1. **Evaluate / Analyse the effectiveness of an electoral system you have studied in providing fair representation.**

**You should refer to electoral systems used in Scotland, the UK, or both in your answer.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| FPTP effectively provides fair representation | FPTP does not effectively provide fair representation |
| It represents the will of the people as there was the opportunity to replace it during a democratic vote and it proved the popular choice. The 2011 Alternative Vote referendum saw voters chose not to replace FPTP with AV- suggesting people feel well represented by FPTP. Although only 19.1m (41%) people voted in the second UK-wide referendum in history. The final result put the Yes vote at 32.1% and the No vote at 67.9%. A fairly conclusive victory for the No camp even though the turnout was not large. | FPTP can be viewed as disproportionate and this leads to poor representation. Neither of the two largest parties has achieved anywhere close to 50% of the vote in the UK for over 40 years and since 2001, no single-party government has commanded the support of more than 40% of voters, but have had power over the whole electorate. Taking turnout into account, the current government commands the support of just a quarter (24.4%) of the registered electorate. For example, in 2015 Conservatives won 37% of the vote but 51% of seats (330), and UKIP won 12.7% of the vote but just 0.2% of seats (only 1 seat). This can be compared to the 2016 Scottish Parliament election where it does seem more proportional as the Scottish Greens won 6.6% of the vote and 4.7% of MSPs. UKIP leader Nigel Farage has called FPTP ‘completely bankrupt’. The problem for UKIP was that their support was not concentrated on key areas so whereas they won 2nd place in 118 constituencies and around 2.3 million more votes than the SNP. The SNP won 50% of the Scottish vote share, but 95% of Scottish seats giving them 56 out of 59 seats. This support was concentrated in a smaller area leading to winning constituencies. This leaves only three MPs (5% of the total) to reflect unionist support in Scotland of which there was 50% voter support. |
| Turnout may be an indicator that people feel better represented in FPTP, and high turnout is healthy for democracy. People seem to think ‘Most votes wins’ rule of FPTP is fair, clear, and easy to understand.For example, there was a higher turnout for UK 2015 general election (66%) than in Scottish Parliament election 2016 using a more complicated, proportional system of voting called Additional Member System (AMS) (55.6%) and the local council elections 2012 using another complicated system called STV (39.1%). In addition, there is a smaller chance of spoiled votes under FPTP. In the 2012 local election under STV, 27,048 or 1.71% of all ballots cast were spoiled. The most common reason for this was that the voter had cast more than one first preference. The incidence of ballots rejected for that reason was more common the greater the number of candidates standing. This suggests that when presented with more than one candidate from their preferred party some voters failed to appreciate they had to place them in order rather than simply give an ‘X’ to them all, and that there remains a need to improve voter understanding of this aspect of the STV system. The overall incidence of rejected ballots tended to be higher in less affluent, more socially deprived areas, and suggests a continued need for efforts at voter education to pay special attention to the needs of those with more limited social and educational resources. | In FPTP, there is less likelihood that voters will be represented by candidates that they have voted for. Because FPTP is a ‘winner takes all’ system, votes for the losingcandidates are not taken into account in any way – something which, when replicated nationally, leads to millions of unrepresented voters. At this election, nearly three-quarters of votes were wasted in this way (74.4%, compared to 71.1% in the last General Election); 22 million people who voted yet had numerically no influence on the outcome. The winning candidate can win with less than half the support of the people he would represent. The SLDP candidate in South Belfast was elected as an MP in 2015 with only 24.5% share of the vote. This does not seem representative when the vast majority of people in his constituency (75.5%) voted against him. In the 2015 general election, there were 650 winning candidates, 322 (49%) candidates got less than 50% of the vote in their constituency, meaning that nearly half of all representatives did not get a majority of the support from their constituency. In fact, Eight MPs won on less than 35% of votes cast. In a system like STV where several members represent the different opinions then there are advantages for the voter. The chance of a voter being represented by a candidate for whom they have voted is higher as fewer votes are wasted. In the 2012 local elections under STV 76.7% of the electorate were being represented by a candidate that they voted for, this is compared to the 2003 local elections which still used FPTP where only 52.3% of the electorate were being represented by a candidate that they voted for. |
| FPTP is less likely to produce a coalition government. A 2015 survey showed that only 29% of voters would be happy with a coalition government. Voters do not look for a diluted version of the policies that they vote for. People feel more comfortable with a strong one party government that is sure about its policies and agenda. A coalition which has to compromise its policies will not tend to deliver that strong outcome and can be a half-hearted affair. Although the exception to this was the 2010-2015 coalition under FPTP. In addition, although AMS is more likely to provide coalitions, it did not in 2016 or indeed in 2011. | FPTP leads towards a two-party system as over time support converges around the main parties as voters vote tactically to prevent the party they dislike most becoming a majority as opposed to voting their preferred party. This point was reinforced before the 2015 UK general election as several newspapers urged tactical voting, Labour urged SNP supporters to vote Labour to keep the Conservatives out, and the Conservatives urged UKIP supporters to vote Conservatives to keep Labour out. Arguably such routinely tactical voting is leading to poor representation as people are discouraged from voting for the constituency candidate and even the party they feel would best represent them. |
| FPTP arguably provides clearer representation as only 1 MP means it is clear who represents people. E.g. voters in East Kilbride know exactly who to speak to if they have an issue – their 1 MP Dr Lisa Cameron. Usually proportional systems inevitably have to create larger constituencies which elect several representatives, therefore losing the direct link between constituency and Parliament for example, AMS and STV. The list part of AMS highlights this point as the public inevitably do not know who the other 7 MSPs who represent them are. They know the 1 MSP (Linda Fabiani) voted by FPTP and have a strong constituency link but this is not the case under the List system. As the party tend to choose these candidates and their credentials are not widely known, there is not the same accountability. Under FPTP constituents can hold their representative accountable, if they misbehave they will call for them to be booted out. It is doubtful if people would know if the other 7 MSPs were not doing a good job. | Often said that FPTP results in strong, stable majority government that can implement manifesto pledges and avoids unstable coalition government. Despite a 2010 coalition between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, 2015 produced a majority Conservative government, meaning they are more accountable in delivering their manifesto in full and cannot use compromise with other parties as an excuse for breaking manifesto promises. AMS is usually a minority although we have had majority in 2011 for the SNP. |
| Voters can still choose and elect candidates from smaller parties. E.g. in 2015 election Brighton Pavillion re-elected Caroline Lucas (Green) and Clacton elected a UKIP MP, Douglas Carswell.This shows that although overall the system tends to favour larger parties, it does still offer scope for smaller parties to gain representation given they have enough support within a constituency, and some may argue that if a party cannot command the support of most of a constituency then they should not be given seats purely as a reflection of their national share of the vote, as then the direct link between constituency and Parliament would be lost, and people would not feel directly represented.  | There is less choice under FPTP- voters in safe seats denied choice. E.g. safest seat in 2015 UK election by number of votes was Knowsley. Labour’s George Howarth has a majority of over 34,655, so supporters of any other party are effectively wasting their vote, so denied choice. AMS allows more choice as 2 votes compared to just 1 for FPTP. Voters of smaller parties given more choice as they benefit from the proportionality of second vote (Party List). In the 2012 local elections using STV there were 7.1 candidates available per area whereas in the 2003 council elections under FPTP, there was only 3.4 candidates per area to choose from, on average. It offers voters a real choice of several options and allows a preference system. In fact, 2012 saw a marked increase on 2007 in the proportion of voters who expressed more than one preference. As many as 86.3% of all ballot papers contained a second as well as a first preference. However, an argument against this choice is that people often to not know or care who their 4th or 5th choice and so may do donkey voting where they just put a number to any box, and thus not using any democratic sense to distinguish candidates, making their voting unrepresentative of their own wishes.  |