK, each of the 650 constituencies pick one representative to send to the House of Commons.
2) **Choosing the Government –** While this occurs indirectly in the UK, it is still a function of elections. As voters vote on prospective MPs they are also voting on a party (which their MP belongs to) at the end of the election, the leader of the largest party becomes the Prime Minister, and if one party gained more than 50% of the seats, they are able to form a majority government. Otherwise a minority government or a coalition government must be formed.
3) **Participation –** Elections also give legitimacy to both the government who was voted into power and to the election system itself as in both cases the public have been able to give their views and choose a government. It ensures a **Mandate from the Masses.**

There are numerous types of election system all of which can alter the results of an election in some way. They are generally split into 3 categories:

1) **Plurality –** This is a system where the winning candidate only needs to get the most votes, rather than more than 50% to win. (First-Past-The-Post)
2) **Proportional Representation –** This is a system where the seats are awarded in proportion to votes cast. (Party List, Additional Member System, Single Transferable Vote)
3) **Majoritarian –** This is a system where the winning candidate needs to get more than 50% of the votes cast to win. (Supplementary Vote, Alternate Vote)

Plurality Systems

First-Past-The-Post (UK General Elections): Under this system, the country is split into constituencies holding a certain number of people (60,000 in the UK). During an election, each party can send 1 prospective MP to stand for election in each constituency. The voters then vote on which candidate they want to represent them in parliament. The winning candidate is the one who gets the most votes, and then returns to parliament.

Pros	Cons
• Strong link between MP and Voters • Little chance of extreme parties gaining many seats. • Simple and easy to understand and run • Tends to produce strong, single party majority governments	• Large numbers of votes wasted. • Benefits concentrated support rather than wide spread support. Lib Dems in 2010 – 23% of vote = 8% of Seats. • Encourages tactical voting • Hard to start a new party

P.R. Systems

Party List (EU Parliament): In this system, each party puts forward a list of candidates for a large constituency and in voting the people vote for a party rather than a person. The votes are then counted and seats are awarded in proportion to votes cast (so 40% of the vote = 40% of the seats). Each constituency has multiple members. In a **closed list** the voters are not able to specify a preference in which candidate from the list will be chosen, but in a **open list** system, they are able to do so.

Pros	Cons
• High degree of proportionality. • Every vote has the same value. • Simple for voters.	• Large constituencies mean there is little voter-MP link. • In a closed system there is no say over the MP.

AMS (Scottish Assembly): This system is a hybrid between Party List and FPTP. Each voter gets 2 votes, one of them works like FPTP and the other works the same as Party List. The seats are then awarded 2/3 FPTP and 1/3 Party List. The results are then adjusted to make it more proportional, so doing well in FPTP means your score is lowered, and doing poorly means it is raised.

Pros	Cons
• Each voter has at least 1 effective vote. • Mostly proportional • Allows voters to show personal support in the FPTP vote and party support in the List vote.	• Not very easy to understand • Possibility that the 'List' MP would be overshadowed by the personally chosen FPTP MP.

STV (RoI Assembly): Under this system, all the constituencies have between 3 and 5 MPs depending on the constituencies' size. In the vote, voters rank candidates in order of preference and in order to secure a seat, a candidate must reach a quota. If no candidate reaches the quota first time, a calculation is done to find the surplus vote, but this is very difficult to and if there is no surplus the bottom candidate is eliminated and all their votes move onto the second choice until one candidate reaches their quota. Once one candidate reaches a quota, all the spare votes for that candidate are moved onto their second choices, and this process continues until enough candidates have achieved their quotas.

Pros	Cons
• Simple for the voters to use. • No wasted votes. • Ensures wide spread representation in a very divided society. • Gives governments a strong mandate.	• Difficult to run as the surplus calculation is complex. Means long counting period and large expense. • Can lead to constant coalitions. • Requires very large constituencies. • Weak MP-Constituency link.

Majoritarian Systems

SV (London Mayor): In this system there are 2 columns on the ballot paper, one for first choice and one for the second choice although there is no obligation to use the second choice if you do not want to. In the first counting stage, if one person wins over 50% of the vote they win, if not then all but the top 2 candidates are eliminated and their secondary votes are added on to the relevant candidate if they are applicable. The winner is then declared.

Pros	Cons
• Simple for the voters to use. • Encourages positive campaigning.	• Many wasted votes. • The winner does not necessarily have the support of over 50% of the electorate.

AV (Austraila): This system allows the voters to list their favorite candidates in order of preference. When voting occurs, if one person wins over 50% in the first count then the voting ends. If not the bottom candidate is eliminated and the secondary votes for that candidate added onto the other candidates as applicable. This continues until one candidate has over 50% of the vote.

Pros	Cons
• Eliminates tactical voting • All MPs would have majority support • Retain current constituencies • Coalitions are no more likely than in FPTP	• Promotes a central view point. • Doesn't stop 2 party dominance. • Prone to 'Donkey Voting' – randomly picking candidates due to lack of knowledge.

Proportional Representation

There are many advantages and disadvantages to the proposal that the UK should change its current FPTP voting system and change it to a PR system instead. Below is a table summarizing the arguments on both sides:

Is Proportional Representation a good thing?	
YES	**NO**
• It delivers are better representation of ethnic and political minorities within society. It effectively removes the Tyranny of the Majority as nearly everyone is represented. It is easier for voters to stand by their political views rather than having to resort to tactical voting. • Coalition politics prevents conviction politicians like Margret Thatcher as more parties are involved in Government so more views are represented. *This could prevent highly unpopular bills such as the Poll Tax in 1990.* • Having a PR system can increase voter turnout by decreasing political atrophy: *e.g. In the UK the voter turnout is roughly 60%, yet in Ireland where they use a PR system, turnout is about 70%.*	• People lose the power to choose the government as the numerous parties do this after the election to form the coalition government: *e.g. the current coalition government was not directly elected by the electorate, but formed behind closed doors in retrospective of the election.* • Creates weak, indecisive governments who are not directly accountable for their actions. • Allows extreme parties to gain representation within government as larger parties frequently have to 'top up' with the small parties to form governments: *an extreme example being the Nazi party in the 1930s who gained representation at first by topping up the larger parties in a Rainbow Coalition.*

1.3 – Pressure Groups

A pressure group is *"an organization which seeks to influence the details of a comparatively small range of public policies and which is not a factor on a recognized political party".* There are various different classifications of pressure groups which affect the ways in which they work:

Types of Pressure Group

Pressure Groups can be categorized by whether or not they are in direct contact with policy makers:

Insider - An Insider group is a Pressure Group which has strong links with decision makers and are regularly consulted on policy areas. These groups work *inside* the political system through contact with MPs, peers and official committees. This may be because their policies are acceptable to the government and the government wishes to be seen as taking other opinions into account, or because the group is of use to the development of policy. **e.g. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI). This group is regularly consulted by the government and produce reports on how businesses are operating, performing and their attitudes towards new issues such as business taxation.**

Outsider - An Outsider Pressure Group does not participate in the consultation process, either by choice or because they are excluded by the government. They can only use indirect methods to attempt to change policy. They work outside the political system, attempting to influence policy via methods such as mobilizing public opinion. **e.g. Occupy - This was a group set up to try and balance the differences between executive pay and worker pay, their methods included camping in high-profile cases to make their voices heard. They were not consulted by the government on policy.**

They can also be categorized based on what types of issues they are campaigning to change:

Interest/Sectional - An Interest or Sectional group is one which is acting on behalf of a particular section of society (e.g. Religious communities), they are sometimes known as Interest groups as they act upon the Interests of a particular segment of society. **e.g. National Union of Teachers (NUT) represents Teachers, furthering their interests including better pay, working conditions and pensions.**

Cause/Promotional - An Cause or Promotional group is focused on promoting a particular issue. They are not self interested as they are trying to promote a particular idea or cause to further, in their opinion, the general good. **e.g. The Electoral Reform Society was set up to examine how changing the electoral system used in the UK would change the election results.**

Lobbying - Lobbying is the processes where-by a pressure group gets in direct contact with a policy maker via the use of committees and commissions which meet to develop policy, consultation with ministers on issues which concern the groups campaign and by giving policy makers help in the form of a source of education or by scrutinizing the legislation. Insider pressure groups find it easier to lobby than Outsiders as they are in direct contact with policy makers. Outsider groups however are still able to attempt to lobby policy makers but typically experience less success than Insiders. **The recent exposure of the Cash for Access debacle is a good example of Lobbying in action, scrutinizing the way in which the government works.**

Parliamentary Methods - The Parliamentary Method is where a pressure group finds an MP to bring up relevant issues as much as is possible in the Commons. This is often done because the MP is a sympathizer to the groups aims or for technically illegal financial returns. The House of Lords is particularly useful to pressure groups as the Lords are more independent of party control than MPs so the group is more likely to find a friendly ear in the Lords. **A recent example of this is the 2010 equality act which sought to prevent discrimination over groups such as women, the disabled, ethnic minorities and gay people. However, a coalition of Christian churches argued that they should had an exemption to this act because they had a "special reason" to exclude gay people. The amendment to the act was successful.** Outsider groups tend to not partake in parliamentary methods and so are described as 'extra-parliamentary'.

Direct Action - This is when a group attempts to gain as much publicity to their cause as possible via a variety of methods such as public stunts such as **Greenpeace destroying fields of GM crops or the Animal Liberation Front releasing animals used for scientific tests into the wild**. Direct Action has become more popular with the advent of modern technology such as mobile phones and the internet as lots of people can be alerted to the action in a very short space of time.

Mobilizing Public Opinion - This method makes use of political parties need to hold onto their voting support. If a large group of people such as the **old segment of the population represented by Age UK are campaigning for larger pensions and rebates on elderly council taxes then the government has to listen in order to maintain their voting support**. This type of action becomes especially prevalent around elections as it is even more important that you do not loose voters then.

Why are some pressure groups more influential than others?

There are many factors which can determine why a pressure group is or is not successful in achieving their aims. In a 25 mark essay, you only need to write about 4, and these are:

1) **Their relationship to the government -** the typical rule is that pressure groups which are of insider status such as the **CBI (Confederation of British Industry)** tend to enjoy much better success in getting their policies included into the governments legislation than, for example, the **Trade Unions** which after Margret Thatcher's premiership found themselves largely excluded from positions of government influence and thus have significantly less power to alter legislation than they enjoyed in the 60s for example.

2) **The size of the pressure groups membership/support -** a pressure group which enjoys a larger amount of membership or public support has a much greater degree of leverage over the government than a little known pressure group. For example, the **1996 Snowdrop campaign** which was calling for a ban on private ownership of handguns in the UK was successful largely due to the 750,000 signatures its petitions received in just 6 weeks.

3) **Ability to cause disruption -** the ability of a pressure group to quickly get itself and aims known are often vital to their success. **Farthers4Justice** for example were able to gain a large amount of news coverage by doing public stunts such as dressing up as supermen and parading through the streets. A lot of public exposure sparks debate and the government is forced to make a decision on the issue presented by the pressure group.

4) **Finance -** Large pressure groups are able to pump a lot more money into lobbying and other activities which promote themselves and thus the issue they are representing. A good example is the supermarket **Tesco** which is able to spend millions every year lobbying the government to seek a better deal for themselves.

How democratic are pressure groups?

Democratic Features	Undemocratic Features
• Provide opportunities for public participation within politics. **The Iraq War rallies allowed hundreds of thousands of people to tell the government that they were against the war.** • Protect the interests of minorities within society. **For example, the Sikh society are represented by the Sikh Federation.** • Act as a safe guard to the power of the state. **NO2ID protested, along with other groups, against the proposed ID cards within the UK.**	• Some groups wield more power than their support warrants, such as **Tesco which while it is a large company, fights little for public interests, and instead fights to further its own.** • Insider pressure groups have influence at the expense of outsiders. The government can justify ignoring outsiders as it is listening to insiders. • Pressure groups are not directly accountable to their actions. • The groups leadership may not accurately convey the views of its members.