1 Democracy and participation

What is democracy in general?

Before considering direct and representative democracy you should understand what the term 'democracy' means in its broadest sense. The following are commonly included criteria and can serve as a working definition when answering questions about democracy in general:

- The people have **influence**, either direct or indirect, over political decisions.
- Government and elected bodies or individuals are **accountable** to the people.
- Government should operate within the **rule of law**, whereby all are equal under the law and government is subject to the same laws as the people.
- **Elections** should be held regularly, they should be free and fair, and there should be universal adult suffrage.
- These elections convey legitimacy upon the government.
- **People should be free** to form political parties and other associations and to stand for elective office.
- The **transition of power** from one government to the next must be peaceful.
- The people should have access to **independent information** and opinion.
- The **rights and freedoms** of the people should be respected by government.
- Power should rest in **many places**, not just one.

Legitimacy A situation whereby the outcome of elections is accepted, and the authority of government is recognised by the public.

Direct democracy

The characteristics of direct democracy are as follows:

- The people make key decisions themselves.
- Only in classical Greece has a whole system been described as direct democracy.
- In its modern form, direct democracy uses initiatives and referendums. Other methods include public meetings and online consultations.
- The UK is a representative democracy that uses direct democracy to resolve constitutional issues.

Remember

A direct democracy is a system where the people make all key decisions themselves, whereas a referendum is really only an example of a direct democratic method, sometimes used within representative democracies.

Direct democracy A political system where the people themselves make political decisions. The modern equivalent is the use of referendums and initiatives within representative democracies.

Referendum An occasion when voters are asked to decide upon an issue of public importance.

Representative democracy

The characteristics of representative democracy are as follows:

- The people elect representatives to make political decisions on their behalf.
- Regular elections are a key feature and the system is characterised by representative assemblies such as parliaments, assemblies and councils.
- A government is elected to make key proposals and arrange for their implementation.
- Government and elected representatives are accountable to the people.
- Parties campaign to be able to represent the people in government.
- Pressure groups operate, representing sections of society and various causes from outside the political system.

Representative democracy A political system where the citizens elect representatives who make decisions on their behalf and are accountable to them.

Now test yourself TESTED

1 Describe three features of direct democracy.
2 Describe three features of representative democracy.

Answers online

The similarities and differences between direct and representative democracy

Table 1.1 compares direct and representative democracy.

Table 1.1 Similarities and differences between direct and representative democracy

Similarities	Differences
Both systems involve voting and participation; only the nature of participation is different.	Voters do not elect an individual under direct democracy — they take part in referendums instead. Representative democracy involves voting for someone to represent voters' interests.
Some forms of direct democracy such as public meetings also require consultation, similar to representative democracy.	Voters consider a range of issues under representative democracy, whereas direct democracy often focuses on a specific issue.
Most forms of representative democracy involve some measure of direct democracy, and vice versa.	Voters in direct democracy are more actively involved in decision making whereas voters in representative democracy are more passive.

There are advantages and disadvantages of both direct and representative democracy, which are shown in Tables 1.2 and 1.3.

Table 1.2 The advantages and disadvantages of direct democracy

Advantage	Example	Disadvantage	Example/Explanation
Everyone gets a say in the decision.	The 2016 EU referendum was one of the greatest democratic exercises in British political history — more than 33 million people voted.	The decisions made by the people in referendums may be at odds with the preferences of their elected representatives, causing political instability.	The UK's political stability was severely compromised by the Brexit referendum.
Organisation is easier due to modern technology.	The growth of e-petitions has shown how easy it has become to find out what people think.	Impractical for large populations.	Emergency decisions often have to be made quickly and by only a handful of people.
Gives equal weight to all votes.	In a referendum, all votes are counted and the side with the most votes wins. In the EU referendum, 52% of voters opted to leave.	It can lead to the 'tyranny of the majority' (J. S. Mill).	A majority of voters in England voted for Brexit, while a majority in Scotland voted to remain. As the Leave side won, Scotland, as part of the UK, has left the EU.
Encourages popular participation.	Turnout for important referendums often exceeds general election turnout. The Scottish independence referendum in 2014 had 85% turnout, whereas the 2019 general election had just 67%.	Lack of accountability.	It is impossible to hold a whole voting population to account if a decision turns out to have unforeseen consequences.
Develops a sense of community and responsibility.	The Good Friday referendum in Northern Ireland paved the way for Catholics and Protestants to share power.	It can divide communities.	The EU referendum exposed and deepened divides between regions.
Encourages genuine debate.	The Electoral Reform Society found that the Scottish independence referendum was conducted in an open and honest way, with reasoned arguments.	It can allow an ill-educated populace to make ill-informed decisions.	The Electoral Reform Society found that many voters in the EU referendum felt confused about the information they received during the campaign.

Exam tip

It is important not just to include both sides of the argument in an essay, but to distinguish between arguments you most agree with and least agree with. When writing the essay, clearly signpost these arguments. A good sentence starter might be the following: 'However, the stronger argument is that direct democracy can divide communities…' (if you have taken the view that the disadvantages of direct democracy outweigh the advantages).

Table 1.3 The advantages and disadvantages of representative democracy

Advantages	Example	Disadvantages	Example/Explanation
Accountability: the representative can be voted out.	Many Liberal Democrat MPs lost their seats in 2015 — the controversy over raising tuition fees resulted in the party losing the trust of its younger supporters.	Representatives do not always do what the people want and may just do what they want.	Liberal Democrat MPs had signed a pledge not to raise tuition fees after the 2010 general election but subsequently voted to do so.
Representatives can become experts.	Yvette Cooper MP is chair of the high-profile Home Affairs Select Committee, which focuses on immigration, crime and civil rights.	Political parties are dominated by individuals pursuing their own agendas.	After claiming that there was no 'magic money tree' for public services in the 2017 general election, Theresa May's Conservatives signed a deal with the Democratic Unionist Party, promising £1 billion of investment for Northern Ireland in return for that party's support in the House of Commons.
Practical for complex issues.	Addressing the Covid-19 pandemic required MPs to weigh up the difficulties faced by small businesses during lockdown alongside the scientific necessity to minimise social contact.	Politicians can be incompetent or corrupt.	Former cabinet minister Chris Huhne MP was found guilty of perverting the course of justice, and so too was former Labour MP Fiona Onasanya.
Gives a voice to minority opinion.	Parliament has passed several laws extending the rights of citizens, including the Human Rights Act and Freedom of Information Act.	Minority groups might still find that their concerns are unmet.	MPs voted down proposed amendments to the bill authorising withdrawal from the EU in 2020 that would have protected child refugees.
Trains future leaders of the country.	Boris Johnson held prominent roles in the cabinets of both prime ministers David Cameron and Theresa May before becoming prime minister himself in 2019.	Not all voters get the representative they want.	The first-past-the-post electoral system has meant that smaller parties are under-represented in Parliament.

Exam tip

It is good to start a paragraph with what you perceive to be the weaker argument and then to dismiss that argument by bringing in a stronger one. Let's look at Table 1.3. If you take the view that representative democracy is a good thing, you should start a paragraph with the argument that you least agree with. It might read something like this: 'There are those who wrongly suggest that in representative democracy, representatives do not always do what the people want.' Notice how, by clearly signposting 'wrongly', it is clear to the examiner what you do and do not agree with.

Now test yourself

3 Give three arguments against direct democracy.

4 Give three arguments in favour of representative democracy.

Answers online

TESTED

Pluralism and democracy

The term 'pluralism' or 'pluralist democracy' implies the following aspects of a society and a political system:

- Power and influence are widely dispersed among the people and among sections of society — power is not excessively concentrated in a few hands.
- There is tolerance, both legal and cultural, of a wide range of minorities, political beliefs, religions, lifestyles and cultures.
- Political parties are free to operate and campaign and there are many parties which citizens may choose to support.
- Pressure groups and campaign groups are tolerated and allowed to operate freely.
- There is a range of sources of independent information, news and opinion available to the people without interference by the state.

Pluralist democracy A political system and/or society where there is widespread acceptance or 'tolerance' of different groups and lifestyles, where freedom of expression and association are respected, where many parties and pressure groups may operate and where there are independent media. The term also implies that power is dispersed and not concentrated.

An overall assessment of democracy in the UK

Table 1.4 offers an assessment of UK democracy. The 'problem/barriers' column summarises the democratic deficit in the UK as described by many critics.

Democratic deficit Where standards of a functioning democracy have fallen short.

Table 1.4 An assessment of UK democracy

Feature	How this feature works in practice in the UK	Problem/barriers preventing this feature from working effectively
Pluralism: power lies in many different places (judges, Parliament, prime minister etc.).	+ The 2017 Article 50 decision on Britain leaving the EU involved a number of institutions, not just the prime minister. Parliament voted on it, judges ruled on it and the people expressed their opinion in a referendum.	+ Others argue that power is instead concentrated in the hands of a few people and organisations. + The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) has been accused of using cash to gain influence over ministers.
Free and fair elections	+ All adults can vote, and the results are trusted and accepted.	+ 16- and 17-year-olds and prisoners cannot vote in general elections. + The first-past-the-post electoral system is unfair and leads to 'elected dictatorship' (Lord Hailsham).
Corruption and wrongdoing are punished.	+ In 2019 two MPs, Fiona Onasanya and Chris Davies, were successfully recalled (see section on the recall of MPs on p. 83).	+ There is a perception of corruption among some representatives (cash for peerages affair and the MPs' expenses scandal). + In 2020 Boris Johnson failed to explain the £15,000 holiday he received from Carphone Warehouse tycoon David Ross.
Citizens' rights are protected.	+ The Human Rights Act allows citizens to use UK courts to protect their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).	+ The Human Rights Act is not entrenched (see Chapter 5), which means that it could be scrapped with an act of parliament.
Devolved decision making	+ Devolution has resulted in the transfer of power from central government to regional and local bodies, such as the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments.	+ Devolution is still limited. + Some 85% of local council budgets in England still comes from central government.

Now test yourself TESTED

5 Look at the following features of democracy in the UK. In each case identify a potential problem or barrier to its effectiveness.

Democratic feature	Problem/barrier to effectiveness
Pluralism	
Citizens' rights are protected.	
Devolved decision making	

Answers online

Exam tip

When writing an essay, it is good to choose three areas to focus on. So, if you answer a question on the democratic deficit, pick three features of UK democracy that you will evaluate, choosing, for example, from the list in Table 1.4. You should aim to cover each feature in a separate paragraph.

The franchise

The franchise refers to the 'right to vote'. It has been fought for over many centuries but the UK currently enjoys 'universal adult suffrage'. The principles of UK suffrage are as follows:

- Everyone over the age of 18 has the right to vote in elections, save for a limited few such as convicted prisoners, people who are certified as insane and members of the royal family.
- No groups are discriminated against in electoral law.
- It is the responsibility of each individual to register to vote.

Franchise or **suffrage** Both terms essentially mean the right to vote. In modern democracies suffrage is extended to all adults, with no groups excluded. A system which does exclude some or all citizens from voting cannot be described as democratic.

Political participation

The following are forms of political participation:

- voting in elections
- joining a political party
- becoming an *active* member of a party
- joining a trade union
- standing for election to office
- joining a pressure group
- becoming *active* in a pressure group
- taking part in a political campaign online or on the ground
- signing a petition or e-petition

Possible reasons why turnout at elections is falling include the following:

- disillusionment with political parties, especially among younger people, and a falling commitment to parties (partisan dealignment)
- people being more concerned with single issues than with broad policies
- a lack of distinction between the parties since the 1990s
- the electoral system results in large numbers of wasted votes (for smaller parties and in safe seats) and votes of unequal value (marginal versus safe seats), and also results in disproportional outcomes for third parties
- with the emergence of referendums, voters prefer direct democracy

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A participation crisis?

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Table 1.5 considers whether there is a participation crisis in the UK.

Table 1.5 Is there a participation crisis in the UK?

Form of participation	There is a crisis	There is not a crisis
Voting in general elections	+ 67.3% turnout in the 2019 general election — down 1.5% from the 2017 one. + This figure is well below the high levels of the 1970s, where turnout reached 78.8% in 1974.	+ From 2001 to 2017, general election turnout steadily increased. + There could be several reasons why the turnout fell in 2019, including the time of year (December) in which the election was held.
Joining a political party	+ Only around 1.7% of the population are members of a political party.	+ Labour Party membership rose considerably after 2015 when Jeremy Corbyn became leader.
Union membership	+ The number of private-sector employees belonging to a trade union constitutes only 13% of the private-sector workforce.	+ Overall union membership has risen for four consecutive years to 2020.
Signing petitions	+ It is difficult to claim that taking 3 minutes to sign a petition amounts to meaningful participation.	+ 38 Degrees claims that almost 40 million people have signed an e-petition on its website, concerning over 10,000 campaigns.
Joining a pressure group	+ Many 'cheque-book' members pay membership fees and do little else.	+ Fair Funding for Schools engaged teachers, headteachers and parents in campaigning against education cuts.

Participation crisis A concern that fewer people are taking part in political activity, leading to a crisis in democratic legitimacy.

Exam tip

Examiners like you to come to a clear decision, so try to avoid arguing that there is a participation crisis 'to an extent'. What is even better is to take a clear decision about specific forms of participation. For example, you could write, 'There is clearly a participation crisis when considering party membership but not in other non-traditional forms of participation such as e-petition use.'

Now test yourself TESTED

6 Give one argument, and an example, to show that there is a participation crisis when it comes to voting.

7 Give one argument, and an example, to show that there is not a participation crisis when it comes to voting.

Answers online

How to improve political participation in the UK

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Different suggestions have been made on how to improve political participation in the UK. These include lowering the voting age, making voting compulsory and utilising online forms of political activity. There has also been a debate about convenience voting.

Table 1.6 considers different ways of improving participation.

Table 1.6 Suggested methods to improve political participation in the UK

Method to improve participation	Arguments for	Arguments against
Lowering the voting age for general elections	+ 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland and Wales can already vote in local and regional elections. + Youth turnout in the Scottish independence referendum reached 80%.	+ Many young people do not vote — only 43% of 18–24-year-olds voted in the 2015 general election.
Compulsory voting	+ Turnout would reach 100%. + Other countries have compulsory voting, such as Australia.	+ Voting is a right, not a duty. + People may spoil their ballot papers.
Voting online	+ Online voting has proven successful in Estonia. + It may boost youth turnout.	+ It is subject to breaches in cybersecurity. + For most people, voting in person is already easy enough.

Convenience voting refers to any measure that makes it easier to vote, including postal voting, online voting, voting on the weekend, voting anywhere in the constituency rather than at a specific polling booth (e.g. at supermarket polling stations and places of work) and voting over multiple days.

Exam tip

When answering questions about ways in which the participation crisis might be solved or how democracy in the UK might be improved, it is important that you do not merely describe the changes proposed but also explain *why* they might work. For example, why might the introduction of proportional representation improve election turnout?

Now test yourself TESTED

8 Outline three ways in which voting could be made more 'convenient'.

9 Complete the table below on lowering the voting age.

Arguments in favour of lowering the voting age	Arguments against lowering the voting age
1	1
2	2

Answers online

The nature of pressure groups

A pressure group is an organisation that seeks to influence public policy. There are two main types of pressure groups, promotional and sectional.

Promotional groups

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- They are altruistic in that they serve the whole community, not just their own members and supporters.
- They tend to concentrate on mobilising public opinion and putting pressure on government in that way. They seek widespread support.
- They often use 'direct action' in the form of public demonstrations, internet campaigns and sometimes civil disobedience.
- They often, but not always, focus on one specific issue or a range of issues relating to a general cause.
- Example: Black Lives Matter focuses strongly on police treatment of black people.

Sectional groups

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- They are largely (although not always) self-interested in that they serve the interests of their own members and supporters.
- Although they seek public support, they tend to promote direct links with decision makers (achieving insider status).
- Their methods tend to be more subtle and less in the public eye, and they often take the parliamentary route to influence.
- They usually have a formal, closed membership.
- Often, sectional groups represent a specific section of the workforce.
- Example: the National Education Union primarily looks after the interests of teachers.

Differences between pressure groups and political parties

The differences between pressure groups and political parties are explored in Table 1.7 below.

Table 1.7 Nature of parties and pressure groups

Area of comparison	Parties	Pressure groups
Power	Seek to gain power or a share of power	Do not generally seek governmental power
Accountability	Have to make themselves accountable to the electorate	Not accountable except to their own members
Policies	Develop policies across all or most areas of government responsibility	Usually have narrower concerns and sometimes are concerned with only one issue
Membership	Usually have a formal membership and some kind of formal organisation	Often have supporters rather than members

Remember

While there are clear differences between most pressure groups and political parties, some pressure groups transform themselves into political parties in order to stand candidates for elections and bring more attention to a particular cause. The National Health Action Party stood candidates for a number of elections to raise awareness of NHS cuts.

Pressure group methods

Table 1.8 shows a list of pressure group methods along with examples of groups that typically use such methods. Pressure groups use different methods for different purposes, and these methods change as society and technology evolve.

Table 1.8 Pressure group methods

Method	Description and example
Lobbying	This involves persuasion through direct contact with important decision makers, policy makers and legislators. Sometimes professional lobby organisations may be used. It is used largely by **insider groups**, such as the National Farmers' Union (NFU), British Bankers' Association (BBA) and Confederation of British Industry (CBI). 'Mass lobbying' of Parliament is also used. Example: Age UK lobbies MPs on behalf of pensioners.
Public campaigning	This involves large-scale demonstrations of support for an issue or a group. It is designed to mobilise public opinion and to show the level of support to decision makers. Examples: pro-remain demonstrations (organised by People's Vote) and pro-leave demonstrations following the EU referendum.
Donations to political parties	These are legal as long as they are declared. They are typically used by large corporations and employer organisations or by trade unions. Example: Open Democracy found that the Conservative Party received £11 million from property developers in Boris Johnson's first year as prime minister.
Media campaigns	These often feature celebrities and mobilise public support. Examples: the 2020 campaign to continue free school meals over the summer holidays (Marcus Rashford) and efforts to reduce the stigma for those suffering from poor mental health (Princes William and Harry).
Civil disobedience	When other methods have failed, illegal methods may be used. Examples: Extinction Rebellion (blocking roads and bridges), Plane Stupid (opposing airport expansion by invading runways). The suffragettes also engaged in civil disobedience, which ranged from women chaining themselves to railings at Buckingham Palace to defacing valuable works of art.
Social media and e-petitions	Social media can be used to raise awareness and gain support, and to organise e-petitions and local action. Examples: the successful campaign to scrap the tampon tax resulted in the government agreeing to scrap VAT on sanitary products from 2021. The e-petition to accept more Syrian refugees in 2015 received 460,000 signatures.
Legal action	Judicial reviews aim to prevent discrimination against women and minorities and to preserve much-needed public services. Examples: the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign won a legal battle in 2013 when the Court of Appeal ruled that the government did not have the legal authority to close Lewisham Hospital. The civil liberties organisation Liberty won a case against police use of facial recognition technology in August 2020.

Insider groups Pressure groups with access to decision makers, which means that their tactics tend to be more discreet and behind closed doors, relying upon a network of close links to advisors and politicians. Outsider groups do not usually have such close contact with decision makers and therefore need to resort to methods that seek public support and media attention.

Remember

It is important to use recent examples when writing about pressure groups. It is particularly useful to use a case study, referring back to it in different sections of your essay. For example, you can refer to how Extinction Rebellion took part in civil disobedience by blocking roads and also refer to how it has used social media.

Now test yourself TESTED

10 Complete the table below by providing examples for each pressure group method.

Method	Example
Civil disobedience	
Use of celebrities	
Donations to political parties	

11 Describe two differences between outsider and insider pressure groups.

Answers online

Pressure group influence

Table 1.9 reviews the factors that affect pressure group success.

Table 1.9 Factors that affect pressure group success

Factor	How this factor increases the likelihood of pressure group success and influence	How this factor might not guarantee pressure group success and influence
Insider status	Insider groups may be given the opportunity to offer their views on draft legislation. Example: private healthcare companies helped draft the controversial Health and Social Care bill that they themselves stood to benefit from.	Not all insider groups are influential in every circumstance. Example: the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has strong ties to the Conservative Party but has not been able to influence government policy on Brexit in the way it would like to.
Group size	A larger membership can be important in persuading government that a pressure group reflects a significant section of public opinion. Example: The Campaign to Protect Rural England has 40,000 members and has been largely successful in defending the green belt from property development.	Larger group size does not always bring success. Example: the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had an estimated 110,000 members in the mid-1980s but arguably had little influence on government.
Public support	Pressure groups that can demonstrate large-scale public support are more likely to have influence. Example: the Snowdrop Campaign to ban the use of handguns was successful largely because of the public reaction to the 1996 Dunblane primary school massacre.	Government attitudes may matter more than public opinion. Example: the 2013 badger cull went ahead, regardless of the public outcry and concern from animal welfare groups.

Exam tip

When it comes to pressure groups, be prepared for an exam question that asks you whether one factor is the most important factor that affects pressure group influence. For example:

Evaluate the view that public support is the most important factor that determines the success of pressure groups in influencing politicians.

The words 'most important' invite you to consider the factor in the question and compare its importance with other factors (such as the status of the pressure group etc.). You will need to take a clear direction — public support either *is* the most important factor or it *isn't*.

Pressure groups and democracy

You should be able to consider the question of whether pressure groups threaten democracy or enhance it. This is explored in Table 1.10.

Table 1.10 Do pressure groups enhance or threaten democracy?

Pressure groups enhance democracy	Pressure groups may threaten democracy
They help to disperse power and influence more widely. Example: the British Medical Association (BMA) ensures that the voice of the medical community is heard when it comes to health policy.	Some groups are elitist and tend to concentrate power in the hands of too few people. Example: the 'revolving door' involves special advisors to ministers getting well-paid jobs at lobbying firms, where they can exploit the contacts they made while in government.
They educate the public about important political issues. Example: the Act for the Act campaign, founded in 2015, raised awareness of how the Human Rights Act has helped ordinary people.	Some groups may distort information or seek to limit social and technological progress. Example: Stop 5G is a group that is concerned about the potential health and environmental effects of 5G, but its claims are hotly contested. Some argue that instead of focusing on the negative effects of 5G, which are yet to be proven, it is better to focus on the economic benefits that 5G rollout could bring.

Pressure groups enhance democracy	Pressure groups may threaten democracy
They give people more opportunities to participate in politics without having to sacrifice too much of their time and attention. Example: while more than 16 million registered voters chose not to cast their ballot at the 2019 general election, 38 Degrees estimates that nearly 40 million people have signed an e-petition since 2013.	Those that are internally undemocratic may not accurately represent the views of their members and supporters. Example: many pressure group leaders are unelected.
They can promote and protect the interests and rights of minorities. Example: the Howard League fights for better prison conditions for prison inmates.	Finance is a key factor in political influence so groups that are wealthy may wield a disproportionate amount of influence. Example: in 2020, housing minister Robert Jenrick was accused of rushing through approval of a development project to satisfy Tory donor Richard Desmond, a property developer.
They help to call government to account by publicising the effects of policy. Example: Justice4Grenfell pushed for a public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire.	

Now test yourself TESTED

12 Why might a pressure group be able to exert influence? Next to each factor, write an explanation.

Factor	Explanation
Insider status	
Group size	
Public support	

13 Outline three arguments that pressure groups enhance democracy.

Answers online

Think tanks, lobbyists and corporations

Think tanks

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There are various examples of think tanks which may influence policy. Many of them can be said to have either a left-wing or right-wing bias, which can affect which political party they influence.

- Non-partisan think tanks include ResPublica, which focuses on general policy issues, and Chatham House, which prioritises international affairs.
- 'Left-wing' think tanks include the Fabian Society, dealing with issues mainly concerning social justice and equality, and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), which researches and develops various centre-left policy ideas.
- 'Right-wing' think tanks include the Adam Smith Institute, which researches and develops free market solutions to economic issues, and the Centre for Policy Studies, which promotes the ideas popular in the premiership of Margaret Thatcher.

Think tank A body of experts brought together to investigate and offer solutions to economic, social and political problems.

Lobbyists

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Lobbyists are professionals who are paid to persuade decision makers to favour a particular group or cause. They might be individuals or companies and are often employed by businesses, employer groups, pressure groups (e.g. Animal Aid), professional associations, trade unions and even foreign governments.

Lobbyists Individuals or companies paid to persuade decision makers to favour a particular group or cause.

Corporations

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A corporation is a large company or a group of companies that operate as a single entity. Corporations' wealth is often so great, and their importance to the UK economy so large, that governments cannot easily ignore them.

Impact on politics

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Table 1.11 analyses the impact of think tanks, lobbyists and corporations on UK politics.

Table 1.11 Impact of think tanks, lobbyists and corporations on UK politics

Group	Influence	Limits to influence
Think tanks	The Centre for Social Justice had an enormous impact on the 2010–15 coalition government welfare reforms that resulted in the introduction of universal credit.	Think tanks aligned to a political party (e.g. the left-leaning IPPR) lose influence when that party is not in power.
Lobbyists	Lobbying firms spend around £2 billion each year seeking to influence decision makers. They employ around 4,000 people. Concerns have been raised that influence can be bought.	Regulations ban MPs from accepting money from lobbyists in return for agreeing to represent lobbyists' viewpoints.
Corporations	Corporations donate to political party election campaigns and they also fund think tanks. Over a fifth of Conservative Party donations came from corporations in the run-up to the 2019 general election.	Corporations do not always get the policies they want. For example, most large corporations opposed Brexit.

Exam tip

Make sure you write about what the question asks. If you are asked about think tanks and lobbyists, you should only write about them and not corporations or other pressure groups. Keep repeating the words in the question in every paragraph to help keep your writing relevant. It might help to use this sentence starter in each paragraph: 'This point is relevant to the question because...'.

Now test yourself

TESTED

14 Identify an example of a particular pressure group that might carry out the function or use the methods described in the table below.

Description	Example
An organisation that seeks to mobilise public opinion through the use of mass demonstrations	
An organisation that operates on behalf of business and seeks to influence ministers and parliamentarians directly	
An organisation that tends to use illegal methods or civil disobedience to gain public attention	
An organisation that has local concerns and typically uses social media to organise protest	
An organisation that uses insider status to represent the interests of a particular section of society	

15 Identify the differences between pressure groups and political parties.

Answers online

The development of rights in the UK

What are the sources of rights in the UK? The following examples show where our rights have come from:

- **Magna Carta.** This document, issued in 1215, was the first document that set out the limits of the king's power. It sought to prevent the government from exploiting its power. While it initially sought to protect barons against an all-powerful king, the Magna Carta has now come to symbolise the right of the people to be free from a government acting beyond the power given to it in law.
- **Common law.** This has developed over many centuries. These are rights which have been recognised as existing and commonly enforced. They are confirmed by judicial precedent — judgments made in the courts and enforced by lower courts. Examples: the rule of law guaranteeing equal treatment under the law, habeas corpus (freedom from imprisonment without trial), rules relating to a fair trial.
- **Statutes.** Parliamentary law may guarantee rights. Example: the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (granting the right to access official information).
- **The Human Rights Act.** This law brought the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law. A wide range of rights and freedoms are guaranteed.
- **Equalities Act 2010.** This law legally protects people against discrimination in the workplace and in wider society, specifically on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital status, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation.

Remember

Many students mistakenly believe that the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is controlled by the European Union. This would imply that now the UK has left the EU, all these rights are lost. This is not so. The ECHR is administered by a different body, the Council of Europe, and its European Court of Human Rights. It has nothing to do with the EU and therefore the rights in the ECHR continue to apply to UK citizens, regardless of Brexit.

How well are rights protected in the UK?

Table 1.12 outlines the strengths and weaknesses of rights protection in the UK.

Table 1.12 An assessment of rights protection in the UK

Strengths	Weaknesses
There is a strong common law tradition. Examples: the rights of cohabiting couples; the right to a fair trial.	Common law can be vague and disputed. It can also be set aside by parliamentary statutes. Example: the government introduced internment in Northern Ireland (imprisonment without trial of suspected terrorists) in the 1970s.
The UK is subject to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Example: the European Court of Human Rights ruled that prisoners in the UK have the right to vote.	Parliament remains sovereign and so can ignore the ECHR or can even repeal the Human Rights Act. Example: prisoners have not yet been given the right to vote in the UK, despite the European Court of Human Rights' ruling.
The judiciary has a reputation for being independent and upholding the rule of law even against the expressed wishes of government and Parliament. Example: in April 2016, judges overturned government plans to deny legal aid to people who have not lived in the UK continuously for at least 12 months.	There is increasing pressure on government, as a result of international terrorism, to curtail rights in the interests of national security. The right to privacy, the right of association and expression as well as freedom from imprisonment without trial are all threatened. Example: in 2016, the Conservative government passed the Investigatory Powers Act ('snoopers' charter').

Now test yourself TESTED

16 Outline three ways in which rights are protected in the UK.

Answers online

Conflicts between individual and collective rights

There are constant conflicts between the principle of individual rights and the collective rights of the community as a whole — see Table 1.13.

Table 1.13 Conflicts between individuals' rights and collective rights

Individual rights	Conflicting collective rights
Freedom of expression	The rights of minority groups not to be subjected to hate speech
The right to privacy	The right of the community to be protected from terrorism by security services which may listen in on private communications
The individual right to privacy	The collective right of the press to report on matters of public interest
The right to demonstrate in public places (right of association and free movement)	The right of the community to their own freedom of movement
The right to strike in pursuit of pay and employment rights	The right of the community to expect good service from public servants who are paid from taxation

Individual rights Rights that belong to a person regardless of personal characteristics. They apply to all individuals regardless of race, religion or gender.

Collective rights Rights that belong to a group. This group might share a particular characteristic (e.g. gay rights) or it might be a group in an organisation (e.g. workers' rights).

Case study: the Ashers bakery case

In October 2018, the UK Supreme Court ruled that a baker could not be compelled to write 'Support gay marriage' on a cake, which was requested by a customer for a same-sex wedding. The decision appears to have upheld the individual right of a baker to their freedom of conscience — they could not be compelled to write something that went against their own beliefs. However, in coming to this decision, the court may have affected the collective right of the LGBTQ+ community to equal access to services (in this instance buying a cake of their choice).

Exam tip

When answering a question on whether rights are protected in the UK, it is important to acknowledge that individual rights might sometimes be in conflict with collective rights, as the 'Ashers bakery case' shows.

Now test yourself TESTED

17 Identify the specific development that matches each purpose in relation to rights in the table below.

Purpose	Development (with date if applicable)
A piece of legislation guaranteeing a wide range of rights and liberties	
A piece of legislation giving citizens access to official documents and information	
A historical phenomenon stretching back centuries that guarantees anciently held rights	
A piece of legislation outlawing discrimination against women and minorities	

18 Describe three sources of rights in the UK.

Answers online

Pressure groups and rights

There are a number of pressure groups concerned with rights in the UK. Table 1.14 details these groups and indicates the limits to their success.

Table 1.14 Pressure groups concerned with rights

Rights group	Description/focus	Limits to success
Liberty	Probably the best-known group, it is a major campaigner and think tank that primarily focuses on limiting government power and protecting citizens' rights.	The group has frequently opposed government proposals for mass surveillance after terror attacks, which has not always proven popular.
Unlock Democracy	This group is concerned with many constitutional reform issues, among which are methods of strengthening rights protection, including a codified constitution containing a bill of rights.	Constitutional issues are not high up on the agenda of either of the two major political parties.
Amnesty International	Investigates and campaigns against human rights abuses around the world. In the UK, it has been involved in numerous campaigns, including over the rights of those in care homes during the Covid-19 lockdowns, defending victims of the Windrush scandal and campaigning for the legalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland.	Amnesty International is often dependent on governments being willing to admit they were wrong and to change their policies. For example, very few victims of the Windrush scandal have been paid compensation.
The Fawcett Society	Campaigns for gender equality and women's rights at work, specifically reducing the gender pay gap and increasing female representation in politics. Much of the group's work focuses on research and lobbying.	There is public frustration at the slow pace of reform, perhaps leading many women to look to the #MeToo campaign and to public protest instead.
JUSTICE	Largely made up of members of the legal profession, campaigning for rights protection, especially in the area of law enforcement and trials.	The war on terror and fight against extremism have meant that the law surrounding the rights and trials of suspects has moved in favour of the prosecution, particularly with the introduction of closed material procedures (the ability of the state to produce evidence that the defence is not allowed to see).

Exam tip

When you are discussing rights, the examiners will wish to see examples of how rights campaign groups are seeking to improve rights protection. It is worthwhile, therefore, to give some examples of the work of the rights groups identified in this section.

Answers and quick quizzes at **www.hoddereducation.co.uk/myrevisionnotesdownloads**

Exam practice

1 Evaluate the view that the UK remains a genuine pluralist democracy. [30]

2 Evaluate the view that rights are effectively protected in the UK. [30]

3 Using the source, evaluate the view that representative democracy is superior to direct democracy. [30]

It is natural to assume that direct democracy is the purest form of political system that can exist. After all, it represents the ultimate form of government by consent and, at the same time, it means that the majority rules. It is also to be expected that the people are more likely to respect decisions they have made themselves.

Direct democracy does, however, have some illustrious critics. In classical Greece, the philosopher Plato argued that it would give rise to the rule of rabble-rousing dictators who would be able to sway opinion through great speeches and appeals to popular emotion. Today we see echoes of this in the way the tabloid press often treats referendum campaigns. In nineteenth-century England, the great liberal thinker John Stuart Mill referred to the 'tyranny of the majority' and, like Plato, feared that the average citizen, lacking much education, would not act rationally and would be ignorant of the issues presented to them. Mill and his fellow nineteenth-century liberals supported representative democracy. This was for several reasons.

First, they argued that elected representatives would be able to use their superior judgement in the interests of the people and would be able to arbitrate between the interests of the majority and those of minorities. Second, they believed that this compromise would satisfy the liberal desire to ensure that all sections of society are considered in political decision making. Third, they had little faith in the people's ability to reach rational decisions.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that representative democracy has now become the norm in modern liberal-based political systems. Nevertheless, there are now signs that direct democracy is creeping back into fashion. In the UK, considered to be the original cradle of representative democracy, governments are increasingly resorting to referendums, the modern form of direct democracy. Referendums are often used to settle constitutional issues and occasions when government itself is unable to resolve an issue without excessive conflict.

Source: original material

In your response you must:

- compare and contrast the different opinions in the source
- examine and debate these views in a balanced way
- analyse and evaluate only the information presented in the source

Answers and quick quiz 1 online

Exam skills

Below is a sample paragraph that uses the content of Table 1.10 to answer the following question:

Evaluate the view that pressure groups threaten rather than enhance democracy. (30 marks)

The student takes the view that pressure groups do not threaten democracy.

There are those who incorrectly argue that pressure groups are elitist and tend to concentrate power in the hands of too few people. They might point to the so-called 'revolving door', which involves special advisors to ministers getting well-paid jobs at lobbying firms, where they can exploit the contacts they made while in government. This point is relevant to the question as it suggests that too few people have a say in decision making, which thus threatens democracy. However, supporters of this view fail to point out that pressure groups help to disperse power and influence more widely. For example, the BMA ensures that the voice of the medical community is heard when it comes to health policy. If thousands of pressure groups help those whose voices would otherwise not be heard, then it is clear that pressure groups enhance rather than threaten democracy.

This paragraph does a number of things really well:

- It is two-sided, which helps the student show good analysis (AO2).
- It explains the arguments (also helping with AO2), using sentence starters that signpost when doing so ('This point is relevant to the question...').
- The paragraph uses two relevant examples, helping the student to gain marks for displaying their knowledge (AO1).
- The student takes a clear direction, signposting the arguments they agree and disagree with ('There are those who incorrectly argue...'). This approach helps the student demonstrate good evaluation skills (AO3).