

Elections



Lecture Notes produced
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Read & précis Chapter 2 & 3 (p.62-67)
‘The Essentials of UK Politics’
by Andrew Heywood (2008).

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Functions of elections

- According to Garnett & Lynch “*In a liberal democracy elections should be competitive, free and fair.*”
- Thinking about how we operate in the UK we need to ask ourselves -What about our elections?

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Competitive elections ...

- **Competitive** means - a meaningful choice between different political parties.
- But - what if those parties are offering more or less the same thing - all supporting a capitalist system - with broadly similar political aims?

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Free elections ...

- **Free elections** - require basic civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and association, the right to join and stand for a party of one's choice and a free press.
- Do we have freedom of speech in the UK? Do we have freedom of association (What about Hizb-ut-Tahrir?)? Do we have a free press?

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Fair elections ...

- The maxim ‘*one person, one vote, one value*’ is a key criterion for a fair election: all citizens have one vote that is of the same worth.
- Do we in the UK? If I vote Conservative in a safe Labour seat - I am wasting my vote. But if I vote the same in a marginal seat - it could influence the outcome.

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Electoral system

- According to Garnett and Lynch ... “*the electoral system should translate votes cast into seats won in the legislature in a reasonably accurate manner.*”
- What we will need consider is if the FPTP, or any other system of elections, provides or can guarantee such an outcome.

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Functions of elections ...

- Representation - indirect election.
- Choosing a government - Do we in the UK?
- Participation of the electorate.
- Influence over policy. Does a loss influence policy (e.g. Labour's unilateral nuclear disarmament policy)?

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Functions of elections ...

- Government accountability Is an MP made to account? Is the govt called to account?
- Citizen education - inform the public on policy.
- Legitimacy - free and fair elections give authority to the political system.
- Elite recruitment - What is it?

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Types of UK Elections ...

- Elections take place at different levels in UK politics.
- General Election - House of Commons 650 MP's. Do we elect the Prime Minister? When are they held?
- EU elections - Who does this elect?

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Types of election ...

- Elections to devolved assemblies - Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly both elected directly (via the additional member system). Northern Ireland Assembly (via STV).
- Local elections - Can you name them?
- By-elections - What are they?

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Who votes and how?

- Produce a list of people who vote and who do not vote.
- What is the role of the Electoral Commission?
- Recreate the box on page 38 showing how voting has increased.

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Break into Pressure Groups

- **Break into pressure groups to suggest and agree the alternative methods of voting (such as postal voting)... discuss each one - then recommend to the class some changes to the voting arrangements.**

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