British politics

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each precise term with its definition.

1 first-past-the-post ____	**a** a voting system where the candidate with the most votes wins outright, without needing a majority
2 whipped vote ____	**b** a vote in which party members are instructed how to vote by party leadership
3 devolved administration ____	**c** a regional government with powers transferred from central government
4 hung parliament ____	**d** a Parliament in which no party holds an overall majority
5 vote of no confidence ____	**e** a formal vote that can force a government or leader to resign if lost
6 shadow cabinet ____	**f** the opposition party's team of MPs shadowing each government minister's role
7 electoral mandate ____	**g** the authority a government claims to govern, based on its election result
8 select committee ____	**h** a group of MPs that scrutinises the work of a government department
9 civil service ____	**i** the permanent, non-political staff who administer government policy
10 marginal seat ____	**j** a constituency that could realistically be won by more than one party

2 Choose the word with the most suitable connotation.

1 For a voting system where the top candidate wins outright: first-past-the-post / proportional representation.

2 For a vote where members follow party instructions: a whipped vote / a free vote.

3 For a Parliament with no majority party: a hung parliament / a landslide majority.

4 For a formal vote that can force resignation: a vote of no confidence / a routine vote.

5 For the opposition's shadow team of MPs: shadow cabinet / backbench group.

6 For the authority claimed from an election result: electoral mandate / personal opinion.

7 For permanent, non-political government staff: civil service / elected politicians.

8 For a seat winnable by more than one party: a marginal seat / a safe seat.

3 Complete the political collocations with one word.

1 first-past-the-_____ (= winner-takes-all voting system)

2 a _____ vote (= instructed by party leadership)

3 a _____ parliament (= no overall majority)

4 a vote of no _____ (= a formal challenge to a government)

5 the _____ cabinet (= the opposition's team of MPs)

6 an electoral _____ (= the authority claimed from an election)

7 a select _____ (= scrutinises government departments)

8 a _____ seat (= winnable by more than one party)

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4 Complete the case notes with words and phrases from the box.

civil service | devolved administration | electoral mandate | first-past-the-post | hung parliament | marginal seat | select committee | shadow cabinet | vote of no confidence | whipped vote

Case A: Critics of 1 _____ argue the system can produce results that don't reflect the overall national vote share.
Case B: After the election produced a 2 _____, party leaders began negotiations to form a working government.
Case C: MPs faced a 3 _____ on the key bill, with several backbenchers privately unhappy about the instruction.
Case D: The government narrowly survived a 4 _____ following the controversy.
Case E: The 5 _____ regularly questions ministers on policy, while a 6 _____ scrutinises departmental spending in detail.
Case F: The 7 _____ implements policy regardless of which party holds power.
Case G: A 8 _____ received extra campaign funding, given how closely the seat was contested.
Case H: The regional 9 _____ exercises devolved powers over education and health, while the national government retains a broader 10 _____ over defence and foreign policy.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Debating electoral reform

Critics of first-past-the-post voting argue the system can produce governments with a large parliamentary majority despite winning a minority of the overall national vote, since votes for losing candidates in safe seats effectively count for nothing. Proponents counter that the system typically delivers clear, stable single-party government, avoiding the prolonged negotiations sometimes associated with a hung parliament under proportional systems. Reform advocates point to marginal seats receiving disproportionate campaign attention as further evidence of systemic distortion, since safe seats receive comparatively little scrutiny or investment from competing parties. Whether an alternative system would genuinely produce fairer outcomes, or simply introduce different distortions, remains a matter of ongoing political and academic debate.

1 What do critics of first-past-the-post argue the system can produce? _____

2 Why do votes for losing candidates in safe seats effectively count for nothing? _____

3 What do proponents of the system counter? _____

4 What do reform advocates point to as further evidence of systemic distortion? _____

5 What do safe seats receive comparatively little of? _____

6 What remains a matter of ongoing debate, according to the text? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence using the word in capitals. Do not change the meaning.

1 No party won an overall majority in the election. HUNG PARLIAMENT _____

2 MPs were instructed how to vote by their party. WHIPPED VOTE _____

3 The government faced a formal challenge that could force its resignation. VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE _____

4 The seat was closely contested between two parties. MARGINAL SEAT _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 120-150 word account analysing the strengths and weaknesses of a particular electoral system, distinguishing observation from argument.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Control connotation carefully. [ ] Avoid unsupported assumptions.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Precise terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Connotation

1 first-past-the-post 2 a whipped vote 3 a hung parliament 4 a vote of no confidence 5 shadow cabinet 6 electoral mandate 7 civil service 8 a marginal seat

3 Collocations

1 post 2 whipped 3 hung 4 confidence 5 shadow 6 mandate 7 committee 8 marginal

4 Case notes

1 first-past-the-post 2 hung parliament 3 whipped vote 4 vote of no confidence 5 shadow cabinet
6 select committee 7 civil service 8 marginal seat 9 devolved administration 10 electoral mandate

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Governments with a large parliamentary majority despite winning a minority of the overall national vote.
2 Because those votes do not translate into any seats won.
3 That the system typically delivers clear, stable single-party government.
4 Marginal seats receiving disproportionate campaign attention.
5 Scrutiny or investment from competing parties.
6 Whether an alternative system would genuinely produce fairer outcomes or simply introduce different distortions.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 There was a hung parliament. 2 MPs faced a whipped vote.
3 The government faced a vote of no confidence. 4 It was a marginal seat.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check lexical precision, appropriate connotation and separation of fact from inference.