

Results are in – Level 1

Elections and voting

This activity lets your class explore how a UK general election translates to ‘seats’ in the House of Commons. Political parties aim to win as many seats as possible so they can have more influence during votes on debates and new laws.

So what are the possible outcomes?

An overall majority

There are 650 seats available in the House of Commons – one for every UK constituency. To win the election outright, and the chance to form government, one political party needs to win an overall majority of the 650 seats (ie, more than half).

1. For this activity, say MPs from four different parties have won seats in the House of Commons during the election. Start by giving each party a different colour or pattern – fill in each party’s circle.



2. Calculate the minimum number of seats required for an overall majority. Remember the total of available seats is 650. Write your answer in the ‘Government seats’ box below.
3. Choose one party to be the ‘election winner’ with a majority of the seats. Fill in the government benches using the colour/pattern from your key.
4. Subtract the number in your ‘Government seats’ box from 650. This is the number of seats left in the House.
5. Divide the remaining seats between the other three parties. You don’t have to give them all an equal amount.

6. Finally, colour in a block of seats for each party on the Opposition benches. Write the number of seats for each party on their colour block.

Government benches

Government seats



Opposition benches

Results are in – Level 2

Elections and voting

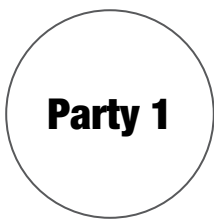
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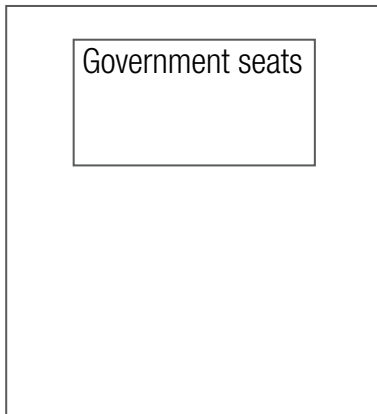
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Government benches



Opposition benches



Hung Parliaments

So what happens if one party **doesn't** win an overall majority?

After the country votes in a general election, if no one political party has more than half the seats in the House of Commons, then this situation is known as a 'hung Parliament'.

The leaders of the political parties will try to work out whether any single party or combination of parties will be able to command support from a majority of MPs. Why is this important?

For the government to carry out its plans it needs the approval of a majority of MPs in the House of Commons. With the support of a majority of MPs, a political party (or parties) can be confident it will have enough support for its ideas and plans during votes.

In the case of a hung Parliament – where no one party has a majority – possible outcomes include:

- a coalition government
- a minority government
- failure to produce a stable government may trigger another election.

It may also be that during the life of a Parliament, some combination of these outcomes may occur.

Coalition government

In the case of a hung Parliament, two or more parties may choose to join forces (and seats) so they command a majority of MPs in the House of Commons. Members of these parties would govern the country together.

1. Divide 650 seats between your four parties. Give each party a different number of seats and make sure no one party holds an overall majority.
2. Choose the parties you'd like to have in your coalition. (You can have up to three.)
3. Add together the seats in your coalition. Do they total more than: $[650/2] + 1$?
If not, try the different coalitions until you have a majority.
4. Add your coalition party colour blocks to the benches.
5. Add the colour blocks of the remaining parties to the Opposition benches.

Government benches

Government seats



Opposition benches

Results are in – Level 3

Elections and voting

This activity lets your class explore how a UK general election translates to ‘seats’ in the House of Commons. Political parties aim to win as many seats as possible so they can have more influence during votes on debates and new laws.

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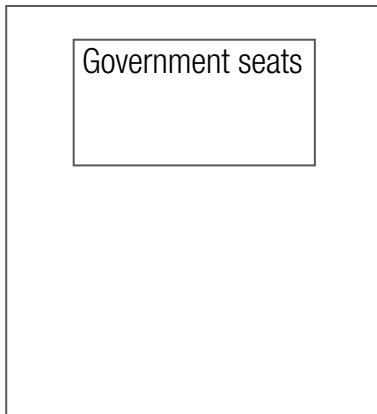
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Government benches



Opposition benches



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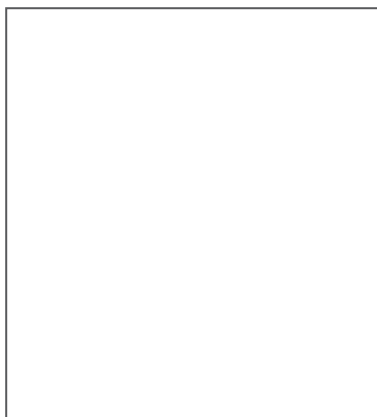
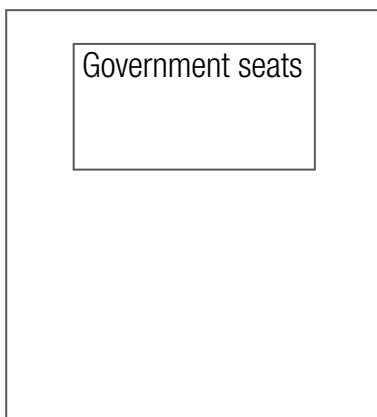
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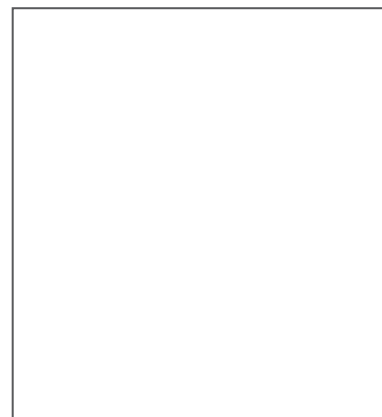
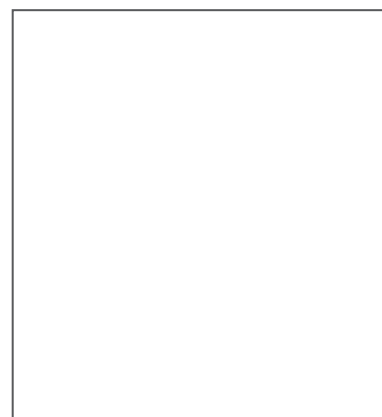
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Opposition benches



Minority governments

Following a general election, the party with the most seats can try to govern with a minority of seats in the Commons. In this case it will need to convince MPs from other parties to support its plans on specific votes. If the party can't get enough support on an important vote, however, it risks defeat, which may force a general election.

A minority government also tends to be less stable than a majority or coalition government because the opposition parties can bring down the government with a simple vote of no confidence.

Minority or coalition?

In 1910 there were two general elections.

General election – January 1910

Party	Number of seats
Conservative	273
Liberal	275
Labour	40
Irish Nationalist	82

General election – December 1910

Party	Number of seats
Conservative	272
Liberal	272
Labour	42
Irish Nationalist	84

Consider both sets of election results before you answer the following questions.

1. The total number of seats in 1910 was 670. How many seats were needed for an overall majority?

2. Which was the leading party following both general elections?

3. The Liberals governed between 1910 and 1915 with a minority of MPs.
If they had chosen to form a coalition government instead, which party (or parties) could they have tried to combine votes with to gain an overall majority?

4. Why do you think the Liberals chose to govern with a minority of MPs in 1910, as opposed to forming a coalition?

5. Why do you think the 80 Irish Nationalists were keen to keep the Liberals in office during this period?
- a) They were hoping that the Liberals would ask them to form a coalition
 - b) The Liberals were passing social welfare and trade union legislation
 - c) The Liberals gave the Irish Home Rule Bill priority during this period

6. When was the last time that two general elections were held in one year and why?