Hello. I'm Gill at engVid, and today's lesson is on the British political system.

So, this may be of interest to you if you're interested in politics or... And interested in this country.

Maybe you're living here in the UK and would like to understand a little bit more about

the system, about how the system works, and what all the terminology is, all the vocabulary

connected with it. So this is just a general introduction to that, and also maybe you're

a native English speaker and you're just interested in the subject and would like to hear something about it, a sort of general summary. So, here it is.

So, first of all, to begin with the main, big organization that runs the country, who

make all of the political decisions, the national parliament and the government. Okay? So, there

are 650 MPs all representing different what are called constituencies. Difficult word

to say, constituency. So the whole country is divided up into these parliamentary constituencies,

and the people who live there register to vote, so everyone has a vote. So depending

on which constituency you live in, you get an opportunity to vote for one of the candidates

in each election. Okay, so a candidate is when the elections are held and there may

be five, or six, or seven, or more candidates all wanting you to vote for them and they

all represent different political parties, like these which I've written here in different

colours because those are the colours associated with those parties. So you get to vote every...

Usually every five years you can vote for the person you want to have as your local

MP, Member of Parliament. Okay.

So there are 650 altogether MPs, members of parliament representing 650 constituencies,

which is a lot of people, millions of people. Okay. So, out of all of those MPs they are

all representing different parties. They're not all from the same party. So, usually these

are the main parties, the ones who actually have MPs in parliament. This party, they only

have one MP, so it's quite small. They're a fairly recent political party compared with

the other ones. They only have one MP. The Green Party, I think maybe only have one MP.

This depends. I mean, we're in 2017 at the moment, so things can change in politics so

it may be different by the time you're watching this lesson.

So anyway, the main parties are the ones in the middle here, really.

The Liberal Democrats don't have quite so many MPs at the moment,

but I've put them here because they're a fairly

central party in political terms. What I've done, you've probably heard of the term

"left wing" and "right wing", so I've put them in the position, where they belong in terms of

how... How their policies, their opinions relate to left-wing and right-wing views.

So UKIP are quite right wing; Labour or Socialist, and Green are quite left wing; and then you

have people who are in the middle, Liberal Democrats are fairly middle;

Conservatives are a little bit more right wing. And these things do change from time to time. You could

have a Labour government a few years ago which was actually quite right-wing in the way it...

In the things that it did. But at the moment the Labour leader is quite a left-wing person.

So you have the same name for the party, but their ideas can change or their interests,

or what they want to do can change.

So, the 650 MPs could come from any of those, as well as national parties because the countries

involved, it's not just England; it's Wales as well, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Okay?

So, there are national parties from Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland specific to

that country who are MPs for their national party related to that country. And there are

also a few independent MPs who don't belong to a party, but they have been a candidate,

an independent candidate, and they were popular enough to be voted for and become an MP. So,

there are other parties, as well as the ones I've written here, the national parties mostly.

So, these four countries: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland... Not the rest

of Ireland, not the Republic of Ireland because they are separate, they're a republic, they're

not part of the UK so they have their own system, their own political system. Okay.

Right, so the six... 650 MPs all belong to different parties, but you have to form a

government from that. Usually it's based on who has the majority. At the moment, at the

time... The time speaking now in 2017, the Conservative party has... Is... Is the government

because they have the majority. Majority of... Of seats. These I'll call seats because they sit.

They sit down in their seat, so it's called a seat. But it means their... Their

position as an MP. They're called seats.

So the Conservatives had a majority of seats, so they formed a government in 2015 when we

had the last general election when the whole country all on one day was voting for their

MP, 2015. The one before that was 2010, so the general elections are usually every five years.

2010, no party had a majority in 2010. So the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats

got together, and they formed a coalition. So I'll write it here, coalition, meaning

they had to work together to form a government, and to run the country basically. So that

was a coalition in 2010, but then the general election 2015 the Conservatives got more seats

and they formed... Had a majority, so they could form a government without the help of

the Liberal Democrats who lost a lot of seats. They lost a lot of popularity. Okay.

So, there's the Conservative government, and then the Labour Party because they are the

next biggest party, they are seen and they're called the opposition.

They are called the opposition party because in a democracy you have your government who are doing things,

but you need the balance of a party to criticize them and to question everything, and sometimes

to try to stop them from doing things. So you might wonder:

"Does anything ever get done when you've got people trying to do something and other people trying to stop them?"

So that's the democratic system. It's a bit sort of aggressive, really, but it means everybody's

opinion is heard that way.

Okay, so you can imagine the Green Party is very interested in the environment, that's

why they're called Green. So, Labour traditionally are more interested, really, in what they

call "working people", except lots and lots of people are working people, but they have

kind of a class view of that which is perhaps a bit out of date nowadays. We're not divided

into three classes anymore, so it's rather difficult to... And they're in a lot of confusion

at the moment because of their new leader. Not everybody is happy with him. Some people

love him, some people hate him, so there we are.

Liberal Democrats, as I say, lost a lot of seats, so they don't have a lot of power at

the moment. Conservatives have a small majority, so they can do things but with a lot of people

trying to stop them, and so it goes on.

U-K-I-P, UKIP as they're called, United Kingdom Independence Party, they were set up specifically

to try to persuade people, the country to leave the European Union. So they were set

up years ago, and people at first thought:

"This was crazy. Why would we want to leave the European Union?"

but gradually they got more and more, you know, people listening

to them, and eventually there was a referendum. So, referendum, where people were given an

opportunity to vote: Did they want to stay in the European Union

or did they want to leave? And it was very close,

but the people who voted to leave was slightly higher than

the number who wanted to stay, so we are now going through what's called Brexit, which

is British exit, the British exit from the EU.

It's called Brexit for convenience. So

we're now going through a process of Brexit where we are gradually being extracted from

the European Union, taken out of the European Union, but I think it's going to be a very

long, slow, complicated process with a lot of negotiations going on. But that's a result

of the referendum when everybody who wanted to voted one way or the other, and the majority

wanted to leave so that's what's being done now at the moment. Okay, so...

So UKIP set themselves up especially for this purpose, and now they have succeeded, that

is going ahead, people wonder:

"What do they do now? Can they continue as a party?"

It's not very clear, because one, their main leader has stopped being leader and they've had two

new leaders so far who have not been all that successful, so people wonder now whether the

UKIP party will continue or whether it will just disappear gradually. Okay, so that's

the main national system there.

We also have local political systems called local councils. So the area where you live

in London, for example, there are more than 30 local councils because London is so big.

London is divided up into council areas. And elections are every four years for councils.

The people who are voted for are called councillors. They... Again, each council is divided up

into smaller areas called wards, so wherever you live in London you are in a ward which

is in a bigger council area, and each ward might have two or three councillors for that ward.

So there may be 20 wards in a council area, so there are quite a lot of wards. They're

just smaller areas to help administration to make it easier to deal with. And then with

a council there is often a Mayor as well, the Mayor who is either just chosen by the

councillors or some local councils' people can elect the Mayor as well. They have a paper,

voting paper where they can choose their Mayor. And London itself has a much bigger...

The London assembly,

and we have a Mayor for London, an overall Mayor of London for the whole London

area, as well as having mayors in different smaller councils. So there are lots of political

systems, all one on top of another. Okay.

So, finally, just for fun I thought I'd tell you about a party, a political party who have

never had an MP, but they have had a few councillors and mayors. They're called the Official Monster

Raving Loony Party. A raving loony is a crazy person, so they were... They were called that

because they wanted to appear crazy, like very eccentric. Eccentric.

So, somebody in

1963, a long time ago, started this party. And his name, it wasn't his real name, but

he called himself Screaming Lord Sutch, and he used to dress in very strange clothes,

and it was just to make people laugh, really. But it was also as a kind of a protest, and

people would vote for them, what's called a protest vote. If people don't like all the

other candidates and they don't like what all the main political parties are doing,

they might vote for a crazy party like this as a protest vote to say:

"Well, we prefer that crazy person in the funny clothes to these serious political people

who don't seem to be helping us very much."

So that's sometimes what has happened. So they've never had an

MP in parliament, they've never had enough votes for that, but sometimes in a local council

people disliked the local councillors so much that they decided to vote for the Official

Monster Raving Loony Party instead, and a few councillors were actually elected, and

one of them, maybe one or two even became the Mayor of their local council, and perhaps

they did a good job. So when you see on television sometimes when there has been an election

and then people stay up very late at night and into the early hours of the morning counting

the votes, and then eventually all the candidates are standing on a stage, and somebody from

the local council is announcing how many votes each candidate received. One of those candidates

may be from this party, and they're very easy to spot, to notice because they are dressed

in a very colourful costume usually of some sort or another, very colourful and maybe

with a big, funny hat or something. So, you can spot the Raving Monster Loony candidate

just by looking, and they stand there waiting to hear how many votes they've received. So

that sort of brightens things up when people are a bit tired of politics, which is going

on all the time, so it's easy to get tired of it because there's always something happening.

So, okay, so that's just a very simple overview, really, but I hope... I hope it's been useful

for you with a bit of vocabulary and a bit of information you may not have known about before.

So, do go to the website: www.engvid.com where there's a quiz on this subject.

Thanks for watching, and see you again soon.

Bye.