

Compare the vote – Level 3

Elections and voting

Not all elections are the same. We use different voting systems to choose who will represent us in various parliaments and elected assemblies, in the UK and around the world.

Use the table to find out which sections you should complete. More information on each system is provided below.

If you chose to compare			Complete sections
First past the post	with the	party list system	A and B
First past the post	with the	alternative vote	A and C
First past the post	with the	single transferable vote	A and D
The party list system	with the	alternative vote	B and C
The party list system	with the	single transferable vote	B and D
The alternative vote	with the	single transferable vote	C and D

1. Fill in the blanks using the words or phrases that refer to an election for the UK House of Commons.

Section A: First past the post – UK House of Commons	
1	Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected to the House of Commons using a system called _____ .
2	The country is divided into _____ voting areas, called _____ , and each is represented by one MP.
3	On election day, voters choose which candidate they would like to be their MP by marking a _____ next to the candidate's name.
4	The candidate with the most votes wins the _____ – the right to represent their constituency at Westminster.
5	The party that wins _____ (the majority) of the seats in Westminster can form a government and the party leader becomes prime minister.
6	If there is no overall majority then two or more parties may join together to form a government. This is called a _____ .

- coalition • more than half • cross • seat
- constituencies • 650 • first past the post

More info – candidates

Most of the candidates in UK general elections belong to a political party, but any individual can stand for election. An MP who doesn't represent a party is called an independent.

More info – additional member system

In some elected bodies (including the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly), MPs representing constituencies are joined by additional MPs who have been elected using a proportional representation system. This is known as the additional member system and it is also used in countries such as New Zealand and Germany.

2. Fill in the blanks using the words or phrases that refer to a European Parliament election.

Section B: Party list system – European Parliament	
1	All _____ countries that are members of the European Union elect representatives to the European Parliament.
2	In the UK, these representatives are known as _____ .
3	In England, Scotland and Wales MEPs are elected using the _____ . (In Northern Ireland MEPs are elected using the single transferable vote system.)
4	Voting areas, called constituencies, are _____ in European elections than in general elections, and each constituency elects several MEPs.
5	Although the names of _____ are listed beneath each party's name on the ballot paper, voters are asked to choose a _____ that represents their views. They do this by marking a cross next to the party they prefer.
6	When the votes are counted, they are shared _____ between the parties, so _____ parties may represent one constituency in the European Parliament.

- **several different** • **proportionally** • **individual candidates** • **political party**
- **larger** • **Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)** • **27** • **party list system**

More info – party list system

The party list system is a form of proportional representation. Under this system it is more likely for smaller parties to have one of their candidates elected than in UK general elections. It is also far less likely for one party to win an overall majority, so parties often have to work together in coalitions.

There are several types of proportional representation; the single transferable vote is another one.

3. Fill in the blanks using the words or phrases that refer to an election for the Australian House of Representatives.

Section C: Alternative vote – Australian House of Representatives	
1	The _____ system is used to elect the Australian House of Representatives – the Australian equivalent of the House of Commons.
2	On election day, under an alternative vote system, voters _____ listed on the ballot paper in order of preference.
3	One candidate is elected to represent each voting area or constituency. When the votes are counted, a candidate must have more than _____ of the votes to win.
4	If no one gets a majority from the _____ of voters, then the _____ candidate is eliminated.
5	The least popular candidate's votes are redistributed among the other candidates, according to the _____ of their supporters. The votes are then re-counted.
6	The process of eliminating the least popular candidate and redistributing their votes continues until someone has a _____ and is declared the winner.

- **majority** • **second choice** • **least popular** • **first choices**
- **50%** • **rank candidates** • **alternative vote**

More info – alternative vote plus

In 1998 a report for the UK government suggested a variant on the alternative vote system, called AV plus. Under this system MPs elected to represent constituencies using an alternative vote system would be joined in Parliament by some additional MPs elected using a proportional representation system. However, at the time, the government decided not to ask Parliament to consider changing the voting system for UK general elections to AV plus.

4. Fill in the blanks using the words or phrases that refer to Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish local elections.

Section D: Single transferable vote – Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish local elections	
1	Scottish local elections and elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly take place using the _____ system.
2	Voting areas, or constituencies, are _____ than in UK general elections and each voting area has _____ elected representatives. This makes it more likely for smaller parties to have one of their candidates elected.
3	On election day, voters _____ the candidates on the ballot paper in order of preference.
4	The votes are counted. Candidates that receive a minimum number, or _____, of votes are elected. (The quota is decided in advance.) Any votes for successful candidates that exceed the quota are _____ among the others, according to the second choice of their supporters.
5	The _____ candidates are eliminated, and their votes are also redistributed according to the _____ of their supporters. This allows more candidates to reach the quota until all the seats are filled.
6	It is rare for a party to win an overall majority of votes in a single transferable vote election, so _____ are common. This system is a form of proportional representation.

- coalition governments • second choice • least popular • redistributed
- quota • rank • several • larger • single transferable vote

More info – single transferable vote quotas

The quota needed by a candidate varies depending on the country and the election. In elections for the Northern Ireland Parliament, for example, each candidate needs just over 14% of the votes to win a seat. Northern Ireland also uses the single transferable vote system to elect its MEPs.

Here is a quick comparison of all the systems showing the main features of each one.

	Where is it used?	How many representatives?	Who do I vote for?	At the ballot box	The winner is ...
First past the post	UK House of Commons	One per constituency	An individual	Choose one candidate	The candidate with the most votes
Alternative vote	Australian House of Representatives	One per constituency	An individual	Rank candidates in order of preference	The candidate with more than half the votes
Single transferable vote	Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish local elections	Several per constituency	An individual	Rank candidates in order of preference	Winning candidates need a quota of votes
Party list system	European Parliament	Several per constituency	A party	Choose one party	Votes are shared proportionally between leading parties