

Higher Politics Paper 2 – Specimen ‘C’ pass answer

Question: Using appropriate examples, compare and contrast the effects of introducing proportional electoral systems into the United Kingdom. (20 marks)

Answer 1

The UK has introduced a number of proportional electoral systems over the years. One system is called the party list system and it was introduced for European elections in 1999. This system involves voting for a party and not a person. The percentage of MEPs elected depends on the percentage of votes received for a party. Each party provides a list of candidates and they are elected in order depending on the share of the vote.

The Single Transferable Vote (STV) system is different in that you vote for a person by putting down a number beside the names of the candidates you like best. Your first choice is a 1, second choice a 2 etc. If a candidate does not get a quota of votes they could be put out of the running and their votes shared until you get a winner. This system might be used in Ireland while the Additional Member system is used in Scotland and unlike the other two you get two votes. One vote is for the party and one is for the MP.

There have been a number of effects of using these systems. The three systems allow smaller parties to get candidates elected. Eg in Scotland if you can't win a constituency you might get in on the list system which helps to make the result more fair. The Green Party has won more seats because of each of these systems. Some people say that proportional systems give fairer results according to what the public want rather than the first past the post system which is only really good for the big parties like Labour and Conservatives.

Sometimes proportional systems lead to coalition governments. This has happened in Germany, Italy and Scotland. In Scotland the devolved Parliament has meant more partnerships between Labour and the Democrats and some Labour policies have had to be changed to keep their partners happy. Proportional representation might mean weaker governments like in Wales where the Leader of the Assembly had to go and was replaced. Some people say voter turnout is lower in these elections – like the European ones which are very low.

The Conservatives have done better in Scotland under that system than under first past the post when they didn't win any seats in Scotland in a General Election once but they've got seats in the last two Scottish elections.