Public Services Level 3 – Election Campaigns

1 of 17 – Welcome

Welcome to this session on election campaign processes.

Before any election takes place, there are a number of processes that take place. In this session we will be learning about what takes place before a general election, from when a general election is announced through to the forming of a new parliament.

2 of 17 – Prorogation

**Prorogation** is the formal end to a session of parliament. Parliament may be 'prorogued' a few days before dissolution. At prorogation, all parliamentary business ends but Parliament continues to exist until dissolution.

The monarch has not attended prorogation since the 19th century. Instead, a speech is made on the Queen’s behalf announcing all the major bills passed in the last year.

3 of 17 – Dissolution of Parliament

By law, Parliament is **dissolved** 25 working days before a general election.

When Parliament is dissolved:

* All business in the House of Commons comes to an end
* There are no Members of Parliament
* MPs revert to being members of the public and lose privileges associated with being a Member of Parliament

MPs are allowed access to Parliament for just a few days to remove papers from their offices. The facilities that the House of Commons provides for MPs in Westminster during a Parliament are no longer available to them from 5pm on the day of dissolution.

4 of 17 – House of Lords and dissolution

Because members of the House of Lords are appointed, not elected, members of the House of Lords retain their positions when Parliament is dissolved. However, all business in the House of Lords comes to an end.

While Members of the Lords can access the premises of Parliament, only limited facilities and services are available to them.

5 of 17 – Government and dissolution

Parliament and Government are two separate institutions, so the Government does not resign when Parliament is dissolved.

Government ministers remain in charge of their departments until after the result of the election is known and a new administration is formed. This is because the Prime Minister is appointed by the Sovereign and Ministers are appointed by the Sovereign on the advice of the Prime Minister. These appointments are independent of the role of MP. Therefore, Ministers retain their ministerial titles after dissolution, but are no longer MPs.

6 of 17 – Purdah

The period before an election is referred to as purdah. During purdah, guidance is issued to civil servants on the principles they should observe in relation to Government business in the run-up to forthcoming elections. This is to make sure that civil servants act in an impartial way and are not seen to favour a particular party or candidate.

7 of 17 – Party campaigning

After the dissolution of Parliament, candidates and parties can campaign to try to win over voters. There are rules in place that candidates must follow when campaigning in relation to:

* Publishing materials
* Spending and donations
* Personal conduct

Candidates must not commit any electoral offences, including:

* **Bribery**: giving money to secure a vote
* **Treating**: giving a reward to secure a vote
* **Undue influence**: threatening someone to secure a vote
* **Personation**: where an individual votes as someone else
* Making false statements about another candidate’s character or conduct

8 of 17 – Candidates

Any candidate wishing to stand for election must be validly nominated in order to have their name appear on the polling card for their constituency. To do this the candidate must complete their nomination papers, including the supporting signatures of 10 registered electors in their ward, by the deadline for nominations.

A candidate may start campaigning at any time. They do not have to wait until they are validly nominated. To campaign before their nomination candidates may:

* Declare that they will run for election
* Ask people to support them
* Publish campaign material
* Attend public meetings

9 of 17 – TV debates

One important campaign tool used by the main political parties are TV debates. These tend to have high viewing figures and can be pivotal in influencing public opinion. However, party leaders do not have to take part.

In the 2017 election, Theresa May was heavily criticised by her rivals for not taking part in the seven-way TV debate.

Watch the video to learn more about this: [BBC debate: Rivals attack Theresa May over absence – BBC News](https://www.youtube.com/embed/D-lf5NJISo0?autoplay=1&rel=0&start=0&modestbranding=1&showinfo=0&theme=light&fs=0&probably_logged_in=0)

Do you think it was the right decision for Theresa May to not attend?

10 of 17 – Polling day

On polling day, polling stations open from 7am to 10pm for those registered to vote in person. Voters mark an X on the ballot paper for their chosen candidate. If anything else is written it is considered a spoilt vote and is void (not counted). At 10pm the doors of the polling stations close and the ballot boxes are sealed. However, people still queuing by 10pm will be able to cast their vote.

Postal voters receive their ballot papers the week before polling day and it needs to be returned by 10pm on election day in order to be counted.

Ballot boxes are transported to counting centres by the police. Counting begins as soon as the first boxes arrive and continues through the night.

11 of 17 – Election results

The political party that wins the most seats in the House of Commons is known as the majority. These seats form the new government and the party’s leader becomes Prime Minister.

If no party wins a majority of seats this creates a hung Parliament, allowing the largest party to form a minority government. Alternatively, there may be a coalition government of two or more parties. The Prime Minister appoints ministers who work in the government departments, and the most senior of these sit in Cabinet.

12 of 17 – Return of Parliament

The state opening takes place shortly after the general election and is the formal start of the new parliament, attended by the Queen in person.

All MPs and Members of the House of Lords are required by law to swear an oath of allegiance to the crown. They are not allowed to take their seat in the House of Commons or House of Lords, speak in debates or vote until the oath is made. Any MP or Member of the House of Lords who objects to swearing an oath can make a solemn affirmation instead. This process is known as swearing in.

Watch the video below summarising the key moments of the 2017 general election. Can you spot any of the pre-election processes covered in this session?

[The General Election campaign in 120 seconds](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-40187354/the-general-election-campaign-in-120-seconds)

13 of 17 – Question 1

How many days before a general election is Parliament dissolved?

1. 20
2. 25
3. 38
4. 40

The correct answer is B, 25.

14 of 17 – Question 2

In order for a candidate to become validly nominated, how many supporting signatures from electors in their ward are required?

1. 5
2. 8
3. 10
4. 20

The correct answer is C, 10.

15 of 17 – Question 3

What are the opening times of polling stations on polling day?

1. 9am to 5pm
2. 8am to 9pm
3. 7am to 10pm

The correct answer is C, 7am to 10pm.

16 of 17 – Question 4

Who transports ballot boxes to counting centres on polling day?

1. The police
2. MPs
3. Councillors
4. Polling centre staff members

The correct answer is A, the police.

17 of 17 – End

Well done. You completed this session on election campaign processes.

In this session you have learnt about what takes place before a general election, from when a general election is announced through to the forming of a new parliament.

If you have any questions about anything covered in this session, please speak to your tutor for more help.