

Playing your part: How the citizen can get involved and make a difference

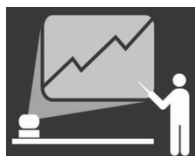


Presentation by Duncan Bunce

Read & Précis: Chapter 6, Issue 1, pages 253-273

Welcome

- Ensure mobile phones are off.
- No eating in the classroom.
- You may take notes.



Topic Aims

- What does 'taking part in the **democratic process**' mean?
- Citizens and the **electoral process**.
- Do **pressure groups** improve the democratic process?



Extended Reading

The following textbooks and periodicals are in the College Library and will deepen your knowledge:

- AQA Citizenship AS. Watts, D. Nelson Thornes (Chapter 11).
- Citizenship and Participation. Firth, L. Issues, Volume 175 (page 26, 28-29, 34-36, 37).

The concept of democracy

- A type of government based on the principle that all people are equal and collectively hold power.
- Other than democracy, what other forms of government can you think of?



The concept of democracy

- In **small groups**, present to class the following (see **pages 254-255**):
 - (1) Liberal democracy
 - (2) Representative democracy
 - (3) Direct democracy
- **Create a table** which highlights the advantages and disadvantages of representative democracy. Be prepared to feedback to class.

Democratic values

(1) Rights

- **The Human Rights 1998** is enshrined in UK law, if breached a citizen can challenge it in court (**legal right**).

E.g. If you are arrested on suspicion of committing a criminal offence, you have the right to a fair trial. What does this mean?

These human rights exist by virtue of us all being human and equal, the minimum requirement for human life and happiness (**moral right**).

Democratic values

(2) Freedoms

- **Write down** what you believe **freedom** means.
- **Write down** what freedoms you believe a citizen needs in society.



Democratic values

(3) Equality

- Democracy can only be legitimate if it allows all people (and their views) to be viewed as equal.
- People must be treated equally.

- Undertake **Activity 2** on **page 256**.



Citizen participation

Opportunities for participation:

- Essential in a *representative democracy* like the UK, that citizens participate.
- We delegate our decision-making power to representatives (e.g. MPs) and they must know if we are unsatisfied with their performance.
- Once voted into power, how can we hold them to account?

Citizen participation

- There is also a limited opportunity for *direct democracy*...

(1) Referendums

- This is a direct vote in which all citizens are asked to vote 'yes' or 'no' on an issue.

E.g. In 1975 a national one was held asking whether Britain should join the EEC (now the EU).

- (2) Campaigning, joining a pressure group, signing petitions, protesting, attending public meetings.

Referendums are rarely given. Why?

Citizen participation

Barriers to participation:

- There has been a significant decrease in political participation.
- **In pairs**, discuss briefly the reasons why you think this might be. **Create a mind map.**



How democratic is the UK?

- As voter turnout **drops**, the result of any election becomes less representative of the views of the population.
- Citizens can only hold elected representatives account **every five years** in a general election.

How democratic is the UK?

- Here is the current Coalition Government Cabinet. **What do you notice?**



- Should MPs be **more** representative of society?

Citizens and the electoral process

- In order to vote in a parliamentary election in the UK, you must be:
 - On the electoral register. **What is this?**
 - Be over 18 years of age.
 - Be a British citizen (or of Rep. of Ireland or Commonwealth).
 - Not be disqualified from voting.



Citizens and the electoral process

- Those who are **disqualified** from voting include:
 - Members of the House of Lords.
 - Citizens of EU states.
 - Convicted prisoners serving a sentence.
 - Anyone found guilty of corrupt or illegal election practices in the last five years.
- **How** does voting take place in the UK?

Citizens and the electoral process

- Voting may be the only time citizens take an 'active' part in politics. As such, it is **important**.
- Citizens have the opportunity to vote in at least three types of election:
 - (1) Local (to elect local representatives).
 - (2) General (to elect MPs).
 - (3) European (to elect MEPs).
- **Note:** Depending on region, citizens may also vote for a mayor. In London, also for members of a Regional Assembly.

General elections

- This is the election of all MPs from every constituency in the UK.
- Political parties fight campaigns by focusing on the policies the party would put in place should they **form Government**.
- The political party that returns a **majority** of MPs to the House of Commons will form Government, the party's leader becoming Prime Minister.
- **When** does a general election take place?



First-past-the-post (FPTP)

- The system of voting currently used in the UK for general elections.
- The candidate with the **greatest number** of votes is declared the winner.
- List the **advantages and disadvantages** of the FPTP system.
- What would be the **advantages** of a proportional system of representation?



Citizens and the electoral process

- In **small groups**, explain/present to class the following (see **pages 262-263**):
 - (1) Local elections.
 - (2) European Parliament elections.
 - (3) Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales elections.
 - (4) Northern Ireland Assembly elections.
 - (5) Mayoral elections.

Citizens and the electoral process

Standing as a candidate:

- Must be at least 18 years of age.
 - Be a British citizen (or of Rep. of Ireland or Commonwealth).
 - Must be eligible to vote (e.g. not convicted prisoners serving a sentence of 12 months, members of the House of Lords).
- Must complete nomination form, gain ten elector signatures from constituency you are standing in.

Role of the media in elections

- At election time political parties create **manifestos** to declare to voters their core beliefs and policy plans. This helps **gain votes**.
- Politicians utilise the media for:
 - Party political broadcasts.
 - Interviews.
 - Campaign publicity.
 - Debates (since 2010!).



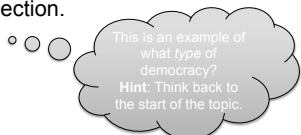
Role of the media in elections

- The UK press is **independent**, its role is to scrutinise and to sell newspapers.
- The relationship between the political candidate and the media is **interdependent**. However, this means it is not always harmonious....



Pressure Groups

- A pressure group is a group of people with a common interest that try to influence the decisions made by those in power.
- They allow citizens to take action on specific issues more quickly than waiting for a general election.



Pressure Groups

➤ Broadly split into **two groups**:



Sectional or interest groups



Cause or promotional groups

➤ What do these terms **mean**?

Pressure Groups

- Pressure groups function outside of the parliamentary system.
- What are 'insider' and 'outsider' groups?
- Why do 'insider' groups generally have more success?
- **Copy the strengths and weaknesses of pressure groups on pages 272-273.**



Just to remind you...

- For the Unit 2 exam, you should be able to **know, understand and discuss**:
 - The concept of democracy and how democratic the UK is.
 - The electoral process in the UK (e.g. general elections, local elections etc).
 - Pressure groups in the democratic process.
