

Introduction

The Political System of the United Kingdom

Outline

Introduction

Ground Rules etc

UK Politics in Perspective

UK Key Facts

Geography

History

Models of the British State

The “Westminster Model”

Alternative Models

Summary & Class Questions



Format and Attendance

- ▶ Format
 - ▶ Short (max. 45 minute) lecture given by me
 - ▶ 45+ minutes of group work, plenary discussion etc.
- ▶ You will attend classes well-prepared (i. e. do your readings)
- ▶ You will contribute to the discussion in class
- ▶ You may miss a maximum of two classes (even with a medical certificate)
- ▶ I will occasionally select a student at random. The poor soul will give a short, impromptu presentation on current affairs in the UK and how they relate to the topic of the respective week

Assessment

- ▶ Participation in class
- ▶ Essay
 - ▶ Usual deadline, usual standards
 - ▶ 7,000-7,500 words each (about 15 pages of text + references)
 - ▶ Topics/titles to be chosen from a list (see course outline)
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Important Peer-reviewed Journals

- ▶ British Journal of Political Science
- ▶ British Journal of Politics and International Relations
- ▶ Government and Opposition
- ▶ Parliamentary Affairs
- ▶ Political Quarterly
- ▶ Political Studies

All available electronically on computers connected to the university network / VPN

Textbook and Current Affairs

- ▶ Core Textbook: Kavanagh et al.: British Politics
- ▶ UK News:
 - ▶ The Guardian: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk>
 - ▶ The Independent: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/>
 - ▶ The Daily Prophet Horror Mail (read at your own peril): <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/>
 - ▶ BBC News: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk/>



Textbook and Current Affairs

- ▶ No British TV (unless you have an unblocker, or a very large dish), but
- ▶ Radio 4 political news and analysis on the internet: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/podcasts/>
 - ▶ NewsPod
 - ▶ Today in Parliament
 - ▶ Weekly Political Review
 - ▶ Week in Westminster



Why study British Politics?

- ▶ ~~I wanted to do another country but couldn't master the bloody French / Latvian / Whatever~~
- ▶ They have one of the oldest parliaments in the world and invented *parliamentary government*
- ▶ It's the home of European Democracy and the Civic Culture. Or so they say.
- ▶ Very early modernisation (Industrial Revolution)
- ▶ Slow and gradual institutional change (in modern times)
- ▶ They've got one of the oldest and most successful Labour Parties
- ▶ They invented constitutional monarchy
- ▶ Former Empire & World Power (they can't stop talking about those glory days)
- ▶ Lots of contradictions (from a continental perspective)
- ▶ Very important & problematic EU MS
- ▶ They invented "Westminster Democracy" → majoritarian democracy

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- ▶ We want to compare so that we can control (e. g. institutional variables)
- ▶ It's useful to have a few points of reference (but this important one is changing)

Which dimensions?

- ▶ Core institutions: Parliament, central government, central administration
- ▶ Federalism vs. unitarism
- ▶ Electoral system
- ▶ Cleavages and party system
- ▶ Political behaviour and political culture
- ▶ Media, judges and other veto players

Course Overview I

- 1 22.04. Introduction: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 3
 - 2 29.04. The British Tradition Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 4+7, supp: Hay, 2007
 - 3 06.05. The Constitution: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 10 + Russell, 2011 + Jones and Norton, 2014, p. 262
 - 4 13.05. We'll debate the fallout from the General Election 2015
 - 5 20.05. Electoral System and Electoral Reform: Dunleavy and Margetts, 2001 + Blau, 2004 + Jones and Norton, 2014, p. 262
-

Course Overview II

- 6 27.05. Parliament: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 19 + Kelso, 2011 + Russell, 2009 (supp.)
 - 7 03.06. The Core Executive: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 12 + Richards, 2011
 - 8 10.06. Ministers, Departments, Civil Servants: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 12+13 + Wilson, 2002 + Rhodes, 2005 (supp.)
 - 9 17.06. Devolution and the Irish Problem: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 17 + Scully and Wyn Jones, 2011 + McLean, 2007 (supp.)
 - 10 24.06. The Party System: Cowley, 2011 + Ford and Goodwin, 2014
-

Course Overview III

-
- 11 01.07. Elections and Voting Behaviour: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 20 + Denver, 2011
 - 12 08.07. The Media: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 25 + Chadwick and Stanyer, 2011
 - 13 15.07. Pressure Groups and the Judiciary: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 21+24 + Woodhouse, 2002
 - 14 22.07. Assessing British Democracy: Kavanagh et al., 2006, ch. 32 + Beetham et al., 2003 + Wilks-Heeg, 2012
-

What's missing?

?

- ▶ Foreign policy
- ▶ The European dimension
- ▶ Political culture (mostly) and social attitudes
- ▶ Local democracy
- ▶ Referenda
- ▶ The Economy
- ▶ History (mostly)
- ▶ Immigration policies
- ▶ A whole lot more

Where is it?



Where is it?



By NASA Goddard Space Flight Center from Greenbelt, MD, USA [CC BY 2.5

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Key Figures

- ▶ Population
 - ▶ (Growing) Population of 64m (3rd in EU)
 - ▶ Scotland has 8 per cent of the population but 1/3 of the area
 - ▶ London has 13 per cent of the population, 1 per cent of the area

Key Figures

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- ▶ Economy
 - ▶ London has about 20-30% of the GDP
 - ▶ Ireland and Wales until recently amongst the poorest regions of Europe
 - ▶ It's the 6th largest economy in the world and Europe's financial centre

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 - ▶ Ireland and Wales until recently amongst the poorest regions of Europe
 - ▶ It's the 6th largest economy in the world and Europe's financial centre
- ▶ Politics
 - ▶ One of five countries permanent members of the UN's security council
 - ▶ One of a handful of (official) nuclear powers
 - ▶ *One of very few countries with an uncodified constitution*

Early Middle Ages

- ▶ Part of the Roman Empire until \approx 450 (Hadrian's wall)
- ▶ Influx of Germanic (Anglo-Saxon) people from the continent, lots of small kingdoms
- ▶ Raids and settlements by Vikings
- ▶ 878 Alfred defeats the Danes, Wessex becomes dominant
- ▶ 991 central administration and first central taxation system in Europe in place
- ▶ Dynastic link with Normandy \rightarrow Norman conquest (1066) and introduction of feudalism
- ▶ Gap between Germanic lower classes/gentry and French-speaking overlords

Middle Ages

- ▶ Scotland: dynastic links and English influence but independent
- ▶ Ireland: an English colony from the 1200s on
- ▶ Wales: dominated by England, (almost) incorporated during the 1400s (English Law from 1536)
- ▶ Complex relationship with France (War of the 100 years 1337–1453)
- ▶ Magna Charta 1215
- ▶ “House of Commons” from the 1300s on
- ▶ Separate Anglican Church (Henry VIII)



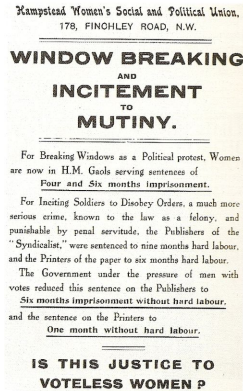
By Original authors were the barons and King John of England. Uploaded by Earthsound. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Modern Times

- ▶ Civil war (1641-1651, monarchy restored 1660)
 - ▶ Religious conflict
 - ▶ Conflict between England, Scotland, Ireland
 - ▶ Republicans vs. Royalists
- ▶ Traumatic experience, king cannot rule without parliament
- ▶ 1688 “Glorious Revolution” (or Dutch invasion?) → 1689 Bill of Rights, Constitutional Monarchy
- ▶ 1707 Acts of Union (English and Scottish Parliament)
→ “United Kingdom”
 - ▶ Customs and monetary union, economic benefits for Scotland
 - ▶ One parliament/monarch for both countries
 - ▶ *Separate legal systems retained*
- ▶ 1800 Union with Ireland

Modern Times II

- ▶ 1832 Well-off middle class men get the vote
- ▶ 1867 (Some) male workers get the vote
- ▶ 1872 Secret ballots and other electoral reforms
- ▶ 1911 Lords': *suspensive* veto
- ▶ 1918 Universal male suffrage (over 21) + women over 30 get the vote
- ▶ 1928 Equal voting rights for men and women



Source: UK public domain via
Wikimedia Commons

Modern Times III

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 - ▶ British Empire in 1922: 458m people, 1/4 of the world's population and land area
 - ▶ 1947: Independence and partition of India
 - ▶ 1956: Suez crisis
 - ▶ 1980-1997: End of the Empire

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- ▶ 1997-1999 Devolution for Scotland and Wales
 - ▶ Scottish Parliament re-established
 - ▶ Welsh Assembly
- ▶ 1998 Directly elected Mayor for Greater London

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- ▶ 1998 Directly elected Mayor for Greater London
- ▶ 2015: Not-So-Great Britain? A Disunited Kingdom? What *is* the British state?

What is the "Westminster model" ?

- ▶ An ideal type
- ▶ For comparativists: a political system where power is centralised (democracy as rule of the majority)

Lijphart's Idea

- ▶ Two-party system
- ▶ Single-party cabinets
- ▶ Parliamentarism & dominance over parl.
- ▶ Non-PR voting system
- ▶ Unitary state
- ▶ Unicameralism or asymmetrical bicameralism
- ▶ Flexible constitution & no review
- ▶ Central bank not independent

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We'll get back to this over the course of the term

What is the "Westminster model" ?

- ▶ An ideal type
- ▶ For comparativists: a political system where power is centralised (democracy as rule of the majority)
- ▶ British ideas even more idealised
- ▶ Essentially: strong political leadership **plus** accountability
- ▶ Civil liberties & Gentlemen's agreements
- ▶ Absolute sovereignty of parliament & centralised and unified administration →
- ▶ Co-operation and conflict between "Westminster" and "Whitehall"

Westminster and Whitehall

Westminster	Whitehall
Parliamentary sovereignty	Permanence
Single Party Majority in Parliament	Anonymity
Collective cabinet responsibility	Neutrality
Party discipline, amateurs	Expertise/knowledge
Choice between (two) disciplined parties	Informal networks
Accountability through free and fair elections	Accountability to political masters
Strong cabinet government	Protects the public interest

Source: adapted from Kavanagh et al., 2006, p. 44

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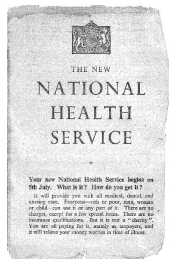
Source: adapted from Kavanagh et al., 2006, p. 44

Problem:

- ▶ Developed by the ruling elites to justify what they do
- ▶ Was never accurate, does not necessarily capture any of the dynamics of the British state

The Changing British State

- ▶ Relatively minimal state in the 19th century
- ▶ Development towards a welfare state around 1900
- ▶ Post-war or Keynesian welfare state during the 1950s-70s
 - ▶ Increase in taxation and government spending
 - ▶ Huge civil service
 - ▶ State involved in all aspects of public, political, economic and private life
 - ▶ Became the target for Mrs. T.'s reforms
- ▶ Still highly centralised, with a clear hierarchy
- ▶ "Deformed modernism"



By Ministry of Health,
and the Central Office
Of Information
(National Health
Service Western Isles
Health Board) [Public
domain], via
Wikimedia Commons

Government vs. Governance

- ▶ Government: old-style, top-down politics
- ▶ Governance: a vague and contested concept
 - ▶ Unitary centre unable to deal with modern state
 - ▶ Multitude of (external) actors
 - ▶ Blurring of borders, centre much less powerful (if there is a centre)
 - ▶ Governance: a multi-level activity (MLG, the EU, local government etc.)
 - ▶ Emphasis on processes and networks
- ▶ Challenge to the Westminster model, building block for new models

The Differentiated Polity Model

- ▶ Developed by Rhodes

- 1. Governance
- 2. Inter-governmental relations (EU etc.)
- 3. Segmented executive and "policy chimneys"
- 4. (Informal) policy networks
- 5. Power-dependence and exchange
- 6. Hollowing out of the state (central government)
 - ▶ Upwards
 - ▶ Outwards
 - ▶ Downwards

The Asymmetric Power Model

- ▶ Developed by Marsh, Richards and Smith
 - ▶ Partial agreement with Rhodes but . . .
1. Structured inequality of actors
 2. Elitist British political tradition
 3. Asymmetric power (central government controls resources)
 4. Government dominant in exchanges
 5. Core executive segmented but strong
 6. External constraints are limited

The Models compared

Dimension	Westminster Model	Differentiated Polity Model	Asymmetric Power Model
Representation	limited	diverse	limited with reforms
Organisation	hierarchical	diverse	hierarchical but fragmenting
Distribution of power	deformed pluralism/elitist	pluralist	elitist
Core executive	unified	segmented	segmented
Role of executive	dominant	weak	dominant
Sovereignty	absolute within state	undetermined	sovereignty reconstituted
Form of governance	state centred	governance without government	state centred with new forms of power

Summary and Outlook

- ▶ UK: A large, important Western European State
- ▶ On an unusual trajectory for at least the last 200 years
- ▶ Difficult to separate realities from myth/wishful thinking/propaganda
- ▶ Next week: Changing British political traditions & ideologies
- ▶ In two weeks' time: the constitution

Class Questions

1. How is the UK different from/similar to Germany and France?
Please consider *various* dimensions
2. How have pre-modern elements affected the nature of the British state?
3. Why and how is the Westminster model not an adequate description of the modern British state?
 - ▶ Work in five groups
 - ▶ Designate one person to keep notes

Readings I



Beetham, David et al. (2003). “Democratic Audit: Towards a Broader View of Democratic Achievement”. In: *Parliamentary Affairs* 56 (2), pp. 334–347. DOI: [10.1093/pa/gsg023](https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsg023).



Blau, Adrian (2004). “Fairness and Electoral Reform”. In: *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6.2, pp. 165–181. DOI: [10.1111/j.1467-856X.2004.00132.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2004.00132.x).
URL: <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2004.00132.x>.




Readings II

-  Chadwick, Andrew and James Stanyer (2011). “The Changing News Media Environment”. In: *Developments in British Politics 9*. Ed. by Richard Heffernan, Philip Cowley and Collin Hay. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 215–237.
-  Cowley, Philip (2011). “Political Parties and the British Party System”. In: *Developments in British Politics 9*. Ed. by Richard Heffernan, Philip Cowley and Collin Hay. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 91–112.
-  Denver, David (2011). “Elections and Voting”. In: *Developments in British Politics 9*. Ed. by Richard Heffernan, Philip Cowley and Collin Hay. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 70–90.




Readings III

-  Dunleavy, Patrick and Helen Margetts (2001). “From Majoritarian to Pluralist Democracy?: Electoral Reform in Britain Since 1997”. In: *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 13.3, pp. 295–319. DOI: 10.1177/095169280101300304. URL: <http://jtp.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/095169280101300304>.
-  Ford, Robert and Matthew J. Goodwin (2014). “Understanding UKIP. Identity, Social Change and the Left Behind”. In: *The Political Quarterly* 85.3, pp. 277–284. DOI: 10.1111/1467-923X.12099.
-  Hay, Colin (2007). “Whatever Happened to Thatcherism?” In: *Political Studies Review* 5.2, pp. 183–201.
-  Jones, Bill and Philip Norton, eds. (2014). *Politics UK*. 8th ed. London: Routledge.

Readings IV

-  Kavanagh, Dennis et al. (2006). *British Politics*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
-  Kelso, Alexandra (2011). “New Parliamentary Landscapes”. In: *Developments in British Politics 9*. Ed. by Richard Heffernan, Philip Cowley and Collin Hay. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 51–69.
-  McLean, Iain (2007). “The National Question”. In: *Blair’s Britain*. Ed. by Anthony Seldon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 487–508.

Readings V

-  Rhodes, R. A. W. (2005). “Everyday Life in a Ministry: Public Administration as Anthropology”. In: *The American Review of Public Administration* 35 (1), pp. 3–25. DOI: 10.1177/0275074004271716. URL: <http://arp.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/0275074004271716>.
-  Richards, David (2011). “Changing Patterns of Executive Governance”. In: *Developments in British Politics 9*. Ed. by Richard Heffernan, Philip Cowley and Collin Hay. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 29–50.
-  Russell, Meg (2009). “House of Lords Reform: Are We Nearly There Yet?” In: *The Political Quarterly* 80.1, pp. 119–125. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-923X.2009.01968.x.

Readings VI

-  Russell, Meg (2011). “Constitutional Politics”. In: *Developments in British Politics 9*. Ed. by Richard Heffernan, Philip Cowley and Collin Hay. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 7–28.
-  Scully, Roger and Richard Wyn Jones (2011). “Territorial Politics in Post-Devolution Britain”. In: *Developments in British Politics 9*. Ed. by Richard Heffernan, Philip Cowley and Collin Hay. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 113–129.
-  Wilks-Heeg, Stuart (2012). “How Democratic is the UK? The 2012 Audit”. In: *Political Insight* 3.2, pp. 8–11. DOI: 10.1111/j.2041-9066.2012.00104.x.

Readings VII



Wilson, Richard (2002). "Portrait of a Profession Revisited". In: *The Political Quarterly* 73.4, pp. 381–391. DOI: 10.1111/1467-923X.00492. URL: <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1111/1467-923X.00492>.



Woodhouse, Diana (2002). "The Law and Politics: In the Shadow of the Human Rights Act". In: *Parliamentary Affairs* 55 (2), pp. 254–270. DOI: 10.1093/parlij/55.2.254. URL: <http://pa.oupjournals.org/cgi/doi/10.1093/parlij/55.2.254>.