

A-LEVEL POLITICS UPDATE

Autumn / Winter 2024 | Issue 3

Contents:

THE 2024 UK GENERAL ELECTION : NINE KEY TAKEAWAYS

NON-VOTING AT THE 2024 UK GENERAL ELECTION

THE 2024 UK GENERAL ELECTION: MAKING THE CASE FOR PR

THE NEW HOUSE OF COMMONS 2024

MAIN UK PARTY POLICIES

CABINET GOVERNMENT

THE AUGUST 2024 RIOTS

AMERICAN POLITICS UPDATE

ROBERT KENNEDY JR

WHO SHOULD AUTHORISE HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION?

THE POLITICAL STRONG MAN

THE 2024 UK GENERAL ELECTION: NINE TAKEAWAYS

by Andrew Mitchell

The 2024 general election produced a new political landscape in the UK. Labour achieved an emphatic victory in terms of seats and Reform and the Greens made significant electoral breakthroughs. The Liberal Democrats were also successful, achieving a record number of MPs but significant defeats were inflicted on the Tories and the SNP, previously the two most dominant parties. Here are nine key takeaways from the 2024 general election.

2024 General Election: Share of the Vote and Parliamentary Seats				
	Vote	Share of the Vote (%)	Seats	Share of the Seats (%)
Labour	9,708,716	34	412	63
Conservative	6,828,925	24	121	19
Lib Dems	3,519,143	12	72	11
Reform UK	4,117,610	14	5	1
Greens	1,943,813	7	4	1
SNP	724,758	3	9	1
Plaid Cymru	194,811	1	4	1

1 Labour Victorious

Labour was the prime beneficiary of the public mood for change at the general election. Starmer’s party achieved a landslide victory, securing 412 seats and a parliamentary majority of 174. The 2024 result represented a remarkable turnaround given that Labour had slumped to just 202 seats in 2019. The party’s new seats came from constituencies won by either the Tories or the SNP at the previous general election. Overall, in 2024, 182 Conservative seats and 36 SNP seats switched to Labour. Most of the ‘red wall’ constituencies in central and northern England that had backed Johnson’s Conservatives in 2019 returned to the Labour fold in 2024. Crucially, Labour’s success rested on vote efficiency – its ability to mobilise just enough votes in each constituency to win rather than secure large majorities in fewer seats on the same share

of the vote. Nevertheless, there was no evident surge of enthusiasm for Labour at the general election. The party lost five seats to pro-Palestinian independent candidates in constituencies with significant Muslim populations due to its stance on the conflict in Gaza. In addition, support for Labour either stagnated at 2019 levels or fell in south-west England, the west Midlands, Wales and London. Eve of election polling also revealed that, although Starmer was significantly less unpopular than Sunak, the Labour leader had a favourability rating of -18. Thus, although the party attempted to portray itself during the campaign as the positive change the country needed, it is fair to say that Labour’s victory was built on Conservative unpopularity rather than its own popularity.

2 Conservative Collapse

As the opinion polls before July 4th predicted, the Tories suffered a severe electoral defeat – the worst, in fact, in their history. The Conservative Party won just 121 seats (down 244 on 2019) on a much-reduced national vote share of 24 percent. Two important features help to explain the scale of the Tory collapse. First, support for the Conservatives was down by 20 percentage points overall compared with 2019 but this was particularly marked in seats the party was trying to defend. In constituencies where the Tories had won over 50 percent of the vote in 2019, for example, their vote share fell by 29 percentage points. This was compounded by rising support for Reform, which was most apparent in Conservative-held constituencies (16 percent as opposed to under 8 percent in Labour-held seats). Second, it is clear that, in England and Wales, anti-Tory voters were prepared to vote tactically to defeat Conservative candidates. In constituencies where Labour was best placed to do this, support for Starmer’s party increased by 6 percentage

points. Where the Liberal Democrats were in a stronger position to prevent a Tory victory, their support received a 9 percentage point boost. Election expert Professor Sir John Curtice concluded that voters 'had clearly had enough of the Conservatives' and this public rejection had multiple causes, including perceived lack of competence (5 PMs since 2015), the corrosive impact of Brexit, scandals such as Partygate, the economic consequences of Truss's mini-budget, the cost-of-living crisis, NHS waiting lists, the 'small boats'/immigration issue and Sunak's lacklustre election campaign.

3 A 'Loveless Landslide'

Labour's victory was quickly dubbed a 'loveless landslide' because Starmer's party secured 412 seats in the Commons on just 33.7 percent of the votes cast. According to Curtice 'Never before has a party been able to form a majority on so low a share of the vote'. Indeed, to put the 2024 result in context, in the 2019 general election, Labour under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, obtained 202 seats on 32.2 percent of the vote. Popular enthusiasm for Labour was clearly muted. Starmer's share of the vote in 2024 was below that achieved by Tony Blair in his three general election victories (1997, 2001, 2005) and Corbyn in 2017. Furthermore, the share

of the vote won by Labour and the Conservatives combined in 2024 (57.4 percent) was the lowest since Labour became the Tory Party's main political rival in the 1920s. The 'loveless landslide' argument was reinforced by the second lowest general election turnout in modern times (59.9 percent). Months of polls predicting a large Labour win encouraged apathetic, resigned and complacent would-be voters to stay at home on election day, including dejected Conservatives, Labour supporters at odds with the party's stance on Gaza and Brexit and those generally disillusioned with politics, particularly 18-24 year olds.

4 Breakthrough for Reform

The 2024 general election marked a breakthrough moment for Reform, which secured 5 MPs on an anti-immigration and lower taxation platform. This advance was spearheaded by leader Nigel Farage, who was elected as an MP (for Clacton) at the eighth attempt. Reform secured over 14 percent of the vote but just 5 seats because it had significant breadth rather than depth of support and was therefore penalized by the FPTP system. For this reason, it was the least effective party when it came to converting votes into seats (about 800,000 votes for each seat won). Reform came second in 98 seats (89 of these were won by Labour) and inflicted significant electoral damage on the Tories. The Conservatives would have won 180 seats if Reform voters had opted for them instead.



5 Liberal Democrat Progress

The Liberal Democrats under Ed Davey achieved a record tally of 72 seats in the 2024 general election (up from 11 in 2019), beating their previous best of 62 MPs in 2005. This strong performance unseated four Conservative cabinet ministers and ensured that the Liberal Democrats replaced the SNP as the third largest party in the Commons. Davey's eye-catching campaign effectively combined media-friendly stunts, such as bungee jumping and paddle boarding, with a strong focus on key policy areas including the NHS and care provision. Liberal Democrat success in 2024, based on vote efficiency, was largely built on an ABC (Anyone But Conservatives) strategy to maximise tactical voting and the decision to target alienated moderate Tory voters in 'blue wall' seats in the home counties and southern England.

6 Green Party Advance

The 2024 general election marked a breakthrough moment for Reform, which secured 5 MPs on an anti-immigration and lower taxation platform. This advance was spearheaded by leader Nigel Farage, who was elected as an MP (for Clacton) at the eighth attempt. Reform secured over 14 percent of the vote but just 5 seats because it had significant breadth rather than depth of support and was therefore penalized by the FPTP system. For this reason, it was the least effective party when it came to converting votes into seats (about 800,000 votes for each seat won). Reform came second in 98 seats (89 of these were won by Labour) and inflicted significant electoral damage on the Tories. The Conservatives would have won 180 seats if Reform voters had opted for them instead.

7 The Fall of the 'Big Beasts'

The Conservatives' dismal election performance in 2024 was underlined by the failure of twelve Tory cabinet ministers and a number of senior backbenchers to hold on to their seats. Such a cull of the Tory 'Big Beasts' was a powerful indicator of the extent of the Conservatives' unpopularity. Those rejected at the polls included Liz Truss (former PM), Penny Mordaunt (Leader of the Commons), Gillian Keegan (Education Secretary), Grant Shapps (Defence Secretary), Lucy Frazer (Culture Secretary), Alex Chalk (Justice Minister), Mark Harper (Transport Secretary), Jonathan Gullis (Tory Deputy

Chairman), Johnny Mercer (Veterans Minister), Jacob Rees-Mogg, Therese Coffey and Michael Fabricant. Labour also lost two high-profile MPs who seemed destined to serve in Starmer's first cabinet. Jonathan Ashworth (Shadow Paymaster General) was ousted in Leicester South as Muslim constituents deserted Labour over its stance on the conflict in Gaza. Another casualty was Thangam Debbonaire (Shadow Culture, Media and Sport Minister) who was defeated in Bristol Central by the Green co-leader Carla Denyer.

8 The SNP's Westminster Collapse

The Scottish Nationalists suffered a heavy defeat at the 2024 general election, dropping from 48 seats in 2019 to just 9. Their share of the vote fell to 29.9 percent, more than 15 percentage points below the corresponding figure for 2019. This ended a decade of SNP dominance in Scotland in Westminster elections. Scottish Labour was the main beneficiary of the SNP's electoral fall from grace, becoming the largest party in Scotland with 37 seats (in 2019 Labour had secured just one Scottish MP). The SNP lost support due to several factors including its failure to deliver a second independence referendum, policy failures (in healthcare, education and transport), financial scandals and internal party disagreements about gender recognition. Following the election results, Stephen Flynn, the SNP's Westminster leader, conceded that the case for Scottish independence was a 'hard sell right now'.

9 The Commons Transformed

The general election produced a much-changed House of Commons. Over half of the MPs returned (335) were new and the average age of an elected representative in parliament dropped to 48, the lowest in almost 50 years. More than 510 MPs belonged to the millennial and gen x age categories. Furthermore, the Commons became more representative in terms of gender, ethnic background and schooling. Some 263 female MPs (40 percent) were elected, the highest number ever to sit in the House, up from 220 in 2019. This total included 129 women who became MPs for the first time in 2024. The general

election also produced 90 MPs drawn from the ethnic minorities (including 66 Labour, 15 Conservatives and 5 Liberal Democrats), 24 more than in 2019. A record 63 percent of MPs attended a state comprehensive school (an increase of 9 percent on 2019) and 23 percent were privately educated, the lowest proportion ever returned at a general election and 6 percent lower than in 2019. The Commons also contained 64 MPs who openly identified as LGBTQ+, the highest number ever recorded at the start of a parliament.

NON-VOTING AT UK GENERAL ELECTIONS

by Andrew Mitchell

Edexcel Component 1: Democracy & Participation; Component 1 4.1 Voting behaviour
AQA 3.1 Democracy & Participation; Elections & Referendums

In the 2024 UK general election, some 40 percent of eligible voters did not cast a ballot and, in the 2019 general election, the corresponding figure was 32.7 percent. The high number of non-voters or abstainers within the electorate in recent general elections is an important issue for UK democracy for two key reasons. First, lower turnout (caused by large numbers of non-voters) damages democratic legitimacy by making elected institutions less representative of the people they serve. Second, particular groups within the UK electorate are more likely not to vote than others. In this article, we will focus on this second feature by examining the demographic and logistical/bureaucratic factors that are associated with non-voting.

Non-voting in UK general elections 1997-2024

General Election	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019	2024
% of electorate not voting	28.6	40.6	38.6	34.9	33.8	31.2	32.7	40.0

Demographic factors

Age

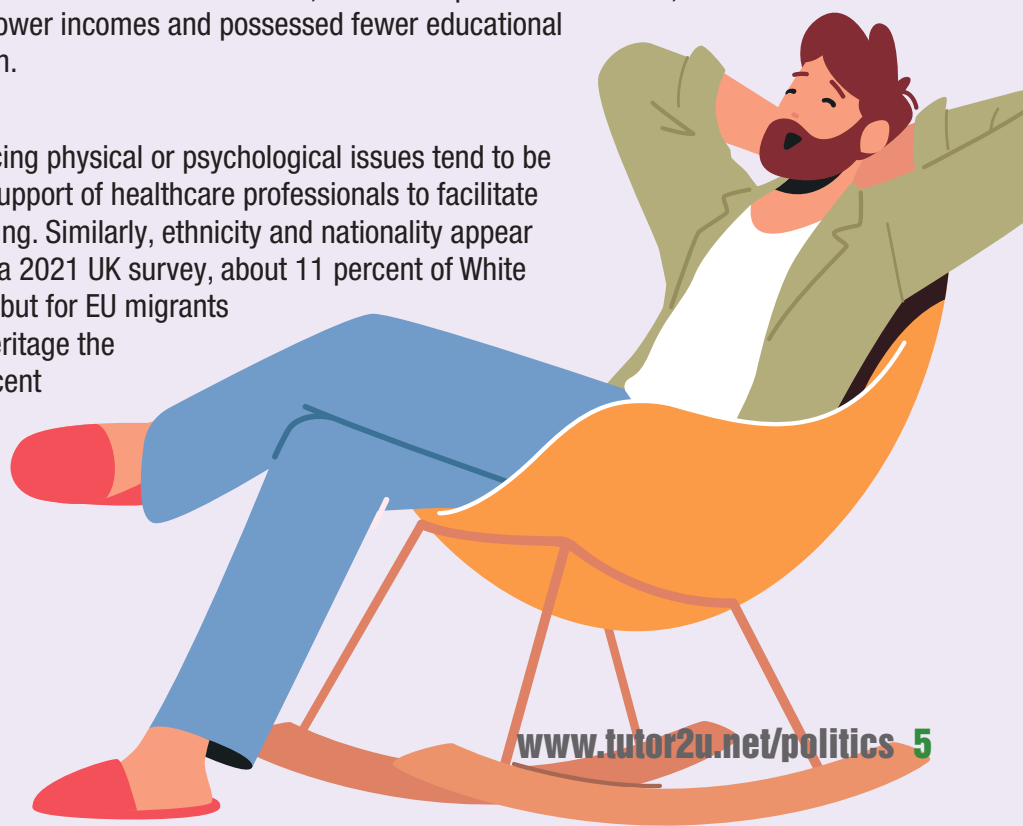
As a general rule, younger members of the electorate (notably those with lower incomes and less education) are less likely to vote than older people. In every general election since 1997, the turnout rate for the 65+ age group has always been over 20 percentage points higher than that for 18-24 year olds. This generational difference raises two important issues, namely (1) it creates an ageing democracy disproportionately composed of politically-active older people, and (2) it can influence governments to pursue policies that favour older sections of the electorate.

Socio-economic background

Research indicates that non-voting is more prevalent among lower socio-economic groups, particularly those located in 'left behind' areas. A study published in 2022 found that, across the period 1964-2019, those who did not own their homes, were on lower incomes and possessed fewer educational qualifications were more likely to abstain.

Health and ethnicity

Studies have also shown that people facing physical or psychological issues tend to be abstainers, particularly if they lack the support of healthcare professionals to facilitate electoral registration and accessible voting. Similarly, ethnicity and nationality appear to be linked to non-voting. According to a 2021 UK survey, about 11 percent of White British people are not registered to vote but for EU migrants and those of Indian and Black African heritage the proportion is higher (39 percent, 14 percent and 25 percent respectively).



Political disengagement and geographical context

Politically disengaged people are more likely to abstain because they feel that their vote makes no difference to political outcomes. For example, a survey of 4,135 adults in 2024 by the Office for National Statistics found that 63 percent of respondents had little or no confidence in their ability to influence the government. Research also suggests that some non-voters may conclude that the candidates and policies put forward by parties have little relevance for their own lives. Indeed, there is evidence to indicate that the growth of working-class abstentionism in general elections is related to the declining number of MPs with a manual worker background. Non-voting can also be influenced by the local context. In safe seats, parties often do not devote time and resources to persuade undecided or marginal voters because a particular candidate is expected to win. Furthermore, voters in safe seats may abstain if they feel that the result is a foregone conclusion.

Logistical/bureaucratic factors

Electoral registration

Eligible voters, in order to participate in UK elections, have to navigate a formal 'opt in' process successfully so that they are included on the electoral register. According to the Electoral Commission in 2023, as many as 8 million people in the UK are not correctly registered at their current address. In addition, the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER) in 2014 has been linked to the decline in registration among those due to turn 18 years old before the next general election (from 51 percent in 2014 to 16 percent in 2022). Changes to registration procedures, introduced under the 2022 Elections Act, may also have caught out some of those intending to vote by post or proxy in the 2024 general election.

Voter ID

Under the terms of the 2022 Elections Act, voter ID is now a requirement in order to cast a ballot in a UK general election. Research indicates that some groups within the electorate, such as those with fewer educational qualifications and lower household incomes, have been more heavily affected by this change because they are less likely to possess photo ID. Initial estimates, based on a More In Common survey of 2000 people, suggest that, in the 2024 general election, about 445,000 members of the electorate were prevented from voting because they were unable to produce the necessary photo ID at the polling station.

Election timings and frequency

There is also evidence to suggest that lower turnout is linked to election frequency and an increase in the number of elected institutions. This may help to explain why turnout has fallen and non-voting has increased from 31.2 percent to 40 percent in the years 2017-2024, given that the UK has held three rather than two general elections during this period. One often overlooked factor related to non-voting is the weather at the time of the general election. Studies suggest that turnout falls by just under one percent for every centimetre of rain that falls on polling day.

Accessibility

In the UK, disabled citizens have higher rates of electoral registration than non-disabled voters. For example, in 2022, about 92 per cent of eligible people with a physical disability were registered to vote compared with 85 percent of those with no disability. Nevertheless, when it comes to actual voting, the turnout rate for people with disabilities is, on average, five percent lower than for those without disabilities. Data drawn from the UK and other countries indicates that this may be explained by the finding that disabled people tend to regard the political system as less responsive, have lower levels of trust in parties, politicians and parliament and are less confident in their ability to influence and engage with the political process.



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The 2024 General Election Result

MAKING THE CASE FOR PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION?

by Andrew Mitchell

Edexcel Component 1: 3 Electoral Systems

AQA 3.1 Elections and Referendums

When reviewing the 2024 general election results, the UK's foremost polling expert, Professor Sir John Curtice, concluded that 'Labour's strength in the new House of Commons is a heavily exaggerated reflection of the party's limited popularity in the country. It is an outcome that may well breathe new life into the debate about electoral reform'. This article will examine three features of the 2024 general election outcome - disproportionality, lack of representation and the unequal value of votes – that strengthen the case for Proportional Representation (PR). A good exercise after reading this would be for you to think about how a supporter of First Past The Post (FPTP) would defend the 2024 result.

Disproportionality

The 2024 general election result proved to be the most disproportional outcome ever produced in the UK under FPTP. Indeed, the distorting effect on the relationship between a party's share of the vote and its share of the seats can be clearly seen in the table below:

2024 General Election: Share of the Vote and Parliamentary Seats		
	Share of the Vote (%)	Share of the Seats (%)
Labour	34	63
Conservative	24	19
Lib Dems	12	11
Reform UK	14	1
Greens	7	1
SNP	3	1
Plaid Cymru	1	1

The two most glaring examples here are Labour's ability to secure almost two-thirds of the seats (412) on just over one-third of the votes cast (9.7m) and Reform UK being limited to just one percent of the seats (5) on a 14 percent share of the vote (4.2m). To a certain extent, these disproportional results can be explained by the fact that FPTP tends to favour parties, such as Labour, with geographically concentrated support and disadvantages those, like Reform UK, with more widely spread support because the latter lack winning numbers in most constituencies. According to the Gallagher Index, used by political scientists to measure electoral proportionality (where a score of zero denotes complete proportionality between votes and seats), the 2024 UK general election scored 23.8, making it the most disproportional result since the advent of 'modern' British elections in 1885. Furthermore, among western democracies since 1945, only the 1993 French National Assembly elections produced a higher disproportionality score.

Lack of representation

Under FPTP, in order to become an MP, a candidate simply has to secure more votes than any of their rivals, not a majority of the votes in any constituency. Consequently, many MPs are elected on a fraction of the votes cast. In the 2024 general election, for example, nearly 100 MPs were elected on less than 35 percent of the constituency vote. This means, of course, that many people vote for losing candidates, leaving them with a representative who was not their political preference. Since 1950, on average, some 47 percent of voters in general elections have ended

up with MPs they did not endorse at the ballot box. In 2024, this proportion of 'unrepresented' voters peaked at 58 percent. The corresponding figures for the other twenty-first century UK general elections ranged from 44 (2017) to 53 (2010) percent. Thus, about half of voters under FPTP do not get their preferred MP. Moreover, when the 2024 'surplus' votes are also included (the extra votes cast for winning candidates beyond the level required for victory which were therefore not decisive) the 'wasted' vote category for the last general election increases to 74 percent.

The unequal value of votes

The wider inequality inherent in FPTP concerns the value of the vote itself. Put simply, a vote counts for more or less depending on which party it is cast for, as the following table for the 2024 general election demonstrates:

2024 General Election: Party Votes per Seat			
	Vote	MPs	Votes per seat
Labour	9,708,716	412	23,565
Conservative	6,828,925	121	56,437
Lib Dems	3,519,143	72	48,877
Reform UK	4,117,610	5	80,529
Greens	1,943,813	4	823,522
SNP	724,758	9	485,953
Plaid Cymru	194,811	4	48,703

These figures reveal that one Labour MP was elected for every 23,565 votes cast for Starmer's party but more than twice this number of votes was required to elect each Conservative and Liberal Democrat MP (56,437 and 48,877 respectively). As a result, each Labour vote had more than twice the aggregate electoral strength of a Conservative or Liberal Democrat one. The Greens and Reform UK fared particularly badly on this measure. Each Labour vote had almost 35 times the aggregate electoral strength of a vote cast for Farage's party and the corresponding Labour-Green ratio was 20.6.



The 2024 General Election result under PR

Recalculating the 2024 general election outcome under three well-known systems of PR (the Additional Member System, the Regional List PR system and the Single Transferable Vote) provides better proportionality, voter choice and representation than the result under FPTP, as the table below demonstrates.

Party share of the seats at the 2024 General Election under PR			
	AMS	Regional List	STV
Labour	258	283	264
Conservative	155	163	168
Lib Dems	71	61	66
Reform UK	91	87	71
Greens	31	14	35
Nationalists	24	24	21
Other	20	18	25

It should be recognized that, as these are projections of the 2024 general election votes cast under FPTP, if the ballot had actually been held under a PR system, then there would probably have been some slight differences in the way voters behaved at the polls. Under PR, for example, there may have been changes in voting behaviour (such as tactical voting), party campaign strategy and the number of parties participating in the election. Nevertheless, the AMS, Regional List and STV projections shown above all bring the parties' share of the seats into line with their share of the vote. In the case of the AMS model, the result removes 80 percent of the disproportionality evident in the actual 2024 general election outcome under FPTP. Labour remains the leading party in terms of seats but its number of MPs is now much more firmly linked to its actual share of the vote and the inflated majority produced by FPTP has been removed. Similarly, all three systems ensure that the other parties translate their votes into seats on a much more proportional basis.

THE NEW-LOOK HOUSE OF COMMONS

by Moyra Grant

Edexcel Component 2 2 Parliament; Component 1 Democracy & Participation

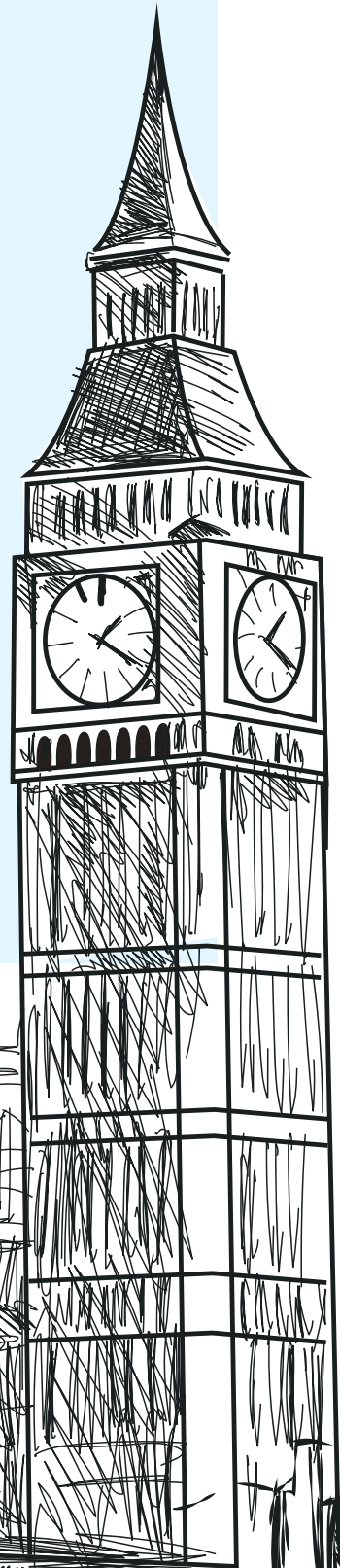
AQA 3.1 The Structure & Role of Parliament; Democracy & Participation

The general election of 4th July was a political tsunami which swept away hundreds of MPs overnight and created a transformed House of Commons. The Labour government won a landslide majority of 174 - although this number was quickly reduced because seven Labour MPs lost the whip later in July for voting in support of an SNP motion to abolish the two-child benefit cap. The Conservatives won just 121 seats, their worst ever result.

Minor parties and independents

The Liberal Democrats won a record 72 seats and regained their place as the third-largest party, replacing the SNP which plummeted from 48 to nine seats. While the Lib Dems won their 72 seats on 12% of the votes, Reform UK won 14% of the votes but just five seats. Reform UK leader Nigel Farage became an MP (at his eighth time of trying) and was quick to complain about the inequities of the first-past-the-post electoral system; and psephologist John Curtice did say that this was the most disproportionate general election ever. Sinn Féin became Northern Ireland's largest party at Westminster for the first time with seven seats to the DUP's five. The Greens won four seats - a record for them - on 7% of the votes, and Plaid Cymru doubled its number of MPs from two to four. Including other regional parties, there are now 13 parties in the House of Commons - a post-war record.

Labour's vote-share among Muslim voters fell by 13% to 43%, and the party lost five of their seats to independents in constituencies with many Muslim voters who rejected the party's position on Israel and Palestine. The most notable example was Jeremy Corbyn, who beat the Labour candidate in Islington North by 7,000 votes after he had been ousted from the party by Starmer. This was also a good example of a strong personal versus party vote. These five independents have now formed an official group in Parliament - the Independent Alliance - which gives them access to more funds and more opportunities in Commons debates and committees.



New MPs

The Commons now has a record 335 new MPs, and their first few days were likened by one of them to freshers' week at university as they tried to find their way around Westminster. The building is - as the BBC has put it - 'a gothic fantasy palace' which covers eight acres with over 1,000 rooms, three miles of passages and 100 staircases. Each new MP was given a map, a green badge and was allocated a 'buddy' - a staff member to show them the ropes. 'It was all hands on deck to show the newbies around... One MP was seen accompanied by a white-jacketed sous chef.' (BBC News, 8 July) They will eventually be allocated offices by the whips but, meanwhile, they've been given a Commons locker, laptop, iPad and email address and must find temporary corners in which to work. They have also been informed about the MPs' expenses system. On a grimmer note: given the rise in abuse and threats of violence against MPs, they have all been offered panic alarms and advice on security measures for their homes and constituency offices.

Parliamentary procedures

On 9 July, all MPs assembled in the chamber for the re-election of Speaker Hoyle (who had to learn hundreds of new names and faces within days) and the swearing-in of each MP - with or without their chosen 'sacred text' in hand - and they all had to swear allegiance to His Majesty King Charles. They are not allowed to participate in debates or votes - nor to get paid - until they have been sworn in. According to the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866, if they try to do so they can be fined £500 and have their seat declared vacant 'as if they were dead'. This is why the republican Sinn Féin MPs never take their seats in the House, but instead focus on constituency

work. There are now so many Labour MPs that some may have to sit on the opposition benches on busy days. The new House has, in total, 263 women MPs (40%) and 90 minority ethnic MPs (14%) - both record numbers.

On 17 July there was the sumptuous ceremony of the State Opening of Parliament, and the King's Speech setting out the new government's legislative and policy agenda for the coming year. It outlined a weighty 40 proposed bills - but there was no mention of Labour's manifesto pledge to lower the voting age to 16, although the government says it is still a commitment. A reference to former PM Liz Truss's 'disastrous' 2022 mini-budget was removed after she submitted a letter of complaint.

Parliament went into recess at the end of July, giving most MPs a bit of a breather. However, a short but sharp wave of far-right, racist riots erupted in the first week of August, creating new headaches for the government and the MPs whose constituencies were affected. PM Starmer rejected demands for the recall of Parliament, since no new votes or laws were needed to start charging and sentencing many hundreds of people who had committed acts of violent disorder and those who incited them on social media.

Conclusion

Labour has won two-thirds of the seats in the Commons on one-third of the votes cast - the lowest vote tally for a winning party in modern history; and they now constitute a potential new 'elective dictatorship' in the Commons. This term was used in the 1970s by Conservative Lord Hailsham to describe the dominance of an executive with a large majority of seats and strong party discipline in the UK's sovereign Parliament with an uncoded constitution.

On the plus side, the 2024 election broke many records and produced the most diverse House of Commons ever. The youngest MP, 22-year-old Sam Carling in North West Cambridgeshire, wasn't even old enough to vote at the last election. A refreshed and rejuvenated Parliament has five busy years ahead.



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UK PARTY POLICIES SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT?

by Graham Goodlad

Edexcel Component 1: 2.2 Established Political Parties AQA 3.1 Political Parties

The appearance of the main UK parties' election manifestos has given us an opportunity to compare their policy positions on a range of issues. Labour has moved back to the middle ground after the Corbyn years and was keen to reassure uncommitted voters that it could be trusted with power. During the campaign, it sought to highlight Conservative government failures and missed opportunities.

The Conservatives presented an easy target for a reviving Labour Party. Rishi Sunak struggled to develop a coherent message. His party has been damaged by scandals, negative fall-out from the October 2022 Liz Truss 'mini budget', delays in passing the Rwanda asylum and immigration bill, and other issues.

The Liberal Democrat leader, Sir Ed Davey, resorted to a series of jokey stunts in a bid to raise his party's profile. Alongside this was a serious attempt to make gains at the Conservatives' expense in the 'blue wall' areas of southern England and the midlands.

Key policy areas

Edexcel specifies four policy areas that students should know about: the economy, welfare, law and order, and foreign affairs. AQA is less prescriptive, but the same material is equally appropriate.

The economy

The three main UK parties pledged not to raise the main taxes that impact working people – income tax, National Insurance and VAT – the exception being Labour's plan to add VAT to private school fees. Conservative philosophy is to cut taxes when economic conditions allow. As Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt made modest cuts to National Insurance, with a pledge to reduce it further, and to abolish it entirely for self-employed people if re-elected. After the Truss government was destroyed by adverse market reaction to its unfunded tax cuts, however, Sunak and Hunt concentrated on stressing their fiscal responsibility.

Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves was also at pains to demonstrate that Labour would not tax and spend recklessly. Before the election was called, Labour

announced a cut to its planned annual £28 billion spending on green investment. Although environmental pressure groups were disappointed, the priority was to scale down a policy that could have been depicted as unaffordable. During the election campaign, Labour rejected Conservative claims that they would add £2,000 to households' tax bills.

Conservatives and Labour differ over public ownership. Starmer jettisoned Corbyn's extensive nationalisation plans, although he plans to create a state-funded energy company, Great British Energy, alongside the privatised utilities. The only industry that Labour will renationalise is rail, and this is for pragmatic reasons – the network has taken heavy losses due to Covid-19 and strike action, and rail users are dissatisfied. Both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats focus instead on improving connectivity and building Northern Powerhouse Rail. However, the differences should not be overstated. The Conservative government took over four failing rail companies, and during the pandemic it proposed to set up a public body to manage the infrastructure and award contracts.

Welfare

Labour has criticised the Conservatives for underinvestment in the NHS, leading to long waiting lists and late diagnoses, but has also pledged to reform the health service. As Shadow Health Secretary, Wes Streeting posed the choice, 'modernise or die'. There is some agreement between the parties on public health, with all of them pledging to recruit more GPs. Labour and the Liberal Democrats backed Sunak's (ultimately abandoned) plan to phase out smoking.

On benefits, Labour's position has shifted to one reminiscent of Tony Blair in the 1990s, ruling out the option of a life on welfare payments for those capable of working. To the dismay of many Labour supporters, the party leadership is not committed to scrapping the Conservatives' two-child limit on payments – whereas the Liberal Democrats would do so. Labour proposed to reform rather than abolish universal credit, whilst the Liberal Democrats advocated raising payments to help the poorest families. Davey also focused more than his rivals on social care, including a plan to provide more help for carers.

All parties are committed to the triple lock for the state pension – a position that reflects the high electoral turnout among older people. This is not a group that any party can afford to ignore.

Law and order

All three parties are committed to increased investment in the police. However, Labour has criticised the Conservatives for running police numbers down in the era of 'austerity' after 2010. The Liberal Democrats would abolish Police and Crime Commissioners – even though they were part of the coalition government that established these posts – and invest the money saved in front-line policing.

Conclusion

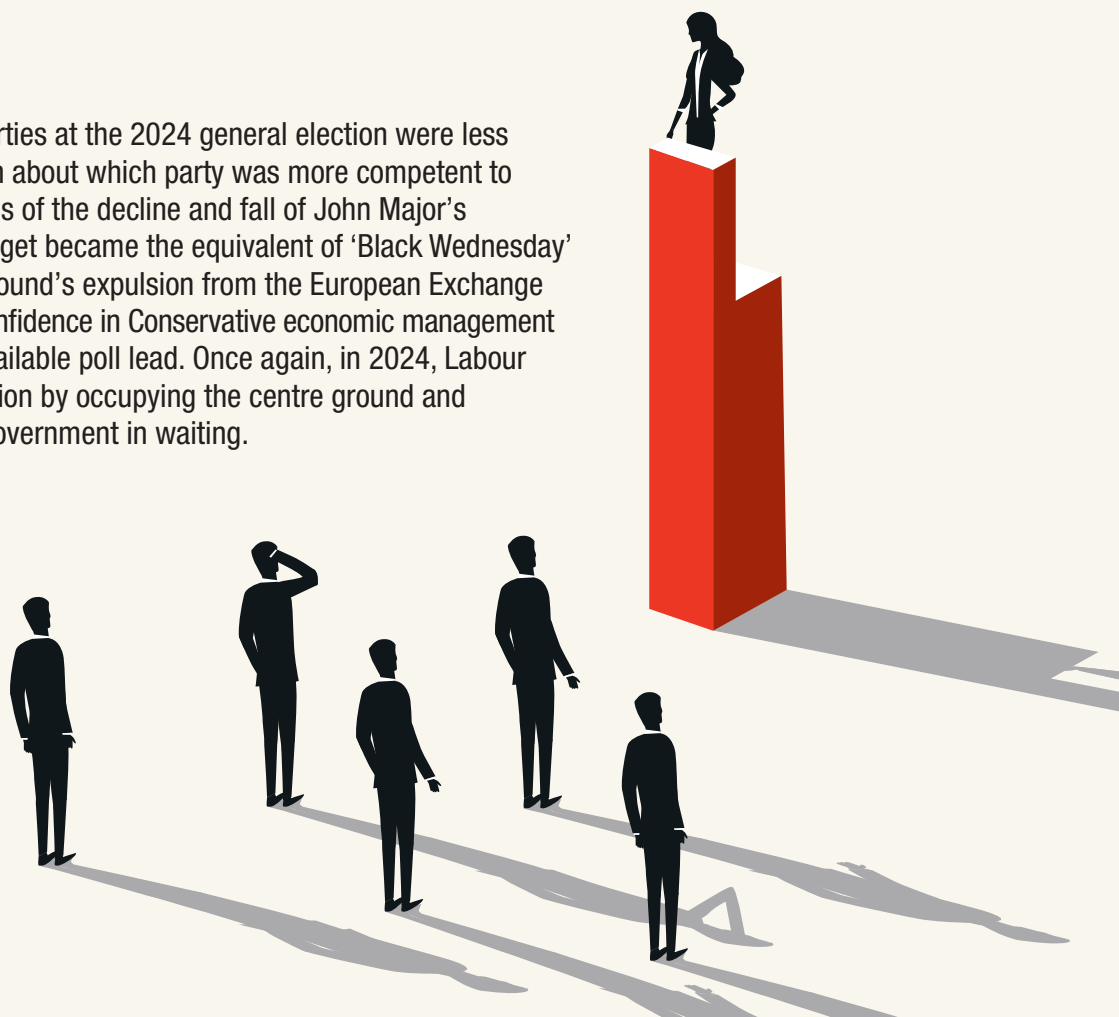
The differences between the parties at the 2024 general election were less about conflicting ideologies than about which party was more competent to govern. There were many echoes of the decline and fall of John Major's government. The Truss mini budget became the equivalent of 'Black Wednesday' in September 1992, when the pound's expulsion from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism undermined confidence in Conservative economic management and gave New Labour an unassailable poll lead. Once again, in 2024, Labour positioned itself to win the election by occupying the centre ground and presenting itself as a credible government in waiting.

In some respects, Labour's position on law and order is reminiscent of Blair's celebrated soundbite about being 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. The message is that the Conservatives have not been effective in keeping the public safe. For example, Labour promised a crackdown on knife crime, combining punishment of offenders with early intervention strategies to deter young people from carrying knives.

Foreign affairs

No major UK party is now committed to reversing Brexit. Although Starmer was a noted Remainer, Labour recognises the unpopularity of the EU with many of their core voters. Both they and the Liberal Democrats – who pledged to reverse the referendum result at the 2019 election – now focus on negotiating a better relationship between Britain and the EU.

The three parties' positions on the Ukraine War are very similar – they are supportive of Ukraine as the victim of Russian aggression. On the Israel-Gaza conflict there is consensus – all three parties condemn the Hamas attack but are also critical of Israel's severe military response. They all support an eventual two-state solution in Israel/Palestine.



CABINET GOVERNMENT: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

by Graham Goodlad

Edexcel Component 2: 3.3: The Prime Minister and the Cabinet

AQA 3.1.3: The Prime Minister and Cabinet

Cabinet government means that decisions are taken by a group of ministers who are both individually and collectively responsible to Parliament. In earlier decades, we frequently heard about a shift towards ‘prime ministerial’ or even ‘presidential’ government under dominant figures such as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. How far have we seen a return to Cabinet government under the five Conservative Prime Ministers who have been in office over the last 14 years?

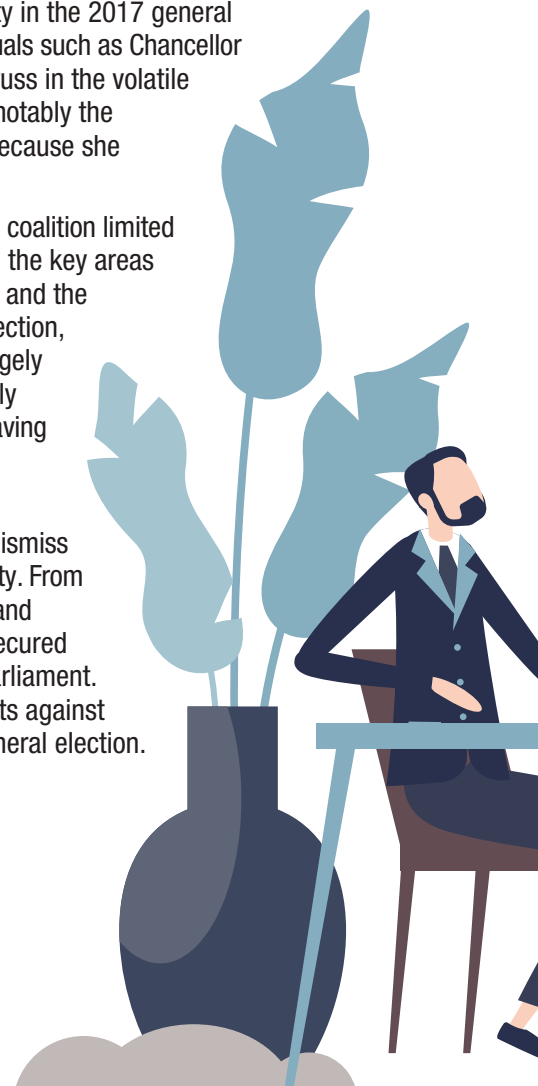
This article argues that in fact there has been no sharp discontinuity in UK government since 2010. Important features of Cabinet government existed under so-called ‘presidential’ Prime Ministers, and they survive today. At the same time, depending on circumstances, Prime Ministers have been able to exercise power independently of the Cabinet. The key factors determining the relative strength of the Prime Minister and Cabinet are the popularity of the Prime Minister, the situation in the country and Parliament, and an ability to dominate Cabinet and drive through an agenda, using a range of tools at his or her disposal.

Prime Ministers and big beasts

The size of the government’s majority and the Prime Minister’s ability to control Parliament and the governing party strongly influence their relationship with the Cabinet. In 2010, the formation of a coalition superficially suggested a return to a more collegiate style of government, as the need to keep two parties together necessitated longer meetings and more compromises on policy. To conciliate the Liberal Democrats, David Cameron held a referendum on the electoral system and agreed not to take a decision on the renewal of the Trident nuclear deterrent. After losing her majority in the 2017 general election, Theresa May had to give more latitude to the so-called ‘big beasts’ – key individuals such as Chancellor Philip Hammond – because of her precarious parliamentary position. On succeeding Liz Truss in the volatile circumstances of October 2022, Rishi Sunak sought stability by retaining key ministers, notably the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt. He initially reappointed Suella Braverman as Home Secretary because she could deliver support from the right wing of the Conservative Party.

Nevertheless, most Prime Ministers have considerable power to shape policy. Although the coalition limited Cameron’s authority in some respects, he was able to insist on a Conservative agenda in the key areas of the government programme: the ‘austerity’ cuts to public spending, reform of the NHS and the introduction of universal credit. After winning an 80-seat majority at the 2019 general election, Boris Johnson was in a very strong position – even if this was to be eroded over time, largely due to his own errors over ‘Partygate’. In February 2020 he was able to lose an apparently strong Chancellor, Sajid Javid, without adverse consequences, after the latter objected to having his advisers chosen by Number 10.

Rishi Sunak was much less secure, trailing Labour in the opinion polls for much of his premiership and widely predicted to suffer a crushing election defeat. Yet he was able to dismiss Suella Braverman in November 2023 following several instances of her defying his authority. From early 2024 he faced recurring speculation that he would be toppled from within his party and replaced by an allegedly more credible alternative such as Penny Mordaunt. Yet Sunak secured the passage of his strongly contested Rwanda deportation bill through both Houses of Parliament. Despite the Conservatives’ poor showing in the May 2024 local elections, rumours of plots against him dissipated, as the ties of party loyalty reasserted themselves in the run-up to the general election.



Bypassing cabinet

Prime Ministers possess a range of powers that can help them to dominate their governments. The power of patronage enables them to appoint individuals with proven loyalty and experience to key cabinet posts. Although the appointment was criticised on the grounds that David Cameron had to be elevated to the Lords to become Foreign Secretary, he also brought natural authority to the role. Prime Ministers also use Cabinet committees and meetings with individuals and small groups to set the agenda. Even the supposedly collegiate Cameron, whilst coalition Prime Minister, used the so-called 'quad' of senior Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers to set policy before it went to the full Cabinet for approval. Boris Johnson took the key decisions on Covid-19 lockdowns with a handful of ministers – the Chancellor, Sunak, successive Health Secretaries Matt Hancock and Sajid Javid, and Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove. This was a well-established practice before 2010 and remains so today.

A skilful Prime Minister can bypass Cabinet and use the convention of collective responsibility to smother dissent. By working with key colleagues, and using the power to hire, fire and reshuffle, the Prime Minister can usually ensure that he or she enjoys a high level of loyalty and is able to shape events and drive forward policy. The media's tendency to focus on individuals, especially at weekly Prime Minister's Questions and during election campaigns, further diminishes the importance of the Cabinet. Johnson, for example, dominated his government after associating himself with the drive to 'get Brexit done' in his first months in Number 10. Even Liz Truss, who was ejected from Downing Street after her economic policy caused a catastrophic market reaction, was able to impose her priorities for government on taking office.

Conclusion

The Cabinet does possess importance. It gives legitimacy to decisions on controversial matters and approves the government's legislative programme. A Prime Minister in difficulties, such as when Johnson confronted mounting backbench discontent over prolonged Covid restrictions at the end of 2020, will need its support. Prime Ministers do not exercise genuinely 'presidential' authority, wholly independent of the Cabinet. As the downfall of Johnson in July 2022 showed, they depend ultimately on the support of their Cabinet colleagues, who are sensitive to parliamentary and wider public opinion. They can – rarely – withdraw support, with catastrophic consequences for an isolated Prime Minister.

In the hands of a determined Prime Minister, however, the power of the office is extensive. Cabinet frequently rubber-stamps decisions taken elsewhere. The dependence of ministers on the Prime Minister's patronage, and their absorption in departmental matters, makes it hard for them to challenge his authority. A Prime Minister who can react successfully to events and deliver success has major reserves of power. It is not true to say that Cabinet government seamlessly reasserted itself after 2010.



THE AUGUST RIOTS

THEIR CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

by Moyra Grant

For a week at the beginning of August, there was a brief but intense spate of riots in England and Northern Ireland. The ostensible cause was protest over a knife attack in Stockport which killed three young girls and injured several others. The attacker was wrongly named on social media as a (wholly fictional) Muslim 'small boat' asylum seeker, although the actual suspect was a 17-year-old British-born Christian with possible mental health issues. The public disturbances targeted mosques, immigration centres and hotels thought to house asylum seekers. In Rotherham, rioters blocked the exits of a hotel and set fire to it. Across England they also attacked police officers, set cars on fire, looted shops and burned down a library. A 17-year-old in Liverpool pleaded guilty to stealing £4,000 of vapes, and another man gained video notoriety for looting from Greggs and Lush in Hull.

Causes

Reform UK MP Lee Anderson denied that the rioters were 'far right', saying, 'they're just young lads who've probably had one too many'. However, many participants clearly were militant racists, judging by their Nazi salutes, swastika tattoos and shouts of abuse; others were just angry and rash opportunists. They were incited by far-right groups such as the former English Defence League and online campaigners such as 'Tommy Robinson' (real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon), who summoned his supporters onto the streets of England from his holiday hotel in Cyprus whence he had fled after jumping bail in July for a previous contempt of court case. Even Twitter/X owner Elon Musk stirred the pot, posting 'civil war is inevitable'. Musk also called Starmer 'two-tier Keir', a reference to inaccurate claims spread by populist politicians such as Nigel Farage that right-wing protests were more harshly dealt with than others.

However, the root causes of the riots went deeper than disinformation on social media and far-right thuggery. Radical left-wing journalist Jonathon Shafi wrote in *The National* - a Scottish paper - of 'the recent race riots in England' that the fomenting of racism was a distraction from the more salient divisions of class and economic inequality. The profound social deprivations and falling living standards caused by years of austerity have provided fertile ground for frustration and anger to spill over and be redirected towards racial and religious hatred. This radicalisation, said Shafi, has happened

from the top down with politicians and policies targeting immigrants and asylum seekers, notably with the expensive and unsuccessful Rwanda deportation plan. Immigration is now a top issue for many voters.

The parties' responses

The riots were a baptism of fire for the new Labour government. PM Starmer cancelled his planned holiday and held a series of Cobra meetings (in marked contrast to PM Johnson's lax response to the onset of the Covid pandemic). Starmer was Director of Public Prosecutions during the 2011 riots, and said the key lesson he learnt was that prompt and very public arrests and sentences would end the disturbances. He passed this on to the police and criminal justice authorities - and it worked. By the second week in August, the riots had ceased with over 1,000 people (ranging in age from 11 to 81) arrested, and charges laid not only against participants but also against some individuals using 'threatening words or behaviour intending to stir up racial hatred' online. For example, a Cheshire woman in her fifties was jailed for 15 months for online calls to 'blow up a mosque with adults inside'. A 15-year-old boy in Sunderland was the first to be charged with 'riot' - a more serious charge than 'violent disorder' - carrying a maximum 10-year sentence. Prosecutors were also considering terrorism charges for some suspects and the extradition from abroad of some online influencers.

This vigorous response, however, put further strain on an already overstretched criminal justice system and overcrowded prison system; so other cases were more delayed, police cells were needed to hold some culprits and early releases from prison for non-violent prisoners were stepped up. Meanwhile, riot investigations and trials will likely continue for months. The Chief Constable of Essex has said, 'You can't come out and assault cops and breed fear in communities. Arrests are what the public wants and we'll keep nicking them as long as it's necessary.'

Large and largely peaceful anti-racist rallies also proved a deterrent, and were praised by the former Chief Constable of Durham Police as 'inspirational'. Communities then came out for street clean-up operations, fundraisers helped affected families and tradespeople repaired walls and windows for free.



Although the riots were halted within a week, Conservative leadership candidate Tom Tugendhat said that they could have been stopped sooner by using the army and that Starmer should have called emergency meetings more quickly. Another Tory leadership contender, Mel Stride, focused on the inflammatory role of social media companies; but other right-wing commentators were ‘appalled by the attacks on free speech’ (Liz Truss), and Elon Musk likened the UK to the Soviet Union for trying to restrict provocative posts and incitement on social media. A third Conservative leadership hopeful, Priti Patel, said that Parliament should be recalled from recess, although no new votes or laws were necessary because the criminal justice system used pre-existing laws to deal with rioters. (Parliament had gone into recess at the end of July and the Labour government had passed no new laws at all). Patel also questioned the operational independence of the police and referenced ‘two-tier policing’, but then said there was ‘a degree of undermining public trust and confidence in policing. That bothers me a lot, it really does.’

Rights and freedoms

The riots and the responses to them reignited the issue of rights and freedoms in the UK. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper described social media as ‘rocket boosters’ for the spread of misinformation and the organisation of violence and said, ‘If it’s a crime offline, it’s a crime

online’. The jail sentences for ‘keyboard warriors’ (as one judge called them) generated a lively debate about the appropriate extent of freedom of speech and expression, at what point freedom of speech becomes hate speech and what constitutes incitement. The riots prompted the government to announce a review of the laws on extremism. The measures due to come into force under the Online Safety Act 2023 will also be reassessed to see if they are fit for purpose..

Conclusion

The riots were short-lived, with the speed and scale of prosecutions proving to be a powerful deterrent; but their root causes among disaffected voters who feel overlooked and ignored will be more intractable. ‘Longer-term challenges’, as the government calls them, include promoting local community cohesion, reviewing the role of social media and far-right organisations, addressing concerns about immigration and racism, and achieving genuine levelling-up of deprived areas in the UK. These issues will not be cheap or easy to resolve; and the government’s decisions to maintain the two-child benefit cap, cut pensioners’ winter fuel payments, neglect social care costs and refuse to raise key taxes are criticised by many within the Labour Party for compounding poverty and public anger. The new government has difficult decisions ahead.



AMERICAN POLITICS UPDATE

by Jeremy Taylor

Edexcel Component 3a: Government & Politics of the USA AQA 3.2 Government & Politics of the USA

It is remarkable how much US politics has changed since the end of June. Joe Biden, already struggling with low approval ratings delivered a disastrous TV debate performance on June 27. Over the next two months:

- his presidential election rival, Donald Trump, survived an assassination attempt
- Biden ended his re-election campaign
- Kamala Harris emerged as the Democratic party's presidential candidate
- both candidates selected their vice-presidential running mate
- and held their national party conventions.

At the end of June, Trump led Biden in the opinion polls. By the end of August Harris led Trump in the national opinion polls by, on average, about 3 percentage points. She also narrowly leads in the polls in most swing states. This article explains the key events of June to August as they provide the context for November's presidential election.

The TV debate

June 27 saw Trump and Biden debate each other for the first time in this campaign. Biden delivered a number of incoherent answers and inaudible remarks. Biden was already under pressure due to his age. The TV debate thus seemed to confirm the worst nightmares of Democrats: that Biden was too old and Trump was destined to win. Of particular concern were the polls in the "swing" or "battleground" states that are essential to win the election under the Electoral College system.



Trump's approach became very clear – attack Biden's age and mental agility and argue Biden was unfit to be President. The polls show these attack lines worked – after the debate, even New Jersey – a safe Democratic state ("blue state") – appeared in polls to be a swing state. Large numbers of Democrat voters wanted Biden to stand down. Over the following days, some members of the Democratic party in Congress put pressure on Biden to do this. However, Biden made clear he would not go.



The assassination attempt, the selection of Vance and the RNC

All of this changed as a result of the events of July 13 and the subsequent week. On July 13, Trump survived an assassination attempt. His defiant raised fist instantly became an iconic image. Many political commentators now regarded the election as already won by Trump. In the immediate aftermath, Trump's campaigning became more restrained and disciplined in an attempt to "unite the nation". The following week the Republicans held their National Convention (the RNC) in Milwaukee. Trump appeared triumphal. His decision to announce J.D. Vance, the Ohio Senator as his Vice-Presidential candidate ("running mate") was initially well-received. Vance, from a poor working-class background and representing a key "Rust Belt" state was seen as an obvious appointment to attract the blue-collar voters who were key to Trump's win in 2016.

Biden's withdrawal

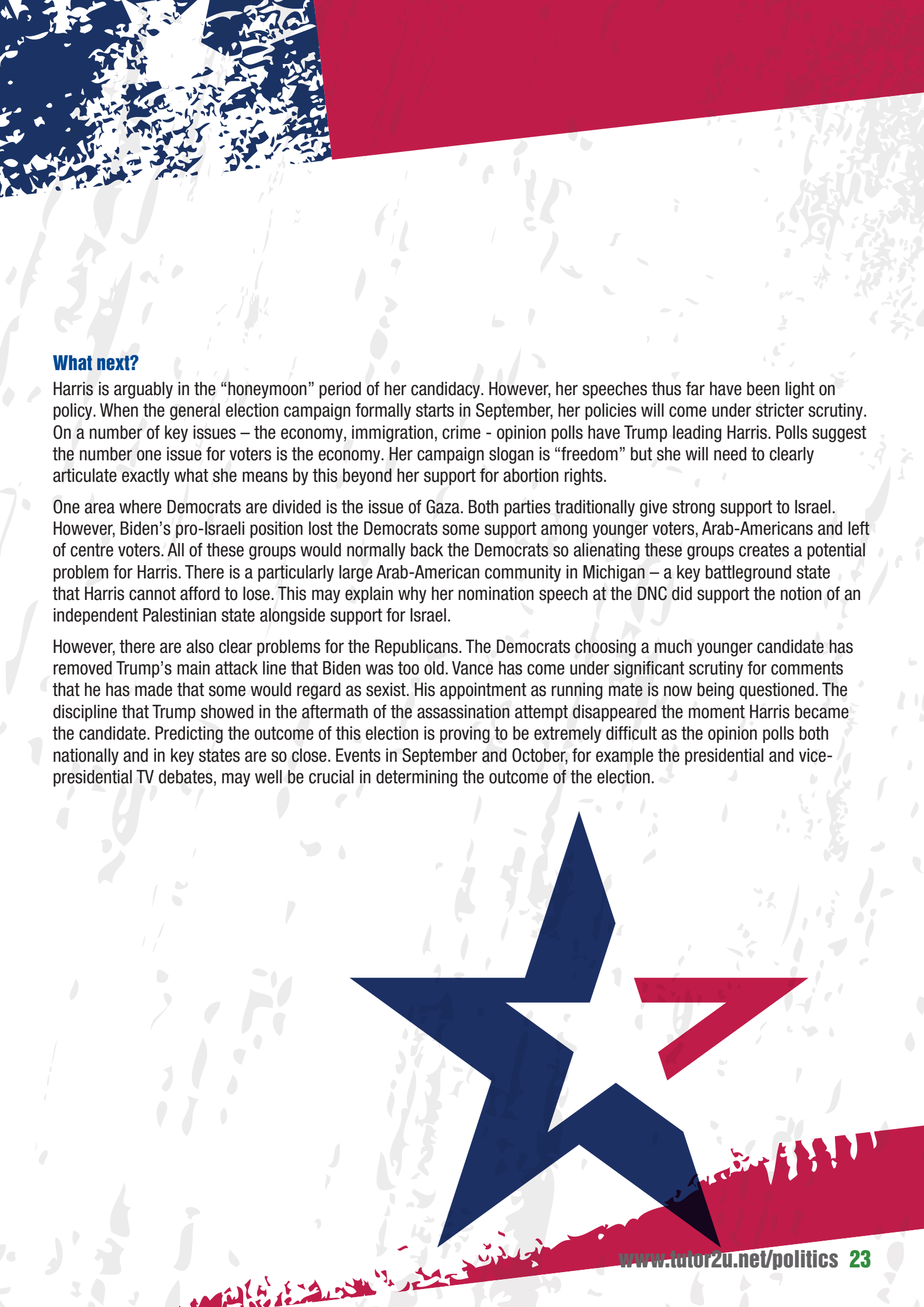
The main consequence of this was to drastically increase the pressure on Biden. This came both from politicians in Congress and also major party donors who had come to the conclusion that their funding would be wasted if Biden was favourite to lose. For the first time in the race, Trump had a fundraising advantage.

It is important to note just how rare it is for an incumbent President to not run for a second term. The last time was in 1968 when Lyndon Johnson decided, as a result of the Vietnam War, to not run for re-election. However, Johnson stood down before the Democrats had completed the nomination process. Biden withdrew after he had won the primaries and had thus won the nomination to be the Democrats' presidential candidate. This is unheard of.

The decision by Biden, on 21 July, to drop out was quickly followed by the decision to endorse Vice-President Kamala Harris as the new candidate. The Democrats were quick to ensure that the delegates to the Democrat National Convention (DNC) would confirm their support for Harris' candidacy before the DNC met. Senior Democrats quickly fell in behind Harris, her opinion poll ratings rose giving her a small lead over Trump and donations significantly increased. In the 24 hours after Harris announced her decision to run, her campaign raised \$81m – a record. Her selection of Tim Walz as running mate has boosted Democrats. Walz is the Governor of a Rust Belt state (Minnesota) and his down to earth persona - he is a former high school teacher and football coach - is seen as potentially a vote winner among the blue collar voters who have been attracted by Trump.

The Democratic National Convention

Late August saw the Democrats hold their National Convention in Chicago. Democrats have largely seen the DNC as a success with the party uniting around the nomination of Kamala Harris as their party's presidential candidate. High profile speakers – Michelle and Barack Obama, Hillary and Bill Clinton – gave passionate speeches in support of Harris. One of the key figures from the Left of the Democratic Party, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, delivered a strong address supporting Harris. It appears that the DNC has helped to re-unite the Democratic Party after a difficult year. Harris' nomination speech seems to have energised the party's activists. Donations to the Harris campaign exceeded \$500m in the period from Biden's withdrawal to the DNC - an astonishing amount.



What next?

Harris is arguably in the “honeymoon” period of her candidacy. However, her speeches thus far have been light on policy. When the general election campaign formally starts in September, her policies will come under stricter scrutiny. On a number of key issues – the economy, immigration, crime - opinion polls have Trump leading Harris. Polls suggest the number one issue for voters is the economy. Her campaign slogan is “freedom” but she will need to clearly articulate exactly what she means by this beyond her support for abortion rights.

One area where Democrats are divided is the issue of Gaza. Both parties traditionally give strong support to Israel. However, Biden’s pro-Israeli position lost the Democrats some support among younger voters, Arab-Americans and left of centre voters. All of these groups would normally back the Democrats so alienating these groups creates a potential problem for Harris. There is a particularly large Arab-American community in Michigan – a key battleground state that Harris cannot afford to lose. This may explain why her nomination speech at the DNC did support the notion of an independent Palestinian state alongside support for Israel.

However, there are also clear problems for the Republicans. The Democrats choosing a much younger candidate has removed Trump’s main attack line that Biden was too old. Vance has come under significant scrutiny for comments that he has made that some would regard as sexist. His appointment as running mate is now being questioned. The discipline that Trump showed in the aftermath of the assassination attempt disappeared the moment Harris became the candidate. Predicting the outcome of this election is proving to be extremely difficult as the opinion polls both nationally and in key states are so close. Events in September and October, for example the presidential and vice-presidential TV debates, may well be crucial in determining the outcome of the election.

THE BRIEF ENIGMA OF ROBERT KENNEDY JUNIOR *by Trish Shepherd*

Edexcel Component 3a: 5 US Democracy & Participation

Robert Kennedy Jnr's entry into the 2024 race was an interesting diversion from the Biden (now Harris) v Trump two party dominance. Over the summer, until the ending of his campaign and declaration of support for Trump, it was unknown how his presence on the ballot papers might affect the outcome of the race. Who would he hurt the most, Democrats or Republicans?

Who is he?

Robert Kennedy Jnr, 70, is son of Robert F. Kennedy and nephew of former Presidential icon John F Kennedy, so is from political royalty in the USA. He cuts a swashbuckling figure, with piercing blue eyes. His son dated Taylor Swift. He has a record for environmentalism and following his entry to the race, rated about 10% in the polls.¹

He even aired an extremely expensive \$4m Superbowl advert that used his uncle's adverts from 1960 superimposed with his own image. This backfired as Kennedy's own family disowned him and promptly attended the White House posing for photographs with Biden.

However he was politically inexperienced (not that this matters these days!) having never held a political post nor run a large corporation. Instead, he found fame/notoriety for his extreme views during the pandemic, being a prolific anti-vaxxer and conspiracy theorist. He was one of the 'disinformation dozen' responsible for spreading significant amounts of misinformation in social media posts that have been shared globally.² He is a lifelong Democrat and initially challenged Biden for the Presidency before running as an independent candidate.

Who was his running mate?

Nicole Shanahan, a billionaire lawyer who was formerly married to Google founder Sergei Brin (and annulled it after 27 days!). She paid for the Superbowl ad and helped bankroll Kennedy's campaign.

What were his policies?

He described himself as a 'truth teller', opposed to corporate interests and pro-middle class America.³ He claimed he could 'fix the country' and drew on his legal background of challenging corporate giants such as Monsanto.

He was pro-Israel following the Oct 7th attacks, yet opposed to US support for Ukraine. He wanted to cut costs in government, focusing on reductions in military spending and healthcare.

Chances of success for independent candidates in US politics

Third party candidates/independents do not do well in US politics for a range of reasons. The first past the post system, exacerbated by the electoral college, favours the main political parties. Third parties or independent candidates struggle to get their name on the ballots nationwide due to complex and differing ballot access laws in each state, which often includes gathering thousands of signatures. They suffer from a lack of name recognition and lack of funding (funding tends to follow probable winners), with financial support also being dependent on previous electoral success. It's a chicken and egg scenario.

The chances of electoral success for independents/third parties are slim. The best performance in recent times was Ross Perot in 1992 who polled 19%, then 8% in 1996. Despite his impressive level of popular support, he failed to gain any electoral college votes.

Kennedy Jnr did have advantages this time: he had stellar name recognition, wealth and fame from his internet/environmental activities. He had a super-PAC (American Values 2024) who worked to help get him access on to the ballot in Utah, plus had enough signatures to support a bid for access in the swing states of Arizona, Georgia and Nevada. This was worrisome for both Biden and Trump, where margins are tight and every possible vote is needed to assure victory. Both feared he would have a spoiling effect, inflict damage on one of, or both of the main two candidates.

Famously, in the 2000 presidential election, Ralph Nadar arguably helped G W Bush into the White House, winning 97,000 votes in Florida, where Bush won by only 537 votes. Likewise, in 2016, Hillary Clinton might have pulled off victories in critical swing states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, but some voters chose Jill Stein of the Green party instead, enabling Trump's victory. In Wisconsin, Stein won 30,000 votes, which was more than Trump's margin of victory over Clinton.⁴

Neither side knew whose campaign he would spoil the most: Trump or Biden/Harris? Polling data suggested that he pulled support from both parties. Most concern was in swing states. For example, in Georgia, Kennedy had 6% support in the polls.

Why did he end his campaign for the presidency?

In the end, his campaign was too much of a long shot. He threw in the towel, having spent his money and effort on trying to get on the ballots in multiple states. He endorsed Trump – a move that enraged the rest of his Democrat family. Trump duly welcomed the “brilliant” and “phenomenal” Kennedy, delighted and hopeful that Kennedy's supporters will back him instead. This still remains to be seen.

A slight problem...

Unfortunately for the two main candidates (most likely Trump), Kennedy's name still appears on the ballot papers in many states which could still have a spoiling effect on the result. Swing states matter more and his name still remains on the ballots in Wisconsin and Michigan. Wisconsin rejected his request to be removed, as in this state candidates can only be removed if they die, whereas in Michigan it was simply too late.

Therefore the independent candidate who is no longer a candidate, may still have an effect on the race.

¹ <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-general/2024/national/>

² *How a Kennedy built an anti-vaccine juggernaut amid COVID-19* | AP News

³ *Who is Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and why is he running for president?* | AP News

³ *What to Know About RFK. Jr. and His Threat to Biden and Trump* - The New York Times ([nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com))



WHO SHOULD AUTHORISE HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION?

by Ollie Riley

Edexcel Component 3b: Global Politics

This article explores the key arguments surrounding the authorisation of humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian intervention refers to the use of armed force by a state or group of states to intervene in another country, typically without the consent of that country's government, with the primary aim of preventing or stopping widespread human suffering.

According to Just War Theory, for a military intervention to be ethical, it must have a just cause, be done with the right intention, be used as a last resort, use proportional means and have a reasonable chance of success. However, some scholars add a sixth criterion - 'right authority', which holds that military action must be authorised by the correct political body. So, who should authorise humanitarian intervention? And does the issue of 'right authority' really matter?

'Right Authority' and the Responsibility to Protect

The international community now has a globally recognised norm concerning humanitarian intervention: the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

Endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2005, R2P asserts that sovereign states bear primary responsibility for protecting their citizens against genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, but when a state cannot prevent or is the perpetrator of such crimes, the international community has a duty to intervene and protect the population at risk.

In the original report from which the Responsibility to Protect norm was born, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) placed primary responsibility for authorising humanitarian intervention on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Still, it argued that there are alternatives should the UNSC fail to act, including the UN General Assembly and regional organisations. Let's examine these three sources of authority in turn.

The UN Security Council

The issue of 'right authority' ultimately comes down to legitimacy and effectiveness. Which organisation has sufficient legitimacy to authorise the use of force and the capabilities to ensure it is carried out effectively? The UN Security Council has strengths in both of these respects.

Firstly, humanitarian intervention approved by the UNSC is most commensurate with international law. Article 24 of the UN Charter confers 'primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security' on the Security Council and Article 39 states: 'the Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken...to maintain or restore international peace and security.'

The UNSC also provides political legitimacy to humanitarian intervention because the presence of the ten non-permanent member states, comprising countries from every region, makes the institution somewhat representative of the international community. With the support of the UNSC, a humanitarian intervention is also more likely to be effective because the five permanent members can mobilise the financial, bureaucratic and military resources to ensure success.

However, one major worry about the Security Council is the potential for a P5 member to misuse their veto power for self-interested reasons. In their report on the Responsibility to Protect, the ICISS highlighted that 'of particular concern is the possibility that needed action will be held hostage to unrelated concerns of one or more of the permanent members – a situation that has too frequently occurred in the past.'

This problem is particularly acute during periods of great power competition. Between 1991-2014, the UNSC successfully authorised 60 UN peacekeeping missions and several humanitarian interventions led by the U.S., most notably in Somalia and Bosnia. However, only two new peacekeeping operations have been authorised since 2014, largely because of deteriorating relations between the United States and Russia. Russia consistently vetoed resolutions to hold President Bashar al-Assad accountable for crimes committed against civilians during the Syrian Civil War, for example. The leveraging of the veto prevents timely action to address humanitarian emergencies.

The UN General Assembly

Another potential source of authority for humanitarian interventions is the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Humanitarian interventions carried out with the UNGA's approval have some legal basis in the 1950 Uniting for Peace resolution which affirms that, if the Security Council fails to exercise its duty to protect international peace and security, 'the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately with a view to making appropriate recommendations to Members for collective measures, including in the case of a breach of the peace or act of aggression the use of armed force when necessary, to maintain or restore international peace and security.'

As the UN's most representative organ, UNGA approval also gives significant political legitimacy to humanitarian interventions. The absence of veto power also allows for more timely action because less bargaining is needed with states that could otherwise use their veto as leverage in the Security Council. However, the Uniting for Peace procedure requires that resolutions be passed with a two-thirds majority, which may be unlikely if the issue is contentious enough to divide the Security Council. Moreover, UNGA resolutions lack the legal force of Security Council resolutions; they are at best indicative votes that may encourage the Security Council to take more urgent action.



Regional Organisations

Regional organisations have played a greater role in authorising humanitarian interventions in this millennium, reflecting the trend towards the regionalisation of global governance as a whole. For example, in 2003 alone, NATO and the EU ran a peacekeeping mission in Macedonia, the African Union authorised a mission in Burundi and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) oversaw action in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire.

The legality of regional organisations authorising humanitarian intervention is ambiguous. Article 52 of the UN Charter states: 'Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action.' However, Article 53 adds that military enforcement by regional organisations cannot occur without Security Council authorisation unless it is against an 'enemy state', a term poorly defined in the Charter.

Humanitarian interventions authorised by regional organisations benefit from increased political legitimacy as it is those states most likely to be affected by the spillovers from a conflict that are giving their consent to the use of force. Moreover, interventions authorised by regional organisations help to alleviate the common concern that humanitarian intervention may be used as a guise for neo-imperialism, particularly by Western countries.

Perhaps the biggest strength of regional organisations is their efficacy. Due to their proximity to the target state, regional organisations often have a deeper understanding of local dynamics, culture, and history. This may put them in a better position to anticipate how the population will respond to a military intervention.

Additionally, regional organisations have stronger incentives to ensure that the aftermath of a humanitarian intervention is carefully managed. A common criticism of humanitarian interventions is the lack of adequate planning for the post-conflict phase, which often involves complex tasks such as nation-building, restoring the rule of law, and organising democratic elections. Because they are most likely to feel the after-effects of an intervention, regional organisations may take greater care to ensure sufficient post-conflict planning before authorising the use of force.

Does 'right authority' really matter?

Let's now look at the deeper question of whether authorisation matters for the morality of humanitarian interventions.

International law requires the Security Council to authorise the use of force to stop the unilateral incursions of state sovereignty. This is useful in a practical sense because unilateral military action usually undermines international peace and security. The need to acquire authorisation protects international order by providing checks on states who might otherwise use humanitarian intervention as a pretext to advance their self-interests or who wish to use force with impunity.

However, the argument that 'right authority' matters for the justness of a humanitarian intervention has two powerful counter-arguments. The first concerns the question of moral authority; is there an international institution with the moral wisdom to decide whether humanitarian intervention is justified?

It's difficult to see how the UNSC possesses such moral authority. The five permanent members of the Security Council occupy their positions because of the distribution of power in 1945, not because of their reputation as beacons of moral virtue. The United States is responsible for several unilateral military interventions that produced disastrous humanitarian consequences, China stands accused of committing crimes against humanity or genocide against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, and Russia's president is wanted by the International Criminal Court for human rights abuses committed since his country's invasion of Ukraine. Does a humanitarian intervention really forfeit moral legitimacy because it lacks the blessing of these states?

There are also doubts about the moral authority of the UN General Assembly. According to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Index, only 18% of UN Member States are liberal democracies and roughly half are either closed autocracies or electoral autocracies (where restrictions on free speech and freedom of the press make the countries' elections meaningless).

A second issue with 'right authority' arguments is that the moral imperative of protecting people from atrocities outweighs the need to obtain authorisation for such action. There have been unilateral humanitarian interventions which were illegal under international law, but that most now agree were justified because of the outcomes they produced. For example, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978 removed Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge from power, ending the genocide which had killed over a million Cambodians. Some argue NATO's mission in Kosovo in 1999 constitutes another example of an "illegal but legitimate" intervention, although the aggregate humanitarian impact of this is contested. On the one hand, NATO's action prevented further ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Albanians by Slobodan Milosevic's forces, but this came at the expense of a high civilian death toll and significant damage to civilian infrastructure.

Arguably, these interventions show that the justice of humanitarian interventions can only be determined by the consequences they bring about. In this view, the authorisation of humanitarian intervention only matters to the extent that gaining international support increases the likelihood of success. We can say that, in general, humanitarian interventions that have the support of international institutions improve the chances of a good outcome and mitigate the abuse of the Responsibility to Protect norm, but this does not preclude the legitimacy of unilateral interventions in specific circumstances.

In conclusion, determining the right authority for authorising humanitarian intervention remains a contentious issue of international law and moral philosophy. While the UN Security Council provides a legal framework and has political legitimacy, it is hindered by the veto power of the P5, often stalling necessary action. The UN General

Assembly offers a more democratic alternative, though its resolutions lack the binding legal force of the Security Council. Regional organisations, due to their proximity and understanding of local dynamics, may offer more effective intervention strategies, but their legal standing is ambiguous without UNSC approval.

Ultimately, while right authority can be vital for ensuring the success of interventions, there are circumstances where unilateral interventions, though illegal under international law, have been justified by the humanitarian outcomes achieved. As such, the question of authorisation should be weighed alongside the moral imperative to protect human rights, with the success of intervention, in many cases, becoming the ultimate determinant of its legitimacy.

Further recommended reading

If you are interested in the politics and ethics of humanitarian intervention, here are some suggestions for further reading:

Michael Walzer, **Just and Unjust Wars** (1977)

Nicholas Wheeler, **Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society** (2003)

Cecile Fabre, **Cosmopolitan War** (2012)

Don E. Scheid (ed), **The Ethics of Armed Humanitarian Intervention** (2014)



THE POLITICAL STRONG MAN?

by Kevin Bloor

Edexcel Component 3b: Global Politics

The ‘strong man’ is a term that has gained much attention of late within the political world (Ben-Ghiat, 2020; Rachman, 2022). Whilst the phrase describes a phenomenon that has existed for some time, the ‘strong man’ thesis seeks to categorise and capture a modern context.

From a student perspective, it is a term that will help you comprehend the dynamics of global politics. Although not specifically mentioned, it holds direct relevance to several areas of the Global Politics syllabus. This short article seeks to identify the main elements of the ‘strong man’ in the contemporary era alongside a number of examples. The article will however raise a question mark over its continued relevance to the contemporary era.

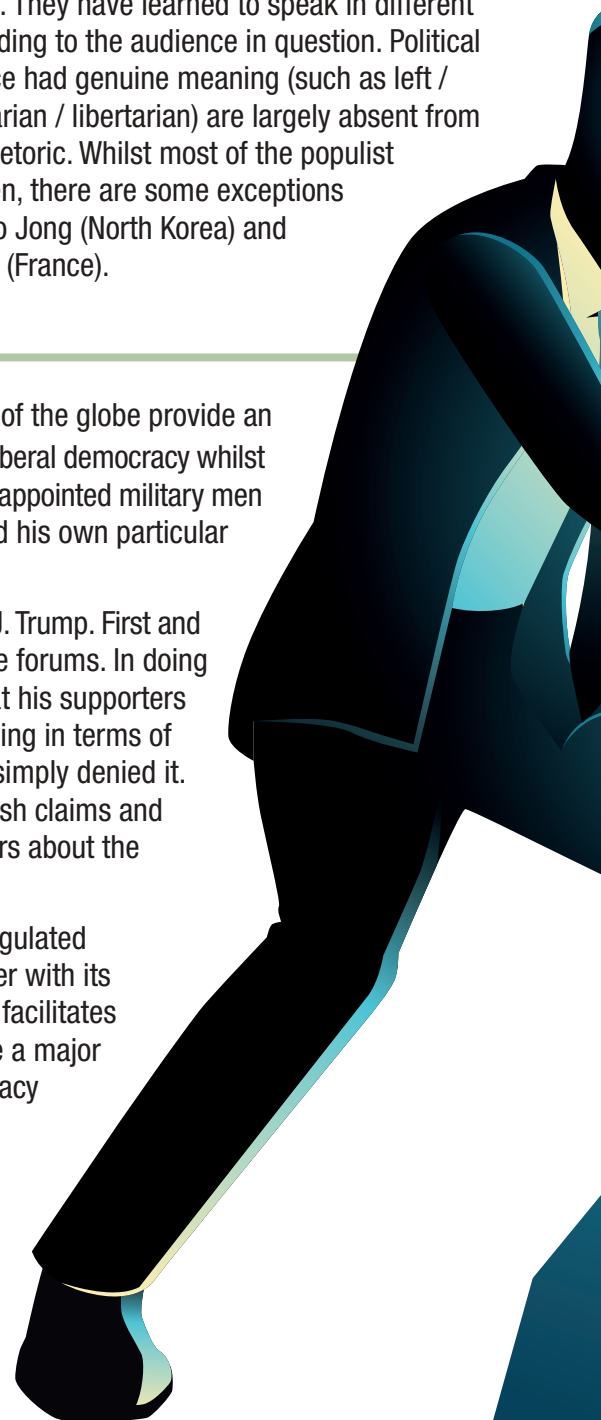
The political ‘strong man’ can be defined as an authoritarian leader characterised by populist rhetoric and a distaste for democratic norms. Politicians who govern on this basis are firmly opposed to liberal concepts such as globalisation, tolerance, secularism, multiculturalism and open borders. Indeed, the emergence of the ‘strong man’ is largely a reaction to the spread of liberal values. In terms of their belief system, it is far easier to depict what a ‘strong man’ is opposed to rather than what they actually stand for. A modern-day strong man is not tied to fixed ideological boundaries or duly concerned with

intellectual preoccupations. They are therefore able to mix and match words without the need for any coherence or consistency. They have learned to speak in different tongues according to the audience in question. Political terms that once had genuine meaning (such as left / right, authoritarian / libertarian) are largely absent from the populist rhetoric. Whilst most of the populist figures are men, there are some exceptions such as Kim Yo Jong (North Korea) and Marine Le Pen (France).

What is particularly notable about the ‘strong man’ thesis is that most parts of the globe provide an illustration to consider. The Hungarian leader Viktor Orban aims to create an illiberal democracy whilst in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro declared the military to be above the Constitution and appointed military men to his Cabinet. In the world’s largest democracy, Narendra Modi has fostered his own particular brand in a manner consistent with the ‘strong man.’

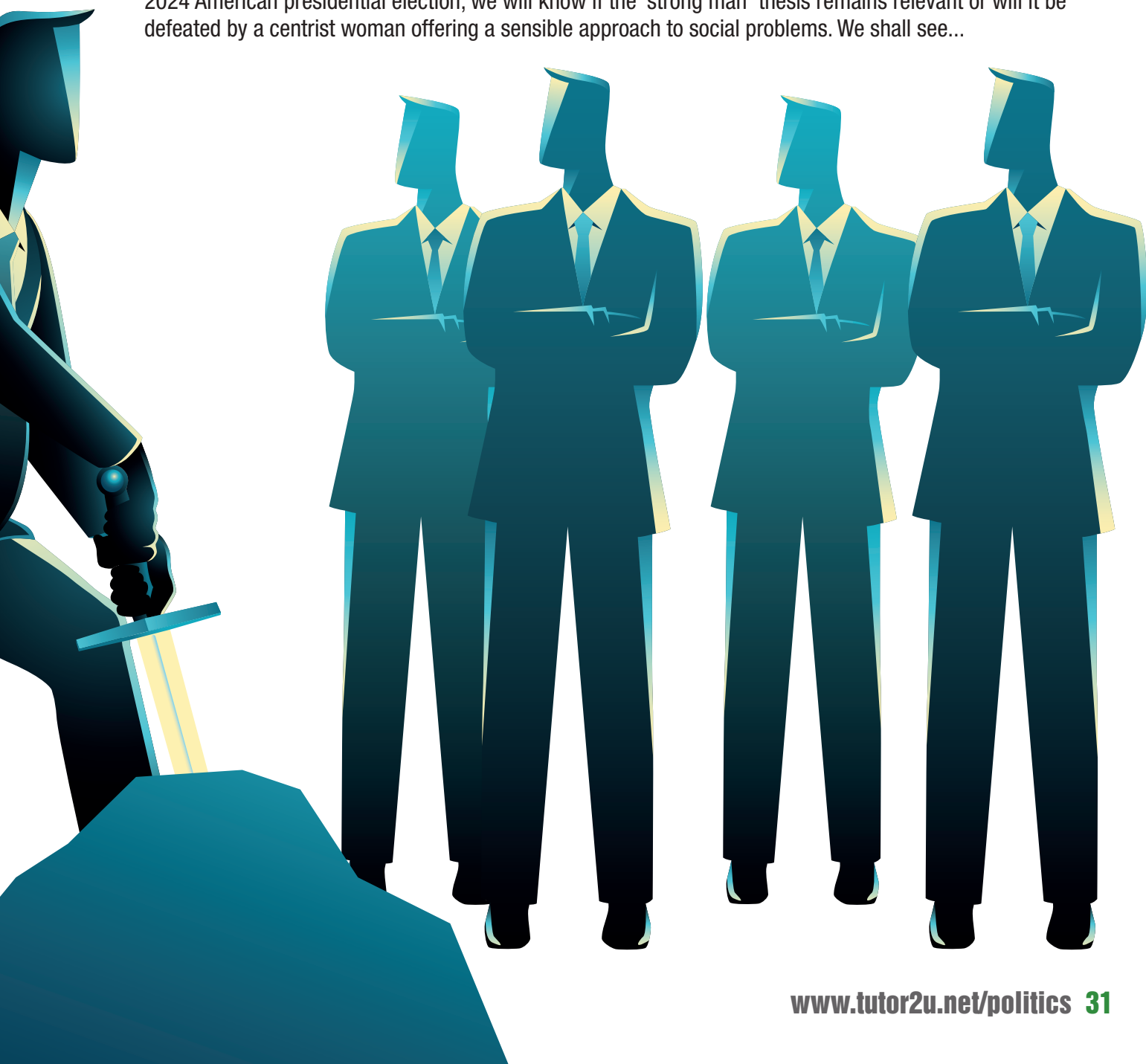
However, the stand-out illustration of a politician using such tactics is Donald J. Trump. First and foremost, he has proved highly adept at creating his own narrative via online forums. In doing so, he has sought to escape traditional democratic limitations posed by what his supporters would call mainstream media. The Trump presidency was particularly revealing in terms of how the ‘strong man’ seeks to operate. When faced with accountability, he simply denied it. If a line of questioning was uncomfortable, he sought to distract via outlandish claims and outright falsehoods. Having lost power in 2020, he even spread false rumours about the presidential election which led to the January riots on Capitol Hill.

Donald J. Trump is also emblematic of the strong man’s preference for unregulated capitalism. Liberal democracy often gets in the way of an authoritarian leader with its judicial oversight and legislative scrutiny. In stark contrast, the marketplace facilitates his desire to enhance the Trump brand and make money. Capitalism can be a major advantage for figures such as Trump in that it provides a space that democracy often curtails.



In terms of explaining the appeal of such figures, there is one academic study that provides us with clarity. Back in 1974, a German study conducted by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann showed how people will go along with majority opinion in order to fit in. This is based on the deepest human desire to become part of a crowd. Conversely, it is also motivated by the fear of isolation. Expulsion is one of the oldest forms of punishment and arguably one of the most effective. Supporters of the 'strong man' often become socialised into supporting their own side and find it easy to reject facts that contradict their narrative. In a post-modern era we often live within the walls of our own reality, and we are encouraged to speak our own 'truth' rather than listen to an opposing argument. This trend is particularly notable online with the existence of echo chambers.

On a final note, the election of Sir Keir Starmer in the United Kingdom offers a challenge to the notion of the 'strong man.' He is representative of a centrist form of politics based on a 'sensible' approach to social problems. Starmer seeks to offer reassurance and calm when faced with those who fan the flames of hatred. It must be noted that all trends within global politics have their peaks and troughs and, by the time of the 2024 American presidential election, we will know if the 'strong man' thesis remains relevant or will it be defeated by a centrist woman offering a sensible approach to social problems. We shall see...



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