

Comparative Politics Case Study: United Kingdom

Background Information (Past)

- Geography
 - Hard to invade
 - Politically – able to develop its own institutions without foreign interference
 - The **Continent** – UK does not consider themselves to be a part of it
 - UK = Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, England
 - Great Britain = Wales, Scotland, England
- Feudalism in Middle Ages
 - Contractual agreement between lords and kings
 - **Fiefdom** – land granted by a king to a noble in exchange for support
 - **Mixed monarchy** – king balanced by nobles
- **Magna Carta**
 - 1215 agreement to preserve rights of English nobles from royal encroachment, limiting monarch's power to stay within the law
- Rise of Parliament
 - Parliament – began as extension of king's court
 - House of **Commons** – Knights and **burghers** (town dwellers, middle class, bourgeoisie)
 - Not “representative” at this time
 - Only a few males who were locally wealthy or powerful
 - House of **Lords** – nobles, top churchmen
- Rise of the Prime Minister
 - In 1700s – PM could not pick **ministers** (king did) and the cabinet was not responsible to Parliament
 - William Pitt the Younger restored cabinet and PM to power and made them responsible only to Commons, not the king
 - Began tradition that the leader is of the largest party in Commons and picks cabinet
 - PM = focus of political power
- Democratization of Parliament
 - Late 1700s – not democratic or representative
 - Right to vote for landowners
 - Party formation
 - **Whigs** – merchants, manufacturers, became Liberal Party
 - **Tories** – landed aristocracy, became Conservative Party
 - Members of Parliament (MPs) were not ordinary people
 - House of Lords – hereditary peers
 - House of Commons – landowners and well-off people
 - **Whig Democracy** – democracy for the few that eventually expands to include the many
 - **Reform Act of 1832** – expanded electorate, Commons should be representative and responsive to the masses
- Rise of the **Welfare State** – system that redistributes wealth from rich to poor
 - Early 1900s – working men received the right to vote
 - Parties paid attention to education, housing, jobs, medical care
 - **Noblesse Oblige** – look to upper class to take care of lower

Key Institutions

- **Constitution**
 - No single written constitution but a collection of Common Law, Magna Carta, Bill of Rights based on customs and traditions
 - Parliament (Commons) can pass any law so changes occur over time without difficulties or obstacles
 - Negative – little guarantee to human rights
- **Crown** – (originally king) monarchy, Parliament, cabinet, civil servants
- **Monarch** – head of state, figurehead, Elizabeth II
 - Psychological bond to hold a country together
 - Sovereign is already occupied so no political battles over it
 - *Dignified* office with symbolic but no real political power
- **Prime Minister** – *efficient* office, head of government, leads party, makes political deals
 - If chief does something foolish, will be blamed
 - Respect for head of state will not diminish → legitimacy
 - “British do not need to love their PM, they love their queen”
 - Controls cabinet and leader of the largest party in Parliament
 - **Whips** – Parliamentary party leader who makes sure they vote with party
 - Strong party discipline in UK
 - Can call new elections whenever he/she thinks the party will do best (win more seats)
 - Resides in **Whitehall** – main British government offices
- **House of Commons** (aka Parliament)
 - **Westminster** – Parliament building
 - Chooses the executive leaders (PM) and becoming more controlled by PM
 - Becoming less important as PM usually always gets his/her way
 - Largest party = Her Majesty’s Government v. Loyal **Opposition**
 - 646 members
 - Each side of chamber has five rows of benches (front row reserved for cabinet and shadow cabinet)
 - Neutral Speaker elected for life from MPs
 - Never votes or takes sides but preserved order (Betty Boothroyd)
 - Can only go up to 5 years without a general election
 - **By-elections** – to replace a vacant seat due to death or retirement
- **House of Lords**
 - 1999 reforms – kicked out most of hereditary peers, turned over to **life peers** (distinguished Britons named for their own lifetimes)
 - Currently – 500 life peers, 92 hereditary peers, 26 top churchmen
 - Limited powers – can delay legislation but not more than 30 days for financial bills and 2 years on other bills
 - Can amend legislation and send back to Commons, which can just delete changes
 - Fewer than 300 lords actually turn up → quorum = 3
 - **Law lords** – top judges in court system
 - With Human Rights Act 1998 – can declare unconstitutionality
- **Cabinet**
 - **Government** = British Cabinet
 - MPs (mostly from Commons, few from Lords) who are high up in parties and important political figures
 - A lot of experience as ordinary MPs, then **junior ministers**, and then cabinet ministers
 - Serve as policy innovators

- PMs usually make sure to pick cabinet ministers with different viewpoints from different political parties
 - Balancing factions in cabinet helps keep party together
 - PM Thatcher picked only Tories loyal to her and was criticized as being dictatorial
- American Cabinet
 - Seldom meets, counts for little, experts from various field but mostly without political experience
 - Serve as administrators
- **Fusion of Powers** – connection of executive and legislative branches in parliamentary systems
 - Cabinet straddles the gap between executive and legislative
 - “Collective responsibility” – stick together and support PM in public
 - In contrast to U.S. separation of powers
- **Select Committees** – set up in 1979 to scrutinize the workings of ministries
- Political Parties (see handout)
 - More cohesive, centralized, and ideological
 - **“Two-plus” party system** – two big parties and several small ones
 - **Single-member districts** – each district sends one person to the legislature
 - **First past the post** – plurality win rather than majority
 - **Majoritarian system**- electoral system that encourages dominance of one party in parliament
 - Tend toward two large parties (left and right)
 - Liberals want **proportional representation** – multimember districts with seats awarded by the % parties win

Political Culture

- Key is not social class but rather **solidarity** – feeling of cohesion
- Become a **meritocracy** – promotion based on ability rather than hereditary
- **“Public” schools** – actually private and expensive → British elite
 - Labour sought to do away with private boarding schools
 - Instead, have resorted to upgrading the quality of publicly support comprehensive schools
 - Education lags behind other industrialized nations (65% of 17-year-olds are in school)
- **Oxbridge**
 - Real path to position and power
 - MPs, cabinet ministers, PM – most from Oxbridge
 - Small % of students go into politics but those who do have advantages
- **Class and Voting**
 - **Class voting** – working class votes left, middle class votes right (in general but not always true)
 - Other factors affect voting behavior
 - Urban v. Rural
 - Cities – intellectuals who criticize existing state and call for reform, workers wages
 - Countryside- calmer and more conservative, traditions
 - Regional voting
 - Periphery votes against core areas
 - Scotland and Wales vote Labour, England stays Tory
 - Religion
 - Big cities are less religious than small towns
- **British civility** – good manners in politics, fairly decent towards each other
- **Center-seeking** – tendency of political parties toward moderate politics
 - **Center-peaked** – most people in the middle, necessary to sustain democracy

- Traditions and symbols add to legitimacy
 - Rightness about the political system
 - Related to **authority** – ability to be obeyed

Patterns of Interaction

- **Party image** – Electorate's perception of a given party
- **Party identification** – psychological attachment of voter to political party
- **Swing vote** – change in parties in elections
- National and Local Party
 - **Safe seat** – constituency where voting has favored a given party
 - Party leaders are normally assigned safe seats because it's embarrassing if they lose
 - Some constituencies insist that candidates actually live in district (most don't)
 - **Carpetbaggers** – candidate from outside constituency (U.S. usage)
- Parties and Interest Groups
 - Labor Unions – constituent members of Labour party
 - Contributed to funds and budgets, provided grass-roots manpower and organization
 - **Trades Union Congress (TUC)** – British labor federation
 - No Labour party leader can completely ignore the wishes of union leaders
 - Charges that Labour is run by and for unions → too far left, too powerful
 - Claim Labour controls unions, not other way around
 - **Interested member** – MP known to represent an interest group
 - **Confederation of British Industry (CBI)** – conservative counterpart of TUC
 - Speaks for British employers but has no formal links to Conservative party
 - CBI members and money support Tories
- Parties Face Each Other
 - **Question Hour** – Monday through Thursday, for MPs to aim questions at cabinet ministers
- Cabinet and Civil Servants
 - Cabinet ministers are generalists, (not specialists) come and go, and depend on civil servants
 - Highest civil servants = **permanent secretaries**
 - Know the problems, personnel, interests, and budget of their ministry

Devolution of Powers

- **Devolution** – central government turns some powers over to regions
- Britain is as highly centralized **unitary system** – power in capital with little autonomy for other areas
- **Regional Nationalism** – separatist movements in some peripheral areas
- **Devolution of Legislatures** – they have their own parliaments/assemblies
 - Northern Ireland
 - Ulster problem
 - History of poor treatment by England – Potato Famine
 - Conflicts with Catholic Republic of Ireland
 - **Home rule?** – giving a region some autonomy to govern itself
 - Irish Republican Army (IRA) uses Sinn Fein to be elected (do not actually take seats because need to take oath to queen)
 - Wales
 - Issue of nationalism = Language (Cymric)
 - Party – Plaid Cymru
 - Scotland
 - Presence of economic factor in rising nationalism when oil was discovered
- **Quasi-federal** – halfway federal

Comparison Matrix Outline

I. Source of Political Legitimacy**A. What is the source of authority and power?**

- 1) Authority and power = "Crown":
 - a) Parliament (Commons)
 - b) Monarch
 - c) Cabinet
 - d) Prime Minister

B. Why do citizens accept the regime as legitimate?

- 1) Disliked absolutism
- 2) Tradition gives the sense that the government is in the right.

C. What are the important aspects to the political culture?

- 1) Social class
- 2) Solidarity – Feeling of cohesion within a social class
- 3) Contribute to voting behavior, attitudes of labor unions and parties

D. What is the relevance of political culture to the political systems?

- 1) Serve to deepen feelings about the rightness of the system
- 2) Contribute to society's stability and continuity

E. How does the process of political socialization work?

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 1) Family | 5) Social Class |
| 2) School | 6) Gender |
| 3) Religion | 7) Political Parties |
| 4) Peer groups | |

II. Society and Politics**A. Socio Economic Organization**

- 1) Racially: around 7% Nonwhite (4 percent Asian, mostly Pakistanis, and 2 percent Black)
- 2) Working Class – typically less affluent and educated
- 3) Middle Class – Professionals, more affluent and educated

B. Political Consequences of this socio-economic organization

- 1) Institutional expression (by parties or policies)
 - i. Labour Party (left) – working class
 - ii. Conservative Party (Traditional Tory) – business, middle class
 - iii. Tony Blair's New Labour Party goals: friendly to business, growth, and political reform
- 2) Political Conflict
 - Party opposition to own party leader policies
 - Old-style Conservatives threatened by Thatcherite policy for total capitalism
 - Attitude toward the European Union caused a split in the Tories
 - Thatcherites favored Common Market (opposed EU infringement on British sovereignty (Euroseptc view)
 - John Major and his followers liked the EU (Euroenthusiast view)

III. Relationship Between Citizens and State**A. What are the roles played by the citizen in political life? (voting parties, other involvement)**

- 1) Voting, referendums

B. Why do citizens differ in their degree and type of political involvement? What factors affect this?

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1) Class | 4) Religion |
| 2) Region | 5) Urban v. Rural |
| 3) Ethnic Group | |

IV. Political and Constitutional Framework**A. Type of political and economic system**

- 1) Parliamentary political system
- 2) Free market Capitalism

B. The institutions and structure of the national government

- 1) Formal and informal institutions, their powers and arrangements
 - i. Monarch – symbolic, *dignified* office
 - ii. Cabinet
 - a. Minister – head of department

- b. Civil Servants
 - Permanent Secretaries – highest civil servants
 - iii. Prime Minister
 - iv. House of Commons
 - v. House of Lords
 - 2) Political parties and interest groups:
 - i. How did they develop? What do they do? How are they organized?
 - a. Majoritarian system
 - b. Two-plus party system
 - c. Single-member districts – plurality victors
 - ii. What interests does each represent?
 - a. See Section IIB1
 - b. See Political Parties Handout
 - iii. What is their link to the government and the political process?
 - a. Policies and arguments based on interests or goals of party
 - iv. How are the political leaders recruited, advanced, or replaced?
 - a. Each electoral district sends one person to the legislature
 - b. First Past the Post or FPTP (Winner-takes-all)
- C. What is the extent or scope of government? (Political, economic, and social areas)
 - 1) Free-market system – limit scope of government
 - 2) Nationalized Health Care – increased scope of government
 - 3) Welfare programs – increased scope of government
- D. How does the policy making process work?
 - 1) First Reading: Title of bill is announced and copies of it are distributed.
 - 2) Second Reading: House of Commons debates the general principles contained in the Bill
 - 3) Committee Stage: Bill is passed to a specific Standing Committee constituted to deal with the bill. The bill is subjected to a thorough line-by-line examination and amendments are made where necessary.
 - 4) Report Stage: Bill is reviewed. All members of Commons have an opportunity to speak and vote at this stage, making it distinct from the Standing Committee Stage, where only about 18 MPs review it.
 - 5) Third Reading: Commons looks at final version of the bill. If substantial amendments are demanded, the bill would be sent back to the Standing Committee for further consideration.
 - 6) Lords' Stage: If the Lords make changes to the bill, the bill is sent back to the Commons for approval or overriding of the changes. Lords may also delay the bill for 30 days on financial bills and 2 years for other bills.

V. Political Change

- A. Source(s) of change
 - 1) Industrialization in the 18th century
 - 2) World War II
 - 3) Economic Crisis
- B. Nature of political change
 - 1) Gradual Change
- C. Consequences of the change
 - 1) Voting rights expanded from nobles to working class (Source 1)
 - 2) Work and Welfare Reform: Rise of labor unions, state mandates education, retirement plans (Source 1)
Extension of rights to the common man: Education, medical care, housing, jobs (Source 1)
 - 4) Collective Consensus: avoid domestic fighting esp. when fighting the world (Source 2)
 - 5) Beveridge Report: Report on the state of health care and social care (Source 2)
 - 6) National Health Service established in 1948 (Source 2)
 - 7) Party split in UK over economic policies (traditional v. neoliberal Tories) (Source 3)
 - 8) Privatized industries controlled by the state, except Health care (Source 3)
 - 9) Legislation limited union chiefs' abilities to call strikes, and the number and length of strikes in Britain dropped drastically (Source 3)
- D. Impact of the change on the regime
 - 1) Decreased labour union support
 - 2) Rise in Thatcherism
 - 3) New Labour rises (Tony Blair) with British socialism and Thatcherism

UK Four Questions:**1) Why does there always seem to be tension between governments and their citizens?**

- Pluralism – multiple interests groups operating within the policymaking process in order to achieve their goals
- Hyperpluralism – too many interest groups vying for power results in the government not being able to carry out policies
- Pluralistic stagnation – Beer's thesis that interest groups out of control produce policy log jam
- Tension between governments and citizens
 - So many constituents try to get their interests heard but there are so many that the government is unable to satisfy all requests
 - Disagreements in policies due to differences in party ideologies
 - Economic issues and policies
 - Gordon Brown and nationalization of the banks
 - Foreign Policies
 - Tony Blair and Iraq War

2) How do historical and international forces shape that relationship between state and society?

- Glorious Revolution – major shift of regime
 - Asserted Parliament over monarch
 - No laws or taxes without Parliament's consent
 - Majority of Englishmen approved (stronger support for Parliament)
- Magna Carta – prevented state (monarch) from having too much control and power
 - Society (groups of Barons) was able to check the power of the state
- The Reform Act
 - 1832 – allowed for more middle class to vote (only expanded to 7% adults)
 - 1867 – doubled electorate, 16% of adults can vote
 - 1884 – added farm workers to the electorate, nearly complete male suffrage
 - Established the principle that the Commons should be representative of and responsible to the broad mass of citizens
 - Stronger connection between state and society
- 1918 – women got the vote
- International Forces
 - “Special Relationship” to the U.S.
 - Tony Blair supported Iraq War, most Britons and Europeans were against it
 - A division between state and society
- European Union
 - Most Britons supported being part of the EU
 - Most Britons don't want EU Constitution
 - “Europe yes, euro no”
 - Lose ability to control currency

3) Why have some – but only some – states developed stable democratic regimes?

- Preconditions of Democracy
 - Level of Economic Development
 - Education and literacy are needed for technological efficiency
 - Primitive transportation and communication isolate people
 - Modernization – new organizations (labor unions) to express interests
 - Better living standards and health conditions before people start worrying about preserving the environment, supporting the elder, civil rights, etc.
 - International Environment of Democracy
 - Decision about democracy is influenced by other states
 - Powerful states may prohibit or impose democracy
 - Prestige of democracy in the world has waxed and waned
 - i. Regimes other than democracy seemed to promise faster routes to prosperity
 - Incentives – Economic alliances
- Persistence and rejuvenation of authoritarian forces and structures
 - Democratic transitions are shallow and did not penetrate institutions with authoritarian ideologies

4) How do countries with different types of governments and levels of resources deal with economic, ethnic, and other issues?

- UK deals with issues by “muddling-through” or improvising as they go
 - Works better for small problems, but for conflicts such as those in N. Ireland, matters escalate
- Economic Issues
 - Thatcher’s plan to privatize and deregulate industries
 - Based on idea that subsidizing inefficient factories and mines would only drain the economy
 - Weak firms went under, while thousands of new small and middle-sized firms sprang up
 - Closed hundreds of unprofitable pits and eliminated 20,000 jobs
- Ethnic Issues
 - Northern Ireland – Good Friday Agreement 1998
 - Power-sharing agreement with UK and N. Ireland after 30 yrs of violence
 - Aims for peaceful ethnic relations
 - British subjects from previous colonies
 - Entitled to work in UK
 - Muslims are especially discriminated against by whites
 - UK’s policies with these issues are weak, alienate several nonwhites

UK Current Events

Social

Racism in Britain

Tony Blair was confident that he could avoid more problems between the Muslim Britons and other Britons in the country. In 2006, the old system where there were bargains between the Muslims in Britons and the Britons had been rid of. The government is being attacked on both sides. From the right, public has complained that the government is hardly doing anything to the radical/reactionary Muslim groups. It's attacked from the left for using fight against terrorism as an excuse for assaults on Muslims and their cultural rights. Problems for government: narrowing the social, economic, and cultural gap between Muslims and countering the threat from other groups ready to commit violence or "elsewhere in the name of Islam."

Politics

The Plaid Cymru had recently launched a new website. MP Adam Price states that the party hopes to encourage debate and make younger voters became involved since the younger generation uses technology a lot. Price also hopes that this new website will bring young voters into "a more realistic path to independence" which would hopefully be lead to "an independent Wales." Polls have shown that 8% of voters wanted an independent Wales within the EU and 5% wanted an independent Wales outside both the UK and EU.

Gordon Brown's polls have declined. Currently, about 27% of the Labour party intends to vote in the next election. Recently, when America's leadership was absent, Brown's standing was increased. A decline in Brown's ratings may be due in part to the takeover by Lloyds, a large bank in Britain that Brown promoted. The take over by Lloyds was supposed to provide a safe haven for troubled HBOS, another large bank. Instead, it threatens to bring down the combined Lloyds Banking Group. It was announced recently that there is an expected loss of £10 billion.

Conservatives plan to commit more to their plan of "localism"-devolving more power from central to local government and beyond. Included in their plan is to grant power of competence to local councils to improve their neighborhoods and new ways to let councils retain the tax benefits of local business growth and new housing.

Economy

UK's economy is currently in a recession too. As a result, Chancellor of Exchequer (treasurer) Alistair Darling has given permission to add up to £150 billion, initially £75 billion. The intent of this is to make it easier for commercial banks to lend money, in hopes that more people would want to borrow to buy goods and services.

The Plaid Cymru is calling for a £3 stimulus package from the UK government to create and save 40,000 jobs in Wales between now and 2011. Mr. Jones, the Plaid Cymru party leader, claims that Gordon Brown is showing no worry for the Welsh economy.

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