

Year 9 Religion & Society - What Really Matters?

Unit 1: Citizenship – The UK Political System

How does the political system work in the UK



Lesson 1 - What's the difference between Government & Parliament?

- A **government** is the group of people who have been **elected** and given **authority** to govern a country or state.
- The Government is the **executive branch**, and it runs the country's day-to-day affairs, like public services and national security.
- Government is led by the **Prime Minister**, who chooses a **Cabinet** to make decisions over how the country is run.
- **Parliament** is the **legislative branch**, made up of the **House of Commons**, **House of Lords** and the **monarch**. In the House of Commons, the MPs are elected by the public. Those in the House of Lords are appointed.
- Parliament's main roles are to **represent** the public and to **scrutinise** the Government. It also debates and passes laws, which the Government then implements.

Common misconception:

That government is the same thing as parliament

Parliament is the law-making branch, made up of elected MPs. The Government, including the Cabinet, is in charge of running the country and implementing those laws. It is led by the Prime Minister. Parliament scrutinises Government actions/decisions.

KEY TERMS:

Government - the individuals who have been elected and given the authority to run the state, led by the Prime Minister (PM) in the UK

Authority - the power or right to have official responsibility, to give orders and make decisions

Parliament - comprises three parts: the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the monarch. Its purpose is to debate, make laws and scrutinise the government

Lesson 2 - How do elections work?

- A **general election** in the UK is when MPs are elected per **constituency**. Each constituency has roughly the same size **electorate** so that **representation** remains fair and equal.
- When a general election is called by the current **Prime Minister**, a chain of events is set in motion; **dissolution of Parliament**, **candidate nominations**, campaigning, new voter registration, polling day and announcing the results.
- The leader of the party with the most seats will become the Prime Minister, the head of the UK Government.

Common misconception:

The Prime Minister is directly elected by the public during general election

The Prime Minister is not elected by the people; instead, they are the leader of the party that has the most seats in the House of Commons after the election.

KEY TERMS:

Election - when people vote to choose their leaders or representatives

Constituency - the specific geographical area that is represented by each MP in the House of Commons

Prime Minister - the leader of the political party who is in power and head of the Government

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Lesson 3 – What happens after a general election?

- After a general election, the Prime Minister is accepted by the monarch and is invited to make a government. MPs are sworn in and the Prime Minister chooses the **Cabinet**. **Parliament** is then officially opened by the **monarch** in the **State Opening**.
- Governments may be run with a **majority, minority or coalition**.
- A **majority** means that one party has 50%+1 of all the seats in Parliament.
- A **coalition** is when typically, two parties join together to form a government. They share the roles in Cabinet and compromise over policies.
- A **minority** government is when a party rules with a majority. Their MPs hold the roles in Cabinet, but they may set up a deal with smaller parties, where they agree to vote the same way on certain issues.

Common misconception:

The party that wins the most seats will form the Government and have all the power

If a party does not have the majority of seats (50%+1) in Parliament, they may not be able to form a government. They might have to form a formal coalition or a voting agreement with a smaller party to get the majority. Power may have to be shared.

KEY TERMS:

Election - when people vote to choose their leaders or representatives

Prime Minister - the leader of the political party who is in power and head of the Government

Majority - holds more than half of the total seats in a legislative body, such as a Parliament

Coalition - a government formed jointly by more than one political party

Minority - a government formed by a political party that does not have an overall majority of MPs.

Lesson 4 - What do political parties do?

- A **political party** is an organised group with **shared beliefs** on how society should be run.
- Its main roles are **representing the people, supporting members, creating policies** and **holding the Government to account**.
- Political party's **policies** reflect their **values**, which shape their **manifesto** and the plans they will implement if in power.
- The UK has many political parties to ensure that **diverse** opinions and values are represented.
- Whilst it does have some flaws, the **political spectrum** shows where parties stand from left wing to right wing.

Common misconception:

Political parties are all either left wing or right wing

Many parties mix both views or focus on specific issues, like regional concerns. Some parties are centrist or have ideas that don't fit neatly into either side.

KEY TERMS:

Political party - an organised group of people who share similar beliefs and goals about how society should be run

Policies - courses of action or goals that people plan to carry out, or are in the process of carrying out

Political spectrum - a concept that models political beliefs and ideologies as a continuum (from left wing to right wing)

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Lesson 5 - What do MPs do?

- An **MP** is voted by residents to represent the people in their **constituency** in Parliament.
- Their main duties in Parliament include **debating** and **making laws**, **scrutinising government actions** and **representing constituency views**.
- Main duties in their constituency include working directly with constituents on local issues and **casework**, **campaigning**, **building relationships** and communicating with local people.
- If on the **Cabinet**, additional responsibilities include leading a government department and working closely with the Prime Minister to shape **UK policy**.
- **Skills** that may be useful for MPs to have are **time management**, **collaboration**, **communication**, **empathy** and **debating**, amongst others.

Common misconception:
MPs only work in Parliament.

MPs spend a lot of time helping constituents, attending local events and managing casework.

KEY TERMS:

Member of Parliament (MP) - a person elected to represent citizens' interests and concerns in the House of Commons

Constituency - the specific geographical area that is represented by each MP in the House of Commons

Skill - the ability gained through training and experience to do a job or action well.

Lesson 6 - How is the UK Government organised?

- The **UK State Government** has three branches: **legislative**, **executive** and **judicial**.
- The **Head of State** is the monarch' who carries out **ceremonial duties**.
- The **UK Government is the executive branch**, led by the PM.
- The PM appoints senior ministers on the **Cabinet**. These are the heads of **government departments** and they make **policies** for the UK.
- **Junior ministers** support senior ministers by overseeing smaller areas within a government department. They work closely with the **Civil Service**, a politically neutral body which carries out the implementation of government policies. The employees are called **civil servants**.
- **Arm's-length bodies** also carry out government work. The workers are called **civil servants** or **public sector workers**.

Common misconception:
Civil servants and public sector workers make political decisions.

Civil servants and other public sector workers are neutral professionals who work to implement government policies and decisions made by elected ministers, but they do not make political decisions themselves.

KEY TERMS:

Government - the group of people with the authority to govern a country; in the UK, the Government is chosen and led by the Prime Minister (PM)

Cabinet - a group of senior MPs who lead major government departments; the Cabinet meets weekly to make decisions about how government policy will be carried out