



SWGS KS5 VOCABULARY LIST: POLITICS

This list consolidates key vocabulary in the subject, making it easier for you to know, understand and use it accurately. This may be provided as a pre-filled glossary or a word list to complete. Your teachers will use this vocabulary frequently, and you will encounter it in reading. You will be expected to learn meanings and spellings.

Paper 1: UK Politics

1. Democracy and participation	
Key term	Definition
Legitimacy	The rightful use of power in accordance with pre-set criteria or widely-held agreements, such as a government's right to rule following an election or a monarch's succession based on the agreed rules.
Direct democracy	All individuals express their opinions themselves and not through representatives acting on their behalf. This type of democracy emerged in Athens in classical times and direct democracy can be seen today in referendums.
Representative democracy	A more modern form of democracy through which an individual selects a person (and/or political party) to act on their behalf to exercise political choice.
Pluralist democracy	A type of democracy in which a government makes decisions as a result of the interplay of various ideas and contrasting arguments from competing groups and organisations.
Democratic deficit	A flaw in the democratic process where decisions are taken by people who lack legitimacy, not having been appointed with sufficient democratic input or subject to accountability.
Participation crisis	A lack of engagement by a significant number of citizens to relate to the political process either by choosing not to vote or to join or become members of political parties or to offer themselves for public office.
Franchise/suffrage	Franchise and suffrage both refer to the ability/right to vote in public elections. Suffragettes were women campaigning for the right to vote on the same terms as men.
Think tanks	A body of experts brought together to collectively focus on a certain topic(s) – to investigate and offer solutions to often complicated and seemingly intractable economic, social or political issues.
Lobbyists	A lobbyist is paid by clients to try to influence the government and/or MPs and members of the House of Lords to act in their clients' interests, particularly when legislation is under consideration.

2. Political parties

Key term	Definition
Old Labour (social democracy)	Key Labour principles embodying nationalisation, redistribution of wealth from rich to poor and the provision of continually improving welfare and state services, which largely rejected Thatcherite/ free-market reforms or a Blairite approach.
New Labour (Third Way)	A revision of the traditional Labour values and ideals represented by Old Labour. Influenced by Anthony Giddens, the 'Third Way' saw Labour shift in emphasis from a heavy focus on the working class to a wider class base, and a less robust alliance with the trade unions.
One Nation	A paternalistic approach adopted by Conservatives under the leadership of Benjamin Disraeli in the 19th century and continued by David Cameron and Theresa May in the 21st century, that the rich have an obligation to help the poor.
New Right	There are two elements – (i) the neo (or new) Conservatives who want the state to take a more authoritarian approach to morality and law and order and (ii) the neo-liberals who endorsed the free-market approach and the rolling back of the state in people's lives and businesses.
Classical liberals	Classical liberalism is a philosophy developed by early liberals who believed that individual freedom would best be achieved with the state playing a minimal role.
Modern liberals	Modern liberalism emerged as a reaction against free-market capitalism, believing this had led to many individuals not being free. Freedom could no longer simply be defined as 'being left alone'.
Party systems	The way or manner in which the political parties in a political system are grouped and structured. There are several variants that could apply to the UK, these include one-party dominant, two-party, two-and-a-half party and multi-party systems.
Left-wing	A widely-used term for those who desire change, reform and alteration to the way in which society operates. Often this involves radical criticisms of the capitalism made by liberal and socialist parties.
Right-wing	This term reflects support for the status quo, little or no change, stressing the need for order, stability and hierarchy – generally relates to Conservative parties.

3. Electoral systems

Key term	Definition
First-past-the-post (FPTP)	An electoral system where the person with the most number of votes is elected. Victory is achieved by having one more vote than other contenders – it is also called a plurality system.
Additional Member System (AMS)	A hybrid electoral system that has two components or elements. The voter makes two choices. Firstly, the voter selects a representative on a simple plurality (FPTP) system then a second vote is apportioned to a party list for a second or 'additional' representative.
Single Transferable Vote (STV)	This system allows voters to rank their voting preferences in numerical order rather than simply having one voting choice. In order to obtain a seat, a candidate must obtain a quota. After the votes are cast, those with the least votes are eliminated and their votes transferred and those candidates with excess votes above the quota also have their votes transferred.
Supplementary Vote (SV)	This is a majoritarian system. The voter makes two choices (hence the term 'supplementary'). If one candidate obtains over 50% on the first vote then the contest is complete. If no candidate attains this level, all but the top two candidates are eliminated. Then the supplementary choices are re-distributed and whoever gets most votes from the remaining two, wins the seat. This form of voting for mayors and police and crime commissioners was ended by the Elections Act in 2022.
Safe seat	A seat in which the incumbent has a considerable majority over the closest rival and which is largely immune from swings in voting choice. The same political party retains the seat from election to election. A majority of seats in UK Westminster constituencies are safe seats.
Marginal seat	A seat held by the incumbent with a small majority. There is no precise percentage or winning margin to which this aligns but a 10% margin would need only a swing of 5% to the rival party to take it. Marginal seats are important as they are where the outcomes of elections are decided. Only a minority of seats in UK Westminster constituencies are marginal.
Minority government	A government that enters office but which does not have a majority of seats in the legislature (Parliament). This makes passing legislation very difficult.
Coalition government	A government that is formed of more than one political party. It is normally accompanied by an agreement over policy options and office of state, as was the Conservative-Liberal-Democrat coalition from 2010–2015

4. Voting behaviour and the media

Key term	Definition
Class dealignment	The process where individuals no longer identify themselves as belonging to a certain class and for political purposes fail to make a class connection with their voting pattern.
Partisan dealignment	The process where individuals no longer identify themselves on a long-term basis by being associated with a certain political party.
Governing competency	The perceived ability of the governing party in office to manage the affairs of the state well and effectively. It can also be a potential view of opposition parties and their perceived governing competency if they were to secure office.
Disillusion and apathy	A process of disengagement with politics and political activity. Having no confidence in politics and politicians as being able to solve issues and make a difference. Manifested in low turnout at elections and poor awareness of contemporary events.
Manifesto	In its manifesto, a political party will spell out in detail what actions and programmes it would like to put in place if it is successful in the next election – a set of promises for future action.
Mandate	The successful party following an election claims it has the authority (mandate) to implement its manifesto promises and also a general permission to govern as new issues arise.

1. The Constitution	
Key term	Definition
Constitution	A set of rules determining where sovereignty lies in a political system, and establishing the relationship between the government and the governed.
Unentrenched (entrenched)	A constitution with no special procedure for amendment.
Uncodified (codified)	A constitution not contained in a single written document.
Unitary (federal)	A political system where all legal sovereignty is contained in a single place.
Parliamentary sovereignty	The principle that Parliament can make, amend or unmake any law, and cannot bind its successors or be bound by its predecessors.
The rule of law	The principle that all people and bodies, including government, must follow the law and can be held to account if they do not.
Statute law	Laws passed by Parliament.
Common law	Laws made by judges where the law does not cover the issue or is unclear.
Conventions	Traditions not contained in law but influential in the operation of a political system.
Authoritative works	Works written by experts describing how a political system is run, they are not legally binding but are taken as significant guides.
Treaties	Formal agreements with other countries, usually ratified by Parliament.
Devolution	The dispersal of power, but not sovereignty, within a political system.

2. Parliament	
Key term	Definition
Parliament	The British legislature made up of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the monarch.
House of Commons	The primary chamber of the UK legislature, directly elected by voters.
House of Lords	The second chamber of the UK legislature, not directly elected by voters.
Confidence and supply	The rights to remove the government and to grant or withhold funding. Also used to describe a type of informal coalition agreement where the minority partner agrees to provide these things in exchange for policy concessions.
Salisbury Convention	The convention whereby the House of Lords does not delay or block legislation that was included in a government's manifesto.
Parliamentary privilege	The right of MPs or Lords to make certain statements within Parliament without being subject to outside influence, including law.
Legislative bills	Proposed laws passing through Parliament.
Public bill committees	Committees responsible for looking at bills in detail.
Backbenchers	MPs or Lords who do not hold any government office.
Select committees	Committee responsible for scrutinising the work of government, particularly of individual government departments.
Opposition	The MPs and Lords who are not members of the governing party or parties.

3. Prime Minister and the government	
Key term	Definition
Executive	The collective group of Prime Minister, Cabinet and junior ministers, sometimes known as 'The Government'.
Cabinet	The Prime Minister and senior ministers, most of whom lead a particular government department.
Minister	An MP or member of the House of Lords appointed to a position in the government, usually exercising specific responsibilities in a department.
Government department	A part of the executive, usually with specific responsibility over an area such as education, health or defence.
Royal prerogative	A set of powers and privileges belonging to the monarch but normally exercised by the Prime Minister or Cabinet, such as the granting of honours or of legal pardons.
Secondary legislation	Powers given to the Executive by Parliament to make changes to the law within certain specific rules.
Individual responsibility	The principle by which ministers are responsible for their personal conduct and for their departments.
Collective responsibility	Principle by which ministers must support Cabinet decisions or leave the Executive.
Presidential government	An executive dominated by one individual, this may be a President but is also used to describe a strong, dominant Prime Minister.

4. Relations between the branches	
Key term	Definition
Supreme Court	The highest court in the UK political system.
Judicial neutrality	The principle that judges should not be influenced by their personal political opinions and should remain outside of party politics.
Judicial independence	The principle that judges should not be influenced by other branches of government, particularly the Executive.
Judicial review	The power of the judiciary to review, and sometimes reverse, actions by other branches of government that breach the law or that are incompatible with the Human Rights Act.
Elective dictatorship	A government that dominates Parliament, usually due to a large majority, and therefore has few limits on its power.
European Union (EU)	A political and economic union of a group of European countries.
Four freedoms (EU)	The principle of free movement of goods, services, capital and people within the EU's single market.
Legal sovereignty	The legal right to exercise sovereignty – i.e. sovereignty in theory.
Political sovereignty	The political ability to exercise sovereignty – i.e. sovereignty in practice.
Ultra vires	Literally 'beyond the powers'. An action that is taken without legal authority when it requires it.

Political Ideologies

Liberalism	
1. Core ideas and principles	
Key term	Definition
Foundational equality	Rights that all humans have by virtue of being born which cannot be taken away (also known as natural rights and inalienable rights).
Formal equality	The idea that all individuals have the same legal and political rights in society.
Equality of opportunity	The idea that all individuals should have equal chances in life to rise and fall.
Social contract	The idea that the state/society is set up with agreement from the people to respect its laws which serve to protect them.
Meritocracy	A society organised on the basis that success is based on ability and hard work.
Mechanistic theory	The idea that the state was created by 'man' to serve the people and act in their interests.
Tolerance	A willingness to respect values, customs and beliefs with which one disagrees.
Limited government	The role of government is limited by checks and balances, and a separation of powers because of the corrupting nature of power.

2. Differing views and tensions within liberalism	
Key term	Definition
Egoistical individualism	The idea that individual freedom is associated with self-interest and self-reliance (see also atomism).
Developmental individualism	The idea that individual freedom is linked to human flourishing.
Negative freedom	The absence of external constraints in society as well as no interference in the private sphere.
Positive freedom	The idea that freedom is about personal fulfilment and realisation of potential.
Laissez-faire capitalism	An economic system, organised by the market, where goods are produced for exchange and profit, and wealth is privately owned.
Keynesianism	An economic system that requires government involvement to stimulate the economy to achieve full employment and price stability.

3. Liberal thinkers and their ideas	
Key term	Definition
Harm principle	The idea that individuals should be free to do anything except harm other individuals.
Minimal state	The idea that the role of the state must be restricted in order to preserve individual liberty.
Enabling state	A larger state that helps individuals to achieve their potential and be free.

Conservatism	
1. Core ideas and principles	
Key term	Definition
Hierarchy	The Conservative belief that society is naturally organised in fixed tiers, where one's position is not based on individual ability.
Authority	For Conservatives, this is the idea that people in higher positions in society are best able to make decisions in the interests of the whole society; authority thus comes from above.
Change to conserve	That society should adapt to changing circumstances rather than reject change outright and risk rebellion and/or revolution.
Atomism	That society is made up of self-interested and self-sufficient individuals (also known as egoistical individualism).

2. Differing views and tensions within conservatism	
Key term	Definition
Noblesse oblige	The duty of the wealthy and privileged to look after those less fortunate.
Anti-permissiveness	A rejection of permissiveness, which is the belief that people should make their own moral choices, suggesting there is no objective right and wrong.
Radical	Belief whose ideas favour drastic political, economic and social change.
Human imperfection	The traditional conservative belief that humans are flawed in a number of ways which makes them incapable of making good decisions for themselves.

3. Conservative thinkers and their ideas	
Key term	Definition
Laissez-faire	A preference towards minimal government intervention in business and the state.
Empiricism	The idea that knowledge comes from real experience and not from abstract theories.

Socialism	
1. Core ideas and principles	
Key term	Definition
Fraternity	The bonds of comradeship between human beings.
Co-operation	Working collectively to achieve mutual benefits.
Capitalism	An economic system, organised by the market, where goods are produced for profit and wealth is privately owned.
Common ownership	Is the common ownership of the means of production so that all are able to benefit from the wealth of society and to participate in its running.
Communism	The communal organisation of social existence based on the common ownership of wealth.

2. Differing views and tensions within socialism	
Key term	Definition
Evolutionary socialism	A parliamentary route, which would deliver a long-term, radical transformation in a gradual, piecemeal way through legal and peaceful means, via the state.
Marxism	An ideological system, within socialism, that drew on the writings of Marx and Engels and has at its core a philosophy of history that explains why it is inevitable that capitalism will be replaced by communism.
Revisionism	A move to re-define socialism that involves a less radical view of capitalism and a reformed view of socialism.
Social justice	A distribution of wealth that is morally justifiable and implies a desire to limit inequality.

3. Socialist thinkers and their ideas	
Key term	Definition
Class consciousness	The self-understanding of social class that is a historical phenomenon, created out of collective struggle.
Historical materialism	Marxist theory that the economic base (the economic system) forms the superstructure (culture, politics, law, ideology, religion, art and social consciousness).
Dialectic	A process of development that occurs through the conflict between two opposing forces. In Marxism, class conflict creates internal contradictions within society, which drives historical change.
Keynesian economics	Government intervention – can stabilise the economy and aims to deliver full employment and price stability.

Nationalism	
1. Core ideas and principles	
Key term	Definition
Civic nationalism	A form of nationalism based on the active participation of its citizens and a shared vision of equal citizens.
Liberal internationalism	The idea that sovereign nations should cooperate and create a level of interdependency to avoid international conflict.
Socialist internationalism	The idea that class solidarity is more powerful and politically significant than national identity. As Marx said: 'Working men of all countries, unite!'.
Ethnicity	The sense of belonging to the social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or the like.

2. Different types of nationalism	
Key term	Definition
Rational	The idea that humans are capable of reasoned thought and are able to make logical decisions for themselves.
Progressive	Ideas that move towards improving society.
Regressive	Ideas that seek to revert society to a former or less advanced state.
Inclusive nationalism	A form of nationalism that believes that joining a nation is straightforward and quick, as it is not based on shared previous experiences.
Exclusive nationalism	A form of nationalism that believes that it takes time to be a part of the nation, as membership is based on shared history and language.
Chauvinistic nationalism	A form of nationalism that believes its nation is superior to others, seeing them as a threat to their survival.
Imperialism/ colonialism	The extension of control by one country over another by settlement or economic domination.

3. Nationalist thinkers and their ideas	
Key term	Definition
<i>Volksgeist</i>	The 'spirit' of a nation, the unique identity of a people based on their culture.
Integral nationalism	An intense, hysterical form of patriotism in which the individual is absorbed into the nation.
Black nationalism	A reaction to white oppression originating in the mid-20th century.

6. Comparative theories	
Key term	Definition
Realism	Wide school of thought in international relations theory that has a belief that world politics will remain a field of conflict among actors pursuing power.
Liberalism	Wide school of thought in international relations theory that rejects power politics as the sole outcome of international relations and emphasises mutual benefits and co-operation.
International anarchy	Concept that the world system is leaderless: there is no universal sovereign or worldwide government.
Security dilemma	Theory that actions by a state intended to increase its security, such as increasing its military strength, can lead to other states responding with similar measures, producing increased tensions that create conflict.
Complex interdependence	Theory that states and their fortunes are inextricably tied together.
Global governance	Movement towards political integration of transnational actors aimed at negotiating responses to problems that affect more than one state or region.
Anarchical society and society of states	Theory that the states of the world can be members of a society despite the anarchical nature of the international system.

4. Power and developments	
Key term	Definition
Hard power	Hard power is the use of military and economic means to influence the behaviour or interests of other political bodies.
Soft power	The ability to attract and co-opt and to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction.
Great power	State that is recognised as having the ability and expertise to exert its influence on a global scale.
Superpower	State with a dominant position in international relations, pre-eminent among great powers, and characterised by its unparalleled ability to exert influence or project power on a global scale.
Emerging power	State that is considered to be rising, primarily in economic power and influence.
Polarity	Describes the nature of the international system at any given time in terms of how power is distributed.
Unipolarity	International system in which there is one dominant pole.
Bipolarity	International system revolving around two poles.
Multipolarity	International system revolving around three or more poles.
Democratic state	A state with a system of government in which all the people are involved in making decisions about its affairs.
Semi-democratic state	A stable state that combines democratic and authoritarian elements.
Non-democratic state	A state that lacks the central characteristics of a democratic state.
Autocratic state	A state that is ruled by a single person with unlimited power.
Failed state	A state that is unable to operate as a viable political unit.
Rogue state	A state that has a foreign policy that poses a threat to other states.

1. The state and globalisation	
Key term	Definition
Sovereignty	Absolute and unlimited power and authority.
Nation state	Autonomous political community held together by citizenship and nationality.
Non-state actors	Participants in international relations with significant power and influence, which are not states.
Globalisation	Emergence of a complex web of interconnectedness in many forms.
Economic globalisation	Growing economic integration and interdependence of economies through intensified cross-border movement of goods, services, technologies and capital.
Political globalisation	Growing importance of international organisations.
Cultural globalisation	Growing transmission of ideas, meanings and values around the world.
Homogenisation and monoculture	Coming together of global cultures and development of a single, homogeneous culture without diversity or dissension.
Interconnectedness	Mutual reliance of two or more groups.
World government	Idea of a common political authority with legislative and executive power over states.
Global governance	Broad and complex process of decision making at a global level.

2. Global governance: political and economic

Key term	Definition
Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)	This is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group organised on a local, national or international level – e.g. Christian Aid. NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information.
Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)	Conditional loans provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to countries that experienced economic crises.
Political	
The United Nations	Organisation created in 1945, following the Second World War, to promote international co-operation and to prevent another such conflict.
Security Council	The United Nations' most powerful body, with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – military alliance based on the North Atlantic Treaty, signed in 1949.
Economic	
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	International organisation working to foster global monetary co-operation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.
World Bank	International organisation that offers concessional loans and grants to the world's poorest developing countries in order to reduce poverty.
World Trade Organization (WTO)	Organisation that regulates international trade.
G7(8)	Organisation – Group of Seven states/Eight states.
G20	Organisation – Group of Twenty states.
North-South divide	Global socio-economic and political divide.
Dependency theory	Emphasises structural imbalances within capitalism that impose dependency on poorer states.

3. Global governance human rights and environmental

Key term	Definition
Human rights	
International law	Law that governs states and other international actors.
International Court of Justice (ICJ)	Principal judicial organ of the United Nations.
International Criminal Court (ICC)	Organisation that prosecutes individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.
International tribunals	Organisations set up to prosecute individuals in specific states for the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.
Human rights	Rights that people are entitled to by virtue of being human.
Universal human rights	Rights that apply to people of all societies regardless of cultural or other differences.
Humanitarian intervention	Military intervention carried out in pursuit of humanitarian rather than other objectives.
Environmental	
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	An international environmental treaty negotiated at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)	UN body set up as an internationally accepted authority on climate change.
Global commons	Areas and resources that are un-owned and consequently beyond national jurisdiction.
Tragedy of the commons	Situation within a shared-resource system where individual users acting independently and rationally according to their own self-interest behave contrary to the common good of all users by depleting that resource.
Sustainability	The capacity to endure.
Sustainable development	Development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

5. Regionalism and the EU

Key term	Definition
Regionalism	Creation and implementation of institutions that express a particular identity and shape collective action within a geographical region.
European Union (EU)	Political-economic union of 28 member states (2015) located in Europe.
European integration	Process of industrial, political, legal, economic, social and cultural integration of states in Europe.
Sovereignty	Absolute and unlimited power and authority.
Supranationalism	Refers to a large amount of power given to an authority, which, in theory, is placed higher than the state.
Intergovernmentalism	Interaction among states based on sovereign independence.
Federalism	Legal and political structures where power is distributed between two distinct levels of government on the basis that neither is subordinate to the other.
Global actor	Entity that participates or acts in international relations.
Widening-deepening	Process by which the EU has attempted to expand membership while furthering integration.