PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION: FOR AND AGAINST

FOR PR	ISSUE	AGAINST PR
PR ensures greater electoral fairness because parties gain representation (generally) in line with their popular support; 'third' parties in particular are not under-represented	*Electoral fairness*	Fairer representation does not necessarily ensure proportional power – 'third' parties enjoy pivotal power (can align with either major party) and they may exert disproportionate influence within a coalition (the tail wags the dog)
PR widens (effective) electoral choice because a larger number of parties have the prospect of winning or sharing government power; votes for minor parties are not 'wasted'	*Electoral choice*	Electoral choice is hampered because the electorate is not offered a clear choice between potential parties of governments, but only a choice between a large number of coalition members
PR ensures that the government has a popular mandate because governments are invariably supported by at least 50% of the electorate – governments thus enjoy popular legitimacy	*Mandate democracy*	Mandate democracy is undermined because the policies of coalition governments tend to made through post-election deals which the electorate has not been able to endorse or reject
PR secures accountable government because governments have to gain the support of two or more parties in the legislature – the legislature cannot be dominated by the executive	*Accountable government*	Greater accountability may result in weak and ineffective government if the legislature becomes over-strong and government is unable to push though its policy programme
PR produces stable government in that there is a more consistent development of policy over a number of government with few dramatic ideological shifts to the left or the right	*Stable government*	Government may become more unstable in the sense that coalition governments more easily collapse due to internal divisions and are thus less likely to survive for a full term in office
PR counters political extremism by encouraging extremist political parties to engage in electoral politics and allowing their arguments and ideas to be publicly challenged	*Political extremism*	Extremist parties will be more likely to gain representation, giving them respectability and providing them with base from which they can broaden their popular support
PR fosters a political culture which emphasises rational debate and compromise rather than polarisation and point-scoring because policy is made though a process of consensus building	*Political culture*	A bias towards compromise and consensus building encourages parties to gravitate towards the centre, so blurring ideological choices and discouraging robust and healthy political debate