

BANGLA FORA

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Session 3

Beymani: Navigating the British
Political System

7th February
6.30pm - 8pm




Resource Pack

Introduction on Bangla Fora

Bangla Fora is a common colloquial term used by the Bengali community for children's education programs that were popularised in the '70s and '80s in an effort for the Bengali community to connect and link their children to their community and culture. Our Bangla Fora will include 10 online webinars available to take live and view as recordings.

The course curriculum will develop participants skills as community organisers and activists while grounding them in the historical context of wider bangladeshi activism in the UK. The course will mix deep dives into the history of the Bangladeshi diaspora and its activism in the 70s and 80s with training in modern anti racism techniques, digital campaigning and community outreach.

Link to video session:  Beymani: Navigating the British Political System
<https://youtu.be/YYkc-ZstuT8>

Session Three - Beymani: Navigating the British Political System

This session will focus on practical tools and strategies that will help you develop invaluable community organising skills that can impact issues that you care about. We will be looking at local and national community organising, how to yield influence in whatever role or position you occupy, and understanding how the axis of power impacts the issues that we most care about. The session will draw on the important lessons learnt from recent campaigns such as the Farmers Protest in India and Kill the Bill right here in the UK and how we can look at how we can learn from previous movements to build meaningful and effective campaigns.

Lesson Objectives:

- To develop an understanding of where power and influence is located across the political landscape
- To develop an understanding around how to use and create impact using our own influence
- To reflect on our role as activists in our own community and think about how we can use what we have learnt to affect issues that affect us

Power

For effective campaigning it's really important for us to understand the source of power and the process through which change can effectively happen.

Often as history has proven to us the traditional form of political engagement (Protesting, and voting) has not typically won the victories that we are aiming for. So what happens when we as organisers begin to think beyond the basic? Many went into think tanks - they set up think tanks to influence (Save the children, IPPR). Influence also comes from the media, which can set the narrative to determine the political opinion.

We do not ease to become activists when we start working!

Political Institutions: These are actual organisations (not groups or individuals) who as part of their existence or mission are required or maintain leverage in politics through relationships, programmes, funding, lobbying, campaigning or literature. (Everything from a political party, NGOS, pressure organisations, think tanks etc).

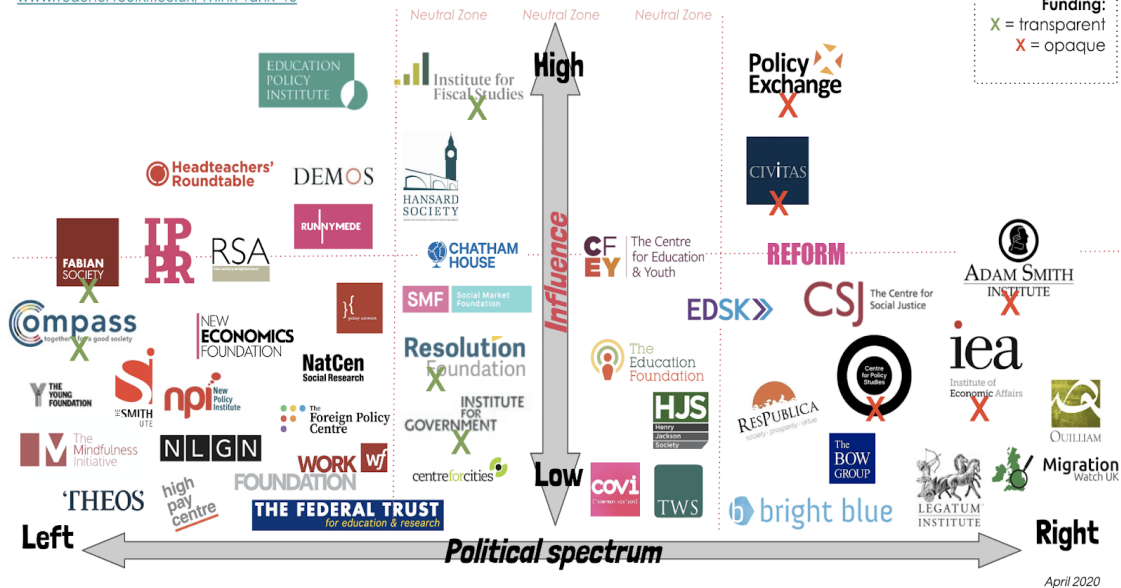
Politicos: These are politicians, those interested in being politicians or working in politics or are the political conduit for politics and . Essentially they work (get paid to do) in politics or live and breathe it. (Ranging from MPs, Special Advisors, staff in unions who have political roles, political consultants/lobbyists, fixers)

Pundits (Phundeet): A mixture of people who are paid and not paid to commentate on politics, news, policies and opinions. They are on twitter, tv and often found writing articles.

Players: Often are funders, donors, movers and shakers but include figure like Marcus Rashford, Jack Monroe, the Bamford family or Coates family (If you don't know who they are - google them - thats point about these players, often most don;t know how prominent they are because their day jobs are not politics.

47 Think Tanks Every Teacher Should Know

www.TeacherToolkit.co.uk/Think-Tank-46



India Case Study : Farmer Strikes

- The 2020–2021 Indian farmers' protest was a protest against three farm acts that were passed by the Parliament of India in September 2020.
- Soon after the acts were introduced, unions began holding local protests, mostly in Punjab. After two months of protests, farmer unions—mainly from Punjab and Haryana—began a movement named Dilli Chalo (transl. Let's go to Delhi), in which tens of thousands of farming union members marched towards the nation's capital. The Indian government ordered the police and law enforcement of various states to attack the protesters using water cannons, batons, and tear gas to prevent the farmer unions from entering into Haryana first and then Delhi. November 2020 saw a nationwide general strike in support of the farmers and thousands converging at various border points on the way to Delhi.
- The Supreme Court of India stayed the implementation of the farm laws in January 2021.
- On 19 November 2021, the union government decided to repeal the bills

House of Lords as a vehicle for change

The Government suffered 14 defeats as the Lords voted against a series of measures in the Conservatives' police and crime bill. This was largely due to a concerted effort

across agencies to highlight the severe inequalities and discrimination that would occur, should the bill be passed.

'The Police Bill Alliance, made up of organisations including Liberty, Bond, Quakers in Britain, Friends of the Earth, and Friends, Families and Travellers, said: "Peers have rightly rejected some of the most extreme proposals in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. We are grateful to every Peer who stayed late to push back against this draconian Bill which seeks to destroy the right to protest in the UK.

"With the Bill set to return to the Commons, we now urge MPs to uphold the changes Peers have made on 'noise-based' conditions on protests.

"Unfortunately many of the measures criminalising protest remain in this Bill, meaning you could get ten years in prison for causing 'serious annoyance'. The Bill also introduces oppressive new measures which criminalise the nomadic way of life for Gypsy and Traveller communities.

"This Bill is just part of a suite of legislation going through Parliament which attack our fundamental rights and undermines democracy in the UK. Be it stripping people of their British citizenship without warning, or allowing Ministers to throw out Court decisions they disagree with - placing politics above the law, we are now entering dangerous waters when it comes to Britain's civic freedoms and democracy." '

This cross party alliance that worked to pressurise what is typically thought of as an unelected undemocratic chamber to serve in the interests of the people. The 'Kill the Bill' alliance is one example of how cross organ strategising can work to exert influence in arenas that we would typically not engage with to secure big 'wins'

The Voting Systems

First-past-the-post

The House of Commons and local councils in England and Wales use the first-past-the-post system.

The UK is divided into constituencies. Local authorities into wards.

At a general or local election, voters put a cross (X) next to their preferred candidate on a ballot paper. Ballot papers are counted. The candidate with the most votes represents the constituency or ward.

Alternative Vote (AV)

Alternative Vote is used to elect:

- chairs of most committees in the House of Commons

- the Lord Speaker and by-elections for hereditary peers.

Voters rank candidates in order of preference by marking 1, 2, 3 and so on. A voter can rank as many or as few candidates as they like or vote for one candidate.

First preference votes are counted first. If a candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the first preference votes then they are elected.

If no candidate reaches 50 per cent, the candidate with the fewest first preference votes is eliminated. Their second preference votes are reallocated to the remaining candidates. If one candidate has more votes than the other remaining candidates put together, that candidate is elected.

If not, the process is repeated until one candidate has more votes than the other remaining candidates put together. This candidate wins the election.

Supplementary Vote (SV)

Elections for mayors in England and Wales, and for Police and Crime Commissioners, use the Supplementary Vote system.

The SV system is like the AV system. Voters are limited to a first and second preference choice. A voter marks a cross in one column for their first preference candidate. They mark another cross in a second column for their second preference if they wish to do so.

If a candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the first preference votes then they are elected.

If no candidate reaches the 50 per cent threshold, the two candidates with the highest number of votes remain. This eliminates the other candidates. The second preference of the eliminated candidates are counted. Any made for the two remaining candidates are transferred. The candidate with the most votes at the end of this process is elected.

Additional Member System (AMS)

The Additional Member System is used by:

- the Scottish Parliament
- the National Assembly for Wales
- the London Assembly.

Voters are given two votes on separate ballot papers. One vote is for a constituency member and one vote is for a party list. In Scotland and Wales list members are elected by region. In London there is a single London-wide list.

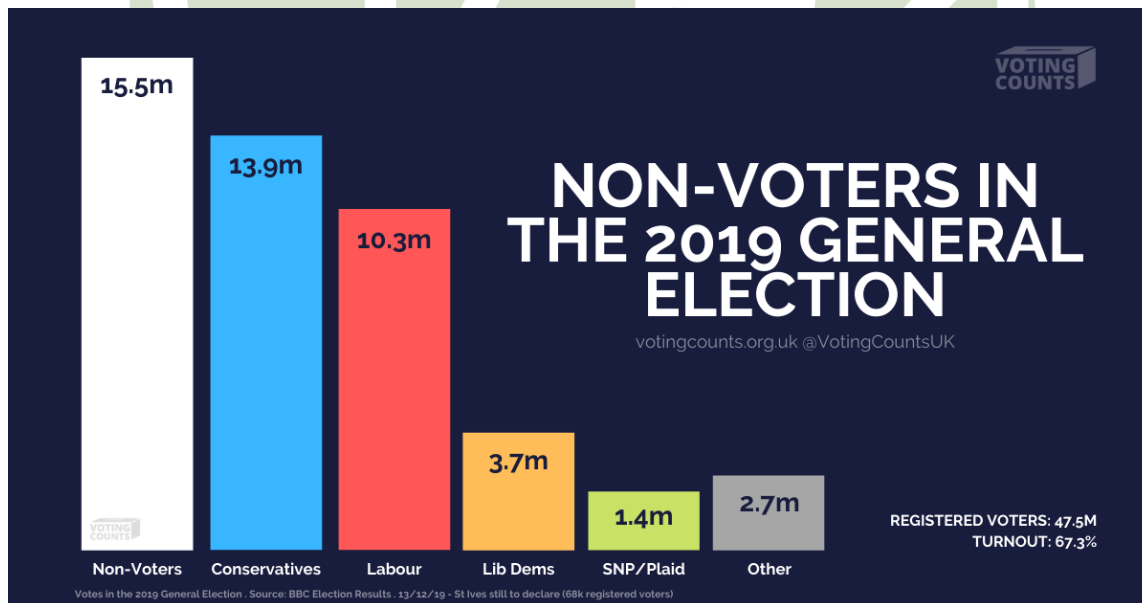
Constituency votes are counted first and the members for each constituency are elected using first-past-the-post.

Additional members are then elected by counting the party list votes in each region. The number of members elected from the list is based on the percentage of the votes cast but also takes into account the number of constituency members already elected in the

region. This is designed to make the result more proportional to the number of votes cast.

In-between elections (Most important and effective period - also you to have years to work on things as opposed to a date or election period)

- Voter Registration
- Voter Drives
- Develop Manifestos, Policies, Pledges,
- Develop and Build Relationships with Candidates
- Build, Fund and Exercise Power / Campaigns / Funding
- Organise.
- Interfere.



Further readings/resources

Books:

Russell, M. (2001). REFORMING THE HOUSE OF LORDS: Lessons from Overseas. *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, [online] 16(2), pp.195–202. Available at: <https://www.aspg.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/22-BookReview-Griffith.pdf>.

Blackburn, R. (2016). *The Electoral System in Britain*. [online] *Google Books*. Springer. Available at:

https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=EQ6_DAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&q=british+electoral+system&ots=9CeJDJfNL2&sig=fekqNSV2SS83wdToFUfxwBGwcRc&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=british%20electoral%20system&f=false.

Films:

▶ How to be an activist | The Economist

▶ Does Grassroots Organizing Still Work?

Articles:

Curtis, J. (9226). *Farmers' protests in India and agricultural reforms*. [online] Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9226/CBP-9226.pdf>.

Arceneaux, K. and Kolodny, R. (2009). The Effect of Grassroots Campaigning on Issue Preferences and Issue Salience. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 19(3), pp.235–249.

Hatch, J. (2022). *Government amendments to Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill defeated in House of Lords*. [online] Bond. Available at: <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2022/01/government-amendments-to-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-defeated-in-house-of> [Accessed 19 Feb. 2022].

UCL (2018). *Government Defeats in the House of Lords*. [online] The Constitution Unit.
Available at:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/parliament/changing-role-house-lords/government-defeats-house-lords>.

ssir.org. (n.d.). *Grassroots Organizing and Preparing for the Unprecedented (SSIR)*.
[online] Available at:

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/grassroots_organizing_and_preparing_for_the_unprecedented#

