

UNITED KINGDOM

Date of Elections: 9 April 1992

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the seats in the House of Commons following dissolution of this body on 16 March 1992. General elections had previously been held in June 1987.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of the United Kingdom consists of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The House of Commons comprises 651 members (previously 650) elected for 5 years. Of the 651 seats, 524 are set aside for England, 72 for Scotland, 38 for Wales and 17 for Northern Ireland.

The House of Lords is indeterminate in size. There were, in 1992, 1196 potential members, of whom some were debarred from taking part in the proceedings of the House either because they were not in receipt of a writ of summons or because they were on leave of absence. The membership comprises: 778 hereditary peers and peeresses sitting by virtue of creation or descent, other than those who have disclaimed their titles for life under the provisions of the Peerage Act, 1963; 392 life peers; 2 archbishops and 24 bishops (as long as they hold **their** sees). About 300 peers attend their House's sessions with any regularity.

Electoral System

All British subjects and citizens of the Republic of Ireland are entitled to vote provided that they have reached the age of 18 on polling day and are resident in a constituency on the "qualifying date" (10 October of each year). Prisoners, persons detained in certain mental health institutions and members of the House of Lords cannot vote, while persons convicted of electoral offences may not do so for a period of five years. Electoral registers are drawn up on the constituency level and revised annually in October to take effect the following February. Voting is not compulsory. Proxy and postal voting are allowed in specific cases.

Candidates for the House of Commons must be qualified electors at least 21 years of age. The insane, undischarged bankrupts and persons serving a prison sentence of more than one year are disqualified from membership of the House, as are members of the armed forces, policemen,

* For a parliamentary election in any constituency in Northern Ireland, the elector must have been resident in Northern Ireland for three months prior to the qualifying date.

civil servants, holders of certain judicial offices, clergymen (except of non-conformist churches), peers and members of a large number of public boards and tribunals. A nomination must be supported by 10 electors and accompanied by a deposit of £500, which sum is returned to the candidate if he obtains at least 5% of the total votes.

For purposes of elections to the House of Commons, the United Kingdom is divided into 651 constituencies. In each, the candidate who obtains the largest number of votes is declared elected.

By-elections are held to fill Commons seats which become vacant between general elections. In the House of Lords, Bishops' places are filled by the next senior diocesan bishop and seats of Lords of Appeal are filled by appointment.

Background and Outcome of the Elections

When the election date was announced on 11 March 1992, Parliament was only three months from completing its maximum five-year term.

The month-long campaign was relatively calm, focusing on domestic issues. Prominent among these were the country's economy, mired in its longest recession in years, and the state of public services, including the National Health Service (NHS). Also seen as important was the credibility of the leaders of the two biggest political parties - Prime Minister John Major (Conservative Party), who had succeeded Mrs. Margaret Thatcher in November 1990. and Mr. Neil Kinnock (Labour Party). A key item of the economic debate involved taxes, the ruling Conservatives advocating a low-tax policy and opposition Labour proposing hikes at higher incomes levels. The Conservatives moreover criticized their opponent's plans to increase public expenditure, while Labour countered by blaming the Government for the recession and outlined plans to redress social inequalities.

Public opinion polls predicted a close outcome, with the resulting possibility that the small, centrist Liberal Democrats Party, led by Mr. Paddy Ashdown, would hold the balance of power. The Liberal Democrats had stressed the need to revise the "first-past-the-post" electoral system and to revitalize the educational sector. Altogether, 2,948 candidates were in the running for the enlarged House of Commons' 651 seats (one more than before).

On polling day, the swing to Labour was smaller than foreseen as the Conservatives captured 336 seats to gain an overall majority of 21 in the Commons. Labour, for its part, reinforced its position as main opposition by picking up 42 additional seats. The Conservatives' victory, albeit with a reduced majority, was their fourth consecutive one, a feat unmatched in the country since the early 19th century. Political observers attributed this in part to voters' anxieties over the prospects of a socialist Government or a hung (no majority) Parliament but also to Mr. Major's personal popularity. Given the election outcome, he continued as Prime Minister and named his new Cabinet on 11 April.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the House of Commons

Number of registered electors	43,253,000 (approx.)
Voters	77%
Valid votes	33,609,431

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	<i>l</i>	Number of Seats	Number of Seats held at Dissolution	Number of Seats won at Previous Elections
Conservative Party	645	14,093,148	41.9	336	368	375
Labour Party	634	11,557,134	34.4	271	229	229
Liberal Democrats	632	5,998,446	17.8	20	22	22*
Scottish National Party	72	629,552	ib	3	5	3
<i>Plaid Cymru</i>	38	156,796	)S	4	3	3
Ulster Unionist Party	13	271,049	1.8	9	9	9
Democratic Unionist Party	7	103,039	»i	3	3	3
Ulster Popular Unionist	1	19,305	..i	1	1	1
Social Democratic and Labour Party	13	184,445	)j	4	3	3
Others	893	596,517	1.8	-	7	2
				651**	650	650

* 17 Liberal and five Social Democratic Party members.

** One seat added since last elections.

2. Distribution of Members of the House of Commons according to Sex

Men	591
Women	60
	651

3. *Distribution of Members of the House of Commons according to Age*

25-29 years. . . . .	.1
30-34".	21
35-39". . . . .	.60
40-44". . . . .	.117
45-49". . . . .	.141
50-54". . . . .	.125
55-59". . . . .	.88
60-64". . . . .	.65
65-69". . . . .	.30
70-74". . . . .	.2
75-79". . . . .	.1
	651