



## AP<sup>®</sup> Government and Politics: Comparative 2001 Sample Student Responses

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The system used to elect members to the British House of Commons is a winner take all or "first past the post" electoral system. Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected from single-member districts by plurality. MPs do not have to live in the district they represent. The system used to elect members to the Russian State Duma is a combination of the British system and a proportional representation system. Half of the members of the Duma are elected from single-member districts by plurality, as in Great Britain. The other half of the members of the Duma are elected using party lists in a proportional representation system. For example, each district has a certain number of seats in the Duma that are divided up percentage-wise between the parties; therefore, people actually vote for the party. Each party then uses party lists to fill their seats.

The electoral system in Great Britain minimizes the number of political parties. Labour and Conservative are the two main parties in Britain with some minor third party competition, the greatest coming from the Liberal Democrats. The two-party system in Great Britain usually delivers a clear majority in the House of Commons and forces the majority party to keep to the middle to stay in power.

The electoral system in Russia encourages a multi-party political system by combining single member districts and proportional representation.

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the examination.

Political parties abound, including the Communist Party and the Unity Party of President Putin. The Communist Party carries the largest support as a single party, which forces their opposition to form coalitions to stay in power. With so many political parties, including many minor parties such as the Beer Lover's Party, coalition building is a must as no single party will ever have much chance at gaining a majority under the current electoral system.

Legislative - executive relations in Great Britain are somewhat unique in that the head of government ~~and~~ is the leader of the majority party in the House of Commons. The electoral system certainly contributes to the selection of the Prime Minister. With the majority party controlling both the legislative and executive branches, legislative - executive relations are generally positive.

In Russia, however, legislative - executive relations are not as strong as in Britain. The President of Russia has much power on his own, with or without the support of the State Duma, whereas the Prime Minister gains his or her power from the House of Commons. In Russia, the executive generally overshadows the legislative wing of the government.

In the British House of Commons, members are elected from single member districts. Although many would prefer the system to change to proportional representation, it is highly unlikely. This is because the single-member districts are essential in maintaining Britain's competitive two party system.

The electoral system in Great Britain promotes a competitive two party system. It is a system in which 1 of 2 major parties alternate rule in Parliament. The party with a majority in Parliament heads the Government and it is from this party that the Prime Minister is selected. In Russia the electoral system is highly centralized. With the Communist Party dominating for so long, the country lacks a truly competitive system.

The electoral system of

Great Britain creates a fusion of power between the legislative and executive branch. The Prime Minister, the formal head of the Government, always has his party in the majority. With the threat of a vote of no confidence followed by dissolution, the members are exceedingly careful to toe party lines, and therefore the Prime Minister gets his policies passed rather easily. Moreover, the monarchy is the ceremonial head of state and accepts the decisions of the Prime Minister. It is because of this structure that the legislative-executive relations are very amicable and respectful. However in Russia the relations are somewhat strained because the legislative & executive branches have separate powers. This also is accompanied by competing agendas and therefore things are more tense and there is a greater need for compromise.

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Members of the British House of Commons are elected by districts throughout Great Britain. Each district sends one member to the House of Commons. The electoral system in Great Britain affects the political party system by keeping most districts certain of who they will send to the House of Commons. Thus, there are relatively few seats that are truly fought over, and the party ratios stay close at similar levels for the most part.

The impact of the electoral system on the legislative-executive relations in Great Britain is that the executive, or Prime Minister, is very stable. Because the Prime Minister comes from the controlling party, and the controlling party loses control far less frequently than in the United States, the Prime Minister can work with his party to form good legislation. However, in Russia the executive does not have to be from the controlling party, as there is usually no one controlling party. The two-party system of Britain also leads to its stability, but the multi-party system of Russia makes the legislative process difficult.

Russia's two largest parties have Communist leanings, but their Presidents are usually not from these parties. This severely affects the legislative-executive relation.

The electoral system in Russia affects their political party system because of their 5 percent rule. If any party gets over five percent of the vote, then they get representation, even if they do not win. With so many parties, several get representation in the Duma. This creates the need for coalitions since no one party holds a majority (or anything near it). These fragile alignments often fall apart, leaving no clear picture of what the Russian political system will look like in the future.