



Political system of Great Britain

Photo by John Byford ©

The British System of Government

BRITAIN IS A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY.

That means it is a country governed by a king or a queen who accepts the advice of a parliament.

It is also a parliamentary democracy.

That is, it is a country whose government is controlled by a parliament which has been elected by the people. The highest positions in the government are filled by the members of the directly elected parliament.

In Britain, as in many European countries, the official head of state, whether a monarch (as in Belgium, the Netherlands or Denmark) or a president (as in Germany, Greece or Italy) has little power.

The Government

The most powerful person is the Prime Minister.

He is the leader of his party, he is the head of the government and has a seat in the House of Commons. He chooses the Cabinet-Ministers, who are the Foreign-, Home- and Defense-Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He recommends a number of appointments to the monarch. The Cabinet takes decisions about new policies, the implementation of existing policies and the



The Government

Prime Minister

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graph TD; PM[Prime Minister] --- SMP[Senior M P-s]; PM --- ML[Members of the Lords]; SMP --- GD[Government departments]; ML --- GD; GD --- CAB[They all form the cabinet]
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The diagram is an organizational chart for the UK Government. It starts with the Prime Minister at the top. A horizontal line below the Prime Minister connects to two boxes: 'Senior M P-s' on the left and 'Members of the Lords' on the right. From the bottom of the 'Senior M P-s' box, a vertical line goes down to a box labeled 'Government departments'. From the bottom of the 'Members of the Lords' box, a vertical line goes down to the same 'Government departments' box. Finally, a vertical line from the bottom of the 'Government departments' box leads to a box at the bottom labeled 'They all form the cabinet'.

Senior M P-s

Members of the Lords

Government departments

They all form the cabinet



THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, LONDON

THE MONARCH

For the evidence of written law only, the Queen has almost absolute power, and it all seems very undemocratic. She is the head of state, the head of the Church of England and the Head of the Armed Forces. Every autumn at the state opening of parliament Elisabeth II. makes a speech. In it, she says what "my government" intends to do in the coming year. And indeed, it is her government - not the people's. As far as the law is concerned, she can choose anybody she likes to run the government for her. The same is true for her choices of people to fill some hundred other ministerial positions. And if she gets fed up with her ministers she can just dismiss them.

Queen Elizabeth

Birth: 4.08.year 1900

Married : 1923

Died :30.03 2002



The Queen Mother

Officially speaking they are all "servants of the Crown". Furthermore nothing the parliament has decided can become law until she has agreed to it. There is also a principle of English law, that the monarch can do nothing that legally wrong. But these facts are only written law. In reality it is very different. Of course she cannot choose anyone she likes to be Prime Minister, but she has to choose someone who has the support of the majority of MPs and the House of Commons - because "her" government can only collect taxes with the agreement of the Commons, so if she did not choose such a person, the government would stop function. With parliament it is the same story - the Prime Minister will talk about "requesting" a dissolution of parliament when he or she wants to hold an election, but it would normally be impossible for the monarch to refuse this request. So in reality the Queen cannot actually stop the government going ahead with any of its politics.

Queen Elizabeth II

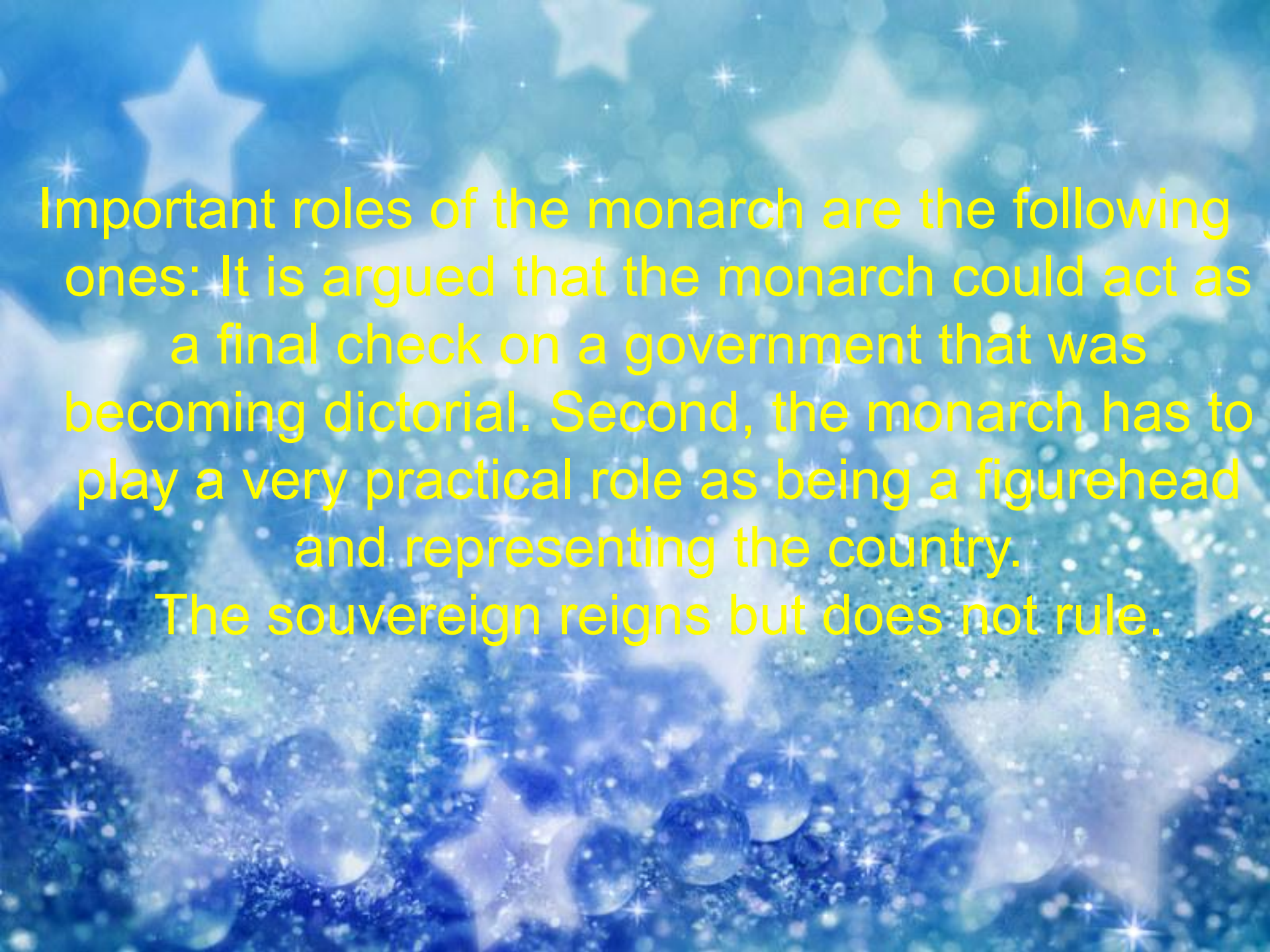
Real name:

*Elizabeth Alexandra
Mary Windsor*

Birth: *21 April
1926 in London*

Children: *3 sons, 1
daughter*



The background is a vibrant blue with a pattern of white and light blue stars of various sizes and orientations. There are also numerous small, bright white sparkles scattered throughout, giving it a shimmering, magical appearance. The stars are semi-transparent, allowing the underlying blue to show through.

Important roles of the monarch are the following ones: It is argued that the monarch could act as a final check on a government that was becoming dictatorial. Second, the monarch has to play a very practical role as being a figurehead and representing the country. The sovereign reigns but does not rule.

The royal family



*Prince
Charles*

*Prince
William*

*Princess
Diana*

*Queen
Elizabeth*

The Parliament

Britain is administered from the **Palace of Westminster** in London (also known as the Houses of Parliament)

The Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is the supreme legislative body in the United Kingdom and British overseas territories. It alone has parliamentary sovereignty, conferring it ultimate power over all other political bodies in the UK and its territories. At its head is the Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II.

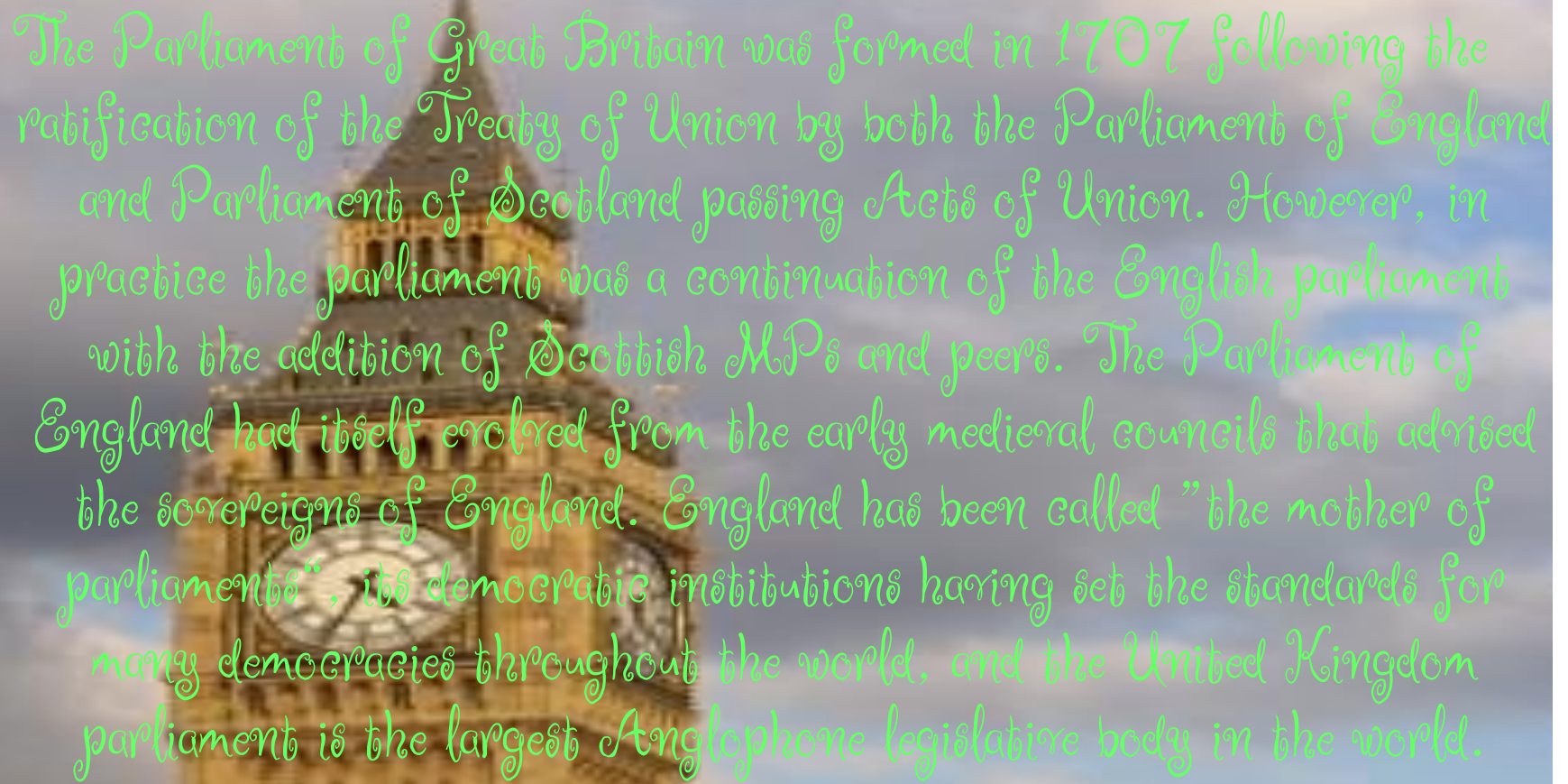
The parliament is bicameral, with an upper house, the House of Lords, and a lower house, the House of Commons. The Queen is the third component of Parliament.



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT



*Palace of Westminster, Westminster, London,
United Kingdom*

The background of the image shows the Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) in London, with several flags flying in the foreground. The text is overlaid on this scene.

The Parliament of Great Britain was formed in 1707 following the ratification of the Treaty of Union by both the Parliament of England and Parliament of Scotland passing Acts of Union. However, in practice the parliament was a continuation of the English parliament with the addition of Scottish MPs and peers. The Parliament of England had itself evolved from the early medieval councils that advised the sovereigns of England. England has been called "the mother of parliaments", its democratic institutions having set the standards for many democracies throughout the world, and the United Kingdom parliament is the largest Anglophone legislative body in the world.

The Parliament

The Queen

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graph TD; Queen[The Queen] --- Line1[ ]; Line1 --- Line2[ ]; Line2 --- Lords[House of Lords]; Line2 --- Commons[The House of Commons];
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House of Lords

The House of Commons

Five last prime ministers since...

1974-1976	Harold Wilson	Labour
1976-1979	James Callaghan	Labour
1979-1990	Margaret Thatcher	Conservative
1990-1997	John Major	Conservative
1997- 2007	Tony Blair	Labour
2007-	Gordon Brown	Labour



The British Parliament is divided into two houses.



The House of Lords



The House of Commons

THE HOUSE OF LORDS

The first one, which is less important, is the House of Lords. It can be described as politically conservative. It consists of different groups. There are the Lord Spiritual. Those are archbishops and bishops. Furthermore the Lords Temporal. These are hereditary peers, which got their titles from their fathers or grandfathers, and life peers, which got their titles for their whole life, and finally there are the Lords of Appeal, which are the High Court Judges. The Lords' main functions are to examine and to discuss the Bills introduced in the House of Commons. They can also delay the legislation for a year, but they can't stop those Bills completely. They have also the function to introduce Bills which are mostly unimportant and non-controversial. They must approve a Bill, before it becomes an act. The power of the Lords has decreased dramatically. There was even a strong movement to abolish the House of Lords completely.

The House of Lords



Members are not elected, they inherit their seats from their fathers

Members are called life peers

The House of Commons

The second House is the House of Commons. The 651 Members of Parliament (MPs) who sit in the Commons are elected representatives of the British people. Each MP represents one of the 651 constituencies into which the UK is divided. The House of Commons has a maximum term of five years, at the end of which a general election must be held. However, a general election can be called in the government at any time. MPs sit on parallel rows of seats known as benches with those who support the government on the one side and the opposition on the other. The important persons are the front-benchers, the less important ones are the back-benchers. The Commons' main functions are to define and to pass the laws and regulations governing the UK and to examine closely all the activities of the government.

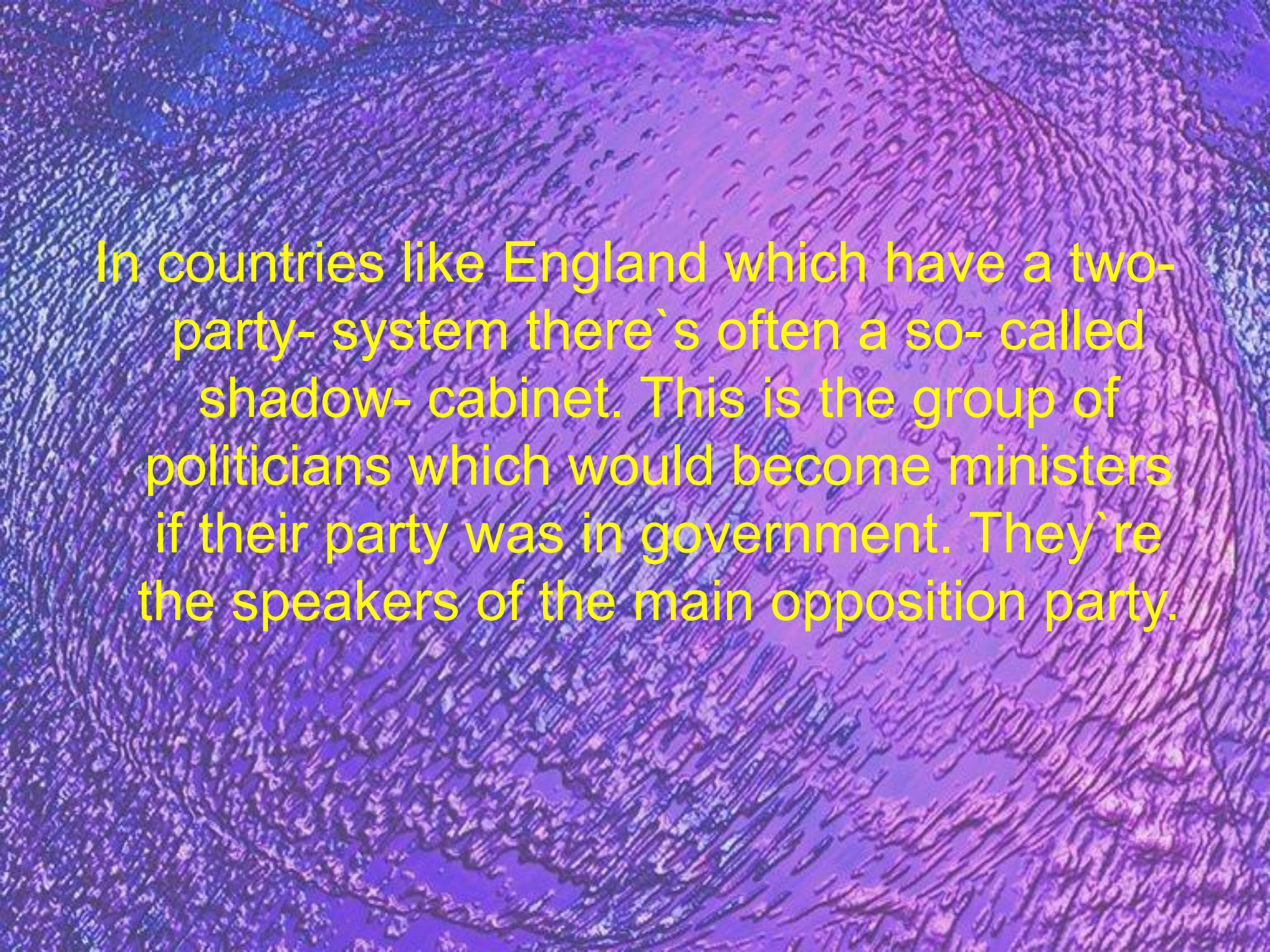
The House of Commons



THE HOUSE OF COMMONS HAS 651 SEATS
THE CHAIRMAN IS CALLED SPEAKER

The Party System

Britain is normally described as having a two-party-system. This is because, since 1945, one of the big parties has, by itself, controlled the government, and members of these two parties have occupied more than 90 % of all the seats in the House of Commons. One of the two big parties is the Conservative Party, also known as the Tories, which is right of centre and standing for hierarchical interference in the economy. They would like to reduce income tax and the give a high priority to national defense and internal law and order. A famous Tory is John Major, the former Prime Minister. The second big party is the Labour Party, which is left of centre and stands for equality, for the social weaker people and for more government involvement in the economical issues. Another smaller party is the Liberal Democratic Party. It was formed from a union of Liberals and the Social Democrats - a breakaway group of Labour politicians. It is regarded to be slightly left of centre and has always been strongly in favour with the European Union.



In countries like England which have a two-party- system there`s often a so- called shadow- cabinet. This is the group of politicians which would become ministers if their party was in government. They`re the speakers of the main opposition party.

THE PARTIES

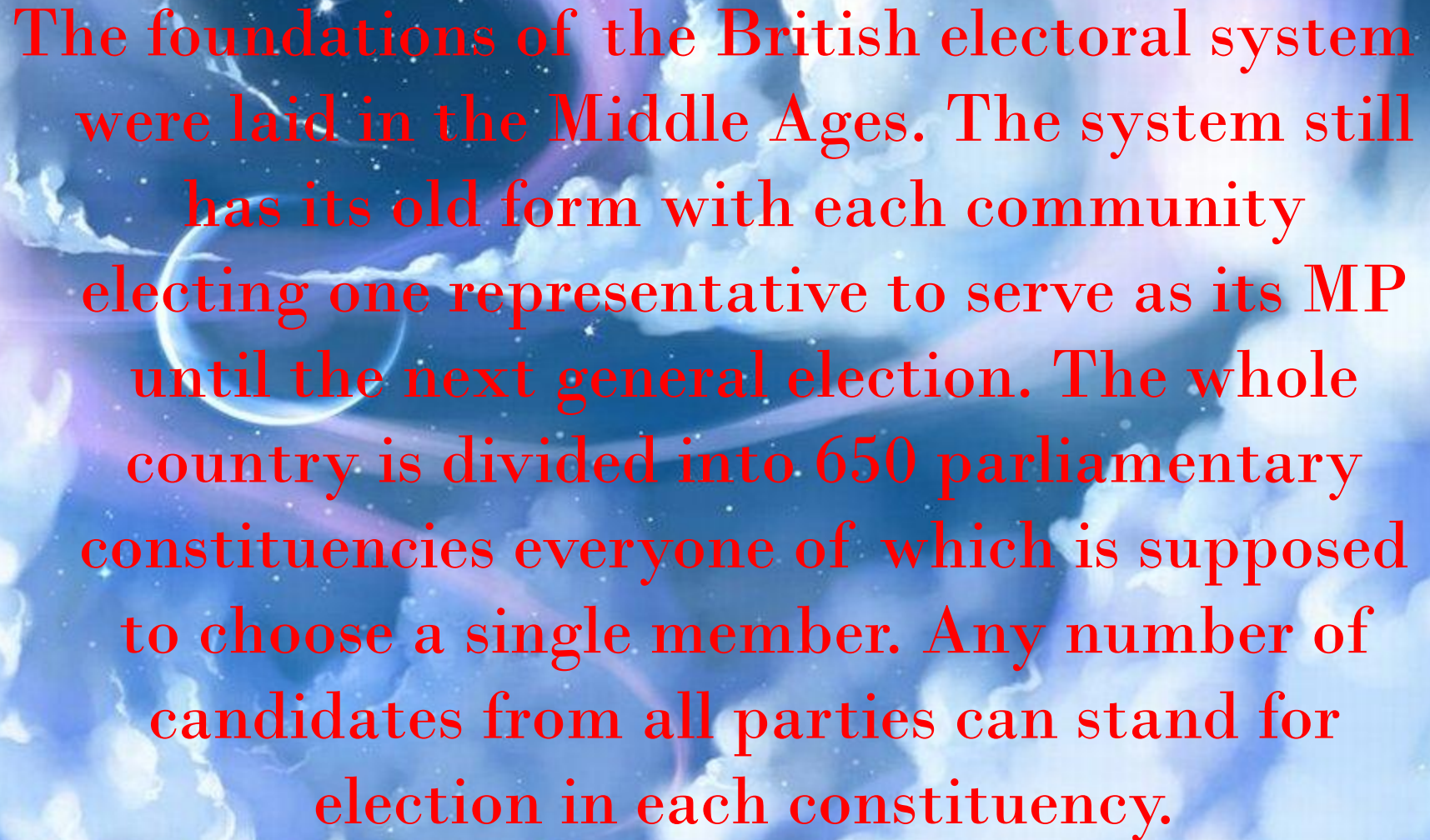
<i>The Labour Party</i>	<i>The Conservative Party</i>	<i>The Liberal Democrats</i>
emerged at the end of the 19 th century	came to power in 18 th century	Formed in the late 1980s
The leader is Tony Blair	M. Thatcher was deposed as leader in 1990	Close relations with Labour Party
It returned to power in 1997	It is popular among older people	



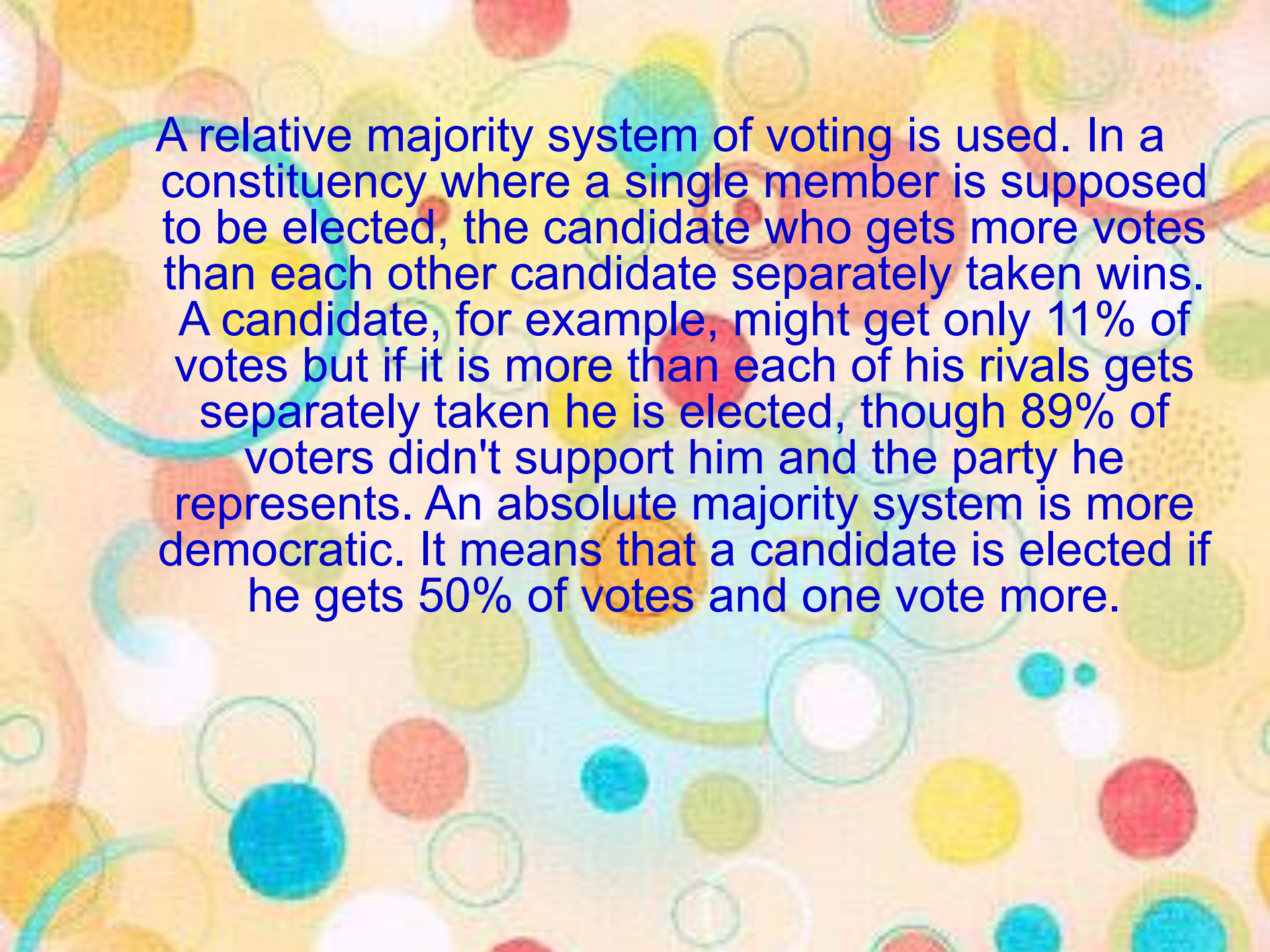
The Electoral System of Great Britain

Elections to the House of Commons, known as parliamentary elections, form the basis of Britain's democratic system. First universal suffrage was demanded by the British working people in 1837 in the petition known as People's Charter. Now each British citizen over eighteen has the right to vote (except prisoners, lords and mentally ill).

GENERAL ELECTION TO CHOOSE MPS MUST BE HELD AT LEAST EVERY FIVE YEARS. VOTING IS BY SECRET BALLOT.



The foundations of the British electoral system were laid in the Middle Ages. The system still has its old form with each community electing one representative to serve as its MP until the next general election. The whole country is divided into 650 parliamentary constituencies everyone of which is supposed to choose a single member. Any number of candidates from all parties can stand for election in each constituency.

The background of the slide is a light cream color, decorated with a pattern of overlapping circles and lines in various colors including teal, orange, yellow, and red. Some circles are solid, while others are just outlines. The text is centered and written in a dark blue, sans-serif font.

A relative majority system of voting is used. In a constituency where a single member is supposed to be elected, the candidate who gets more votes than each other candidate separately taken wins. A candidate, for example, might get only 11% of votes but if it is more than each of his rivals gets separately taken he is elected, though 89% of voters didn't support him and the party he represents. An absolute majority system is more democratic. It means that a candidate is elected if he gets 50% of votes and one vote more.