**Level One**  *(version on 15/10/17)*

*This is a basic guide to key words and the ideas behind them. It should help you to sort out what people mean, whether they are being honest and talking sense and whether you want to vote for them. It looks at:*

**Conservative, Labour and Liberal (Left and Right)**

**Capitalism, Communism, Mixed Economy, Socialism**

**Democracy**

**Where do you get the facts? (a) sources (b) crapometers**

This is meant to be a fair-minded, objective guide. It will try to avoid obvious bias, but watch out for it just in case.

 It is needed because so much of what you read or hear will contain terms which

> 1) don't mean anything to you
>
> and/or
>
> 2) seem to mean different things to different people
>
> 3) are not always used honestly.

Let's start with the obvious words and look at the main political parties.

**Conservative, Labour and Liberal (Left and Right)**

A major difference between them is how much a government should control people - how much 'freedom' can we have from rules. Conservatives prefer governments not to interfere. They say we should be free to act as we choose, within the law. They often want fewer laws and less red tape for business. Labour argues that this means the strong will bully the weak and behave badly, for example having low standards when selling food or being unfair when they employ people.

| Labour | Conservative |
|---|---|
| Control people if you have to, to make them behave well towards each other. | Leave people alone as much as you possibly can. |

Of course, people are not all the same. There are shades of opinion within parties.

The Liberal Party also think government has to control people to bring about a more fair society and solve problems like not having enough houses. They disagree with Labour

members about who should do the controlling and how.  Should it be governments (the state)?

Another basic difference is that conservatives want to 'conserve'; or protect what they think of as good in society, to resist any change that might spoil what we already have. Labour and Liberal members are more likely to argue for change. Parties, and individuals within them, might disagree over what kind of change we need and how much we need.

Now we can think about **left and right wing.** Very roughly, right wing policies tend to favour personal freedom over controls; left wing policies tend to favour equality and justice for the majority over the freedom of an individual or powerful company to behave as they choose.

| Labour (more left) | Conservative (more right) |
| --- | --- |
| Control people if you have to, to make them behave properly. | Leave people alone as much as you possibly can. |
| Things need to change to make a more fair society. | Don't change things if you don't have to. |

It is not quite that simple.

Right wing ideas tend to respect authority whereas left wing ideas are more likely to challenge authorities to bring about change.

Right wing people think you should make your own way in the world - solve your own problems. They say if you work hard you will succeed, and we should all work hard to make a strong country.  Leave people alone and let them look after themselves. The left wing argues that some people come from difficult backgrounds with rotten schools, poor housing and not enough food. It's not their fault but they may not get far unless we help them, to make the competition fairer. The right wing point to people who became millionaires from very poor backgrounds and ask why other people don't try harder. The left wing says this is only a small number who succeed and we need to help the majority who are not going to be millionaires. Within the Liberal Party, some people will argue for more state control and some for less. A very simple version might put them somewhere in the middle of this table.

| Liberals | |
| --- | --- |
| Labour (more left) | Conservative (more right) |
| Control people if you have to, to make them behave properly. | Leave people alone as much as you possibly can. |
| Things need to change to make a more fair society. | Don't change things if you don't have to. |
| People need to have equal opportunities. Provide a council house if they can't afford their own. | People need to take responsibility for their own lives. Help them buy their own house. |

**Capitalism, Communism, Mixed Economy, Socialism**

**Capitalism** is a system where trade and industry are owned privately. Businesses, banks, etc. belong to individuals, or groups of people, not to the state.

**Communism** is where things are owned 'communally'. Often, that means it all belongs to the government who are supposed to run it on behalf of the voters.

Old fashioned capitalism was called 'laissez faire' (French = allow to do). That means leaving things alone to look after themselves, not interfering in whatever happens in a country. Businesses can do what they like.

Modern capitalism, in the UK, is called a 'mixed economy'.  We have controls to stop businesses behaving badly and some things are owned by the government, so it is a 'mix' of public and private ownership. The NHS is publicly owned. Railways used to be but now they are privately owned. Right wing ideas tend to want more private ownership, left wing people more public ownership.

But do not get confused. All of the major parties in the UK are in favour of 'mixed economy' capitalism; none of them is for laissez fair of communism.

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| Communism | Mixed Economy | Laissez faire capitalism |
|---|---|---|

| The community (really the government) fix wages and working conditions. You can't just start your own business so any movement up the social ladder tends to be by getting a different kind of job. Everyone is responsible to each other. In reality, that may mean responsible to the government speaking on behalf of the people. | Tries to get the best of both worlds - enough control for a civilised life balanced with personal freedom. People accept the need to pay tax to support anyone in need (e.g. sick and needing an operation), unemployed and hungry. They accept laws to restrict bad behaviour. Some vital services might be 'nationalised' = belong to the nation. | Anyone can own what they want and are free to behave as they want with fewer restrictions. You can get rich, but if you are poor nobody is responsible for you. In major emergencies (e.g. famine) a government may have to step in. |

Mixed Economy

←——————————————————————————————————————→

left (Labour)                    Liberal              right (Conservative)


Now you need to be careful with the next word. **Socialism** is a belief in 'social ownership'. That means that a country should be owned and managed by the people who live in it (society). How far can voters take control of all the things that affect them, like hospitals, water supply, electricity, house building, banks, railways etc?

It doesn't mean communism. The term 'state socialism' can do, but that is not the same.

It isn't always against mixed economy capitalism. People called Social Democrats try mix up both systems.

Socialists are more likely to join the Labour Party, but not all members of the Labour Party are socialists.

Take it slowly.


Labour Party

←——————————————————————————————————————→

Socialist (more left)                       non-socialists (more right)

social democrats


In arguments, which are not always fair or logical, some people use 'socialist' as an insult because they think it means we all have to be controlled by the government instead of being 'free'.

Socialists argue that, in fact, by letting private companies control our jobs and wages, nuclear energy, electricity, water and railways we are giving away our freedom and losing control of our lives. We need to take control of our own country through our own government and keep businesses more under control for our benefit.  Otherwise they run off with all the profits and sometimes don't even pay enough tax or provide proper pensions.

Their opponents argue that if you try to control businesses they'll run away to another country to find workers and you'll be unemployed and poor.

The two sides disagree over whether or not that is true.

**Some basic research**

Can you find out who owns the following in your area? Is it public or private?

water  electricity  trains  busses  hospitals  gas  any coal under the ground  seashore (coastline/beaches)  dentists  any gas under the ground  the biggest area of open country the biggest bank

What is the name of your local MP?

Who does s/he think should own them?

There are certain words that are considered good or bad by voters even if they don't really know what the word means. Words like 'democracy' and 'stable government' are 'hurrah' words, whereas 'fascist' or 'nazi' are usually 'boo' words.

A fascist is someone who believes in strong government - a strong leader who can make people behave and keep order. Real fascists are willing to give up some personal freedoms - especially other people's - to let the strong leader keep people in order. The word is sometimes used a general insult for anyone who wants to be in charge or impose rules - if you ask people to tidy up when they make a mess you are fascist. But used properly is means giving up certain freedoms because you are afraid if we are too free there will be too much disorder.

Nazi is a really 'boo' word because it is associated with Hitler. Some people are very careless and use it to mean anyone who likes to keep order, or to give orders. In fact it is usually associated with racist views (white power and anti-immigration) and anti-semitism (blaming Jews for the state of the economy). Confusingly, the word comes from a mixture of nationalism (my country is superior) and socialism (more power for the people) so that 'national socialism' really meant 'more power to white gentile German people'.  It shows how careful you have to be with how people use labels.

One of the most popular hurrah words is democracy. But what does it mean?

**Democracy** comes from a Greek word (demos) meaning 'the people'. The idea is that governments are made only when people vote for them so you are governed by your choice of person or party. They rule on your behalf.

A lot depends on:

how the voting system works

how you get the information to make up your mind

If we all have one vote each that is democratic. Then we need to know the facts to know who to vote for. Where do you get your facts? From friends? Social media? Newspapers? TV?

If a large television station and several newspapers all belong to one person, who can tell you whatever story they like, can they influence how you vote? If you read one paper, do you read another one too in case it has a different version? Most people don't bother.

If you see something on Facebook or Google or Twitter, how do you know if it is true? Would they be good ways of spreading lies or rumours to try to get votes or undermine your opponent?

Once you are sure you have the facts, you cast your vote. Maybe your party (A) gets 30%. Party B gets 31%. Party C gets 39%. So party C wins and forms a government. 61% don't want it but it got the biggest vote so it wins. Our First Past the Post system works like that.

| Votes | For | Against | Result |
|-------|-----|---------|--------|
| A | 30 | 70 | Lose |
| B | 31 | 69 | Lose |
| C | 39 | 61 | Win |

Another system (single transferable vote) allows people to have second choices. If nobody gets at least 51% then the smaller party drops out and all their supporter's votes go to their second choice. Then whoever becomes a government has a majority on their side, even if only as second choice for many of the voters.

Round one

| Votes | For | Against | Result |
|-------|-----|---------|--------|
| A | 20 | 80 | Goes out |
| B | 39 | 61 | Try again |
| C | 41 | 59 | Try again |

Round two

| Votes | For | Against | Result |
|-------|-----|---------|--------|
| B | 54 | 46 | Win |
| C | 46 | 54 | Lose |

Proportional representation is another system. It takes in all the votes then hands out seats in government according to the proportion of the vote each party got. Suppose there are 400 seats in parliament to be won. If party A gets 50% of the votes it gets 50% of the seats = 200. If it gets 10% of the votes you get 10% of the seats = 40. This is an example:

| Votes | % of the votes cast (rounded) | Seats in parliament (rounded) |
|---|---|---|
| A = 8,000 | 8.42% | 34 |
| B = 47,000 | 49.47% | 198 |
| C = 40,000 | 42.10% | 168 |
| Not bothering to vote = 5,000 | | |
| Total votes cast = 95,000 | 100 (more or less) | 400 |

Then they'd fight it out for who really makes the decisions and who gets to have the Prime Minister etc. Notice that in this case, with only 34 seats from 8000 votes, party A could join up with B or C to make a government that has over 50%, so both parties would have to be very nice to them to get their votes. That gives lots of influence to the least popular party..

So, all in all, Democracy is not so simple. But it works better of the voters take it seriously and make sure they know what is going on.

That raises the question of how you get your information to help you decide.


**Where do you get the facts?**

**a) sources**

Some people vote out of a kind of loyalty. They support the side their families or neighbours have always supported. Those loyalties can change under pressure. For example, if an area gets poorer because a large employer has closed and incomes drop, votes might look for someone new to provide a solution.

Another kind of loyalty might mean you read the same newspaper as your friends and family. This gives you a certain image of the world, a version of it that all the readers like and support but is only one point of view. Other papers have different points of view but, as you don't read them, you don't consider them. The stories on radio and t.v. might or might not be reliable, but they are always presented from a certain point of view. It would be difficult for an individual to check for themselves, and hard work to read all the different points of view, so the very least we need to do is spot when their might be obvious bias and try to allow for it. That is not as easy as it sounds.

Sometimes it is a matter of careless reporting, sometimes deliberate lies and sometimes having a point of view or a party loyalty. Newspapers, radio stations and t.v. channels supporting a certain side may decide to repeat 'facts' that influence opinion, or spread

rumours. Donald Trump likes to appear popular so he claimed the crowd at his inauguration rally was massive and he had received lots of votes but they we not counted properly because of widespread voting fraud. Neither claim was true, but news outlets could choose whether to repeat them or examine and deny them. Different channels made different choices.

Social media are more of a problem. It is common knowledge that lots of people lie on Facebook to make themselves look better. But lots of stories and images are fed into Google and Wikipedia too. Anyone can do it and who is responsible for checking the facts? If a scare story started on Facebook about milk being radioactive lots of people would stop drinking it, but how would you know if it was just a joke? If you wanted to make people think a certain way in an election wouldn't it be useful to put lots of stories on Facebook and twitter that nudged them in a certain direction?  How can we know when something is true or reliable? You can use fact-checking web sites.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/267ada11-b730-4344-b404-63067c032c65/reality-check

http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/rise-fact-checking-sites-europe

https://fullfact.org

http://www.snopes.com

http://www.factcheck.org

https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174

http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2016/dec/13/2016-lie-year-fake-news/

http://www.itv.com/news/2017-04-06/how-to-spot-fake-news-on-facebook/

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fake_news_websites

https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck

**b) crapometers**

But you can also keep an eye out for certain signals. There are obvious key words to watch out for. Some are always hurrah words, like 'moderate' and 'freedom fighter'. Others are always boo words, like 'extremist' and 'terrorist'. The problem is that people tend to apply

boo words to their enemies to try to persuade other people to condemn them too, whatever the facts.  So, for example, Nelson Mandela was called a terrorist by the British government until we changed our minds and called him a freedom fighter, then a hero and a good example.  Martin McGuiness was an IRA terrorist until he became deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and shook hands with The Queen. At that point most newspapers changed the way they spoke about him.

There are lots of different groups fighting each other in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq etc. UK, US and Russian governments have changed their minds, over time, about who they support, who is a freedom fighter and who is a terrorist.

Politics is sometimes like advertising - words are used to persuade people to buy an opinion or attitude. In some ways they might be meaningless but they carry little signals about things being good or bad and we might not even notice how we are being influenced.  Look at adverts and packaging that says things like 'farm fresh' or 'premium'. Sounds good, but what do the really mean? You could hardly label it 'factory stale', could you? And does 'premium' mean good, expensive or cheap?

Some people are very good at choosing words which make 'bad' things sound acceptable. This is not a new problem.  In 1979, arguing about our attitude to the EU, a politician was interviewed by the Guardian and accused of being one-sided in his negotiations:

> A large part of Dr Owen's reply was taken up with a rebuttal of the charge that Britain was pursuing selfish policies towards the European Community. "We do not act selfishly, we are motivated by our own interests", he stressed.

In August 2017, as the UK is negotiating with the EU over Brexit, the British side call for "flexibility and imagination" while the European side claims we are trying to have our cake and eat it. Are they being inflexible or are we being selfish? It often depends how you choose your words.

There used to be an advertisement for Swiss hotels that claimed they were good value because they did not raise their prices in summer, and prices were even lower in winter.

What is the difference between:

| admitting defeat | giving up |
|---|---|
| running away | strategic withdrawal |
| getting old | becoming a senior citizen |
| stealing | liberating |
| armed bands | guerrillas |
| group of protesters | mob |
| peacekeeping force | invaders |
| young people on motorcycles off to the seaside | bikers pouring into a coastal town |

| someone running away from a dangerous place | refugee/immigrant |
| --- | --- |
| someone dedicated to a cause | fanatic |
| dying | going to your rest/reward/passing over |
| arrogant | confident |
| wanting change for the better | trying to destroy old values |
| rejecting society's artificial rules | being unable to fit in |
| education | propaganda |
| upholding standards | imposing a rigid regime |
| discipline | bullying |
| patriotism | nationalism |

Patriotism is loving your country, being loyal to it. Nationalism is thinking your country should always come first, and even that it is in some way better than others. It is not the same as racism - thinking one race is superior to another - but if you start to argue that being French or German or Irish is better than being anything else then you have to be clear whether you mean holding a French passport, even if your grandparents were born in Algeria, or being 'racially' French. It can get confusing. And some people will use that confusion to get votes.

Perhaps the most difficult problem for 2017 is the difference between words like Muslim, Islamic, Islamist, extremist and terrorist. Islam is a religion and a Muslim someone who follows it. There are about 1.8 billion Muslims in the world and they don't all have the same views. Just as Catholics and Protestants disagreed in Ireland, Sunni and Shia are just two of the different forms of Islam. Just as Protestants can be Church of England or Baptist or Pentecostal, Muslims can have differences within their own groups.  Likewise, Jews can be orthodox, strict or 'liberal' in their practice.  Some Christian groups oppose abortion to the extent they demonstrate outside clinics, and think being gay is a sin so they pray for someone to recover from their 'illness'.  Some Christians won't marry outside their own sect and sometimes communities are formed that won't even talk to people from outside their own group, in case of 'contamination'.  Outsiders might call that 'extremism'. They would call outsiders 'sinners'.

The fact that one group of Muslims decided to fight for an extreme version of their religion meant commentators in the West started to refer to 'Islamic terrorists' and 'lslamists'. The words were attached to bombings and beheadings. The people got confused about the difference between Islamist and Islamic, turning against Muslims in general. Some groups encouraged that confusion because it suited their racist political arguments. Even the President of the USA thought he had to ban Muslims from certain countries from entering America, just in case they carried bombs. Fear creates a reaction and ignorance can be exploited. The best defence to keep a close eye on how people use language

For example, how would you react to a web site called The Voice of The Martyrs? Is it Islamist propaganda?  Actually it is a Christian site, about people persecuted for their faith,

but the word 'martyr' usually appears in the news now associated with suicide vests, so it has become one of those 'bad' words.

That's why you need a crapometer, so when you see something labelled premium farm fresh you know that doesn't actually mean anything, and when someone says "vote for me to uphold standards" or "only my party can save the country from extremists" you need to look very carefully at what they are really selling.

**https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote**