



General Election 2019

General Election Lingo: An A-Z on election terminology



Overview

It is the first Christmas election to be held since 1923; but before we head to the polls on December 12th, Dods Monitoring consultants have put together an overview of all the election lingo that will be utilised by the candidates and the papers in the run up to the big day.

This guide will outline all the election language you might come across in a digestible format, with a short description of each word or phrase. The contents are listed in alphabetical order.

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A- D

Agent

A person who represents candidates in their dealings with the electoral authorities and runs their campaigns.

Ballot

Another term for vote.

Ballot box

Sealed box with a slit in the lid, into which voters place their ballot papers.

Ballot paper

Paper containing a list of all candidates standing in a constituency. Voters mark their choice with a cross.

Battlebus

A vehicle used by a party to transport its leader or other senior figures around the country to rallies or to meet the people.

Bellwether

A bellwether seat is one that swing with the national tide, often indicating the overall outcome of the election.

Budget

The government's tax and spending plans, outlined once a year by the chancellor of the exchequer.

By-election

An election held between general elections, usually because the sitting MP has died or resigned.

Canvassing

Otherwise known as "getting out on to the doorstep", canvassing is politicians and their supporters trying to persuade members of the public of their cause face to face. Activists are encouraged to target marginal seats.

Dissolution of Parliament

The act of ending a Parliament. It ceases to exist and MPs are no longer MPs.

E – O

Electoral register

A list of all those in a constituency entitled to vote. Also known as electoral roll.

Exit poll

A poll carried out by researchers asking people how they have voted just after they have left the polling station on election day.

First past the post

Term used to describe the UK's parliamentary election system. It means a candidate only needs to win the most votes in their constituency to win the seat.

Hustings

A meeting at which candidates in an election address potential voters. Also referred to as 'the hustings', which are the general political campaigns and speeches before an election.

Kingmaker

In the case of a hung parliament, smaller parties might play 'kingmaker' to the bigger parties who need extra MPs to make up a government.

Landslide

When a party wins significantly more seats than the nearest rival party.

Losing deposit

Any candidate who fails to secure more than 5% of the total valid votes cast in a first-past-the-post voting system forfeits their deposit and bail rights.

Marginal seat Seats where there are only a few percentage points stand between the front-runners and their competition, meaning it could easily change hands. Voters in these seats are known as "floating" or "swing" voters.

Nomination papers

A candidate must be nominated on these documents by 10 voters living in the constituency.

P– R

Party Election Broadcast (PEB)

Broadcasts made by the parties and transmitted on TV or radio. By agreement with the broadcasters, each party is allowed a certain number according to its election strength and number of candidates fielded.

Polling clerk

The person in the polling station who checks the electoral register to verify that the voter is eligible to cast their vote and at that particular polling station.

Polling day

Election day.

Polling station

Place where people go to cast their votes.

Popular vote

The total number or percentage of votes cast for a party by voters.

Prorogation

The act of ending a session of Parliament.

Presiding officer

The person responsible for ensuring the conduct of the ballot in polling stations. They have to ensure that ballot boxes are kept secure and are responsible for transferring them safely to the count.

Proxy vote

People unable to get to a polling station are allowed to appoint someone to vote on their behalf if they apply in advance. They are also allowed a postal vote.

Psephology

The study of voting and voting patterns.

Returning Officer

The individual who oversees and administers the election. Responsible for: counting the votes, setting up polling places, managing the postal voting process, providing staff to work at polling stations and declaring the results for Elections and the local totals for Referendums.

S– Z

Safe seat

A constituency in which the holding party has a big lead to defend. Often regarded as being a margin of 15-20% or more.

Shy Tory factor

The phenomenon where so-called "shy Tories" voted Conservative after telling pollsters they would not. Used to explain why the share of the Conservative Party vote was significantly higher than the equivalent share in opinion polls. The term was coined after John Major was returned to power in 1992.

Spoilt ballot

A vote that is rendered invalid by it being filled in incorrectly. May occur accidentally or deliberately, for example, to indicate dissatisfaction with the choice of candidates. All spoiled ballots are counted and appear in election statistics.

Swing

The transfer of votes from one party to another. The actual transfer is complicated, so usually taken to mean between the top two parties in any seat or area.

Swing voter

A voter who may not be affiliated with a particular political party or who will vote across party lines. Tony Blair targeted the 'Essex Man' to get his landslide in 1997 and the 'Worcester Woman' became synonymous with New Labour. Today, the Workington Man is purported to be the target swing voter.

Tactical voting

This is when people vote not for the party they really support, but for another party in order to keep out a more disliked rival.

Target seats

In theory, any seat that a party contests and held by a rival is one of its targets. In practice, a target seat is one that a party believes it can win and puts a lot of effort into doing so.

Tellers

Representatives of parties who wait outside polling stations and ask people for their number on the electoral roll. This is to help the parties ensure all their supporters have voted. Tellers have no official status and no-one is obliged to give them any information.

Three-way marginal

Constituencies where the third placed candidate in 2017 is within 20 percentage points of the winner.

Voxpop

Popular opinion as represented by informal comments made by members of the public. Often broadcasted.



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