



POLITICS

Our first topic in UK Politics will be - **Democracy and Participation**.

Complete the following work to best prepare you for the start of the course.

Watch the inserted YouTube links for extra support on developing your knowledge.

What is Politics?

Politics is about how we are governed. It concerns the ways in which decisions are made about government state and public affairs; where power lies; how governments and states work; in different theories and practises such as democracy, equality, tyranny, and violence. In the AQA course we will look at the activities of political parties and politicians, as well as the other groups and individuals who take part in political activity and help to shape the society in which we live.

In society, people have different values and ideas about what goals should be pursued and about the best means of achieving those goals. Whenever people are engaged in making decisions, conflict is inevitable. It may be mild verbal disagreement or it may be more dramatic physical confrontation. The process of resolving conflicts about the way in which we organise our society and the priorities which we establish is a political process. Those charged with making decisions exercise power and authority over us. They have the ability to determine how our community is run and how we live our lives.

There is a difference between power and authority:

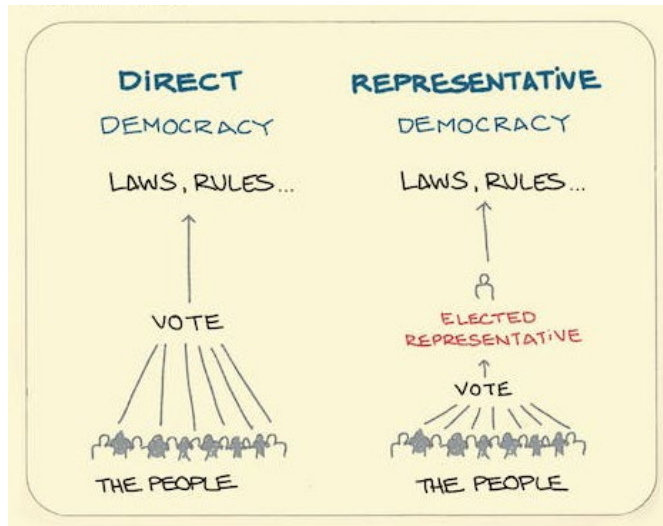
- **Power** is the ability to get things done if necessary by making others do what they would not do by free choice. Other means of persuasion may be used but underlying their use is the ability to reward or punish. Power is a key ingredients of politics enabling collective decisions to be made and in fast. It is the tool that enables rulers to serve our manipulate the people over whom they rule. Hay has described politics as being concerned with the 'distribution exercise and consequences of power'.
- **Authority** is the ability of governments and individuals to direct others and achieve their goals because the majority of people accept that it is the government's right to tell them what to do rather than because of the power of force they have at their disposal. If power is the ability to influence or determine the behaviour of others, authority is power cloaked in rightfulness. Usually the exercise of authority implies that others will obey and force will not have to be used. It is a legitimate power based on respect and recognition that the person exercising it is justified in doing so. A police officer has both power and authority, whereas A blackmailer has power but no authority.

Power can depend on naked force or coercion. It is used in many authoritarian regimes to maintain leaders in office, the rule of dictators often ultimately relying on intimidation and physical threat. By contrast, in a democracy, those who govern have the authority to do so. They derive their legitimate authority from the consent of those over whom they govern, as determined in periodic, free and meaningful elections, in which there is a genuine choice of

candidates with a range of differing viewpoints. In a democracy, there is free competition between parties and participation by the massive voters in elections.

What is Democracy?

The word democracy derives from two Greek terms: *demos* meaning people and *kratia* signifying 'rule of' or 'by'. Many people therefore see democracy as meaning 'people power', with government resting on the consent of the governed. According to Abraham Lincoln, democracy is government 'of the people, by the people, and for the people'. In ancient Athens, between 461 BC and 322 BC, every qualified citizen (this did not include women slaves and non Athenians) had the opportunity to participate in political decision making. Citizens gathered together and voted directly on issues of current interest and concern. This was **direct democracy** in action. In today's large and more industrialised societies, people cannot all come together to discuss and vote on issues. They elect representatives to act on their behalf. This is **indirect or representative democracy**.



Key elements of a modern representative democracy include:

- Popular control of policy makers
- The existence of open and organised opposition
- Political equality ('one person, one vote')
- Political freedom
- Majority rule
- Free and fair elections
- Lawmaking by elected representatives

A democratic political system is one in which public policies are made, on a majority basis, by representatives subject to effective popular control at periodic elections which are conducted on the principle of political equality and under conditions of political freedom.

Almost all countries claim that they are democratic because the language of democracy presents a good image – so they use the terms or labels of democracy to some extent. However, we might not recognise their regimes as democratic. Particularly over the last three decades, since the 1970s, democracy has been widely accepted around the world as the most desirable form of government. At one time it was seen mainly as a Western creed, strong in Western Europe and former colonies such as Australia, New Zealand and North America, but that is no longer true. Democracies are to be found in southern Europe such as Greece and Portugal, most of Eastern Europe like Hungary and Slovenia, and parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia. The democratic ideal appears to have triumphed.

In a democracy, a few govern and the mass of people follow. The electors cast their vote every few years at election time, but in between they have little say. This is obviously a form of 'people power', but are limited one. In effect, the voters are giving away their rights of decision making to a small number of elected representatives who make decisions on their behalf. This is political elitism, the few acting on behalf of the many.

Britain and other Western democracies are often described as liberal democracies. In addition to the features of democracy that we have already mentioned such as free elections, the right to oppose etc, liberal democracies are noted for their commitment to the ideas of:

- **Pluralism** - The existence of diverse centres of economic and political power, involving a choice of political parties and the existence of many pressure groups.
- **Limited government** - Checks and limitations on the power of government in order to secure essential liberties.
- **Civil liberties and civil rights** - the existence of essential public freedoms that are often written into law, for example, freedom of assembly and speech, the right to vote and to a fair trial.
- **Open government** – non-secretive government that can be seen to be fair and accountable.
- **Independent judiciary** – a just, impartial and independent legal system based on equal access to the law.
- **Free and open media** – newspapers and broadcasting being allowed to operate freely without government pressure.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2LC7dWnzqM&list=PLXtShDmDvfwx4PEtnDa9tK2HZwH_Fg9zm&index=8

Participation – The Essence of Democracy

All citizens can participate by standing as political candidates. In politics, participation is an umbrella term that covers the various means by which the public can directly participate in decisions about public policy.

A country is democratic if the people have the means and opportunity to affectively participate in the way that it is run. Citizen participation is basic to the democratic system. People may not be able to make decisions directly, but those who do make them are accountable to the electorate at election time. All adults have gained the franchise All right to the comma sometimes as a result of prolonged struggle. For many of them, this is the extent of their involvement in the political process. But there are plenty of other ways in which they can participate, whether that is by contacting their MP are attending political meetings, signing petitions or going on a demonstration to register their protest. All are forms of 'people power'.

Democracy Core Note Questions – Answer the following questions

1. How can politics be defined?
2. What is the difference between Power and Authority within politics?
3. Where does the word 'democracy' originate from and what is its meaning?
4. What is the difference between direct and representative democracy?
5. Why could direct democracy work in Ancient Athens?
6. What are the elements of representative democracy?
7. What is political elitism within a democracy?
8. What are 'liberal democracies'?
9. What does participation mean within politics?
10. What is meant by the term 'citizen participation'?

Different Types of Democracy

Democracy in the UK primarily takes the form of representative democracy, with the occasional element of direct democracy. Some of the countries, for example the USA, have a presidential democracy, which involves a directly elected leader who governs alongside a representative body for example Congress.

Representative Democracy

Representative democracy is by far the most common form of democracy in the UK, with regular elections for parliament, local councils and, until 2020 and Brexit, to the European Parliament. Representative democracy involves the people voting for representatives who then serve in parliament or on councils as MP's or councillors. Certainly, at Westminster level, virtually all MPs belong to a political party. Once in office, they make decisions and pass laws on behalf of voters. Accountability comes in the form of regular elections when voters can endorse or reject candidates at the ballot box. The following points are among the most common cited advantages of representative democracy and elected representatives:

- Elected representatives have the knowledge and skill to make often difficult and complex decisions on behalf of voters.
- By being responsible for nearly all areas of policy and decision making, they are able to take a broader view of issues and balance effectively competing claims and issues. This is particularly significant when it comes to priorities for allocating spending, balancing budgets and setting taxes.
- Belonging to a political party enables voters to have a good idea of how representatives will act once in power. Will they cut taxes, spend more on health than defence, or trim welfare benefits?
- Representative government is more efficient than laying numerous decisions and laws directly before the people for approval or rejection.

Direct Democracy

Direct democracy is in many ways the opposite of representative democracy. It entails directly involving the people in policy choices as opposed to leaving it purely to elected officials. Referendums are commonly associated with this type of democracy. Direct democracy in practice is rarely used in the UK, and then almost exclusively reserved for constitutional issues.

Examples of direct democracy in the UK include the following. Note that some of these were regional not national:

- 1973 Northern Ireland: vote on whether it would remain part of the United Kingdom.
- 1975 Whole of UK: vote on continued membership of the EU.
- 1979 and 1997 Scotland and Wales: proposed introduction of devolution.
- 1998 London: referendum on whether there should be a directly elected Mayor of London and the creation of a Greater London Authority.
- 1998 Northern Ireland: vote on the Good Friday Agreement.

- 2011 Whole of UK: proposal to replace the first past the post electoral system with the alternative vote.
- 2011 Wales: vote on whether more powers should be transferred to the Welsh Assembly.
- 2014 Scotland: independence referendum.
- 2016 Whole of UK: EU referendum.

The UK's use of direct democracy contrasts sharply with some other democracies that make far more use of direct democracy - the prime example is Switzerland where the practise is strongly embedded in its political culture. For example, 50,000 people can challenge any piece of legislation within 100 days of its adoption by parliament, a process known as an optional referendum and a clear check on representative government. There is also scope for citizens to draw up their own laws provided 100,000 people within 18 months sign up to a measure. Among the measures voted on by Swiss citizens over the years include joining the UN and banning the construction of minarets for mosques. The Republic of Ireland too has made quite extensive use of referendums on ethical issues that have led to the legislation of both abortion and same sex marriage.

E-petitions

Alongside occasional referendums the other notable form of direct democracy in the UK is the growing use of E-petitions. Originally started in 2006 and re launched in 2011 these enable members of the public to identify and raise issues with the government. Any E petition with more than 10,000 signatures receives a response from the government, and those with more than 100,000 signatures are considered for a debate in parliament. The following is a list of popular petitions:

- In 2019 around 6,000,000 signatures were collected in a petition to revoke article 50 and have the UK remain in the EU.
- In 2019 around 1.7 million signatures were collected in a petition in opposition to the planned prorogation of parliament in the midst of the debates and stalemate of a post Brexit deal.
- In 2017 around 1.86 million signatures were collected in a petition to stop President Donald Trump from making a state visit to the UK.
- In 2007 around 1.8 million signatures were collected in a petition to stop plans to introduce road pricing which would have charged motorists for actual road use.

In none of these cases did the petitioners change the mind of the government, although road pricing was subsequently abandoned and the Supreme Court ruled against the prorogation of parliament.

Features of Democracy – Complete the table to show key features and evaluate challenges

Features	Explanation	Challenges
Elections	These should be free, fair and secret. Everyone has an equal say in selection of their elected representatives irrespective of gender, class, ethnicity, wealth etc.	Turnout to elections varies significantly according to age.
Representation		
Legitimacy		
Participation		
Accountability		
Rule of Law		
Transition of Power		
Civil rights		
Education and Information		

The Development of Democracy in the UK

Between 1832 and the present day, the development of democracy in the United Kingdom has been marked by key legislative reforms and the efforts of various political movements. Before 1832, Britain was considered an oligarchy, a system in which power was concentrated in the hands of a small, privileged elite. Voting rights were limited to wealthy landowners, and the vast majority of the population, including working-class men and all women, were excluded from the political process. This lack of broad political representation led to growing demands for reform, especially as industrialisation changed the structure of British society.



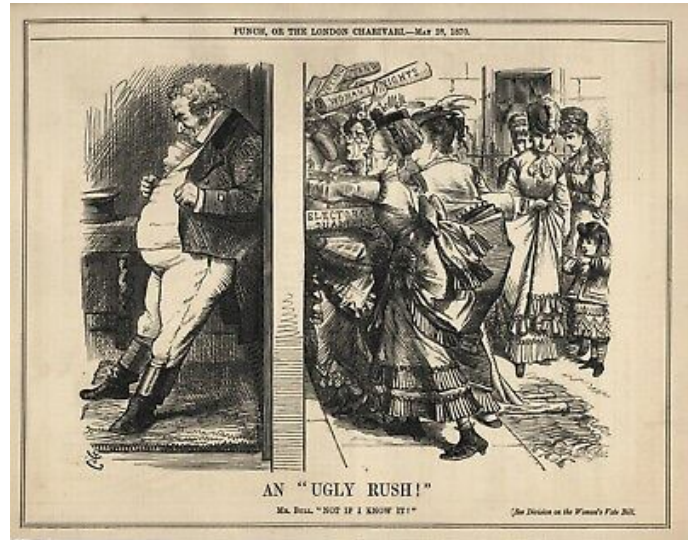
One of the earliest and most significant examples of grassroots political agitation came in the form of the Chartist movement during the 1830s and 1840s. The Chartists were an early pressure group who campaigned for political reform. They presented petitions to Parliament calling for universal male suffrage, secret ballots, the abolition of property qualifications for MPs, equal electoral districts, payment for MPs, and annual parliaments. These demands were laid out in the People's Charter of 1838.

Although their immediate efforts were largely unsuccessful, none of their petitions were adopted at the time, the movement is credited with popularising ideas that would later become key components of the British democratic system.

The Chartists were primarily motivated by the inequality that working-class men faced within the political system. They believed that political power should not be confined to the wealthy and that every man, regardless of income or property ownership, should have a say in how the country was governed. This belief threatened the established social order, and the wealthy elite were particularly wary of granting the vote to working-class men. They feared that such a shift in political power would lead to radical changes in policy, including higher taxes for the rich and greater government intervention in the economy.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw further reforms that expanded democratic participation. The Ballot Act of 1872 was a significant step, introducing secret voting to prevent voter intimidation and bribery. The Reform Act of 1867 had already significantly increased the male electorate, doubling it to over two million. The Representation of the People Act 1918 marked a watershed moment by extending the vote to all men over 21 and women over 30. This Act was followed by the 1928 Representation of the People Act, which granted equal voting rights to women, allowing them to vote on the same terms as men—at age 21.

The women's suffrage movement, which had been active for decades, played a crucial role in achieving these milestones. The movement was divided between the suffragists, who employed peaceful and lawful methods, and the suffragettes, who adopted more militant tactics. Despite their differences, both groups demanded the right to vote for women, arguing that women contributed equally to society, paid taxes, and should therefore have an equal voice in governance. Their opponents contended that women were too emotional or uninformed to participate in politics and that their involvement would disrupt traditional gender roles and family structures.



Ultimately, the women's suffrage movements were highly successful in advancing political reform, culminating in full electoral equality with the 1928 Act. Later reforms continued to deepen democratic participation: the Representation of the People Act 1969 lowered the voting age from 21 to 18, recognising the maturity and contributions of younger citizens. Additionally, the Parliament Act of 1911 curbed the power of the unelected House of Lords, reinforcing the democratic authority of the elected House of Commons. The Life Peerage Act of 1958 allowed for the appointment of life peers, introducing more expertise and diversity into the upper chamber. The Human Rights Act 1998 further bolstered democracy by incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, giving citizens a clearer legal framework to protect their civil liberties.

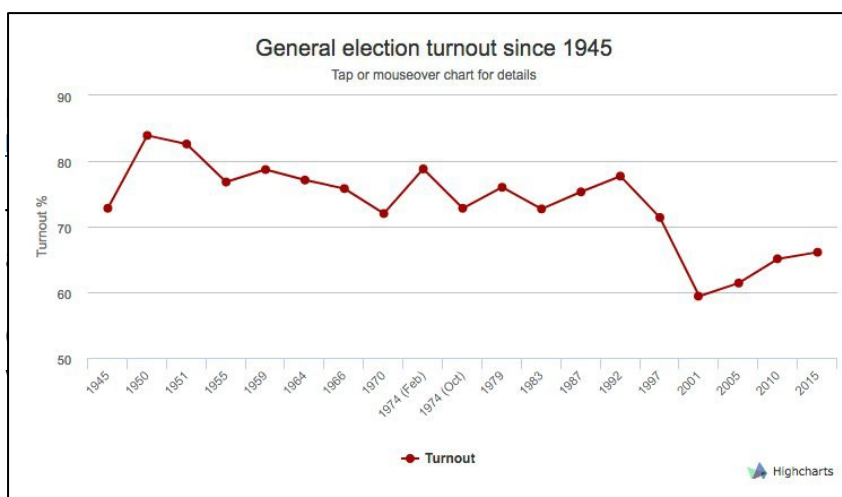
In summary, the development of democracy in the UK has been a gradual but transformative process. From the restrictive oligarchy of the early 19th century to a modern representative democracy with near-universal suffrage, political reform has consistently expanded the rights and freedoms of citizens. These changes were driven by both legislative milestones and the persistent efforts of reformist movements that demanded a more inclusive and equitable political system.

1. Why was Britain seen as an Oligarchy before 1832?
2. How did the Chartists become an early example of a pressure group for political reform?
3. How successful was the Chartist movement on political reform?
4. What were the Chartists primarily concerned with in regard to inequality within politics?
5. Why were the wealthy elite concerned about giving the vote to working class men?
6. How did the suffragettes and the suffragists differ?
7. What were the demands of the women's suffrage movement? What arguments did they have for female suffrage?
8. What were the arguments against votes for women?
9. How successful were women suffrage movements in political reform?

Identify which development had the following impact on democracy in the UK.

Act	Year	Development
		Allowed all men over 21 and women over 30 to vote
		Ensured that voting took place in secret
		Equalised the voting qualification across the UK
		Lowered the voting age from 21 to 18
		Doubled the electorate to over 2 million men.
		Enshrined the European Convention of Human Rights in UK law
		Allowed women to vote on the same terms as men – i.e. at 21.
		Established the principle that the elected House of Commons takes primacy over the unelected House of Lords.
		Members of the House of Lords can be appointed for life.

Political Participation -



[PEtnDa9tK2HZwH Fg9zm](#)

ation crisis is a complex

cal participation have
below post-war averages,

especially among young people. Membership of mainstream political parties has significantly declined over the past decades, reducing the direct connection many citizens once had with representative politics. Public trust in politicians is also notably low, a majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the way the country is governed and even showed support for a strong leader who could bypass Parliament, an indication of democratic strain. These trends suggest disillusionment and detachment from formal political structures.

However, it is important to recognise that political engagement is not disappearing, it is evolving. Many citizens are now participating through alternative channels, such as online activism, petitions, protests, and issue-based campaigns. The rise of digital platforms has made it easier for individuals, especially younger generations, to engage with politics in less traditional but still impactful ways. Movements like climate strikes or campaigns around social justice have demonstrated high levels of participation outside the ballot box. Moreover, political party membership has risen in some cases, such as the Labour Party surge under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, and voter turnout increased notably in the 2016 EU referendum and the 2019 general election.

In conclusion, while there are legitimate concerns about declining trust and engagement with traditional political mechanisms in the UK, this does not necessarily amount to a full-blown participation crisis. Instead, it may reflect a transformation in how people choose to engage politically, suggesting the need for institutions to adapt rather than simply lament disengagement.

Political Participation – Data Analysis

Using the [Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement Report](#), complete the following tasks:

1. According to the Hansard Society's 2019 report, what percentage of the British public expressed dissatisfaction with the system of governing, and how did this compare to previous years?
2. What key trends did the Hansard Society identify in terms of public trust in politicians, and how did these attitudes differ across social or political demographics?

3. How did the public's understanding of how Parliament works affect their confidence in the political system, as outlined in the Audit of Political Engagement?

4. What concerns did the 2019 Audit raise about public support for a strong leader who could bypass Parliament, and what implications does this have for democratic norms in the UK?

5. How has public engagement in traditional political activities, such as voting and contacting elected representatives, changed over time according to the Audit report?

6. What role did Brexit play in shaping public attitudes toward democracy and political engagement, as reflected in the 2019 Hansard Society findings?

7. What were the main findings related to political knowledge and education in the Audit report, and what recommendations might be inferred for improving civic literacy?

8. How did public confidence in Parliament compare to confidence in other UK political institutions, based on the Hansard Society's 2019 data?
9. According to the INFO Pack and Audit report, what are some key factors that influence whether individuals feel politically empowered or alienated?
10. What solutions or strategies does the Hansard Society suggest might help address the democratic discontent and low engagement identified in their 2019 report?

11. 'Political participation and engagement are high in the UK.' How far do you agree with this statement? Use the data in the Audit of Political Engagement to support arguments on both sides of the debate.

Agree	Disagree

12. Provide an overall conclusion of your findings below – essentially writing a conclusion to the statement question.

13. From the report and your own knowledge, what might be done to improve participation and engagement with politics in the UK? Aim for three ideas and explain your reasoning.

-

-

-

Getting ahead – Watch these videos to develop a broad understanding of political ideologies that will support your understanding of politics and government in the UK.

Introduction - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEUaW-o-OE>

100 Year overview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xL8L7kM-gak&t=615s>

Today's Political Parties <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HqnBQMAbhs>