

# Political parties and elections



The origin of the political parties in the UK dates back to the late 1670s, when the House of Commons was formed by two groups: the **Tories**, the aristocracy loyal to the Church and the **King**, and the Whigs, the party made of rich businessmen, merchants and landowners. Nowadays, the UK has a multi-party system even though the political scene has been dominated by the two major parties, the Conservative and the Labour parties, over the last century.

The **Conservative Party** is a centre-right political party, born in the 1830s, but whose origin dates back to the Tories. The party is generally supported by landowners, businesspeople and the middle class. It is strong in wealthy parts of England, especially in the South, and in suburban and rural areas. It stands for free market and low taxation.

The **Labour Party** is a centre-left party, born in 1901, which emerged as the political expression of the trade unions and the working classes. It is supported by the working classes and is strong in the North of England, Scotland and Wales. Over the years it has moved from strict socialist ideas, such as state intervention in the economy, towards a democratic socialist party or New Labour.

The **Liberal Democratic Party**, born in 1988 from the merger of the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party, is the descendant of the Whigs. It is socially progressive and supports human rights and economic liberalism.

The **Green Party**, born in 1990, is a left-wing party whose primary focus is the environment.

The **UK Independence Party** (UKIP), established in 2013, is a right-wing party against the EU.

Other parties: the **Scottish National Party** (SNP), **Plaid Cymru** in Wales, the **Democratic Unionist Party** and **Sinn Féin** in Northern Ireland.

## General elections

Each constituency in the UK elects one Member of Parliament (MP) to a seat in the House of Commons.

The 2011 Fixed-term Parliament Act set the date of the last general election on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015 and subsequent elections to be held on the first Thursday of May at five year intervals.



American politics has always been dominated by two major parties: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

The **Democratic Party** is a centre-left, liberal party, founded in 1828. It is progressive in social and economic matters and its voters mainly live in the North-East and West-Coast states. Franklin D. Roosevelt was an inspiration for the economic ideas of the party. The symbol of the party is a donkey.

The **Republican Party** is a centre-right, conservative party, founded in 1854. It is in favour of private business and social conservatism. The party became important thanks to Abraham Lincoln. The symbol of the party is an elephant.

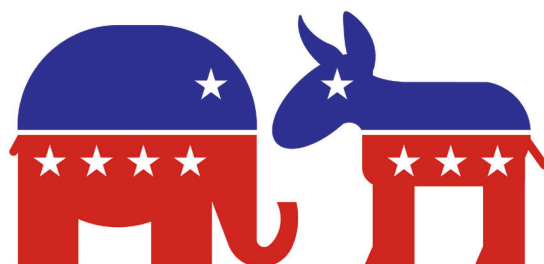
Other parties are: the environmentalist **Green Party**, active since the 1980s, the **Libertarian Party**, founded in 1971 and in favour of free market and civil liberties, and the **Constitution Party** which is a far-right party.

## Elections

Congressional and presidential elections take place simultaneously every four years, and the intervening Congressional elections, which take place every two years, are called Mid-term elections.

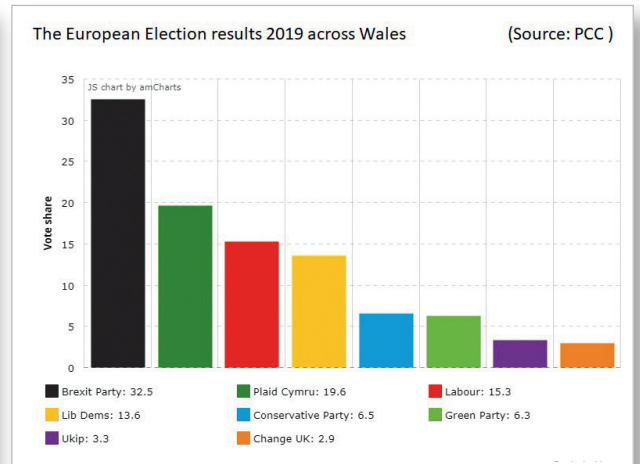
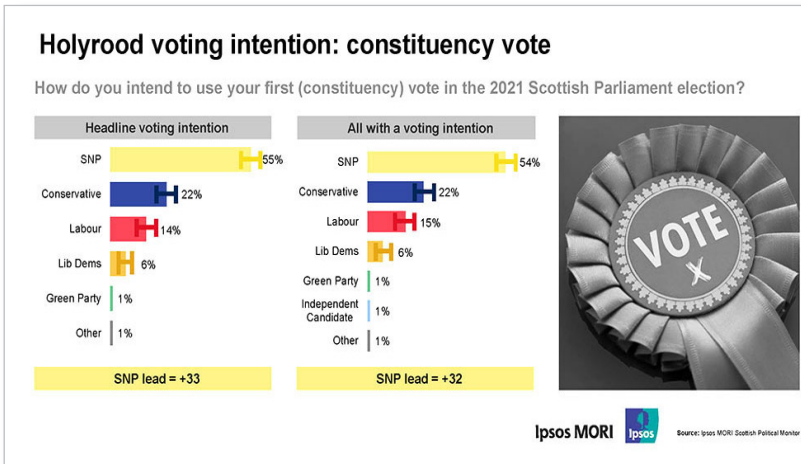
The Senate is elected for a six-year term in dual-seat constituencies (2 from each state), and one-third is renewed every two years.

State laws and state constitutions, controlled by state legislatures, regulate elections at state level and local level such as county and city government positions. Some examples of local elected positions include sheriffs at the county level and mayors and school board members at the city level. Like state elections, an election for a specific local office may be held at the same time as either the presidential, midterm, or off-year elections.





1 Look at the two tables and discuss them. Use the given questions as guidelines.



1. What type of graph are they?
2. What do they represent?
3. What type of data do they provide?



2 Listen to the extract on the Presidential Election Process in the US and complete the second column of the table.

Period	Event	Date for 2016
Spring of the year before an election	<i>Candidates announce their intentions to run</i>	
Summer of the year before an election through spring of the election year		
January to June of election year		
July to early September		Democratic Convention: Republican Convention:
September and October		
The first Tuesday after the first Monday in November		
December		
Early January of the next calendar year		
January 20 <sup>th</sup>		



3 Listen to the second part of the extract to complete the table for 2016 and find out the definitions of the following.

1. state primaries
2. caucuses
3. superdelegates
4. national convention
5. general election campaigning
6. electoral college

