



Dear *Simon*,

Today is election day! Why does the UK not vote on a Sunday? Are general elections still felt to be "a special day" across the country?



As with so much of British politics, the vote takes place on a Thursday out of convention, rather than any specific requirement. Since the 1930s, Thursday has been the choice of successive governments, for reasons that are not very clear.

Some suggest that it was because Friday was the day most workers got paid, so Thursday was intended to increase turnout (because people had no money to go something else after work) and to reduce the likelihood of drunken voters: neither option suggests a very positive view of mass suffrage!

The other argument is that Thursday was often the market day, so people would be coming into towns in any case, although this doesn't explain the persistence of the day after the Second World War. In short, it's just the way it is, and is now part of electoral law (which states that general elections will normally be held every five years on the first Thursday in May).

A consequence of a weekday election is that it usually doesn't feel very special: work continues as normal, with voters either coming before or after work. The only real exception is for those schoolchildren (like my own) who get a day off because their school is being used as a polling station.

However, they – like their parents – still have to go to work the next day, so even the delights of the results coming in overnight is often something that is only really appreciated at the end of a working day. With no one party likely to win a majority and with so many more parties having the potential to make coalition talks more complex, there will be a lot of discussions over the week-end!

Talk soon,

*Simon*