

How to find out more

If you have any questions, please go to www.aboutmyvote.co.uk or call our helpline on 0800 3 280 280.

You can download further copies of this booklet from www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

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Local elections and Referendum

on the voting system used to elect MPs to the House of Commons



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About this booklet

On Thursday 5 May 2011, there will be a referendum on the voting system you use to elect MPs to the House of Commons. This booklet explains the referendum and how you can take part.

In some parts of England, outside London, there will also be local elections on 5 May. To find out if there are elections in your area and for information on them, go to www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

This booklet has been produced by the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the UK's democratic process. We set standards for well-run elections. We are also responsible for the conduct and regulation of referendums held under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (2000).

Referendum on the voting system used to elect MPs to the House of Commons

A referendum asks you to vote yes or no to a proposal. For this referendum, you will receive a ballot paper with this question:

At present, the UK uses the 'first past the post' system to elect MPs to the House of Commons. Should the 'alternative vote' system be used instead?

How do I vote in the referendum?

You show your choice by putting a cross (X) in the 'Yes' or 'No' box on your ballot paper.

Put a cross in only **one** box or your vote will not be counted.

If more people vote 'yes' than 'no' the 'alternative vote' system will be used for future elections to the House of Commons. See page 8 for information on when the 'alternative vote' system would be introduced.

If more people vote 'no' than 'yes' the 'first past the post' system will continue to be used.

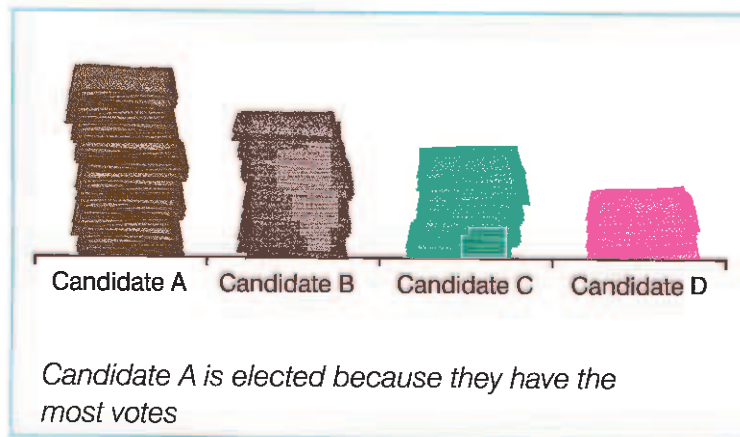
What is the 'first past the post' system?

Voting

You vote for one candidate using a cross (X). You must only mark one cross against one candidate.

Counting

The votes for each candidate are put into a pile and counted. The candidate with the most votes wins.



A candidate doesn't need to get a minimum number of votes – they only need more votes than any other candidate.

What is the 'alternative vote' system?

Voting

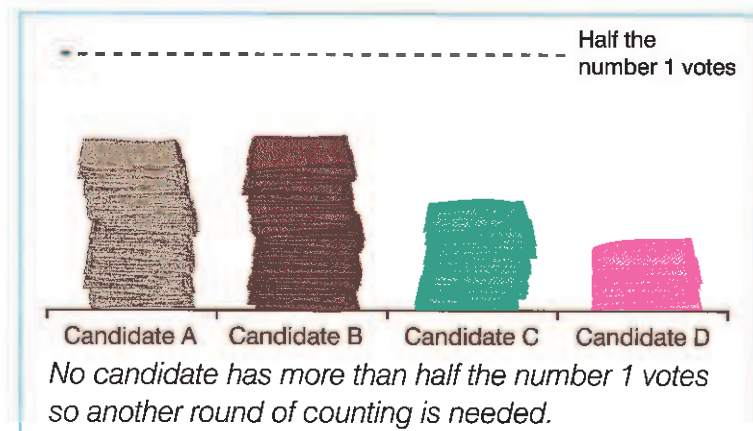
You use numbers to rank the candidates in order of your preference. You put 1 next to your first choice, 2 next to your second choice, 3 next to your third choice and so on.

You can choose how many candidates to rank. You don't have to rank every candidate. As long as you rank at least one, your vote will be counted.

Counting

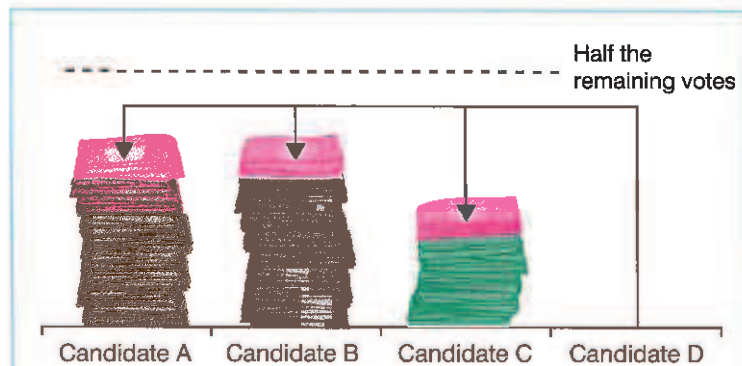
Round one

- The number 1 votes for each candidate are put into a pile and counted.
- If a candidate receives more than half the number 1 votes cast, they win and there is no further counting.
- If no candidate receives more than half the number 1 votes there would be at least one more round of counting. The diagrams and descriptions on the following pages show how this works.



Round two

- The candidate with the fewest number 1 votes is removed from the contest – in this case Candidate D.
- Each ballot paper on Candidate D's pile is looked at again.
- If the ballot paper shows a number 2 vote for another candidate, it is added to that candidate's pile. For example, if a ballot paper showed a number 1 vote for Candidate D and a number 2 vote for Candidate B, it would be moved to Candidate B's pile.
- If the ballot paper does not show a number 2 vote, it is no longer used.

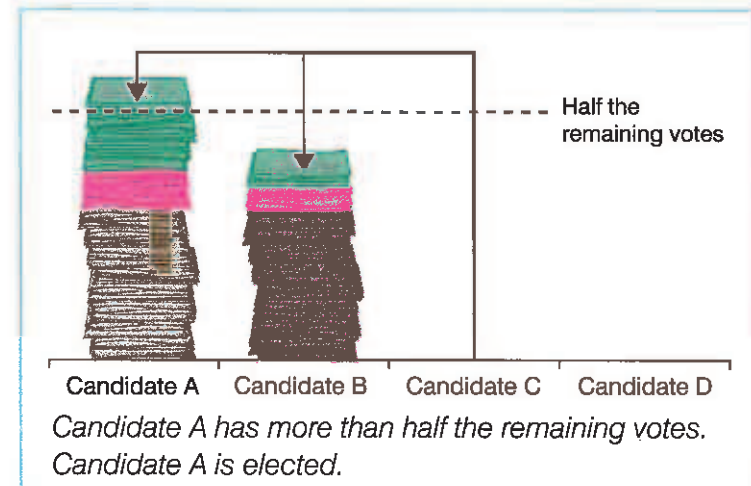


Candidate D is removed from the contest.

There is still no candidate with more than half the remaining votes. So, another round of counting is needed.

Round three

- Again, the candidate with fewest votes is removed from the contest – this time it's Candidate C.
- Each ballot paper on Candidate C's pile is looked at again to see if any of the remaining candidates are ranked.
- If so, the ballot paper is moved to the pile of the candidate ranked highest on that ballot paper.
- If none of the remaining candidates are ranked the ballot paper is no longer used.



If more candidates are involved, this process can be repeated until one candidate has more than half the remaining votes.

Because voters don't have to rank all of the candidates, an election can be won under the 'alternative vote' system with less than half the total votes cast.

For more information about the 'first past the post' and 'alternative vote' systems, visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

What are the arguments?

Campaigners in the referendum will explain why they think you should vote 'yes' (to use the 'alternative vote' system) or 'no' (to continue using the 'first past the post' system). Look out for information from them.

If more people vote 'yes' than 'no', when will we start using the 'alternative vote' system?

The 'alternative vote' system will be used after a review of the boundaries of the area that each MP represents (known as their constituency) is completed. This is due to happen between 2011 and 2013. The review will happen regardless of the outcome of this referendum.

At the end of the review, the UK Parliament will vote on implementing the new boundaries. If the new boundaries are implemented, the 'alternative vote' system will be used for all future elections to the House of Commons.

Can I vote?

You can vote in the referendum and local elections if you are registered to vote, are 18 or over on 5 May 2011 and are:

- a British citizen, or
- a qualifying Commonwealth citizen*, or
- a citizen of the Irish Republic

British citizens living overseas can't vote in the local elections. However, they can vote in the referendum.

Citizens of other European Union countries registered to vote in the UK can vote in local elections. However they can't vote in the referendum.

You have to be registered to vote by **Thursday 14 April** to vote in the referendum and local elections. There is more about registering to vote on page 11.

* Qualifying Commonwealth citizens are those who have leave (permission) to enter or remain in the UK, do not need to have such leave or are treated as having such leave.

Ways of voting

There are three ways of voting:

In person on Thursday 5 May: Most people vote in person at their polling station. It is straightforward and a member of staff will always help if you are not sure what to do. You will receive a poll card telling you where your polling station is. It is often a nearby school or a community centre. If you do not receive your poll card, you can contact your local council to find out where your polling station is. Their details are on www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

Polling stations are open from 7am to 10pm. If you have not been issued with ballot papers by 10pm you won't be able to vote, so make sure you arrive in plenty of time.

By post: You can apply to vote by post. You will need to fill in an application form and send it to your local council to arrive by **5pm on Thursday 14 April**. You can get an application form at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

Your local council can send a postal ballot paper to your home address or to any other address that you give. Ballot papers can be sent overseas, but you need to think about whether you will have time to receive and return your ballot papers by Thursday 5 May.

You should receive your postal ballot papers about a week before polling day. If they don't arrive, you can

get replacements from your local council up to 5pm on Thursday 5 May. You can find their contact details on www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

By proxy: If you can't go to the polling station and don't wish to vote by post, you may be able to vote by proxy. This means allowing somebody you trust to vote on your behalf. You will need to fill in an application form and send it to your local council to arrive by **5pm on Thursday 21 April**. You can get an application form at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

When you apply for a proxy vote you have to state why you cannot vote in person. Anyone can be your proxy as long as they are eligible to vote and are willing to vote on your behalf. You will have to tell them how you want to vote.

Am I registered to vote?

If you're not registered, you won't be able to vote. Most people register to vote using the form that local councils send to each household each year.

If you are not on the electoral register, you will need to complete a voter registration form and send it to your local council to arrive by **Thursday 14 April**. For a voter registration form, go to www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

If you aren't sure whether you are registered or not, your local council can tell you. You can find their contact details on www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.