

# The British Political Tradition

## The Political System of the United Kingdom

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- ▶ Guardian Headlines UK
  - ▶ Madeleine McCann: Parents win libel damages
  - ▶ Nigel Farage: EU response to migrant boat crisis would bring jihadis to UK
  - ▶ Economic growth halves ahead of election

## Revision: three models of UK politics

1. The Westminster Model
2. The Differentiated Polity Model
3. The Asymmetric Power Model

## Last week's class questions

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

# Outline

## Intro

## Ideas and Ideologies

Ideologies in British Politics

Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism

## Decline

Political Decline

Economic Stagnation and Decline

## Summary & Class Questions



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## Today: Tradition

- ▶ Major institutions in place for many centuries, hardly changed after 1918
- ▶ Glorious revolution: limited government, constitutional monarchy
- ▶ Many problems solved by Irish secession
- ▶ After 1688/1745 hardly any (violent) conflict (outside Ireland) about
  - ▶ Form of government/constitution
  - ▶ The Nation
  - ▶ Distribution of resources
  - ▶ Ideology (cf France, Germany, Italy)
- ▶ “Postwar consensus”
- ▶ Ended by Thatcherism?

## British Governments from 1940

from-to	PM(s)	parties
40-45	Churchill	Coalition
45-51	Attlee	Labour
51-64	Churchill, Eden, Macmillan, Douglas-Home	Conservative
64-70	Wilson	Labour
70-74	Heath	Conservative
74-79	Wilson, Callaghan	Labour
79-97	Thatcher, Major	Conservative
97-10	Blair, Brown	Labour
10-14	Cameron (Clegg)	Conservative/Liberal Democ- rats

# What are ideologies?

- ▶ Consistent system of political ideas and perceptions → political action
- ▶ “Closed”
- ▶ Going back to the French revolution
- ▶ Major ideologies developed during 19th century:
  - ▶ Liberalism
  - ▶ Nationalism
  - ▶ Conservatism
  - ▶ Socialism

# Ideologies in British Politics

- ▶ Notoriously unpopular (pragmatism)
- ▶ But: salient left-right dimension brings together various (super)-issues
  - ▶ The state vs the market
  - ▶ collectivism vs Individualism
  - ▶ Equality of outcomes vs merit
  - ▶ Progressive vs minimal taxation

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- ▶ Radicalisation during 1970s
- ▶ Labour: “Third Way” from 1990s
- ▶ Cameron: “Compassionate Conservatism” (initially)

# What is Liberalism?

- ▶ Ideology of a new class (merchants, professionals)
- ▶ John Locke (1632-1704), John Stuart Mill (1806-73)
- ▶ Basic human rights and freedoms more important than authority, society, the state
- ▶ Individuals must not harm others, no other limits on liberty
- ▶ Government exists to guarantee liberty
- ▶ Free markets promote individual freedom and economic growth
- ▶ Dominant ideology of the 19th century
- ▶ Turn in the late 19th century: liberty requires (some) economic security → progressive taxation, more active government



## What is Conservatism?

- ▶ A reaction against the (French) Revolution
- ▶ Edmund Burke (1729-97)
- ▶ Conservatives suspicious of (coherent) ideology and sceptical of all great schemes
- ▶ Emphasis on tradition, moderation, authority
- ▶ Organic view of society (vs. individualism)
- ▶ Paternalistic view of government, not necessarily in favour of markets and modernisation
- ▶ *Not* Christian Democracy

# What is Socialism?

- ▶ A reaction to (early) industrialisation
- ▶ Improve the lot of the working (and lower middle) classes
- ▶ Public or worker ownership of means of production
- ▶ Individual rights but limited economic freedom
- ▶ Four important strands in the UK
  - ▶ Trade Unionism (bargaining)
  - ▶ Fabianism (reform, pragmatism)
  - ▶ Non-Marxist Socialism (gradual transformation of capitalism)
  - ▶ Marxism

# What is Thatcherism?

- ▶ Thatcher radicalised Conservatism
- ▶ Economic Liberalism:
  - ▶ Market Radicalism
  - ▶ Small government
  - ▶ Lower taxes, privatisation, Monetarism instead of Keynesianism
  - ▶ Benefit cuts
  - ▶ New Public management, against trade unions
- ▶ Plus authoritarian elements
  - ▶ Nationalism
  - ▶ Moral Conservatism
- ▶ (Electorally) successful at the time, but made Conservative brand “toxic”
- ▶ Parallel radicalisation of Labour (not successful)
- ▶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izjs0UV12fo>

# Thatcherism...

1. A break with the past?
  2. A resolution of the 1970s crisis?
- ▶ Both points controversial (in academic circles)

## The End of Ideology and the Third Way?

- ▶ “New Labour” moved to the centre
- ▶ (Largely symbolic) modification of Clause IV (nationalisation)
- ▶ Accepted many premises of Thatcherism
  - ▶ Market mechanisms, incentives
  - ▶ Lower taxes
  - ▶ Public-Private partnerships
  - ▶ Pro-business
  - ▶ “Tough on crime”
  - ▶ Sceptical of benefits

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- ▶ Just another standoff between Labour’s left & right wing?
- ▶ Cameron’s “modern compassionate Conservatism”
  - ▶ Detoxifying the conservative brand by moving to the centre
  - ▶ “Notting Hill Set” isolated

# The Role of Ideology?

- ▶ Ideology less prominent than in the 1970s/80s
- ▶ Emphasis on results, not principles
- ▶ Yet ideological (=fundamental?) issues relevant:
  - ▶ Privatisation/re-nationalisation of public services
  - ▶ Afghanistan/Iraq
  - ▶ Europe, Immigration
  - ▶ Workers vs. capital owners
- ▶ Political ideas still relevant



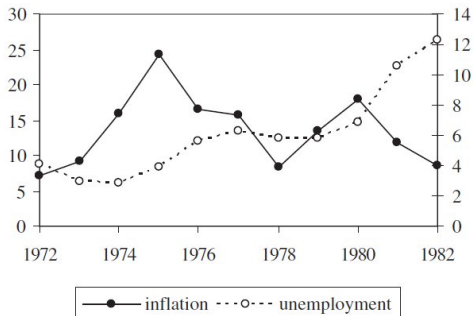
## From Empire to EU

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- ▶ “Britain won the war, lost the peace”
- ▶ Relatively smooth process of decolonisation reduced former centre of Empire to middle-sized European power
- ▶ No longer a world power (Suez 1954)
- ▶ But also not involved in European Integration (unlike France) – a late-comer and trouble-maker
- ▶ “Special Relations” with US and Commonwealth
- ▶ Economic decline, pound crisis
  - ▶ 1976: 2.3 billion rescue loan from IMF
  - ▶ 1992: Exit from ERM (“Black Wednesday”)

## The economic crisis of the 1970s



Source: OECD, *Economic Outlook*, various years.

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- ▶ Economic facts and political interpretation

## Is/was there economic decline?

- ▶ GDP/capita (EU-15):  
Britain 3rd in 1960, 9/10/11th in 1970/80/90,  
back to 4th in 2002, currently 6th
- ▶ Recovery in 1990s not uniform, largely  
due to the role of London (financial services)
- ▶ Some  
areas amongst the poorest in Western Europe
- ▶ Industrial centres of the north all but wiped out
- ▶ Low productivity

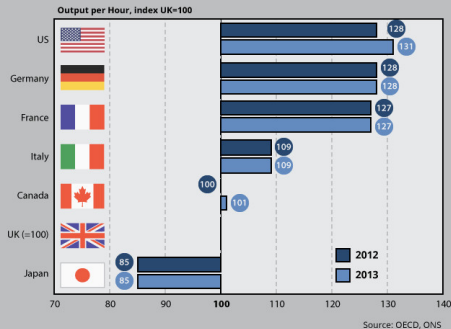


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# Is/was there economic decline?

## Levels of productivity (current prices)

Current price productivity is referenced to UK=100. Any country above 100 is more productive than the UK and any country below 100 is less productive.



Final estimates for 2013 show that the US, for every hour worked, produced 31 per cent more output relative to the UK.

Source: ONS, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/reli/cp/international-comparisons-of-productivity-2013-final-estimates/info-icp-feb-15.html>



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- ▶ Horrendous infrastructure, investment backlog
- ▶ Hit hard by the financial crisis (but bounced back)



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## Decline: why?

Argument	Cause	Remedies
Culture	Anti-enterprise culture, elitist education	Change of attitudes
Empire	Empire as cushion, imperial overstretch	Adaption to changed status
Industry	Poor management, unions	New management techniques and culture, reduce power of unions
Finance Institutions	The City's short-termism Overload	Longer-term investments State as a solution/problem?

Source: adapted from Kavanagh et al. p. 128

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zL\\_m5Cznen0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zL_m5Cznen0)

# Summary

- ▶ Britain spiritual home of classic ideologies
- ▶ Most of the time, slow and gradual development of the state
- ▶ Ideologies as such currently unpopular, but
  - ▶ Enormously important during 1970s-80s
  - ▶ Big conflicts/questions persist
- ▶ One of these: How to explain/manage/reverse *decline*
- ▶ Next week: The (changing) constitutional framework

## Class questions

- ▶ Why did the Third Way appeal to many Labour leaders in the 1990s?
- ▶ Which explanation for Britain's relative decline do you find most useful/convincing?
- ▶ (Liberalism has been more successful as a set of ideas than in helping a party to win votes – discuss)