

# HOW DOES AN ELECTION WORK?

YOU might have heard about the General Election that's happening on Thursday 12 December. But why are people voting? Who for? And who can vote?

A GENERAL election is how we choose a government to run the country. Normally, these national votes are held every five years, but this will be the third general election since 2015.

This election is happening because of Brexit. The UK voted to leave the EU as a result of the 2016 Referendum, but that has still not happened because politicians have not been able to agree on exactly how to do it. Some of them want to leave, some want a new referendum – and some want to cancel Brexit altogether. Prime Minister Boris Johnson hopes this election will give him more MPs who support his Brexit plan. Normally general elections are about issues such as the NHS, the economy and the environment – but this time everyone's talking about Brexit.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

This year's election will be the first UK general election to be held in December since 1923!



## THE LEADERS OF THE FOUR BIGGEST PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT RIGHT NOW

AND...



Conservative: Boris Johnson



Labour: Jeremy Corbyn



Liberal Democrats: Jo Swinson



SNP: Nicola Sturgeon



Brexit Party: Nigel Farage

● **WHAT WILL HAPPEN ON 12 DECEMBER?**

The UK is split up into 650 areas, known as constituencies, each represented by its own Member of Parliament (MP). On 12 December, people will go to a local polling station to vote for the person they want to be their MP in the constituency where they live.

A total of 650 people will be chosen as MPs, to decide laws and vote on policies.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

In 2015, the Electoral Commission said that if a person draws a smiley face next to the name of the person they want to vote for, instead of a cross – it will still count!

Voters don't get to pick the prime minister, only their local MP. Most of the successful candidates

are members of political parties, but anyone can stand for election. Each candidate has to pay £500. If they don't manage to win 5% of the votes cast, they lose their £500.

● **WHAT IS A POLITICAL PARTY?**

A political party is a group of people with similar political ideas who come together to try to win power. All parties make promises to the voters before the election in their manifesto, such as their ideas for the NHS (National Health Service) or the armed forces, or their plans to get more people jobs.

● **WHO WINS?**

Each election candidate simply needs to get more votes than anyone standing against them. Then they become the MP for their constituency and take a seat in Parliament. The party with the most

MPs is the winner, and the leader of the winning party will usually become prime minister.

If one party wins a majority (at least half, ie, 326 or more) of the seats in Parliament, then they will form a government. Having a majority of MPs makes it easier for the Government to bring in new laws or make other changes to the country, because they have enough MPs to win any vote that takes place in Parliament.

However, this doesn't always work out because, if enough of the Government's MPs disagree with what their party is trying to do, they are still allowed to vote against them. These MPs are known as 'rebels'.

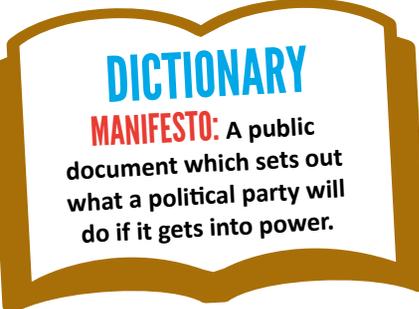
● **WHAT HAPPENS IF NO PARTY HAS A MAJORITY?**

Things get more complicated if no party gets a majority. This is known as a 'hung Parliament' which can make it difficult to govern, because the other parties can club together to block any laws that the Government tries to pass. This is what happened in 2017 because the party with the most seats – the Conservatives – only won 318 seats. Former prime minister Theresa May then asked the Democratic Unionist Party, a Northern Irish party who had 10 MPs, to help her reach a majority.

It's unlikely this will happen again though, since the DUP have said that they cannot support Boris Johnson's new Brexit deal.

**THE BREXIT PARTY**

The Brexit Party is new and has no MPs yet. Nigel Farage set up the Brexit Party to see through the results of the referendum to leave the EU. But the other main parties are worried he could 'split' the vote, taking votes from them, leaving no party in overall power.



**WHO VOTES?**

Unfortunately for you, most First News readers will have to wait a while before you can vote, as you're not allowed to vote until you're 18 (although you can register as soon as you're 16). You also need to be a British citizen or an Irish, Commonwealth or European Union citizen who lives in the UK. British people living overseas can still vote, too.



Often, schools are used as polling stations. If yours is, you might get a day off!

## CONSERVATIVES



- **Leader:** Boris Johnson (Prime Minister and MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip)
- **Number of MPs before election:** 298 (238 men, 60 women)

The Conservative Party is the main right-wing party in the UK. Being on the right of politics means they believe in a small role for Government, low taxes and stricter rules on benefits (support for people who are out of work, or who are on low incomes).

They believe that an economy is stronger if people can take home more of the money they earn, and give less in taxes to the Government.

Conservatives think that businesses should be less regulated (more free to do what they want) and that the more money they make, the more it benefits the country.

When it comes to crime, Conservatives believe that strict discipline and respect will cut crime rates and that criminals should be treated harshly.

They have traditionally supported grammar schools and stricter laws on immigration, too.

Under Boris Johnson, the Conservatives, who are also known as the Tories, are supporting a Brexit that sees the UK leave the European Union and its trading market completely.

## LABOUR



- **Leader:** Jeremy Corbyn (Leader of the Opposition and MP for Islington North)
- **Number of MPs before election:** 243 (128 men, 115 women)

The Labour Party describes itself as 'centre-left'. Left-wing ideas include higher taxes for the wealthy and Government playing a bigger role in the lives of citizens. Labour wants to invest more than the Conservatives into the National Health Service, which was created by a Labour government in the 1940s.

Labour also wants to scrap university tuition fees, increase the legal minimum wage and boost the amount of money spent on education. They have pledged to give everybody in the UK free fibre broadband by 2030.

Labour believes that to fund these things, individuals and companies who earn more money should pay higher taxes. The more money they earn, the bigger proportion they would pay as tax, which can then be spent on public services.

Under Jeremy Corbyn, Labour has pledged to take the railway network and water supply back under public ownership. At the moment these are private industries.

Labour has also proposed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by investing heavily in green industries, which they say will create many jobs.

Labour has pledged a new Brexit referendum, giving voters a choice between remaining in the EU and exiting with a new deal.

## LIBERAL DEMOCRATS



- **Leader:** Jo Swinson (MP for East Dunbartonshire)
- **Number of MPs before election:** 21 (11 men, 10 women)

The Liberal Democrats – or Lib Dems – are known as 'centrists', which means that unlike the Conservatives or Labour, the party doesn't have mainly left-wing or right-wing policies. Instead, they mix ideas from across the political spectrum. But their main policy this year is to stop Brexit.

They say that if they win a majority in the election, they will cancel Brexit altogether, without another referendum. Realistically, though, they won't win a majority, but could form part of a coalition government and argue for a new referendum.

When it comes to the economy, the Lib Dems believe strongly in free trade and less regulation for business. Unlike the Conservatives, however, the Lib Dems believe that a stronger economy is created by working towards a more global society.

Eight of the last Lib Dem MPs were elected for another party, and switched to the Lib Dems during the last Parliament.

# VOTE IN THE FirstNews GENERAL ELECTION

**FIRST NEWS is holding its own general election, to make sure your voice is heard by those in power at Westminster.**

To help decide which political party to vote for, we've put together a guide to the main political parties standing on 12 December.

Normally, people vote on issues such as the NHS, the environment and education, but this election is a little different. This election was called

because of disagreement about Brexit – how the UK should leave the EU – so you can bet that it will be a big issue for voters.

To cast your vote and to find out more, go to [first.news/election2019](http://first.news/election2019).

There's also a short video guide at [first.news/election2019](http://first.news/election2019).

## GREEN PARTY



- **Leaders:** Jonathan Bartley and Sian Berry
- **Number of MPs before election:** 1 (woman)

The Green Party is an environmentalist, left-wing party whose focus is on green issues, such as tackling climate change.

They want to invest £100 billion a year for a decade to tackle climate change, and create more than a million new "green jobs" in the UK.

They also want to scrap university tuition fees and write off existing student debt.

The Greens don't want Brexit to happen, and want another referendum to be held. They will campaign to Remain in that vote.

Although they won't win this year's general election, they have had a boost in popularity: the Greens had their most successful European election ever earlier this year, when they increased their number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from three to seven.

## BREXIT PARTY



- **Leader:** Nigel Farage
- **Number of MPs before election:** 0

The Brexit Party was formed for one reason: to make sure the UK leaves the European Union.

They won the recent European elections, delivering them 29 MEPs, even though they are campaigning for Britain to leave the EU and, obviously, its Parliament! As First News went to press, they had not revealed many policies other than to have a hard Brexit. But they have proposed a £200 billion spending programme on infrastructure and services for young people.

## THE NEXT PM

Unlike countries like the USA and France, we don't have a president who people can vote for. Our parliamentary system means that citizens vote for a local MP. The party that wins the most MPs usually forms the Government. Whoever is that party's leader becomes the prime minister.

Realistically, only two people can become the next PM of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: the Conservatives' leader Boris Johnson (right, top), and the Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn (right, bottom).

That's because those two parties have been the biggest in the House of Commons since 1922, and it's highly unlikely any other party will win more seats than the Conservatives and Labour this time around. Though never say never...

The next PM will live and work in Downing Street, in a house they will share with Larry the cat. As well as being a minor celebrity, Larry is Chief Mouser to the Cabinet, which means it's his job to catch mice!



## TEACHER ALERT: RUN A PARALLEL GENERAL ELECTION IN YOUR SCHOOL



Run a parallel general election in your school to find out if young people in your school agree with the UK electorate who will be voting on 12 December. Help is at hand. **Educate GE** is a collaboration between 24 democratic education organisations who have come together to support schools and educators to engage young people in the 2019 general election. Tell your teacher to visit [thepoliticsproject.org.uk/educatege](http://thepoliticsproject.org.uk/educatege) to download resources to prepare for a parallel election in your school. Everything on the site is free and non-partisan.

After your election, First News wants to know your results. We will aggregate all your votes, to get a wider picture of the opinions of young people in the UK. Teachers can find out more at [firstnews.co.uk/schoolsGE2019](http://firstnews.co.uk/schoolsGE2019)

## SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY



- **Leader:** Nicola Sturgeon (First Minister of Scotland and Member of the Scottish Parliament for Glasgow Southside)
- **Number of MPs before election:** 35 (23 men, 12 women)

Since SNP candidates only run in the 59 Scottish constituencies, only voters living in Scotland are able to vote for the SNP. They are the biggest party in Scotland.

The party's ultimate aim is for Scotland to become an independent country, separate from the rest of the UK. Their two main policies this year are to push for a referendum on Brexit, and a new referendum for Scottish voters on the question of independence. The SNP are strongly against Brexit.

They are also against the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system, which is based in Scotland, and would like to see all the country's nuclear weapons scrapped.

The SNP is on the left of politics, so has more in common with Labour than the Tories. Like Labour, they want to nationalise some public services. That means taking things like the railways out of private control and under the Government's authority.

They oppose the Government's tough benefits policies and are against increasing the pension age above 66.

## PLAID CYMRU



- **Leader:** Adam Price (Member of the Welsh Assembly for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr)
- **Number of MPs before election:** 1 (woman)

A centre-left party, Plaid Cymru candidates only stand in the 40 Welsh constituencies. They want independence for Wales, just as the SNP want it for Scotland. They think it can be achieved within the next ten years.

Plaid Cymru also want to stop Brexit by supporting a new referendum.

They want to introduce "green jobs" in Wales, with major investment in renewable energy, transport infrastructure and digital services. The party wants the Welsh Assembly to have full control of the justice system, which it doesn't right now.

They have also proposed new benefits for children in low-income families, and a £300 million investment in Welsh education.

ONLY RUNNING IN WALES

## NORTHERN IRELAND PARTIES



The largest Northern Irish party in the House of Commons before the election was called was the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which had 10 MPs. They signed a deal to support the Government of the previous Prime Minister, Theresa May, but fell out with current PM Boris Johnson over his Brexit deal.

The DUP is right-wing in its policies. The party is 'unionist', which means it thinks that Northern Ireland should continue to be a part of the United Kingdom. They are strongly in favour of Brexit. The DUP have also proposed increasing spending on health in Northern Ireland by at least £1 billion.

The other main unionists are the Ulster Unionist Party, though they had no MPs before the election.

The second biggest party representing Northern Ireland is the left-wing Sinn Fein, who returned seven MPs at the 2017 election, but they never take their seats in Westminster. That's because Sinn Fein does not recognise Northern Ireland as being part of the UK. They believe it should be part of a united Republic of Ireland, joining the southern part of the country that is independent and therefore not governed by UK Government.

Also running at this year's general election are the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Alliance Party and the Green Party. None currently has any MPs in the House of Commons.

..... DON'T FORGET TO VOTE IN THE FIRST NEWS GENERAL ELECTION AT [FIRST.NEWS/ELECTION2019](http://FIRST.NEWS/ELECTION2019) .....