CHAPTER

8

POLITICS IN BRITAIN

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Country Bio

UNITED KINGDOM

Population
61.8 million

Territory
94,525 square miles

Year of Independence
From twelfth century

Year of Current Constitution
Unwritten; partly statutes, partly common law and practice

Head of State
Queen Elizabeth II

Head of Government
Prime Minister David Cameron

Language
English; plus about 600,000 who regularly speak Welsh and about 60,000 who speak Gaelic; plus immigrants speaking languages of the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere

Religion
Nominal identification in census: Church of England 26.1 million, Roman Catholic 5.7 million, Presbyterian 2.6 million, Methodist 1.3 million, other Christian 2.6 million, Muslim 1.5 million, Hindu 500,000, Sikh 330,000, Jewish 260,000, other 300,000, no religion 8.6 million, no reply 4.4 million

In a world of new democracies, Britain is different because it is an old democracy. Its political system has been evolving for more than 800 years. In medieval times, the king of England claimed to rule France and Ireland, too. While the claim to rule France was abandoned in the fifteenth century, sovereignty was gained over Wales and Scotland. The government of the **United Kingdom** was created in 1801 by merging England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland under the authority of Parliament in London.

Unlike new democracies, Britain did not become a democracy overnight. It became a democracy by evolution rather than revolution. Democratization was a slow process. The rule of law was established in the seventeenth century, the accountability of the executive to Parliament was established by the eighteenth century, and national political parties organized in the nineteenth century. Even though competitive elections had been held for more than a century, the right of every adult man and woman to vote was not recognized until the twentieth century.

The influence of British government can be found in places as far-flung as Australia, Canada, India, and the United States. Just as Alexis de Tocqueville travelled to America in 1831 looking for the secrets of democracy, so we can examine Britain for secrets of stable representative government. Yet the limitations of the British model are shown by the failure to transplant its institutions to countries gaining independence from the British Empire, and even more by the failure of institutions that have worked in England to bring political stability in Northern Ireland.

The evolution of democracy in Britain contrasts with a European history of countries switching between democratic and undemocratic forms of government. Whereas the oldest British people have lived

in the same political system all their lives, the oldest Germans have lived under four or five constitutions, two democratic and two or three undemocratic.

At no point in history did representatives of the British people meet to decide what kind of government they would like to have, as happened in America at the end of the eighteenth century, and as has happened many times in France. There is no agreement among political scientists about when England developed a modern system of government.[1] The most reasonable judgment is that this occurred during the very long reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901, when institutions were created or adapted to cope with the problems of a society that was increasingly urban, literate, industrial, and critical of unreformed institutions. However, the creation of a modern system of government does not get rid of the problems of governing.

POLICY CHALLENGES FACING THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

The general election of 2010 has faced British party leaders with their biggest political challenge in more than half a century. Normally, the party with the most votes gains an absolute majority of seats in the House of Commons. It can thereby take control of the chief offices of government, the prime ministership and Cabinet. However, in 2010, no party won the 326 seats needed to have a majority of MPs with seats in the House of Commons. The **Conservative Party** under the leadership of David Cameron came first with 307 seats, the outgoing Labour government of Gordon Brown trailed in second place with 258 seats, and the **Liberal Democratic Party** led by Nick Clegg came third with 57 seats.

After losing three successive elections, the Conservative leadership was desperate to gain office. After half a century of Liberal leaders claiming that they wanted their party to become a party of government, a hung Parliament (that is, a House of Commons in which no party had an absolute majority) gave the Liberals an opportunity to gain office. Following a week of intense negotiations, the Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties formed the country's first coalition government since that led by Winston Churchill in 1940 to fight World War II.

The coalition government's chief offices are divided between Conservative David Cameron as **prime minister** and Liberal Democratic leader Nick Clegg as deputy prime minister (see Box 8.1). Conservative MPs head most government departments

BOX 8.1

Two Faces at the Top of Government

While a government can have only one head, the Conservative and Liberal Democratic coalition has two faces at the top: David Cameron, the Conservative prime minister, and Nick Clegg, the Liberal Democratic deputy prime minister.

Both party leaders are youthful; each was forty-three years old on assuming the highest offices in government and neither had held high office before. Both have been full-time politicians since leaving university.

Cameron started as a young assistant to a Conservative Cabinet minister and was then a lobbyist. He won the leadership on the grounds that he was not associated publicly with the electoral defeats of his predecessors and could present himself as a centrist, post-Thatcherite Conservative. In opposition, Cameron's strategy was to make the party electable by moving it to the political center. He endorsed measures to improve the environment, accepted liberal policies on gay and minority rights, and endorsed such popular programs as the National Health Service. Cameron silenced Thatcherite critics by claiming that the alternative to changing the party was a fourth election defeat.

Clegg, a polylingual supporter of the EU, was an assistant to a Conservative in the European Commission in Brussels. Because of his views on Europe, he joined the Liberal Democratic Party and served a term as a Member of the European Parliament before becoming a British MP in 2005. Unlike some of his Liberal Democratic colleagues, he was never a member of the Labour Party, nor has he identified himself with the left of center, as have most of his predecessors as party leader.

See: Peter Snowdon, *Back from the Brink* (London: Harper Press, 2010); Paul Marshall and David Laws, eds., *The Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* (London: Profile Books, 2004).

with a Liberal Democrat as their deputy, but Liberal Democrats are in charge of major departments concerned with the environment, business, and the economy. A German-style coalition compact recorded agreement on policies; it involved concessions by both parties.

The first challenge facing the government is to keep the coalition together. Some Conservatives were unhappy that their leader did not try to form a minority government that held onto office by avoiding controversial legislation and relied on divisions among its opponents to remain in office. Many Conservatives oppose EU measures, whereas Liberal Democrats are strong supporters of greater British integration into the EU. Some Liberal Democrats were unhappy because they consider their policies closer to the **Labour Party** on, for example, which programs to cut and which taxes to increase in order to deal with the massive budget deficit that the coalition inherited from its Labour predecessor.

The coalition partners agreed to disagree about what kind of electoral system should be used at the next national election. The Conservatives favor keeping the existing first-past-the-post system, in which the candidate with the most votes in a constituency, whether less or more than half, becomes its MP. The Liberal Democrats have favored the introduction of proportional representation as a fairer system, and incidentally, one which would more than double their number of MPs. Coalition leaders have agreed to hold a referendum in May 2011 offering voters the choice between the first-past-the-post system and the alternative vote, in which voters list their second and third preferences for an MP and these votes may be transferred to ensure that the winner has the support of at least half of the constituency's voters. The coalition has also agreed to reduce the number of MPs and to fix the term of Parliament to five years, except in unusual circumstances, rather than allowing the prime minister of the day to call a national vote sooner if he or she thinks election victory is likely.

Traditionally, experts interpreted the doctrine of the sovereignty of Parliament to mean that the government can do whatever it wants as long as it has the backing of a majority in the House of Commons. However, many problems facing British government are "intermestic," because globalization is blurring the traditional distinction between international and domestic problems. While a coalition agreement can be managed in London, effective economic, national security, and trade policies involve the cooperation of national governments and intergovernmental institutions scattered from Berlin

Two People, Two Party Leaders, One Coalition Government

An election result with no party winning a majority of seats has resulted in party leaders who campaigned against each other sharing power as prime minister (David Cameron, Conservative) and deputy prime minister (Nick Clegg, Liberal Democrat).

David Bebber/AFP/Getty Images/Newscom

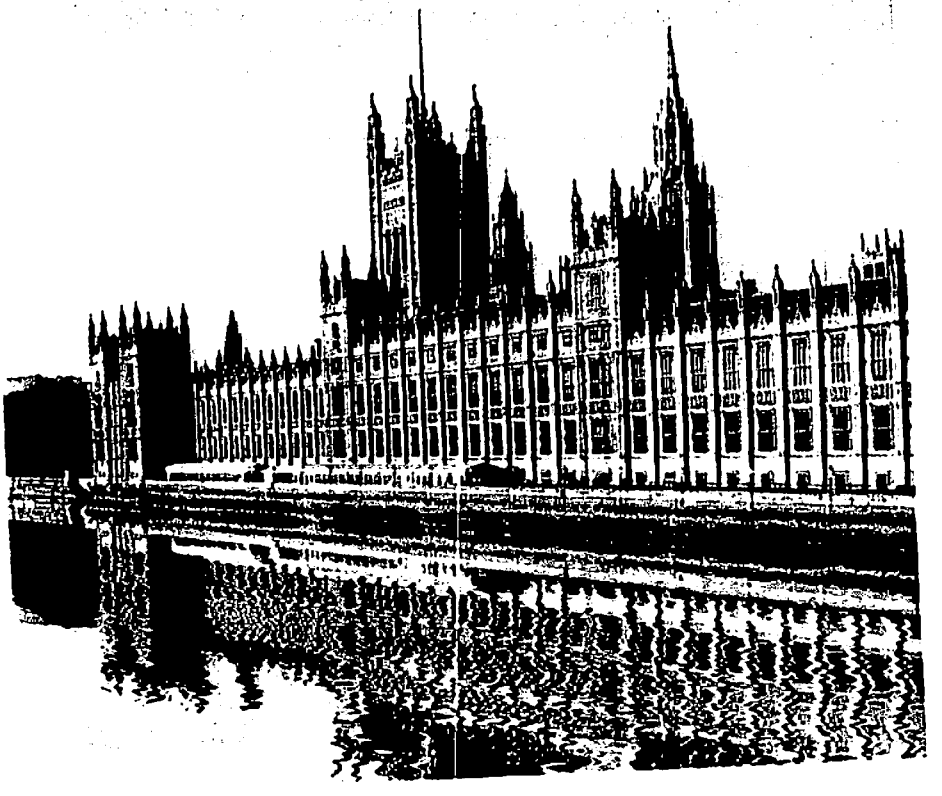
and Brussels to Washington and Asia. Whatever their party, Britain's governors accept the inevitability of globalization. Many top ministers spend as much as one day a week at meetings in other countries.

Globalization challenges the country's governors to answer the question, "Where does Britain belong?" Traditionally, the answer has been that Britain is a major world power having close ties with Commonwealth countries, the United States, and Europe.

The British Empire was transformed into the Commonwealth, a free association of fifty-three sovereign states with members on every continent, after World War II. The independent status of its chief members is shown by the absence of the word *British* from the name of the Commonwealth. Its members range from Antigua and Australia to India, Pakistan, and Zambia. Commonwealth countries differ from each other in wealth, culture, and their commitment to democracy. The Commonwealth has no military or economic power and its diplomatic influence is slight. When it sought to put pressure on the dictatorship of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe left the Commonwealth.

Every British prime minister claims a special relationship with the United States. The traditional view, dating back to the time of Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, was "America provides the brawn and we provide the brains." However, the number of countries with which America has a special relationship keeps expanding, whereas British prime ministers have not built equally strong relationships with other countries. After the end of the Cold War, the emergence of the United States as a unique global force has made the relationship more attractive to Britain but less relevant to Washington. When President George W. Bush formed a "coalition of the willing" to attack Iraq in 2003, Prime Minister Tony Blair was eager to participate in the war. Subsequent official reviews of the decision have questioned his evidence and whether his actions were in Britain's own interests.

An all-party House of Commons committee concluded that the idea of a special relationship should be abandoned as misleading and that the United Kingdom should be "less deferential and more willing to say no to the U.S. on those issues where the two countries' interests and values diverge." A majority of the British public also rejects the idea of a special relationship with the United States while endorsing cooperation on specific issues where there are common interests.[2]



The Mother of Parliaments

Parliament has met in London by the River Thames for more than seven hundred years, and the clock tower of Big Ben is famous as a symbol of democracy in Canada and Australia as well as in Europe.

Maksym Gorpenyuk/ Shutterstock

The coalition government is under pressure to undertake a fundamental review of Britain's overall commitments abroad. The war in Afghanistan has revealed the cost in human life of budget cuts that left British soldiers short of protective equipment. Simultaneously, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force want more money for aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and planes. This goes against the coalition government's priority for cutting spending to reduce the country's budget deficit.

After rejecting becoming a founding member of the European Community in 1957, Britain joined it in 1973. The EU now has the power to impose regulations affecting British business, spending decisions in such fields as agriculture, and Acts of Parliament. Government ministers spend an increasing amount of their time negotiating with other countries of the EU on everything from political fundamentals to whether British beer should be served in metric units or by the traditional measure of a British pint. The Channel Tunnel makes the rail link to Paris shorter than that to the North of England or Scotland. Manufacturers such as the Ford Motor Company link their plants in Britain with factories across Western Europe, just as Ford links factories across American states.

One theory is that Britain could increase its influence in Washington and further afield by becoming a leading member of the EU. However, Britain has always had a limited commitment, seeing the EU as an important market but rejecting proposals to strengthen its supranational powers. The Conservative Party is divided between those who are skeptical of the benefits it brings and a hard core that wishes Britain, like Norway, were not an EU member state. Liberal Democrats are very pro-EU, and the Labour Party tends to evaluate EU measures in terms of its party interest. The coalition government has submitted a bill to Parliament requiring a national referendum to be held on any further changes in EU treaties.

In small countries, which have always recognized the influence of bigger neighbors, exchanging nominal sovereignty to participate in the EU presents no problems. However, it is a shock to Britons who pride themselves on being a leader in world affairs, rather than just another partner in an international coalition. However, many British opinion leaders now think that the country should play a smaller role in world affairs. In this era of globalization, it is not possible for Britain to become a small and prosperous country. The effective choice today is between Britain being a big, prosperous country or a big country that is not prosperous.

Government influences the market through taxing and spending policies, interest rates, and policies that are designed to stimulate growth and reduce unemployment. Increasingly, what happens to the British economy is also influenced by what happens elsewhere in the EU and on other continents too, because Britain imports much of its food and raw materials and pays for them by exporting manufactured goods, tourism, and the "invisible" services of international banks and financial institutions. The British pound sterling (£) is an international currency, but speeches by the prime minister and head of the Treasury do not determine its international value. This is decided in foreign exchange markets in which currency speculators play a significant role. Since 1997, the value of the British pound in exchange for the dollar has ranged from above $2.50 to less than $1.25. In 2010, the value of the pound fluctuated around $1.50. In the decade before the global financial crisis, the British economy grew by two-fifths and its growth rate was higher than the average for the EU and was similar to that of the United States.

When the 2008 global financial crisis erupted, a number of major British banks faced the threat of bankruptcy; the government hurriedly took ownership in a number of banks and pumped hundreds of billions of pounds of credit into the banking system to prevent its collapse. However, the cost of bailing out the banks, added to the cost of Labour government spending commitments designed with an eye on the 2010 election, resulting in a public sector deficit equivalent to more than 10 percent of gross domestic product. For every three pounds that are raised in taxes, the government spends almost four pounds.

The coalition government faces a double challenge: to reduce the size of the government's deficit and to stimulate a return to economic growth. When the coalition took office, the rate of growth was only 1 percent. There are built-in pressures to increase public expenditure, because an aging population requires more health care, longer life increases the cost of pensions, an educated population demands better education for their children, and a more prosperous society wants a better environment.

There is no agreement among professional economists or among coalition partners about how or whether all its desired economic goals can be achieved within the life of the coalition government. Most Conservatives want to give priority to spending cuts,

A Stronghold of Financial Capitalism

The financial institutions of the city of London, such as the London Stock Exchange, pictured here, are a major source of earnings for the British economy when times are good and of losses when times are bad.

Bloomberg/Getty Images

while most Liberals are prepared to maintain higher spending financed by higher taxes. In an emergency budget introduced in June 2010, the coalition government imposed major cuts in public expenditure and in public employment. It said mismanagement by Labour predecessors was the reason for doing so. However, during the life of a Parliament, it cannot evade the blame if the economy remains troubled, just as it will take the credit if economic conditions improve.

THE ENVIRONMENT OF POLITICS: ONE CROWN BUT FIVE NATIONS

The Queen of England is the best-known monarch in the world, yet there is no such thing as an English state. In international law, the state is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Great Britain is divided into England, Scotland, and Wales. The most distinctive feature of **Wales** is that one-quarter speak an old Celtic language, Welsh, as well as English. **Scotland**, once an independent kingdom, has been an integral part of Britain since 1707. However, the Scots have separate legal, religious, and educational institutions. The fourth part of the United Kingdom, **Northern Ireland**, consists of six counties of Ulster (note that Ulster has nine counties, three of which are in the Republic of Ireland). The remainder of Ireland rebelled against the Crown in 1916 and established a separate Irish state in Dublin in 1921. The current boundaries of the United Kingdom, colloquially known as *Britain*, were fixed in 1921.

The United Kingdom is a unitary state because there is a single source of authority, the British Parliament. However, the institutions of government are not uniform throughout the Kingdom. In the minds of its citizens, it is a multinational state, for people differ in how they describe themselves (see Table 8.1). In England, people often describe themselves as English or British without considering the different meanings of these terms. This does not happen elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In Scotland, almost three-quarters see themselves as Scots. In Wales, two-thirds identify as Welsh. In Northern Ireland, people divide into three groups, some seeing themselves as British, some as Irish, and others as Ulster.

Historically, Scotland and Wales have been governed by British Cabinet ministers accountable to Parliament. After decades of campaigning by nationalist parties seeking independence, in 1997, the Labour government endorsed **devolution**; an Act of Parliament gave responsibilities for policy to elected assemblies in Scotland and in Wales, and they came into being in 1999. The revenue of both assemblies comes from Westminster. It is assigned by a formula relating it to public expenditure on comparable policies in England.

The Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh has powers to legislate, to decide its own budget, and to initiate a variety of policies. Elections to the 129-seat Parliament mix the traditional British first-past-the-post electoral

National Identities
Identities of people vary by nation.

TABLE 8.1

	Region of Residence			
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
British	52%	24%	26%	37%
English, Scots, Welsh, Irish	37%	72%	65%	26%
Other, don't know	11%	4%	9%	37%*

*Includes 29% identifying as Ulster.
Sources: Calculated from British Social Attitudes survey, June–September 2008 (n = 4,486) and Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, October 2008–February 2009 (n = 1,216).

system and proportional representation. After the 1999 and 2003 elections, the Labour Party in Scotland formed a government in coalition with the Liberal Party. At the May 2007 Scottish election, the unpopularity of the British Labour Party gave the Scottish National Party (SNP) a margin of one seat over Labour, forty-seven seats to forty-six. The remaining seats were divided between the Conservatives (seventeen), Liberal Democrats (sixteen), and others (three).

Under the leadership of Alex Salmond as First Minister, the SNP established a minority government. Its first aim was to demonstrate that the SNP was not just a protest party but a party capable of governing as well as or better than British parties. Its second aim was to promote a referendum on independence for Scotland. The three Opposition parties reacted by establishing a commission to recommend increases in powers devolved to Scotland, subject to approval by the British government in London. At the May 2011 election of the Scottish Parliament, the Labour Party seeks to regain office. If it does, it will face a different situation than before, since it will not be the junior partner of a Labour government in London but trying to wriggle free of domination by a Conservative-led government in London while also opposing the Nationalist claim that this would be best achieved through Scottish independence.

The Welsh Assembly in Cardiff has powers over a variety of local and regional services and its activities are conducted in English and in Welsh. However, it does not have the power to enact legislation. It is elected by a mixed first-past-the-post and PR ballot. Labour has consistently been the biggest party at each election, but has difficulty in winning a majority of Assembly seats. After the May 2007 Assembly election, Labour held twenty-six seats; Plaid Cymru (the Welsh Language Party), fourteen; the Conservative Party, twelve; Liberals, six; and others, two. Labour and Plaid Cymru together formed a coalition government, which is possible because Plaid Cymru does not demand independence as the Scottish Nationalists do. The May 2011 Welsh election will decide the composition of a new coalition or minority government.

Northern Ireland is the most un-English part of the United Kingdom. Formally, it is a secular polity, but differences between Protestants and Catholics about national identity dominate its politics. Protestants, comprising about three-fifths of the population, want to remain part of the United Kingdom. Until 1972, the Protestant majority governed through a home-rule Parliament at Stormont, a suburb of Belfast. Many of the Catholic minority did not support this regime, wanting to leave the United Kingdom and join the Republic of Ireland, which claims that Northern Ireland should be part of the Republic.

After Catholics launched protests against discrimination in 1968, demonstrations turned to violence in 1969. The illegal **Irish Republican Army (IRA)** was revived and in 1971 began a military campaign to remove Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. Protestants organized illegal armed forces in response. In 1972, the British government abolished the Stormont Parliament, placing government in the hands of a Northern Ireland Office under a British Cabinet minister. Political violence has killed more than 3,700 people since the troubles began in 1969. After adjusting for population differences, this is equivalent to about 150,000 deaths in Britain or almost 750,000 political killings in the United States.

In 1985, the British government took the unprecedented step of inviting the Dublin-based government

of the Republic of Ireland to participate in institutions affecting the governance of part of the United Kingdom. A stable settlement requires the support of paramilitary organizations as well as political parties on both sides of the political divide. In 1994, the IRA announced a cessation of its military activity, and Sinn Fein, the party political wing of the Irish Republican movement, agreed to talks. Protestant paramilitary forces also announced a cessation of activities. On Good Friday, 1998, an agreement was reached for an elected power-sharing executive and cross-border institutions involving both Dublin and Belfast. Contrary to the practice of government at Westminster, power-sharing means that whatever the outcome of a Northern Ireland election, government must be a coalition of parties representing both the pro-British Protestant majority and the pro-Irish Republic Catholic minority. This has been described as "a unique form of devolution—involuntary coalition."[3]

An election to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007 gave the Democratic Unionist Party led by Dr. Ian Paisley thirty-six seats; Republican Sinn Fein, twenty-seven seats; the Ulster Unionist Party, eighteen seats; the pro-Irish Social Democratic and Labour Party, sixteen seats; the cross-religious Alliance Party, seven seats; and others, four seats. After intensive negotiations in which London and Dublin offered incentives to Irish Republicans and put pressure on Ulster Unionists, a coalition government was formed with Dr. Ian Paisley, an outspoken Unionist and Protestant, as First Minister, and Martin McGuinness, a Sinn Fein politician who had been active in the IRA, as Deputy First Minister, plus representatives of the Ulster Unionist Party and the Social Democratic and Labour Party. On Paisley's retirement, Peter Robinson became the Democratic Unionist party leader and First Minister.

While there is no agreement about national identity within Britain, there is no doubt about which nationality is the most numerous. England dominates the United Kingdom. It accounts for 84 percent of the UK population against 8 percent in Scotland, 5 percent in Wales, and 3 percent in Northern Ireland. In earlier editions of this book, this chapter has been called "Politics in England" because, as Tony Blair once said, "Sovereignty rests with me, as an English MP, and that's the way it will stay."[4] However, changes in the institutions of the United Kingdom have begun to affect politics in England. For example, in the 2005 British general election, the Conservative Party won the most votes in England but the Labour Party, thanks to its dominance in Scotland and Wales, won the most votes in the United Kingdom and a majority in the British Parliament. In 2010, the Conservative Party won an absolute majority of seats in England as well as having a big lead in votes there.

A Multiracial Britain

Throughout the centuries, England has received a relatively small but noteworthy number of immigrants from other parts of Europe. The Queen herself is descended from a titled family that came from Hanover, Germany, to assume the English throne in 1714. Until the outbreak of anti-German sentiment in World War I, the surname of the royal family was Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. By royal proclamation, King George V changed the family name to Windsor in 1917.

The worldwide British Empire was multiracial and so is the Commonwealth. Since the late 1950s, job-seekers from the West Indies, Pakistan, India, Africa, and other parts of the Commonwealth have settled in Britain. Hundreds of thousands of people from Australia, Canada, the United States, and the EU flow in and out of Britain as students or as workers. A strong British economy attracts temporary workers from Eastern European countries of the EU. Public opinion has opposed unlimited immigration and both Labour and Conservative governments have passed laws trying to limit the number of immigrants. However, these laws contain many exceptions.

Political disturbances around the world have resulted in an increasing number of immigrants who claim asylum as political refugees from troubled areas in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa. Some have valid credentials as refugees, whereas others have arrived with false papers or make claims to asylum that courts have not upheld. In response to popular concern, the government has tried to make deportation of illegal immigrants easier. However, the government has admitted that there are hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants in Britain.

The minority ethnic population of the United Kingdom has risen from 74,000 in 1951 to 4.6 million in the latest census, almost 8 percent of the UK population. All together, almost half of the minority category comes from the Indian subcontinent, a quarter are black people from the Caribbean or Africa, one in seven are of mixed British and minority origin, and the remainder are from many different countries.

Younger Generation is the Most Multi-Racial Generation

Schools and street scenes in big cities show that Britain is now a multiracial society.

Universal Images Group/ Diverse Images/Getty Images

Official statistics define the minority population by the one characteristic that they have in common—they are not white. Because persons placed in this catchall category have neither culture nor religion in common, there is a further subdivision by race and ethnicity. West Indians speak English as their native language and have a Christian tradition, but this is often not the case for black Africans. Ethnic minorities from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are divided between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, and most speak English as a second language. Chinese from Hong Kong have a distinctive culture. In addition, there are gender differences. There is a tendency for immigrant women not to speak English as well as male immigrants, and this is particularly the case for immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

With the passage of time, the ethnic minority population is becoming increasingly British-born and British-educated. This raises an important issue: What is the position of British-born offspring of immigrants? Whatever their country of origin, they differ in how they see themselves: 64 percent of Caribbean origin identify themselves as British, as do more than three-fifths of Pakistanis, Indians, and Bangladeshis, and two-fifths of Chinese. However, some offspring of immigrants have rejected integration. A coordinated terrorist attack in London on July 7, 2005, killing more than fifty people, was organized by British-born offspring of Pakistani immigrants who had been converted to jihadism at British mosques. British-born jihadists have been able to receive training in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan. The government has greatly increased police powers, justifying shoot-to-kill policies even when people wrongly suspected of being terrorists are the victims.

In response to terrorist attacks, the government has shifted from promoting multiculturalism to stressing the integration of immigrant families into the British way of life. The government seeks to promote a sense of Britishness among immigrants, giving lessons about rights and obligations of citizens to immigrants wanting British passports. British-born offspring of immigrants automatically gain citizenship. Whether they choose to adopt British ways is much influenced by family and ethnic background.

Many immigrants and their offspring are being integrated into electoral politics, since residential concentration makes their votes important in some parliamentary constituencies, where candidates from different immigrant groups may compete with each other. A disproportionate number of minority ethnic people have voted Labour. There are now hundreds of elected minority ethnic councilors in local government. The twenty-six ethnic Conservative and Labour MPs in the Commons today come from diverse backgrounds—India, Pakistan, the West Indies, Ghana, and Aden—and include three Muslim women. A white backlash against immigration organized by the British National Party has not received much electoral

support. At the 2010 election, the party won only 1.9 percent of the popular vote.

THE LEGACY OF HISTORY

The legacy of the past limits current choices, and Britain has a very long past. The continuity of England's political institutions through the centuries is remarkable. Prince Charles, the heir to an ancient Crown, pilots jet airplanes, and a medieval-named Chancellor of the Exchequer pilots the British economy through the deep waters of the international economy. Yet symbols of continuity often mask great changes in English life. Parliament was once a supporter of royal authority. Today, it is primarily an electoral college deciding which party is in charge of government.

The 1940 to 1945 wartime coalition government laid foundations for the introduction of a welfare state led by Winston Churchill. The victory of the Labour Party at the 1945 general election established a comprehensive National Health Service and took many major industries into state ownership. Between 1951 and 1964, Conservative governments led by Winston Churchill, Sir Anthony Eden, and Harold Macmillan maintained a consensus about the mixed economy welfare state. Economic growth, full employment, and low inflation led to an era of consumer prosperity, and there was the beginning of a big expansion of free university education. After thirteen years of Conservative government, the Labour Party under Harold Wilson won the 1964 election campaigning with the vague activist slogan, "Let's go with Labour." New names were given to government department offices, but behind their doors, many officials went through the same routines as before. The economy did not grow as predicted. In 1967, the government was forced to devalue the pound and seek a loan from the International Monetary Fund. Labour lost the 1970 election.

The major achievement of Edward Heath's 1970 to 1974 Conservative government was to make Britain a member of the EU. In trying to limit unprecedented inflation by controlling wages, Heath risked his authority in a confrontation with the left-wing-led National Union of Mineworkers, which struck for higher wages in what was then the state-owned coal industry. When Heath called the "Who Governs?" election in February 1974, the vote of both the Conservative and Labour parties fell. Labour formed a minority government with Harold Wilson as prime minister, and he won a bare majority at a second election held in October. Inflation, rising unemployment, and a contraction in the economy undermined Labour's platform. James Callaghan succeeded Wilson as prime minister in 1976, and the economy deteriorated. A loan from the International Monetary Fund was followed by the Labour government's adopting monetarist policies in an attempt to curb inflation.

When Margaret Thatcher won the 1979 election as leader of the Conservative Party, she became the first female prime minister of a major European country. Uniquely among modern British prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher gave her name to a political ideology emphasizing the value of letting people make decisions in the market rather than relying on government to promote their well-being (see Box 8.2.).

While proclaiming the virtues of the market and attacking big government, Thatcher did not court electoral defeat by imposing radical spending cuts on popular social programs. Thatcherite policies did not win favor among the electorate. On the tenth anniversary of Thatcher's tenure as prime minister, an opinion poll asked whether people approved of "the Thatcher revolution." Less than one-third said they did.[5]

Divisions among opponents enabled Thatcher to lead her party to three successive election victories. Militant left-wing activists seized control of the Labour Party, and in 1981, four former Labour Cabinet ministers formed a centrist Social Democratic Party (SDP) in an alliance with the Liberal Party. The Labour Party's 1983 election manifesto was described as the longest suicide note in history. After Thatcher's third successive election victory in 1987, the SDP leadership merged with the Liberals to form the Liberal Democratic Party.

During her third term of office, Thatcher became very unpopular in opinion polls. In autumn 1990, disgruntled Conservative Members of Parliament forced a ballot for the party leadership that caused her to resign. Conservative MPs elected a relatively unknown John Major as party leader, and he thereby became prime minister. In 1992, Major won an unprecedented fourth consecutive term for the Conservative government. However, a few months afterward, his economic policy, based on a strong British pound, crashed under pressure from foreign speculators. The Major government maintained such Thatcherite policies as the **privatization** of the coal mines and railways, but sniping from Conservative ranks and the rise of a reinvigorated Opposition undermined Major's authority.

The Meaning of Thatcherism

BOX 8.2

Among British prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher has been unique in giving her name to a political ideology, **Thatcherism**. Her central conviction was that the market offered a cure for the country's economic difficulties. She had more in common with the market-oriented outlook of President Ronald Reagan than with the mixed-economy welfare state philosophy of her Conservative as well as Labour predecessors.

In economic policy, the Thatcher administration experienced both successes and frustrations. Her anti-inflation policies succeeded, but unemployment increased. Industrial relations acts gave union members the right to elect their leaders and vote on whether to hold a strike. State-owned industries and municipally owned council houses were sold to private owners. What were described as "businesslike" methods were introduced into managing everything from hospitals to museums.

As long as it was in her hands, Thatcher believed in strong government. In foreign policy, she was a formidable proponent of what she saw as Britain's national interest in dealings with the EU and in alliance with President Ronald Reagan. The 1982 Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands, a remote British colony in the South Atlantic, led to a brief and victorious war there. Thatcher was also quick to assert her personal authority against colleagues in the Cabinet and against civil servants. The autonomy of local government was curbed and a property tax on houses was replaced by a poll tax on each adult.

Following her departure from office, Conservatives divided between Thatcherites, who sought to push market-oriented and anti-EU measures further, and those who believed that the time had come to maintain the status quo. David Cameron gained office in 2010 by avoiding association with Thatcherism.

See: Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993); Dennis Kavanagh, *The Reordering of British Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

In 1994, Tony Blair was elected Labour leader because he did *not* talk or look like an ordinary Labour Party member. Instead of being from a poor background, he was educated at boarding school, he studied law at Oxford, and his parents were Conservatives. To show that he rejected socialist values, he sought to relabel the party as the **New Labour Party** and proclaimed a vague Third Way philosophy modeled on that of President Bill Clinton. He pledged a pragmatic government that would do "what works" and appealed to the voters to "trust him." The strategy was electorally successful (see Box 8.3).

In his first term of office, Blair and his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, sought media publicity to demonstrate that Labour was good at governing. Blair appointed many media-oriented political advisors with little or no prior experience of working in government. Five years after becoming prime minister, Blair recognized the limits of a media-oriented strategy: "In opposition, announcement is the reality. For the first period in government, there was a tendency to believe this is the case. It isn't. The announcement is only the intention."[6]

The Blair government implemented Labour's long-standing program of constitutional reforms, including the devolution of powers to elected assemblies in Scotland and Wales and creation of a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland. Major laws protecting individual human rights were adopted. However, in the wake of terrorist attacks, the government sought to limit human rights in ways that drew protests from civil liberties groups. Blair welcomed such criticism as proof of his toughness.

In 2005, Labour again won a majority of seats in the House of Commons, making Tony Blair Britain's second-longest-serving prime minister in more than a century. Since a prime minister does not have a fixed term of office, when Blair's popularity fell in the opinion polls, he came under pressure from his long-serving and jealous heir apparent, Gordon Brown, to retire rather than fight a fourth election. Blair resigned in June 2007.

The Labour Party unanimously elected Gordon Brown as its leader on the basis of his record as the Chancellor of the Exchequer during a period when the economy grew, inflation was low, and unemployment

BOX 8.3

The Electoral Success of Tony Blair

Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party with the goal of winning elections. To make the party electable, he abandoned its traditional commitments to the trade unions and to socialist values. The strategy accomplished an unprecedented series of three straight Labour wins in three straight general elections. However, the Labour share of the vote declined from 43 percent in 1997 to 41 percent in 2001 and then to 35 percent in 2005.

As prime minister, Blair sought to make his office the focus of attention. A high priority was given to media publicity, where a sound bite or a clever phrase is sufficient. Political advisors used the prime minister's authority to push government ministers and civil servants to produce good headlines.

Blair promoted policies to change the delivery of state-financed health and education services by introducing more market mechanisms intended to increase efficiency and give citizens a degree of choice. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, played a key role, too, in allocating public expenditure. Many doctors, teachers, and public employees were demoralized or angered by these measures; for example, in 2006, university teachers staged their first nationwide strike.

In international affairs, Blair's chief initiative was to bond not only with Democratic president Bill Clinton but also with Republican president George W. Bush in support of the Iraq War. Since he left office, when his popularity was falling and Gordon Brown was pressing to take over, he has had a successful career in consultancies and lecture fees.

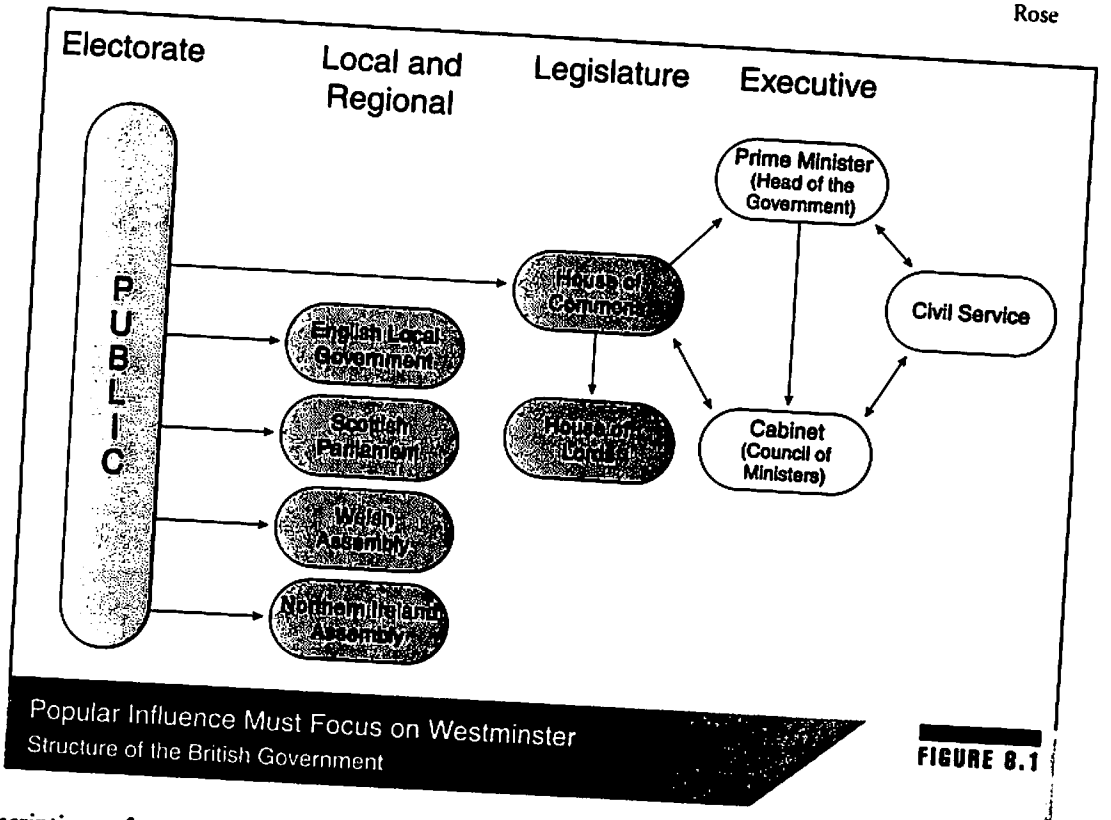
See: Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (London: Allen Lane, 2006); Terrence A. Casey, ed., *The Blair Legacy* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); Peter Mandelson, *The Third Man* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).

fell. Brown boasted that he had ended the economic cycle of "boom and bust." His critics charged him with trying to run an expensive Swedish-style welfare state without imposing the taxes necessary to finance it. Brown's hesitancy in making and explaining decisions, combined with a reserved personality, led to his approval rating in the polls falling as low as Blair at his worst. Labour critics fed stories of his faults to the media and Lord Peter Mandelson, a Cabinet colleague, privately described the relationship between Blair and Brown as "dysfunctional."

The world economic crisis and the subsequent plunge in the government's finances raised questions about Brown's achievements at the Exchequer. In May 2010, he led his party to defeat; Labour's 29 percent share of the popular vote was its second lowest since 1918. The new leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband, elected in September 2010, has the task of explaining to traditional Labour voters and ex-Labour voters where the party now stands. The position the Labour Party takes in opposition depends, in the words of a former Labour Cabinet minister, on whether the Conservative-Liberal Democratic coalition government "embeds a status quo it wouldn't have created" (that is, the New Labour legacy) and on "whether the country would welcome that with relief or be thirsty for greater change."[7]

THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

In Britain, the term *government* is used in many senses. People may speak of the *Queen's government* to emphasize enduring and nonpartisan features; they may refer to a *Labour government* or *Conservative government* to emphasize partisanship, or to *David Cameron's government* to stress a personal feature. The departments headed by Cabinet ministers advised by senior civil servants are referred to collectively as **Whitehall**, after the London street in which many major government departments are located. **Downing Street**, where the prime minister works, is a short street off Whitehall. **Parliament**—that is, the popularly elected House of Commons and the nonelected House of Lords—is at one end of Whitehall. The term *Parliament* is often used as another way of referring to the House of Commons. Together, all of these institutions are often referred to as **Westminster**, after the district in London in which the principal offices of British government are located. With devolution, institutions are found in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, too (see Figure 8.1).



Popular Influence Must Focus on Westminster
Structure of the British Government

FIGURE 8.1

Descriptions of a government often start with its constitution. However, Britain has never had a written constitution. In the words of a constitutional lawyer, J. A. G. Griffith, "The Constitution is what happens."[8] The **unwritten constitution** is a jumble of Acts of Parliament, judicial pronouncements, customs, and conventions that make up the rules of the political game. The vagueness of the constitution makes it flexible, a point that political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair have exploited to increase their own power. Comparing the written U.S. Constitution and the unwritten British constitution emphasizes how few are the constraints of an unwritten constitution (see Table 8.2). Whereas amendments to the U.S. Constitution must receive the endorsement of well over half the states and members of Congress, the unwritten constitution can be changed by a majority vote in Parliament or by the government of the day acting in an unprecedented manner.

The U.S. Constitution gives the Supreme Court the final power to decide what the government may or may not do. By contrast, in Britain, the final authority is Parliament, where the government of the day commands a majority of votes. Courts do not have the power to declare an Act of Parliament unconstitutional; judges simply ask whether the executive acts within its authorized powers. Many statutes delegate broad discretion to a Cabinet minister or to public authority. Even if the courts rule that the government has improperly exercised its authority, the effect of such a judgment can be annulled by a subsequent Act of Parliament retroactively authorizing an action.

The Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution allows anyone to turn to the courts for the protection of their personal rights. Instead of giving written guarantees to citizens, the rights of British people are meant to be secured by trustworthy governors. An individual who believes his or her personal rights infringed must seek redress through the courts by invoking the European Convention of Human Rights and the 1998 British Human Rights Act, adopted in emulation of it.

The **Crown** is the abstract concept that Britain uses in place of the continental European conception of the state. It combines dignified parts of the constitution, which sanctify authority by tradition and myth, with efficient parts, which carry out the work of government. The Queen is only a ceremonial head of state. The public reaction to the accidental death of Princess Diana was a media event but not a political event like the assassination of President Kennedy.

TABLE 8.2

British and American Constitutions
Comparing an unwritten and a written constitution

	Britain (unwritten)	United States (written)
Origin	Medieval customs	1787 Constitutional Convention
Form	Unwritten, vague	Written, precise
Final constitutional authority	Majority in Parliament	Supreme Court
Bill of individual rights	Borrowed from Europe	Yes
Amendment	Ordinary vote in Parliament; unprecedented action by government	More than majority vote in Congress, states
Policy relevance	Low	High

Queen Elizabeth II does not influence the actions of what is described as Her Majesty's Government. The Queen is expected to respect the will of Parliament, as communicated to her by the leader of the majority in Parliament, the prime minister.

What the Prime Minister Says and Does

Leading a government is a political rather than a managerial task. The preeminence of the prime minister is ambiguous, and this is especially so in a coalition government (see Box 8.4). A politician at the apex of government is remote from what is happening on the ground. The more responsibilities attributed to the prime minister, the less time there is to devote to any one task. Like a president, a prime minister is the prisoner of the law of "first things first." The imperatives of the prime minister are as follows.

- *Winning elections.* A prime minister may be self-interested, but he or she is not self-employed. To become prime minister, a politician must first be elected leader of his or her party. The only election that a prime minister must win is that of party leader. Seven prime ministers since 1945—Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, James Callaghan, John Major, and Gordon Brown—initially entered Downing Street during the middle of a Parliament rather than after a national election. In the eighteen elections since 1945, the prime minister of the day has ten times led the governing party to victory and eight times to defeat.
- *Campaigning through the media.* A prime minister does not need to attract publicity; it is thrust upon him or her by the curiosity of television and newspaper reporters. Media eminence is a double-edged sword, for bad news puts the prime minister in an unfavorable light. The personality of a prime minister remains relatively constant, but during a term of office, his or her popularity can fluctuate by more than 45 percentage points in public opinion polls.[9]
- *Patronage.* To remain prime minister, a politician must keep the confidence of a party, or in the case of David Cameron, of two parties (the Liberal Democrats as well as Conservatives). Potential critics can be silenced by appointing a quarter of MPs to posts as government ministers, who sit on front bench seats in the House of Commons. MPs not appointed to a post are backbenchers; many ingratiate themselves with their party leader in hopes of becoming a government minister. In dispensing patronage, a prime minister can use any of four different criteria: (1) personal loyalty (rewarding friends); (2) co-option (silencing critics by giving them an office so that they are committed to support the government); (3) representativeness (for example, appointing a woman or someone from Scotland or Wales); and (4) competence in giving direction to a government department.
- *Parliamentary performance.* The prime minister appears in the House of Commons weekly for half an hour of questions from MPs, engaging in rapid-fire repartee with a highly partisan audience. Unprotected by a speechwriter's script, the prime minister must show that he or she is a good advocate of government policy or suffer a reduction in confidence. By being in the Commons and participating in votes there, the prime minister is able to judge the mood of the governing party.

- *Making and balancing policies.* As head of the British government, the prime minister deals with heads of other governments around the world; this makes foreign affairs a special responsibility of Downing Street. When there are conflicts between international and domestic policy priorities, the prime minister is the one person who can strike a balance between pressures from the world "out there" and pressures from the domestic electorate. The prime minister also makes policy by striking a balance between ministers who want to spend more money to increase their popularity and a Treasury minister who wants to cut taxes in order to boost his or her popularity.

In a coalition government, the role of deputy prime minister is also important; Nick Clegg leads the Liberal Democratic Party, on whose support the prime minister depends for a parliamentary majority. In the formation of the coalition, Clegg bargained for a significant amount of patronage. The coalition pact involved compromises that balanced competing demands from each party as well as having policy commitments on which they agree (see Box 8.4). The extent to which Clegg is able to secure substantial media attention will depend on the issue at hand. His strategy for the Liberal Democrats doing well at the next general election is not oriented toward television appearances; he wants to change the electoral system to remove the handicaps under which it has suffered.

While the formal powers of the office remain constant, individual prime ministers have differed in their electoral success (see Figure 8.2), how they view their job, and their impact on government. Clement Attlee, Labour prime minister from 1945 to 1951, was an unassertive spokesperson for the lowest common denominator of views within a Cabinet consisting of very experienced Labour politicians. When an aging Winston Churchill succeeded Attlee in 1951, he concentrated on foreign affairs and took little interest in domestic policy; the same was true of his successor, Anthony Eden. Harold Macmillan intervened strategically on a

Keeping a Coalition Together

BOX 8.4

A coalition government gives new meaning to the doctrine of collective responsibility. Coalition ministers who competed against each other at the 2010 election are expected to support each other in the Commons and to refrain from briefing the media against each other. Equally important, they are expected to persuade backbench Conservative and Liberal Democratic MPs to vote for compromises necessary to maintain the coalition, even if these compromises sometimes depart from previously endorsed party policies.

The formation of the Con-Lib coalition was preceded by bargaining about issues that were likely to provoke disagreement between the two parties. The result was a thirty-six-page coalition pact recording the compromises reached. In addition, the pact listed issues on which public differences of opinion could be expressed, such as electoral reform.

Policymaking and coalition building starts in government departments. In the majority, the minister in charge and his or her deputy are from different parties. Thus, before a departmental position can be established on issues where the parties tend to differ, the departmental ministers must agree between themselves. If there is a disagreement between departments, it may be handled in the conventional way through Cabinet committees. However, if interdepartmental differences reflect partisan differences, competing claims of the coalition partners must be reviewed by the Conservative and Liberal Democratic leaders in order to maintain the unity of the coalition.

When a Commons vote is an issue of confidence in the government, both Conservative and Liberal Democratic MPs are expected to unite to keep it in office. However, political confrontation makes news, and journalists are always looking for signs of disagreement to publicize. Backbench Conservative and Liberal Democratic MPs are not bound by collective Cabinet responsibility. They may criticize a coalition policy when they dislike a compromise. In addition, all-party committees of MPs can hold hearings that reveal divisions within the coalition.

See: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/jked9a'409088/p0fg_coalition.pdf, accessed June 29, 2010. David Laws, *22 Days in May* (London: Biteback, 2010).

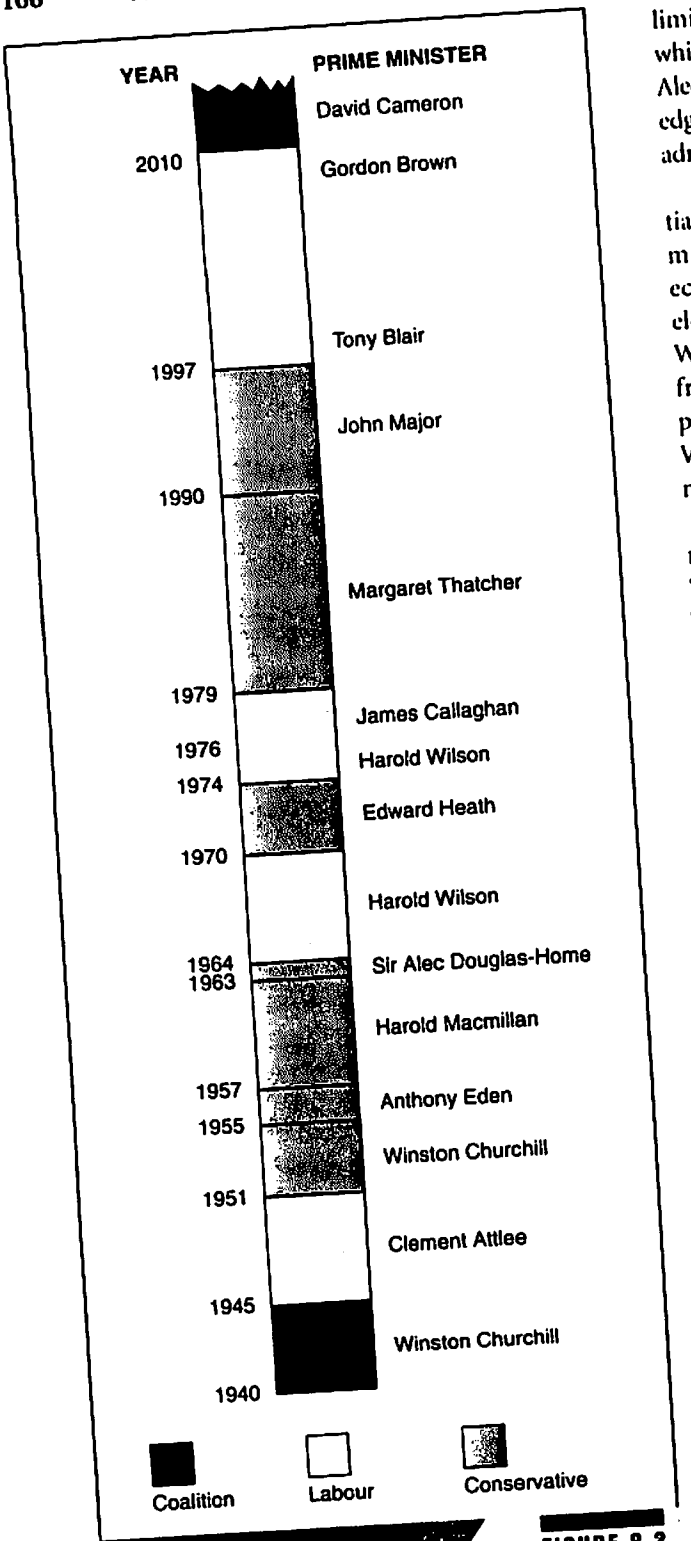


FIGURE 8.2 Long and Short Tenures in Downing Street
Prime Ministers and Governments since 1940

limited number of domestic and international issues while giving ministers great scope on everyday matters. Alec Douglas-Home was weak because he lacked knowledge of economic affairs, the chief problem during his administration.

Both Harold Wilson and Edward Heath were initially committed to an activist definition of the prime minister's job. However, Wilson's major initiatives in economic policy were unsuccessful, and in 1974, the electorate rejected Heath's direction of the economy. Wilson won office again by promising to replace confrontation between management and unions with political conciliation. James Callaghan, who succeeded Wilson in 1976, also emphasized consensus, but economic crises continued.

Margaret Thatcher had strong views about many major policies; associates gave her the nickname "Tina" because of her motto: There Is No Alternative. Thatcher was prepared to push her views against the wishes of Cabinet colleagues and civil service advisors. In the end, her "bossiness" caused a revolt of Cabinet colleagues that helped bring about her downfall. Her former colleagues welcomed John Major as a consensus replacement of a domineering Thatcher. However, his conciliatory manner was often interpreted as a sign of weakness. Sniping from ministers led Major to refer to his Cabinet colleagues as "bastards."

Tony Blair carried into the prime ministership the priority he gave in Opposition to attracting support from middle-class voters and business, and he paid little attention to traditional Labour activists and trade union officials. Cabinet ministers were supposed to support his strategy on pain of losing favor with Downing Street. While in charge of the Treasury, Gordon Brown used its power of the purse to influence Cabinet colleagues and to build up a coterie of supporters who would help him hasten Tony Blair's retirement and his own succession. After a brief honeymoon with public opinion, Prime Minister Brown fell out of favor and Labour ministers briefed the media about the need for changing the party's leadership to prevent defeat at the next election. Brown's critics were unwilling to mount an open challenge to his position, which is difficult to do under the party rules. When Brown lost the 2010 election, he immediately resigned.

Tony Blair's personalistic leadership led to claims that Britain now has a presidential system of government. However, by comparison with a U.S. president, a British prime minister has less formal authority and less security of office (see Table 8.3).

Prime Minister and President
Comparing the power of and processes for choosing a prime minister and a president.

TABLE 8.3

	Britain (prime minister)	United States (president)
Media visibility	High	High
Route to top	Parliament	Governor, senator
Chosen by	Party vote	State primaries and caucuses
Elected by	Parliament	National election
Term of office	Flexible, insecure	Four years, secure
Constitution	Unitary	Federal
Domestic influence	High	So-so
International role	Semi-independent	Superpower
Checks	Informal	Congress, Supreme Court

Source: Adapted from Richard Rose, *The Prime Minister in a Shrinking World* (Boston: Polity Press, 2001), 242.

The president is directly elected for a fixed four-year term. A prime minister is chosen by his or her party for an indefinite term and is thus vulnerable to losing office if confidence wanes. The president is the undoubted leader of the federal executive branch and can dismiss Cabinet appointees with little fear of the consequences; by contrast, senior colleagues of a prime minister are potential rivals for leadership and may be kept in Cabinet to prevent them from challenging him or her. With the support of the Cabinet and governing party, a prime minister can be far more confident than a president that major legislative proposals will be enacted into law, since the president is without authority over Congress. By contrast, the prime minister is at the apex of a unitary government, with powers not limited by the courts or by a written constitution.[10]

Coalition government introduces another distinction, for the role of the deputy prime minister is much more important than that of the American vice president. Nick Clegg is the leader of a party on whose votes the prime minister and the majority of Cabinet ministers depend for their jobs. Thus, when disagreements arise, David Cameron must bargain with his deputy rather than give orders to him.

The Cabinet and Cabinet Ministers

The **Cabinet** consists of senior ministers appointed by the prime minister; they must be either members of the House of Commons or of the House of Lords. As MPs as well as ministers, they contribute to what Walter Bagehot described as "the close union, the nearly complete fusion of the executive and legislative powers."[11]

Historically, the Cabinet has been the forum in which the prime minister brought together leading members of the governing party, many with competing departmental interests and personal ambitions, to ensure agreement about major government policies. A half century ago, there were usually two Cabinet meetings a week, and many took several hours to arrive at a political consensus. Tony Blair reduced the frequency of meetings to less than once a week and cut their average length to under an hour. Coalition government has revived the need for the Cabinet to meet.

The convention of Cabinet responsibility requires that all Cabinet ministers give public support to or at least refrain from public criticism of what the government is doing, even if they have opposed a policy in private. A minister unwilling to share responsibility has been expected to resign office. However, ministers almost always prefer to complain in private or leak their views to the press rather than resign.

Cabinet ministers remain important as department heads, for most decisions of government are made within departments, and departments are responsible for overseeing all the services of government, most of which are delivered by public agencies subordinate to and distant from Whitehall. Whitehall departments differ greatly from each other. The

coalition Cabinet formed in May 2010 had the following departments:

- *External affairs*: Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs; Defense; International Development
- *Economic affairs*: Treasury; Business, Innovation, and Skills; Energy and Climate Change; Transport
- *Legal and constitutional issues*: Justice and Lord Chancellor; Home Office and Women's Affairs
- *Social services*: Culture, Media, and Sport
- *Territorial*: Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs; Communities and Local Government; Northern Ireland office; Scotland office; Wales office
- *Managing government business*: Lord President of the Council and deputy prime minister; leader of the House of Commons; chief whip in the House of Commons; leader of the House of Lords

For example, the Department of Business, Innovation, and Skills supervises a larger staff than the Treasury. However, because of the importance of the Treasury's responsibility for taxation and public expenditure, it has more senior civil servants. The Business Department's staff has a dispersed variety of concerns, including the competitiveness of industry, trade, employment, and university education. The Treasury concentrates on one big task: the management of the economy. The job of the Chancellor of the Exchequer is more important politically, insofar as economic performance affects the governing party's electoral fate. But the head of the Department of Business, Vince Cable, is the Liberal Democratic Party's leading figure on economic affairs, and as a former Labour Party activist, his political background differs from that of the Conservative Chancellor.

Cabinet ministers are willing to go along silently with their colleagues' proposals in exchange for endorsement of their own measures. However, ministers often have to compete for scarce resources, making conflict inevitable between departments. Regardless of party, the Defense and Education ministers press for increased spending, while Treasury ministers oppose such moves. Cabinet ministers sometimes resolve their differences in Cabinet committees including all ministers whose departments are most affected by an issue.

A minister has many roles: initiating policies, selecting among alternatives brought forward from within the department, or avoiding a difficult or unpopular decision. A minister is responsible for actions taken by thousands of civil servants nominally acting on the minister's behalf and must answer for agencies to which Whitehall is increasingly contracting out responsibility for delivering public services. In addition, a minister is a department's ambassador to the world outside, including Downing Street, Parliament, the mass media, and interest groups. Not least, Cabinet ministers are individuals with ambitions to rise in politics. The typical minister is not an expert in a subject but an expert in politics. This skill has particular importance when MPs in two coalition parties must be asked to support what the minister is doing.

The Civil Service

Government could continue for months without new legislation, but it would collapse overnight if hundreds of thousands of civil servants stopped administering laws and delivering public services that had been authorized by Acts of Parliaments. The largest number of civil servants are clerical staff with little discretion; they carry out routine activities of a large bureaucracy. Only if these duties are executed satisfactorily can ministers have the time and opportunity to make new policies.

The most important group of civil servants is the smallest: the few hundred higher civil servants who advise ministers and oversee work of their departments. Top British civil servants deny they are politicians because of the partisan connotations of the term. However, their work is political because they are involved in formulating and advising on policies. A publication seeking to recruit bright graduates for the higher civil service declares, "You will be involved from the outset in matters of major policy or resource allocation and, under the guidance of experienced administrators, encouraged to put forward your own constructive ideas and to take responsible decisions."

Top civil servants are not apolitical; they are bipartisan, being ready to work for whichever party wins an election. High-level civil servants are expected to be able to think like politicians, anticipating what their minister would want and objections that would be raised by Parliament, interest groups, and the media. Civil servants like working for a political heavyweight who can carry the department's cause to victory in interdepartmental battles.

The relationship between ministers and higher civil servants is critical. A busy politician does not have time to go into details; he or she wants a brief that can catch a headline or squash criticism. Ministers expect higher civil servants to be responsive to their political views and to give advice consistent with their outlook and that of the governing party or the coalition. Civil servants like working for a minister who has clear views on policy, but they dislike it when a minister grabs a headline by expressing views that will get the department into trouble later because they are impractical. In the words of a senior civil servant, "Just because ministers say to do something does not mean that we can ignore reality."[12]

Both ministers and senior civil servants have been prepared to mislead Parliament and the public. When accused in court of telling a lie about the British government's efforts to suppress an embarrassing memoir by an ex–intelligence officer, the then-head of the civil service, Robert Armstrong, described the government's statements as "a misleading impression, not a lie. It was being economical with the truth."

The appointment of political advisors from outside Whitehall has caused difficulties with civil servants. The advisors are loyal to their minister and to the governing party. While experienced in dealing with personalities in the governing party and the media, they have no experience with Whitehall. When departmental policies attract criticism, some ministers now blame civil servants rather than take responsibility themselves. The head of the trade union of higher civil servants has argued, "There is a danger of descending into a search for scapegoats when problems emerge."[13]

The Thatcher government introduced a new phenomenon in Whitehall: a prime minister who believed civil servants were inferior to businesspeople because they did not have to "earn" their living—that is, make a profit. *Management* was made the buzzword in Whitehall, and it has continued under each of Thatcher's successors. Departments are now supposed to be run in a businesslike fashion, achieving value for money so that the government could profit politically by avoiding tax increases to pay for its spending priorities. Parts of government departments were "hived off" to form separate public agencies, with their own accounts and performance targets. However, when an agency's task is politically sensitive, such as the marking of national school examinations, the education minister cannot avoid blame if there are major errors in delivering examination marks to pupils.

The coalition government has Conservative and Liberal advisors for its ministries. It has also called on outside experts to head task forces and has created bodies to offer expert information. For example, the team of economists at the Office of Budget Responsibility is expected to produce an independent forecast of the state of the economy before the government announces its annual budget.

The Role of Parliament

The House of Commons is a rectangular room in which the majority of MPs supporting the government sit on one side and Opposition MPs sit facing them. The government's state of mind is summed up in the words of a Labour Cabinet minister who declared, "It's carrying democracy too far if you don't know the result of the vote before the meeting."[14] In the great majority of House of Commons votes, MPs vote along party lines. The Opposition cannot expect to alter major government decisions because it lacks a majority of votes in the Commons. For the life of a Parliament, it accepts the frustrations going with its minority status because it hopes to win a majority at the next election.

The government expects to get its way because its ministers are the leading politicians in the parliamentary majority. If a bill or a motion is identified as a vote of confidence in the government, defeat risks the government having to resign and call a general election. The leaders of the Conservative and Liberal coalition formed in 2010 have sought to alter this assumption so that a general election will only be called if both the coalition partners want this to happen.

Whitehall departments draft bills that are presented to Parliament, and few amendments to legislation are carried without government approval. Laws are described as Acts of Parliament, but it would be more accurate if they were stamped "Made in Whitehall." In addition, the government rather than Parliament sets the budget for government programs. The weakness of Parliament is in marked contrast to the U.S. Congress, where each house controls its own proceedings independent of the White House. A U.S. president may *ask* Congress to enact a bill, but cannot compel a favorable vote.

The first function of the Commons is to weigh political reputations. MPs continually assess their colleagues as ministers, potential ministers, and coalition partners. A minister may win a formal vote of confidence but lose status if his or her arguments are demolished in debate. They continually assess their leader as a person who will lead them to victory or defeat at the next election.

Second, backbench MPs can demand that the government do something about an issue and force a minister to explain and defend what he or she is responsible for. The party whip is expected to listen to the views of dissatisfied backbench MPs and to convey their concerns to ministers. In the corridors, dining rooms, and committees of the Commons, backbenchers can tell ministers what they think is wrong with government policy. If the government is unpopular and MPs feel threatened with losing their seats, they will be aggressive in demanding that something be done.

Publicizing issues is a third function of Parliament. MPs can use their position to call the media's attention to issues and to themselves. Television cameras are now in Parliament, and a quick-witted MP can provide the media with sound bites.

Fourth, MPs can examine how Whitehall departments administer public policies. An MP may write to a minister about a departmental responsibility affecting a constituent or interest group. MPs can request the parliamentary commissioner for administration (also known as the *ombudsman*, after the Scandinavian original) to investigate complaints about maladministration. Committees scrutinize administration and policy, interviewing civil servants and ministers. However, as a committee moves from discussing details to discussing issues of government policy, it raises a question of confidence in the government; this can divide a committee along party lines, with MPs in the governing party in the majority.

A newly elected MP contemplating his or her role as one among 650 members of the House of Commons is faced with many choices. An MP may decide to be a party loyalist, voting as the leadership decides without participating in deliberations about policy. The MP who wishes more attention can make a mark by brilliance in debate, by acting as an acknowledged representative of an interest group, or in a nonpartisan way—for example, as a wit. An MP is expected to speak for constituency interests, but constituents accept that their MP will not vote against party policy if it is in conflict with local interests. The only role that an MP rarely undertakes is that of lawmaker.

To keep the published salary of MPs from rising, they receive very generous expense allowances, including amounts for the upkeep of a second home, since many divide their time between London and their constituency outside London. The expense claims were not audited until after the press published evidence that MPs were claiming expenses for everything from cleaning the moat around their country house to remodeling a London flat that was quickly sold for a profit of tens of thousands of pounds. Hundreds of MPs paid back some expenses rather than defend their claims, and a few have been indicted on charges of criminal fraud. New rules now restrict expenses and open them to public scrutiny.

Backbench MPs perennially demand changes to make their jobs more interesting and to give them more influence. However, the power to make major changes rests with the government rather than the House of Commons. Whatever criticisms MPs make of Parliament while in opposition, once they are in government, party leaders have an interest in maintaining arrangements that greatly limit the power of Parliament to influence or stop what ministers do.

Among modern Parliaments, the House of Lords is unique because it was initially composed of hereditary peers, supplemented by lords appointed for life. However, in 1999, the Labour government abolished the right of all but ninety-two hereditary peers to sit in the House of Lords. Today, a large majority of its members are life peers who have received a title later in life for achievement in one or another public sphere, for having been government ministers without a seat in the House of Commons, or for being prominent financial donors to a party.

No party has a majority of seats in the House of Lords, and more than one-quarter of its members are cross-benchers who do not identify with any party. The government often introduces relatively noncontroversial legislation in the Lords, and it uses the Lords as a revising chamber to amend bills. Members of the Lords can raise party political issues or issues that cut across party lines, such as problems of the fishing industry or pornography. The Lords cannot veto legislation, but it can and does amend or delay the passage of some government bills.

Although all parties accept the need for some kind of second chamber to revise legislation, there is no agreement about how it should be composed or what its powers should be. In 2007, a majority of MPs voted in favor of a completely elected House of Lords, and the coalition government has affirmed its desire to move toward an elected upper chamber. However, the last thing the government of the day wants is a reform that gives the upper chamber enough electoral legitimacy to challenge government legislation.

The Courts and Abuses of Power

The creation of a Supreme Court as the highest judicial authority in the United Kingdom in 2009 replaced the centuries-old practice of the highest court operating as a committee of the House of Lords. The court consists of a president and eleven justices appointed by a panel of lawyers. Its chief function is to serve as the final court of appeal on points of law in cases initially heard by courts in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It also hears some cases from Scotland, which maintains a separate legal system, although its laws are usually much the same.

Although the new British Supreme Court has the same name as the highest court in the United States, its powers are much more limited. It can nullify government actions if they are deemed to exceed powers granted by an Act of Parliament, but it cannot declare an Act of Parliament unconstitutional. Governments often include clauses in Acts that give ministers broad discretionary powers. Parliament remains the supreme authority, deciding what government can and cannot do. In practice, when the government is under attack, it can usually rely on its own MPs to close ranks in its defense.

Britain's membership in the EU offers additional channels for judicial influence. The United Kingdom is now bound to act within laws and directives laid down by the EU. British judges can use EU standards when evaluating government actions, and plaintiffs can challenge British government actions at the European Court of Justice. The 1998 Human Rights Act of the Westminster Parliament allows citizens to ask British courts to enforce rights conferred by the European Convention on Human Rights.

There is tension between the principle that the elected government of the day should do what it thinks best and the judges' view that government should act in accord with the rule of law, whether it be an Act of Parliament or an obligation in a European treaty that the British government has endorsed. When judges have handed down decisions that ministers do not like, ministers have publicly attacked them. Judges have replied by declaring that they should not be attacked for enforcing the law; if the government does not like it, they say, it should pass a new Act of Parliament or alter a European law.

In constitutional theory, Parliament can hold prime ministers accountable for abuses of power by the government. In practice, Parliament is an ineffective check on abuses of executive power, because the executive consists of the leaders of the majority in Parliament. When the government is under attack, MPs in the governing party tend to close ranks in its defense. The government can use this shield to protect itself from charges of abusing its power.

Whitehall practices that abuse powers have been protected from parliamentary scrutiny by legislation on **official secrecy**. This legislation treats information as a scarce commodity that should not be given out freely. The Whitehall view is that "The need to know still dominates the right to know."[15] A Freedom of Information Act has reduced but has not ended the executive's power to keep secret the exchange of views within the Whitehall network. Information about policy deliberations in departments is often deemed to be not in the "public" interest to disclose, for it can make government appear uncertain or divided. The introduction of a coalition government is loosening up these restrictions, since there is now a need to consult more widely and openly among ministers and MPs in two parties. This makes unauthorized leaks to the media more likely.

Terrorist activities challenge conventional norms about individual rights and the collective interests of the state. The Labour government's proposals for reducing the rights of suspected terrorists have been condemned by Conservative and Liberal parties as creating the risk of a "siege" or "authoritarian" society.[16] At times, British government forces have dealt with the violence of the Irish Republican Army and illegal armed Protestant groups by "bending" the law, including fabricating evidence to produce convictions that courts have subsequently overturned. However, the government is slow to admit it has erred. For example, it took thirty-eight years before it admitted that the British Army's killing of thirteen Irish demonstrators

in Londonderry in 1972 was totally unjustified. In response to jihadist terrorist bombs in London in 2005, the police have been ready to use harsh measures against suspects, including shoot-to-kill responses when arresting suspects.

Occasional abuses of executive power raise problems for civil servants who believe that their job is not only to serve the elected government of the day, but also to maintain the integrity of government. This has led civil servants at times to leak official documents with the intention of preventing government from carrying out a policy that the leaker believes to be unethical or inadvisable (see Box 8.5).

Government as a Network

The ship of state has only one tiller, but whenever a major policy decision comes up, many hands reach out to steer it. Policymaking involves a network of prime minister, ministers, leading civil servants, and political advisors, all of whom share in what has been described as the "village life" of Whitehall.[17] However, the growth of government has increased specialization so that policymakers see less and less of each other. For a given issue, a relatively small number of people are involved in the *core executive* group that makes a decision. However, the people in decision-making networks are a floating population; the core network is not the same for transport and agriculture, or for health and defense.

The prime minister is the single most important person in government. Since there is no written constitution, a determined prime minister can challenge the status quo and turn government to fresh ends. But to say that the prime minister makes the most important decisions and less important decisions are left to departmental ministers leads to the question, "What is an important decision?" Decisions on issues in which the prime minister is not involved, such as social security, are more numerous, require more money, and affect more lives than most decisions made at Downing Street. Scarcity of time is a major limitation on the influence of the prime minister. In the words of one Downing Street official, "It's like skating over an enormous globe of thin ice. You have to keep moving fast all the time."[18] In a coalition government, major decisions cannot be made by a single politician because they require interparty agreement.

Within each department, the permanent secretary, its highest-ranking civil servant, usually has much more knowledge of a department's problems than does a transitory Cabinet minister. Political advisors brought into a department to put the best spin on what their minister does know less about the department's work than its career civil servants. However, they have the political advantage of knowing the minister better.

BOX 8.5

The inability of Parliament to hold the government of the day accountable for palpable misdeeds disturbs senior civil servants who know what is going on and risk becoming accessories before the fact if they assist ministers in producing statements that mislead Parliament.

In one well-publicized case, a Ministry of Defense official, Clive Ponting, leaked to the House of Commons evidence that questioned the accuracy of government statements about the conduct of the Falklands War. He was indicted and tried for violating the Official Secrets Act. The judge asked the jury to think about the issue this way: "Can it then be in the interests of the state to go against the policy of the government of the day?" The jury concluded that it could be; Ponting was acquitted.

Most senior civil servants are unwilling to become whistle-blowers and jeopardize their own careers by voicing doubts about what ministers do. Inquiries after major mistakes can show that these mistakes have occurred because ministers have refused to listen to cautions from civil servants or misrepresented their views. This was notably so in Tony Blair's justification of going to war in Iraq.

See: Graham Wilson and Anthony Barker, "Whitehall's Disobedient Servants? Senior Officials' Potential Resistance to Ministers in British Government Departments," *British Journal of Political Science* 27, no. 2 (1997): 223–46.

POLITICAL CULTURE AND LEGITIMACY

Political culture refers to values and beliefs about how the country ought to be governed. For example, there is a consensus that Britain ought to have a government accountable to a popularly elected parliament. This view is held not only by the major parties but also by the parties that demand independence, such as the Scottish National Party.

The values of the political culture impose limitations on what government *can* do and what it *must* do. Regardless of party preference, the great majority of British people today believe that government ought to provide education, health services, and social security. Cultural norms about freedom of speech prevent censorship of criticism, and liberal laws about sexual relations and abortion allow great freedom of choice in sexual matters.

Today, the most significant limits on the scope of public policy are practical and political. Public expenditure on popular policies such as the health service is limited by the extent to which the economy grows and the reluctance of government to raise more money for health care by increasing taxes or by imposing some charges for its use, as is done in continental European countries.

The **trusteeship theory of government** assumes that leaders ought to take the initiative in deciding what is collectively in the public interest. This theory is summarized in the epigram, "The government's job is to govern." The trusteeship doctrine is always popular with the majority party because it justifies doing whatever the government wishes. The opposition party rejects this theory because it is not in office.

The **collectivist theory of government** sees government as balancing the competing demands of collective groups in society. From this perspective, parties and interest groups advocating group or class interests are more authoritative than individual voters.[19] Traditional Conservatives emphasize harmony between different classes in society, each with its own responsibilities and rewards. For socialists, group politics has been about promoting working class and trade union interests. With changes in British society, party leaders have distanced themselves from close identification with collective interests as they realize that votes are cast by individuals rather than by business firms or trade unions.

The **individualist theory of government** postulates that political parties should represent people rather than group interests. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher proclaimed that personal welfare should be the responsibility of each individual rather than of the state. She went so far as to declare, "There is no such thing as society." David Cameron has amended this view by emphasizing the importance of what he calls a big society, that is, a set of institutions bigger and broader than the state. Liberal Democrats put emphasis on individual freedom from government enforcement of social norms.

The legitimacy of government is seen by the readiness of the British people to conform to basic obligations such as paying taxes and cooperating with public officials. However, British people make many specific criticisms about government. Citizens have become distrustful of many political institutions in reaction to changing standards of elite behavior, such as MPs making excessive claims for expenses and Cabinet ministers seeking to besmirch the reputation of colleagues with whom they compete.

Less than one in five Britons trusts political parties that seek their support, and even fewer trust the press, which claims to represent the voice of the people. The press and television are trusted by less than one-third of the population. Barely one in three expresses trust in Parliament as a whole. Civil society organizations such as churches and trade unions likewise have the trust of less than half of the population. The most trusted public institutions today are those that maintain authority, including the armed forces, the police, and the courts (see Figure 8.3).

Dissatisfaction with government policies can stimulate popular protest, but the legitimacy of government means that protest is normally kept within lawful bounds. The World Values Survey finds that nearly every Briton says they might sign a petition, and half might participate in a lawful demonstration, but only one-sixth consider participating in an illegal occupation of a building or factory. The readiness of groups in Northern Ireland to use guns and bombs for political ends makes it the most "un-British" part of the United Kingdom.

The legitimacy accorded to British government is not the result of economic calculations about whether parliamentary democracy "pays" best, as rational choice theories propose. During the depression of th

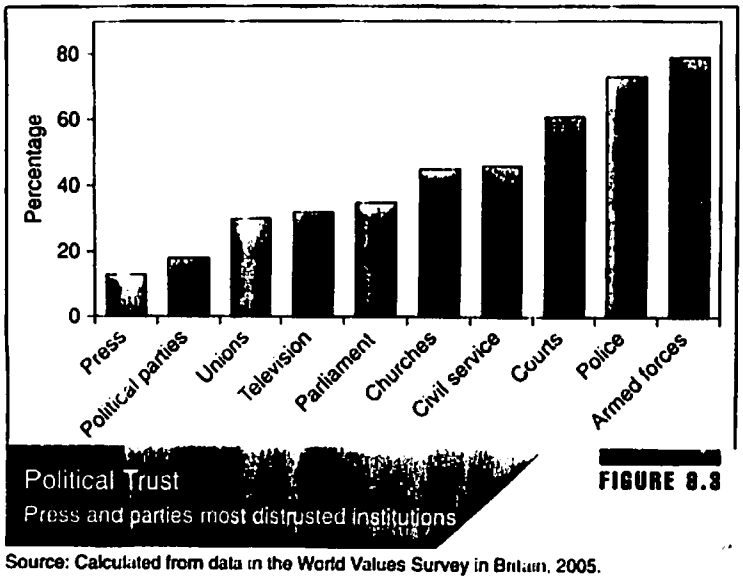


FIGURE 8.3

Source: Calculated from data in the World Values Survey in Britain, 2005.

1930s, Communist and Fascist parties received only derisory votes in Britain, while their support was great in Germany and Italy. Likewise, inflation and unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s did not stimulate extremist politics.

The symbols of a common past, such as the monarchy, are sometimes cited as major determinants of legitimacy. But surveys of public opinion show that the Queen has little political significance; her popularity derives from the fact that she is nonpolitical. The popularity of a monarch is a consequence, not a cause, of political legitimacy. In Northern Ireland, where the minority denies the legitimacy of British government, the Queen is a symbol of divisions between British Unionists and Irish Republicans who reject the Crown. Habit and tradition appear to be the chief explanations for the persisting legitimacy of British government. A survey asking people why they support the government found that the most popular reason was, "It's the best form of government we know."

Authority is not perfect or trouble-free. Winston Churchill made this point when he told the House of Commons:

> No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.[20]

In the words of the English writer E. M. Forster, people give "two cheers for democracy."

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Socialization influences the politic division between those who participa in politics and those who do not. T family's influence comes first chronolo ically; political attitudes learned with the family become intertwined with p mary family loyalties. However, soc change means that the views parer transmit to their children may not be r evant by the time their offspring ha become forty to fifty years old. F example, a religious identificatic learned in childhood may no longer ha a political relevance, for in contemp rary Britain, whether one is a Christi or a Muslim tends to be more releva than whether one was raised as a member of t Church of England or as a Roman Catholic.

Family and Gender

A child may not know what the Labour, Conservativ or Liberal Democratic Party stand for, but if it is t party of Mom and Dad, this can be enough to creat youthful identification with a party. However, t influence of family on voting is limited, because third do not know how one or both of their parer usually voted, or else their parents voted for differe parties. Among those who report knowing whi party both parents supported, just over half vote their parents have. In the electorate as a whole, only percent say that they know how both parents vot and that they vote for the same party.[21]

Children learn different social roles according gender, yet as adult citizens, men and women have t same legal right to vote and participate in politic Men and women tend to have similar political att tudes. For example, more than half of women and h of men favor capital punishment, and a substanti minority in each group oppose it. At each general ele tion, the votes of women are divided in much the san way as the votes of men (see Table 8.4).

Gender differences do lead to differences in poli cal participation, however. Two-thirds of local gover ment councilors are men; one-third are wome Women make up almost half the employees in the ci service but are concentrated in lower-level clerical jot

Social Differences in Voting
In a multiparty system, no party has majority support in any social group.

TABLE 8.4

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Other
Gender				
Women	38%	28%	22%	12%
Men	36%	31%	26%	8%
Age				
18–24	30%	31%	30%	9%
25–54	34%	30%	27%	9%
55–64	38%	28%	23%	12%
65 and over	44%	31%	16%	9%
Social Class				
Middle, professional	44%	23%	27%	7%
Lower middle	40%	28%	24%	9%
Skilled manual	33%	33%	19%	15%
Unskilled manual	32%	35%	13%	20%

Source: Ipsos MORI, *How Britain Voted in 2010* (www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2613); analysis of all who said they were absolutely certain to vote or had already voted, interviewed March 5–May 19, 2010 (n = 5,927).

women hold about one-third of the top appointments in the civil service. In 2010, a total of 142 women were elected to the House of Commons; it remains more than three-quarters male. The coalition Cabinet has four women ministers.

Education

The majority of the population was once considered fit for only a minimum level of education, but the minimum level has steadily risen. In today's electorate, the oldest voters left school at the age of fourteen and the median voter by the age of seventeen. Only a small percentage of young persons attend "public" schools, that is, fee-paying schools, which are actually private. Whereas half a century ago Britain had few universities, today more than two-fifths of young persons enter postsecondary institutions. However, many of the new institutions created in the past two decades lack the facilities of established research universities.

The stratification of English education used to imply that the more education a person had, the more likely a person was to be Conservative. This is no longer the case. People with a university degree or its equivalent now divide their votes between the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democratic Parties.

Education is strongly related to active participation in politics. The more education a person has, the greater his or her chances of climbing the political career ladder. One-third of MPs went to fee-paying private schools. University graduates make up nine-tenths of the members of the House of Commons. The expansion of universities has broken the traditional dominance of Oxford and Cambridge; only one-quarter of MPs went to these two institutions. The concentration of university graduates in top jobs is a sign of a meritocracy, in which persons qualified by education have replaced an aristocracy based on birth and family.

Class

Historically, party competition has been interpreted in class terms; the Conservative Party has been described as a middle-class party, and Labour as a working-class party. Class is relatively important in England because of the absence of major divisions in race, religion, or language, as are found in the United States, Canada, or Northern Ireland.

Occupation has been the most commonly used indicator of class. Manual workers are usually described as the working class and nonmanual workers as the middle class. Changes in the economy have led to a reduction in manual jobs and an increase in middle-class jobs. Today, many occupations such as computer technician have an indeterminate social status. When British people are asked about belonging to a class, 57 percent reject placing themselves in either the middle or the working class.

The relationship between class and party has become limited. No party now wins as much as half the vote of middle-class or of skilled or unskilled manual workers (see Table 8.4). Due to the cross-class appeal of parties, less than two-fifths of voters now conform to

the stereotypes of middle-class Conservatives or working-class Labour voters.

Most Britons have a mixture of middle-class and working-class attributes. Socioeconomic experiences other than occupation often influence voting. At each level of the class structure, people who belong to trade unions are more likely to vote Labour than Conservative. Housing creates neighborhoods with political relevance. People who live in municipally built council houses tend to vote Labour, while Conservatives do relatively well among homeowners, who are now a big majority of the electorate.

Media

The mass media's emphasis on what is happening today makes it an agency for resocializing people. Today, the upper class no longer commands deference, and celebrities prominent in sports, rock music, or making money are better known than most MPs and many Cabinet ministers. Moreover, the Internet provides people with alternative sources of information and opinion, and most Britons old enough to vote are able to find information there.

The British press is sharply divided into a few quality papers (such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent*, and *The Financial Times*) that carry news and comment at an intellectual level higher than American newspapers, and mass-circulation tabloids that concentrate on trivia and trash (such as *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*). *The Economist* is the best-known weekly periodical for politics and for economics; it circulates worldwide. Most papers tend to lean toward one party. However, if the party that they normally support becomes very unpopular, they tend to lean toward a party that has risen in popularity.

In the aggressive pursuit of news and audiences, journalists are prepared to grab attention by making the government of the day look bad, and television interviewers can gain celebrity by insulting MPs and ministers on the air. A majority of MPs think that the media is to blame for popular cynicism about politicians and parties. However, opinion polls find that a majority of the electorate thinks that the conduct of politicians is just as much to blame for cynicism about politics as is the conduct of the media.

Television is the primary source of political news. Historically, radio and television were a monopoly of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which sought to educate its audience and was respectful of politicians. There are now many television channels and a great variety of radio stations competing for audiences. Current-affairs programs seek audiences by exposing the failings of government. The law forbids selling advertising to politicians, parties, or political causes.

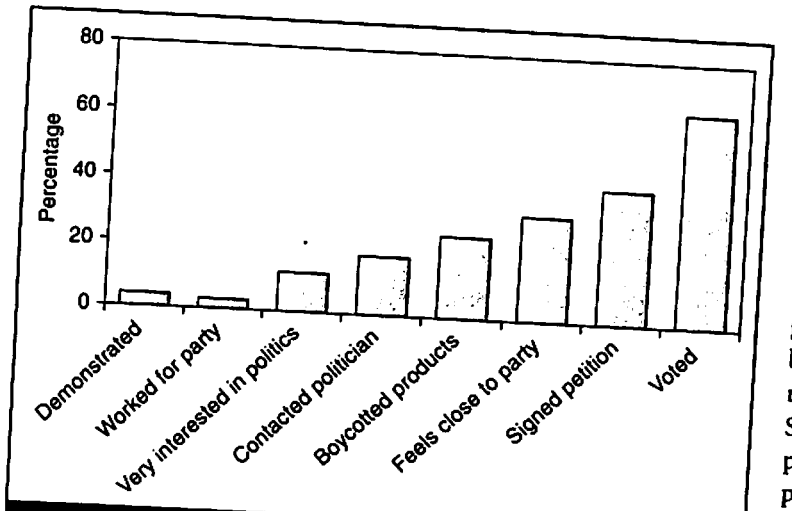
The government of the day controls the license renewals of broadcasting companies, and it sets the annual fee that every viewer must pay for noncommercial BBC programs, currently about $210 a year. Broadcasters try to avoid favoring one party, because over time, control of government (and with it the power to make decisions that affect broadcasting revenue and licenses) is likely to shift between parties.

Use of the Internet and other new media of communication by a majority of Britons has opened up a wide variety of sources of information to the public. Government agencies, Parliament, and the Prime Minister's Office provide substantial details about their activities and policies. Political parties produce electronic "mail shots" to targeted audiences, and MPs' hard drives overflow with communications from constituents and interest groups. Politicians are also vulnerable to having opinions expressed in informal e-mails leaked to the press.

Since political socialization is a lifetime learning process, the loyalties of voters are shaped by an accumulation of influences over many decades. Today, there are still some members of the electorate who were old enough to vote for or against Winston Churchill when he led the Conservative Party. In 2010, the youngest voters had not been born until after Margaret Thatcher retired as leader of the Conservative Party. At the next British general election, more than half the electorate will have cast their initial vote at the 1997 election or subsequently.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

An election is the one opportunity people have to influence government directly. Every citizen aged eighteen or over is eligible to vote. Local government officials register voters, and the list is revised annually, ensuring that nearly everyone eligible to vote is actually registered. Turnout at general elections has fallen from a high of 84 percent in the closely fought 1950 election to as low as 59 percent. In 2010, the closeness of the election increased turnout; it rose to 65 percent. However, only half those who vote say they feel close to a political party.



Participation in Politics
Most Britons are only voters

FIGURE 8.4

Source: European Social Survey Round 3, conducted in the United Kingdom between September 5, 2006, and January 14, 2007 (n = 2,319).

In addition to voting, there are many ways in which Britons participate in politics. Two-fifths have signed a petition on a public issue. One-quarter say that politics has affected their shopping by causing them to boycott a product. In the course of a year, almost one-fifth say that they have contacted a politician about a matter that concerns them. One in eight describe themselves as very interested in politics (see Figure 8.4).

Party workers are a very small minority of the electorate; Britons are much more inclined to participate in voluntary associations that they regard as nonpolitical, or nonparty, such as Oxfam, which is concerned with reducing world poverty. The concentration of the media in central London means that a political demonstration there in which ten thousand people participate will get national coverage. However, those participating are less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the electorate (see Figure 8.4).

POLITICAL RECRUITMENT

We can view recruitment into politics deductively or inductively. The deductive approach defines the job to be done and individuals are recruited with skills appropriate to the task; this practice is favored by management consultants. Alternatively, we can inductively examine the influences that lead people into politics and ask: Given their skills and motives, what can such people do? The constraints of history and institutions make the inductive approach more realistic.

The most important political roles in Britain are those of Cabinet minister, higher civil servant, partisan political advisor, and intermittent public persons analogous to Washington insiders. Each group has its own recruitment pattern. To become a Cabinet minister, an individual must first be elected to Parliament. Shortly after leaving university, ambitious politicians often become assistants to politicians and then "graduate" to lobbyist or journalist, then to parliamentary candidate for a constituency that their party normally wins. Individuals enter the civil service shortly after leaving university by passing a highly competitive entrance examination; promotion is based on achievement and approval by seniors. Intermittent public persons gain access to ministers and civil servants because of the knowledge and position that they have gained by making a career outside party politics.

In all political roles, starting early on a political career is usually a precondition of success, because it takes time to build up the skills and contacts necessary to become a major political actor. Geography is a second major influence on recruitment. Ministers, higher civil servants, and other public persons spend their working lives in London. A change at Downing Street does not bring in policymakers from a different part of the country, as can happen in the White House when a president from Chicago succeeds a president from Texas. Since London is atypical of the cities and towns in which most British people live, there is a gap between the everyday lives of policymakers and the majority on whose behalf they act.

MPs and Cabinet Ministers

For a person ambitious to be a Cabinet minister, becoming an MP is the necessary first step. Nomination as a parliamentary candidate is in the hands of local party committees. A candidate does not have to be resident in the constituency in which he or she is nominated. Hence, it is possible for a young person to go straight from university to a job in the House of Commons or party headquarters, and then look

around the country for nomination for a winnable seat, a process that usually takes years. Once selected for a constituency in which his or her party has a big majority, the MP can then expect to be reelected routinely for a decade or more.

After entering the House of Commons, an MP seeks to be noticed. Some ways of doing so—for example, grabbing headlines by questioning the wisdom of the party leadership—make it difficult to gain promotion to ministerial rank. Other approaches assist promotion, such as successfully attacking opposition leaders in debate or being well-informed about a politically important topic, or showing loyalty to the party leader.

Experience in the Commons does not prepare an individual for the work of a minister. An MP's chief concerns are dealing with people and talking about what government ought to do. A minister must also be able to handle paperwork, relate political generalities to specific technical problems facing his or her department, and make hard decisions when all the alternatives are unpopular.

The restriction of ministerial posts to MPs prevents a nationwide canvass for appointees. A prime minister must distribute about a hundred jobs among approximately two hundred MPs in the governing party who are experienced in Parliament and have not ruled themselves out of consideration on grounds of parliamentary inexperience, old age, political extremism, personal unreliability, or lack of interest in office. An MP has a better than even chance of a junior ministerial appointment if he or she serves three terms in Parliament. A few people who have special skills or the confidence of the prime minister can be given ministerial appointments without becoming an MP; they are given a seat in the House of Lords.

A minister learns on the job. Usually, an MP is first given a junior post as a Parliamentary Under Secretary and then promoted to Minister of State before becoming a full member of the Cabinet. In the process, an individual is likely to be shuffled from one department to another, having to learn new subject matter with each shift between departments. The average minister can expect to stay in a particular job for about two years, and never knows when the accidents of politics—a death or an unexpected resignation—will lead to a transfer to another department. The rate of ministerial turnover in Britain is one of the highest in Europe. The minister who gets a new job as the result of a reshuffle usually arrives at a department with no previous experience of its problems. Anthony Crosland, an able Labour minister, reckoned: "It takes you six months to get your head properly above water, a year to get the general drift of most of the field, and two years really to master the whole of a department."[22]

Higher Civil Servants

Whereas MPs come and go from ministerial office, civil servants can be in Whitehall for the whole of their working lives. Higher civil servants are recruited without specific professional qualifications or training. They are meant to be the "best and the brightest"—a requirement that has traditionally meant getting a prestigious degree in history, literature, or languages. The Fulton Committee on the Civil Service recommended that recruits should have "relevant" specialist knowledge, but members could not decide what kind of knowledge was relevant to the work of government.[23] The Civil Service Commission tests candidates for their ability to summarize lengthy prose papers, to resolve a problem by fitting specific facts to general regulations, to draw inferences from a simple table of social statistics, and to perform well in group discussions about problems of government.

Because bright civil service entrants lack specialized skills and need decades to reach the highest posts, socialization by senior civil servants is especially important. The process makes for continuity, since the head of the civil service usually started there as a young official under a head who had himself entered the civil service many decades before.

In the course of a career, civil servants become specialists in the difficult task of managing ministers and government business. As the television series *Yes, Minister* shows, they are adept at saying "yes" to a Cabinet minister when they mean "perhaps" and saying "up to a point" when they really mean "no." Increasingly, ministers have tended to discourage civil servants from pointing out obstacles in the way of what government wants to do; they seek people offering "can do" advice from outside the civil service.

Political Advisors

Most advisors are party-political; their job is to mobilize political support for the government and for the Cabinet minister for whom they work. Because their

background is in party politics and the media, such advisors bring to Whitehall skills that civil servants often lack and that their ministers value. But because they have no prior experience of the civil service, they are often unaware of its conventions and legal obligations. Some tricks used by political appointees to put a desirable spin on what the government is doing can backfire, causing public controversy and even their dismissal.

In addition, experts in a given subject area, such as environmental pollution or cloning, can act as political advisors. Even if inexperienced in the ways of Whitehall, they can contribute specialist knowledge that is often lacking in government departments, and they can be supporters of the governing party, too.

Most leaders of institutions such as universities, banks, churches, and trade unions do not think of themselves as politicians and have not stood for public office. They are principally concerned with their own organization. But when government actions impinge on their work, they become involved in politics, offering ministers advice and criticism. They are thus intermittent public persons.

Selective Recruitment

Nothing could be more selective than an election that results in one person becoming prime minister of a country. Yet nothing is more representative, because an election is the one occasion when every adult can participate in politics with equal effect.

Traditionally, political leaders had high social status and wealth before gaining political office. Aristocrats, business people, or trade union leaders can no longer expect to translate their high standing in other fields into an important political position. Today, politics is a full-time occupation. As careers become more specialized, professional politicians become increasingly distant from other spheres of British life.

The greater the scope of activities defined as political, the greater the number of people actively involved in government. Government influence has forced company directors, television executives, and university heads to become involved in politics and public policy. Leadership in organizations outside Whitehall gives such individuals freedom to act independently of government, but the interdependence of public and private institutions, whether for-profit or nonprofit, is now so great that sooner or later they meet in discussions about the public interest.

ORGANIZING GROUP INTERESTS

Civil society institutions have existed in Britain for more than a century. Their leaders regularly discuss specific policies with public officials in expectation that this will put pressure on government to do what they argue is in the public interest as well as their own group's interest.

The scope of group demands varies enormously from the narrow concerns of an association for the blind to the encompassing economic policies of organizations representing business or trade unions. Groups also differ in the nature of their interests; some are concerned with material objectives, whereas others advocate for single causes such as reducing violence on television or race relations.

The Confederation of British Industries is the chief representative organization of British business. As its name implies, its membership is large and varied. The Institute of Directors represents individuals at the top of large and small businesses. The heads of the biggest businesses usually have direct contacts with Whitehall and with ministers, whatever their party, because of the importance of their activities for the British economy and for its place in the international economy. For example, the dividends of BP (British Petroleum) have been a major source of income for British investors, most of the oil it drills is outside the United Kingdom, and when things go wrong, as in the Gulf of Mexico, it can create diplomatic problems. The construction industry has access to government because home-building is important for the national economy, and Whitehall's tight control over land use influences where houses can be built.

The chief labor organization is the Trades Union Congress (TUC); its members are trade unions that represent many different types of workers, some white-collar and some blue-collar. Most member unions of the TUC are affiliated with the Labour Party, and some leading trade unionists have been Communists or Maoists. None is a supporter of the Conservative or Liberal Democratic parties.

Changes in employment patterns have eroded union membership, and union members are disproportionately older workers. Today, less than one-quarter of the labor force belongs to a trade union.

Over the years, the membership of trade unions has shifted from manual workers in such industries as coal and railways to white-collar workers such as teachers and health-service employees. Less than one in six private sector workers belongs to a trade union. By contrast, more than half of the public sector workers are union members. Elected representatives control their wages, and strikes or go-slow actions by teachers, hospital workers, or other public employees can cause political embarrassment to the government.

Britain has many voluntary and charitable associations, from clubs of football team supporters to the Automobile Association. It is also home to a number of internationally active nongovernmental organizations such as Oxfam, dealing with problems of poor countries, and Amnesty International, concerned with political prisoners. The latter organizations try to bring pressure not only on Westminster but also on organizations such as the World Bank and on repressive governments around the world.

Unlike political parties, interest groups do not seek influence by contesting elections; they want to influence policies regardless of which party wins. Nonetheless, there are ties between interest groups and political parties. Trade unions have been institutionally part of the Labour Party since its foundation in 1900 and are the major source of party funds. The connection between business associations and the Conservatives is not formal, but the party's traditional commitment to private enterprise is congenial to business. Notwithstanding common interests, both trade unions and business groups demonstrate their autonomy by criticizing their partisan ally if it acts against the group's interest.

Party politicians seek to distance themselves from interest groups. Conservatives know that they can only win an election by winning the votes of ordinary citizens as well as prosperous businesspeople. Tony Blair sought to make the Labour government appear business-friendly and reaped large cash donations from very wealthy businessmen. However, this led union leaders to attack his government as unsympathetic, and a few small unions have left the Labour Party.

To lobby successfully, interest groups must be able to identify those officials most important in making public policy. When asked to rank the most influential offices and institutions, interest-group officials named the prime minister first by a long distance; Cabinet ministers came second, the media third, and senior civil servants fourth. Less than 1 percent thought MPs outside the ministerial ranks were of primary importance.[24] However, interest groups do not expect to spend a great deal of time in Downing Street. Most of their contacts are with officials in government departments concerned with issues of little public concern but of immediate interest to the group.

What Interest Groups Want

Most interest groups pursue three major goals: the sympathetic administration of established policies, information about government policies, and influencing policymaking and implementation. Whitehall departments are happy to consult with interest groups that provide information about what is happening outside Whitehall, cooperation in administering and implementing policies, and support for government initiatives. As long as the needs of Whitehall and interest groups are complementary, they can bargain as professionals sharing common concerns. Both sides are ready to arrive at a negotiated agreement.

The more committed members are to an interest group's goals, the more confidently leaders can speak for a united membership. Consumers are more difficult to organize because they have no social contacts with other people who buy what they buy. Drivers of Ford cars are a category rather than a social group. Changes in the economy, in class structure, and in the lifestyles of generations have resulted in a decline in the "dense" social capital networks of coal mining villages and textile mill towns.

Individuals usually have a multiplicity of identities that are often in conflict—for example, as workers desiring higher wages and as consumers wanting lower prices. The spread of mass consumption and decline in trade union membership has altered the balance between these priorities. As a trade union leader has recognized, "Our members are consumers too."[25]

Group members who care about an issue can disagree too about what their leaders ought to do. Even if an interest group is internally united, its demands may be counteracted by opposing demands from other groups. In economic policy, ministers can play off producers against consumers or business against unions to increase their scope for choice and present their policies as "something-for-everybody" compromises.

The more a group's values are consistent with the cultural norms of society as a whole, the easier it is to

equate its interest with the public interest. But in an open society such as Britain, the claims of one group to speak for the public interest can easily be challenged by competing groups. The **centralization** of authority in British government means that interest groups must treat as given the political values and priorities of the government of the day.

Insider interest groups usually have values in harmony with every party. Insiders advance their case in quiet negotiations with Whitehall departments. Their demands tend to be restricted to what is politically possible in the short term, given the values and commitments of the government of the day.[26] **Outsider interest groups** are unable to negotiate because their demands are inconsistent with the party in power. Outsider groups without any influence in Whitehall often campaign through the media. To television viewers, their demonstrations appear as evidence of their importance; in fact, they are often signs of a lack of political influence. Green interest groups face the dilemma of either campaigning for fundamental change in hopes that eventually Whitehall departments will turn their way, or becoming insiders working within the system to improve the environment to some extent, but not as much as some ecologists would like.

Keeping Interest Groups at a Distance

Whitehall civil servants find it administratively convenient to deal with united interest groups that can implement agreements. For a generation after World War II, ministers endorsed the corporatist philosophy of bringing together business, trade unions, and political representatives in tripartite institutions to discuss such controversial issues as inflation and unemployment. Corporatist bargaining assumed a consensus on political priorities and goals and that each group's leaders could deliver the cooperation of those they claimed to represent. In practice, neither Labour nor Conservative governments were able to maintain a consensus. Nor were interest-group leaders able to deliver their nominal followers. By 1979, unemployment and inflation were both out of control.

The Thatcher administration demonstrated that a government firmly committed to distinctive values can ignore group demands and lay down its own pattern of policy. It did so by dealing at arm's length with both trade unions and business groups. Instead of consulting with interest groups, it practiced state-distancing, keeping the government out of everyday marketplace activities such as wage-bargaining, pricing, and investment.

A state-distancing strategy emphasizes the use of legislation to achieve goals, since no interest group can defy an Act of Parliament. Laws have reduced the capacity of trade unions to frustrate government policies through industrial action. The sale of state-owned industries has removed government from immediate responsibility for the operation of major industries, and Labour Chancellor Gordon Brown gave the Bank of England responsibility for monetary policy.

State-distancing places less reliance on negotiations with interest groups and more on the authority of government. Business and labor are free to carry on as they like—but only within the pattern imposed by government legislation and policy. Most unions and some business leaders do not like being "outside the loop" when government makes decisions. Education and health-service interest groups like it even less, because they depend on public funds for their revenue.

PARTY SYSTEM AND ELECTORAL CHOICE

British government is party government. The candidates on the ballot in each parliamentary constituency are nominated by party members, and the party leaders are chosen by the vote of their MPs and party members. The prime minister is not popularly elected, but gains office by being the leader of the party with the most MPs.

A Multiplicity of Choices

A general election must occur at least once every five years. The coalition government favors changing the law to have elections occurred at a fixed date, starting in 2015, while making allowance for an earlier contest if the government loses the confidence of a clear majority of MPs. This would replace the long-established practice of the prime minister's being able to call an election sooner if he or she thinks this is politically more favorable.

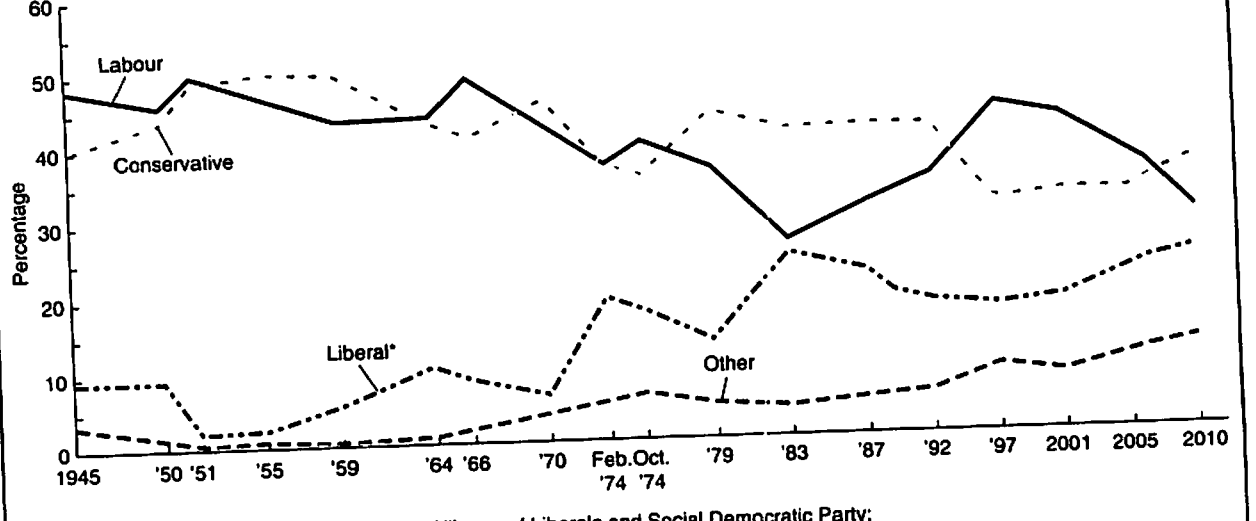
An election offers a voter a very simple choice between candidates competing to represent one of the 650 constituencies into which the House of Commons is divided. Within each constituency, the winner is the

candidate who is **first past the post** with a plurality of votes, even if this is less than half the total vote. In 2010, the winner in one English constituency received only 29 percent of the total vote, and in most constituencies, the victor had a plurality but not an absolute majority of the vote. The winner nationally is the party gaining the most MPs. In 1951 and in February 1974, the party winning the most votes nationally did not win the most seats; the runner-up party in the popular vote formed the government.

Between 1945 and 1970, Britain had a two-party system; the Conservative and Labour parties together took an average of 91 percent of the popular vote and in 1951 took 97 percent (see Figure 8.5). The Liberals had difficulty fielding candidates in a majority of constituencies and even more difficulty in winning votes and seats. Support for the two largest parties was evenly balanced; Labour won four elections and the Conservatives won four.

The decline in the attractiveness of the class-based Labour and Conservative parties gave other parties an opportunity to gain support. A **multiparty system** emerged in the elections of 1974. The Liberals won nearly one-fifth of the vote, and Nationalists did well in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Together, the Conservative and Labour parties took only 75 percent of the vote. The Liberal Democrat and Nationalist parties have maintained their strength. The number of parties in the system today depends on the measure used.

- The number of parties competing for votes varies from three to five in different parts of the United Kingdom. In England, three parties—Labour, Conservatives, and Liberal Democrats—compete for votes (and in 2010, four, as the anti-EU United Kingdom Independence Party fought in most seats, too). In Scotland and Wales, there are normally four parties, and the Scottish National and Plaid Cymru (Welsh Nationalist) parties also elect MPs. In Northern Ireland, at least five parties contest seats, two representing Unionist and Protestant voters, two Irish Republican and Catholic voters, and the weakest a cross-religious Alliance of voters.
- The two largest parties do not monopolize votes. In the 2010 election, the biggest parties together won less than two-thirds of the popular vote (see Table 8.5). No party has won half the popular vote since 1935. In recognition of this, the 2010 televised election debates gave equal attention to Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown,



*1945–1979 Liberal Party; 1983–1987 Alliance of Liberals and Social Democratic Party; since then known as Liberal Democrats.

FIGURE 8.5

Ups and Downs of Electoral Fortunes of Parties
Votes Cast in General Elections since 1945

The 2010 Election
Party vote percentages by nation in 2010.

TABLE 8.5

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
Conservative	39.5%	16.7%	26.1%	—	36.0%
Labour	28.1%	42.0%	36.3%	—	29.0%
Liberal Democratic	24.2%	18.9%	20.1%	—	23.0%
Nationalists*	—	19.9%	11.3%	89.3%	—
Others	8.2%	2.4%	6.2%	10.8%	11.9%

*Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru (Wales), and in Northern Ireland the Alliance party, the Democratic Union and Ulster Unionist parties, and pro–Irish Republic Sinn Fein and the Social Democratic and Labour Party.
Source: General Election 2010: Preliminary Analysis. House of Commons Library Research Paper 10/36.

Conservative leader David Cameron, and Liberal Democratic leader Nicholas Clegg.

- The two largest parties in the House of Commons are often not the two leading parties at the constituency level. At the 2010 election, in more than one-quarter of constituencies, one or both of the two front-running parties was neither Labour nor Conservative.
- More than half a dozen parties consistently win seats in the House of Commons. In 2010, so-called "third" parties won more than one-eighth of the seats in the Commons.
- Significant shifts in voting usually do not involve individuals moving between the Labour and Conservative parties but rather in and out of the ranks of abstainers or between the Liberal Democrats and the two largest parties. Nationalist parties in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland win seats because they concentrate their candidates in one part of the United Kingdom.

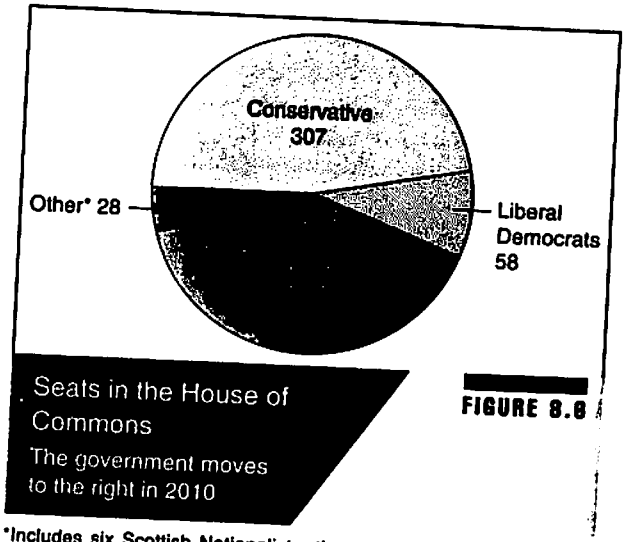


FIGURE 8.8

*Includes six Scottish Nationalists, three Welsh Plaid Cymru, eight Northern Ireland Democratic Unionists, five Sinn Fein, three Northern Ireland Social Democratic and Labour, one Green, and two others.
Source: General Election 2010: Preliminary Analysis. House of Commons Library Research Paper 10/36.

The distribution of seats in the House of Commons is different from the distribution of the share of votes. In 2010, the Conservative Party won 47 percent of MPs with 36 percent of the vote, and the Labour Party won 40 percent of the seats in the House of Commons with 29 percent of the popular vote (see Figures 8.5 and 8.6). The Liberal Democrats gained just under 9 percent of MPs with 23 percent of the popular vote.

In 2009 the election of British Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) was held with a proportional representation ballot, and it occurred when the Labour government was very unpopular. The anti-EU United Kingdom Independence Party came second in the popular vote, and the anti-immigrant British National Party and the Green Party also elected MEPs. However, when the choice in the following year was about who governs Britain, only the Green Party was able to win a single seat at Westminster.

Defenders of the first-past-the-post electoral system argue that proportionality is not a goal in itself. It is justified because it usually places responsibility for government in the hands of a single party. This justification is used in the United States, where the president can be described as representing all the people, whether he wins just over half or just under half the

popular vote. In countries using proportional representation, coalition or minority governments are the norm. When a coalition is necessary, a party finishing third in the popular vote usually determines who governs by joining in a formal or informal coalition with one or the other of the two largest parties.

The strongest advocates of proportional representation are the Liberal Democrats. In a proportional representation system, the Liberal Democrat vote in 2010 would have given it 150 seats, more than double what it actually received. The coalition government is committed to holding a referendum in May 2011 on whether the plurality first-past-the-post system should be maintained or replaced by the alternative vote (AV) system. The AV system asks voters to indicate their order of preference between candidates. If the front-running candidate lacks an absolute majority, the candidates finishing lowest in the constituency are progressively eliminated and the second preferences of their voters redistributed until one candidate gets a majority.

In elections that do not affect the composition of the Westminster Parliament, a variety of electoral systems are in use.[27] All British members of the European Parliament are elected by proportional representation, and this has been true of electing members of the Northern Ireland Assembly for four decades. The Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly use a mixed electoral system: some representatives are elected by the first-past-the-post method and some by proportional representation. The mayor of Greater London is elected by the alternative vote, ensuring that the winner is the first or second choice of more than half the voters.[28]

Political parties are often referred to as "machines," but this description is very misleading, for parties cannot mechanically manufacture votes. Nor can a political party be commanded like an army. Parties are like universities; they are inherently decentralized, and people belong to them for a variety of motives. Thus, party officials have to work hard to keep together three different parts of the party: those who vote for it, the minority active in its constituency associations, and the party in Parliament. If the party has a majority in Parliament, there is a fourth group: the party in government. Whether the party leader is the prime minister or the leader of the Opposition, he or she must maintain the confidence of all parts of the party or risk ejection as leader.[29]

The headquarters of each party provides more or less routine organizational and publicity services to constituency parties and to the party in Parliament. Each party has an annual conference to debate policy and to vote on some policy resolutions. Constituency parties are nationally significant because each selects its own parliamentary candidate. The **decentralization** of the selection process has allowed the choice of parliamentary candidates with a wide variety of political outlooks and abilities. Under Tony Blair, the Labour Party introduced more central direction in choosing candidates. Doing so was justified on the grounds of securing more female MPs, and this has happened.

The Liberal Democrats have a small central organization and have built up the party by winning council seats at local government elections and at parliamentary elections targeting seats where the party is strong locally. This strategy has paid off; it has almost trebled its number of MPs from twenty in 1992 to fifty-eight in 2010, while its share of the popular vote has scarcely altered.

Party Images and Appeals

While the terminology of "left" and "right" is part of the language of elite politicians, it is rejected by the great majority of British voters. When asked to place themselves on a left/right scale, the median voter chooses the central position, and only a tenth place themselves on the far left or far right. Consequently, parties that veer toward either extreme risk losing votes. Tony Blair won elections for Labour because he avoided left-wing rhetoric and policies, and David Cameron led the Conservatives to victory by moving the party toward the center of British politics.

A large majority of the public named economic problems as a major issue at the 2010 general election. Second in importance were issues related to race relations and immigration. A quarter of the electorate also expressed concerns about crime, and the health service was important to a quarter of the voters. Foreign-policy issues were of limited concern. When public opinion is examined across a variety of issues, such as inflation, protecting the environment, spending money on the health service, and trade union legislation, a majority of Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democratic voters tend to agree. Big divisions

in contemporary British politics often cut across party lines. Any attempt to impute a coherent ideology to a political party is doomed to failure, for institutions cannot think and are not organized to debate philosophy.

Instead of campaigning in ideological terms or by appealing to collectivist economic interests, parties increasingly stress consensual goals, such as promoting prosperity and fighting crime. They compete in terms of which party or party leader can best be trusted to do what people want, or whether it is time for a change because one party has been in office for a long time. The titles of election manifestos are virtually interchangeable between the parties. In 2010, manifestos had such titles as "A Future Fair for All," "An Invitation to Join the Government of Britain," and "Change That Works for You."[30]

Much of the legislation introduced by the government is meant to be so popular that the Opposition dare not vote against the bill's principle. For every government bill that the Opposition votes against on principle in the House of Commons, up to three are adopted with interparty agreement.[31] MPs who rebel against their party whip are usually so extreme and insufficient in number that government bills are not threatened with defeat.

Most policies of government are not set out in its party manifesto; they are inherited from predecessors of the same or a different party. When the Thatcher administration entered office in 1979, it inherited hundreds of programs enacted by preceding governments, including some on the statute books since 1760.[32] It repealed some programs inherited from its predecessors—and it repealed some of its own programs that were quickly recognized as mistakes. When Margaret Thatcher left office, two-thirds of the programs for which the government was responsible had been enacted by her predecessors.

The freedom of action of the governing party is limited by constraints embedded in the obligations of office. Once in office, ministers find that all the laws enacted by their predecessors must be enforced, even if the government of the day would not have enacted them. A newly elected government also inherits many commitments to foreign countries and to the EU. As a former Conservative minister said of his Labour successors, "They inherited our problems and our remedies."[33]

CENTRALIZED AUTHORITY AND DECENTRALIZED DELIVERY OF POLICIES

In a unitary state, political authority is centralized. Decisions made by central government are binding on all public agencies through Acts of Parliament and regulations prepared in Whitehall. In addition, Whitehall controls taxation and public expenditure to a degree unusual among other member states of the EU, where coalition government and federalism encourage decentralization.

Centralization is justified as the best way to achieve **territorial justice**—that is, public services being at the same standard throughout the United Kingdom. For example, schools in inner cities and rural areas should have the same resources as schools in prosperous suburbs. This can be achieved only if tax revenues collected by central government are redistributed from wealthy to poor parts of the country. In addition, ministers emphasize that they are accountable to a national electorate of tens of millions of people, whereas local councilors are only accountable to those who vote in their ward. Instead of small being beautiful, a big, nationwide electorate is assumed to be better. The statement "Local councillors are not necessarily political animals; we could manage without them" was made by a left-wing law professor.[34]

For ordinary individuals, the actions of government are tangible only when services are delivered locally at a school, at a doctor's office, or in rubbish collection at their doorstep. However, Whitehall departments usually do not deliver policies themselves. Most public goods and services are delivered by agencies headquartered outside Whitehall. Moreover, five-sixths of public employees work for non-Whitehall agencies.[35] Thus, making and delivering public policies involves *intra*governmental politics.

Whitehall

Running the "Whitehall obstacle race" is the first step in intragovernmental politics. Most new policies must take into account the effects of existing policies in a crowded policy "space." Before a bill can be put to Parliament, the Cabinet minister sponsoring it must negotiate with ministers in other departments about how the new measure will affect existing programs

England: an Urban Country with Lots of Green Fields

Although three-quarters of the residents of the United Kingdom live in cities or suburbs, strict planning laws have left most of the landmass of the country open countryside including greenbelts around cities to preserve countryside and villages.

Soundsnaps/Shutterstock

and the terms of cooperation between departments to implement it. Negotiations are time-consuming. Often, a department will begin work on a new initiative under one minister and complete it under another or even under a different party in power.

Because of Treasury control of public expenditure, before a bill can be put to Parliament, the Treasury must authorize the additional expenditure required, because increased spending implies increased taxation. Ministers in charge of spending departments dislike constant Treasury reminders that there are strict cash limits on what they can spend. In the words of a veteran Treasury official, "the Treasury stands for reality."[36]

A minister anxious to gain attention by introducing a popular bill in Parliament cannot do so on his or her own. Approval must be gained from those concerned with the government as a whole. Criticism by the opposition party is less of a concern than attacks from MPs within the government's ranks. In a single-party government, approval to important measures may be needed from the prime minister and from Cabinet colleagues on matters of lesser importance. The coalition government adds a new dimension; there are committees representing both the Conservative and Liberal Democratic leaders to check that legislation is acceptable to both parties in government.

Once a bill becomes a law, there are many reasons why ministers do not want to be in charge of delivering services. Ministers may wish to avoid charges of political interference, allow for flexibility in the market, lend an aura of impartiality to quasi-judicial activities, allow qualified professionals to regulate technical matters, or remove controversial activities from Whitehall. The prime minister prefers to focus upon the glamorous "high" politics of foreign affairs and economic management. However, since "low-level" services remain important to most voters' lives, ministers are under pressure to do something—or at least *say* something—in response to media demands, for example when there is evidence of declining standards in schools, lengthening lines for hospital admission, and an increase of crime on the streets.

Devolution to Elected Officials

Local government councilors are elected, but within England, local government is subordinate to central government. Westminster has the power to write or rewrite the laws that determine what locally elected governments do and spend, or even to abolish local authorities and create new units of government with different boundaries. Both Conservative and Labour governments have used these powers. Changes in local government boundaries have reflected a never-ending search to find a balance between efficiency (assumed to correlate with fewer councils delivering services to more people spread over a wider geographical area)

and responsiveness (assumed to require more councils, each with a smaller territory and fewer people).

Local council elections are fought on party lines. In the days of the two-party system, many cities were solidly Labour for a generation or more, while leafy suburbs and agricultural counties were overwhelmingly Conservative. The Liberal Democrats now win many seats in local elections and, when no party has a majority, introduce coalition government into town halls. However, being a councilor is usually a part-time job.

The Blair government introduced the direct election of the mayor of Greater London, citing New York and Chicago as positive examples. However, it refused to give London the independence in taxing and spending that American local government enjoys.[37] The office is a political platform that attracts media attention. London's first mayor, a left-wing independent, and its second, a Conservative eccentric, have used their legitimacy as elected officials to challenge the views of government at Westminster.

Local government is usually divided into two tiers of county and district councils, each with responsibility for some local services. The proliferation of public–private initiatives and special-purpose agencies has reduced the services for which local government is exclusively responsible. Today, there is a jumble of more or less local institutions delivering such public services as education, police protection, garbage collection, housing, and cemeteries (see Box 8.6). Collectively, local institutions account for about a fifth of total public expenditure.

Grants of money from central government are the largest source of local government revenue. There is no local income tax or sales tax, since the central government does not want to give local authorities the degree of fiscal independence that American local government has. The Thatcher government replaced the local property tax with a poll tax on every adult resident of a local authority, believing it would make voters more aware of the costs of local government. In practice, the tax produced a political backlash and was replaced by a community charge (tax) on houses and business real estate, which central government tends to control.[38] The problem of how to fund services that local government delivers remains a contentious issue.

Devolution to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland is an extreme form of decentralization. The Scottish government, accountable to a parliament in Edinburgh, has the right to enact legislation about a large range of services—such as education, health, and roads—of direct concern to individuals and communities in Scotland. It is also responsible for determining spending priorities within the limits set by its block grant of money from the British Treasury. With the Scottish National Party in government, it has political incentives to challenge the authority of Westminster; the Welsh Assembly has administrative

Delivering Public Services: [illegible]

BOX 8.6

Education is an example of how different institutions relate in complex ways. It is authorized by an Act of Parliament and principally financed by central government. Two Cabinet ministers divide responsibility; one is responsible for schools and the other for universities. The delivery of primary and secondary education is the responsibility of classroom teachers who are immediately accountable to the head of their school and not to Parliament. Dissatisfaction with the management of schools by local government has led Whitehall to establish city academies, secondary schools independent of local government but dependent on Whitehall for funding.

Increasingly, central government seeks to monitor the performance of schools in nationwide examinations and set targets that teachers and pupils are expected to achieve. But since the Whitehall department responsible for schools employs only 1 percent of the people working in education, success depends on actions taken by others. Conservative Minister of Education Lord Hailsham contrasted his position with that of being a minister of defense. In the latter, "You say to one person 'come' and he cometh and another 'go' and he goeth"; with the former, "You say to one man 'come' and he cometh not, and another 'go' and he stays where he is."[39]

See: Richard Rose, "The Growth of Government Organizations," in *Organizing Government, Governing Organizations*, ed. C. Campbell and B. G. Peters (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 99–128.

discretion, but has not gained legislative or taxing powers. Northern Ireland is exceptional because the key service is police and security, which was kept under the control of British ministers until agreement was achieved under a power-sharing government that included participants active in organizing its decades of civil war.

Nonelected Institutions

Executive agencies are headed by nonelected officials responsible for delivering many major public services. The biggest, the National Health Service (NHS), is not one organization but a multiplicity of separate institutions with separate budgets, such as hospitals and doctors' offices. Access to the National Health Service is free of charge to every citizen, but health care is not costless. Public money is allocated to hospitals and to doctors and dentists who must work within guidelines and targets established centrally. Because central government picks up the bill, the Treasury, as the monopoly purchaser, regularly seeks to cut costs in providing increasingly expensive health care.

Public demand for more and better health care has increased with the aging of the population and the development of new forms of medical treatment. The government's rationing of supply has sometimes involved months of waiting before a person can see a medical specialist or have a nonemergency hospital operation. British government has sought to deal with this problem by administrative changes intended to increase efficiency; that is, keeping total expenditure relatively constant by cutting the cost of individual services while expanding the total number supplied. It has not adopted the practice common in most EU countries of asking patients to pay a limited part of the cost of seeing a doctor or getting hospital treatment.

British government sponsors more than a thousand **quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations** (**"quangos"**). All are created by an Act of Parliament or by an executive decision; their heads are appointed by a Cabinet minister and public money can be appropriated to finance their activities. When things go wrong with quangos delivering public services, Parliament has difficulty in assigning responsibility. The coalition has sought to reduce the number of quangos on the grounds that they blur responsibility for decision-making.

Advisory committees draw on the expertise of individuals and organizations involved in programs for which Whitehall departments are responsible. For example, ministry officials dealing with agriculture can turn to advisory committees for detailed information about farming practices. Because they have no executive powers, advisory committees usually cost very little to run. Representatives of interest groups are glad to serve because this gives them privileged access to Whitehall and an opportunity to influence policies in which they are directly interested.

Administrative tribunals are quasi-judicial bodies that make expert judgments in such fields as medical negligence or handle a large number of small claims, such as disputes about whether the rent set for a rent-controlled flat is fair. Ministers may use tribunals to avoid involvement in politically controversial issues, such as decisions about deporting immigrants. Tribunals normally work much more quickly and cheaply than the courts. However, the quasi-judicial role of tribunals has created a demand for independent auditing of their procedures to ensure that they are fair to all sides. The task of supervising some seventy tribunals is in the hands of a quango, the Council on Tribunals.

Turning to the Market

The 1945 to 1951 Labour government turned away from the market because its socialist leaders believed that government planning was better able to promote economic growth and full employment. It nationalized many basic industries, such as electricity, gas, coal, the railways, and airlines. State ownership meant that industries did not have to run at a profit; some consistently made money while others consistently lost money and required big subsidies. Government ownership politicized wage negotiations and investment decisions. The Thatcher government promoted privatization by selling shares of nationalized industries on the stock market. Selling council houses to tenants at prices well below their market value was popular with tenants. Industries needing large public subsidies to maintain public services, such as the railways, have continued to receive subsidies after privatization.

Privatization has been justified on grounds of economic efficiency (the market is better than civil servants in determining investment, production, and

prices); political ideology (the power of government is reduced); service (private enterprise is more consumer-oriented than civil servants); and short-term financial gain (the sale of public assets can provide billions in revenue for government). Although the Labour Party initially opposed privatization, it quickly realized it would be electorally disastrous to take back privatized council houses and shares that people had bought at bargain prices.

Since many privatized industries affect the public interest, new regulatory agencies have been established to monitor telephones, gas, electricity, broadcasting, and water. Where there is a substantial element of monopoly in an industry, the government regulatory agency seeks to promote competition and often has the power to fix price increases at a lower rate than inflation. Even when government no longer owns an industry, when things go wrong, government ministers cannot ignore what has happened. An extreme example of government intervention occurred when several fatal accidents occurred on railway track maintained by a privatized transport company. The Blair government took it back into public ownership.

From Trust to Contract

Historically, the British civil service has relied on trust in delivering policies. British civil servants are much less rule-bound than their German counterparts and less threatened with being dragged into court than are American officials. Intragovernmental relations between Whitehall departments and representatives of local authorities arrived at consensual understandings upheld by all sides on the basis of trust as well as law. However, the Thatcher government preferred to use law and its control of finance to constrain local government and promote competition by establishing new agencies or contracting for public services with private sector companies. The New Labour government intensified the use of targets to be met by agencies receiving public money. The coalition government talks about decentralization but this can only be achieved on terms set by central government.

Trust has been replaced by contracts with agencies delivering such everyday services as automobile licenses and patents. In addition, the government has sought to keep capital expenditure from visibly increasing public debt through private finance initiatives. Banks and other profit-making companies loan money to build facilities that will be leased by government agencies or even operated by profit-making companies. The theory is that government can obtain the greatest value for money by buying services from the private sector, ranging from operating staff canteens in government offices to running prisons. However, the government's experience with cost overruns and failure to meet targets for expensive information-technology services shows that either the market cannot supply what government needs, civil servants do not know how to purchase and manage contracts for services costing hundreds of millions of pounds, or both.

Government by contract faces political limits because a departmental minister must answer to Parliament when something goes wrong. The Prison Service is a textbook example. It was established as an executive agency separate from Whitehall in 1993 to bring in private management in order to reduce unit costs in the face of rising "demand" for prisons due to changes in crime rates and sentencing policies. However, when prisoners escaped and other problems erupted, the responsible Cabinet minister blamed the business executive brought in to head the Prison Service. The Prison Service head replied by attacking the minister's refusal to live up to the terms of the contract agreed upon between them.

The proliferation of many agencies, each with a distinctive and narrow responsibility for a limited number of policies, tends to fragment government. For example, parents may have to deal with half a dozen different agencies to secure all the public services to which they are entitled for their children. Tony Blair promoted "joined up" government, linking the provision of related services so that they could more easily be received by individual citizens. To many public agencies, this looked like a device to increase Downing Street's power. In fact, it demonstrated the limited ability of a few people in Downing Street to determine what is done by millions of people delivering public services.

The Contingency of Influence

The theory of British government is centralist; all roads lead to Downing Street, where the prime minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have their homes and offices. The Foreign Office and the Treasury are only a few steps away. In practice, policymaking occurs in

many buildings, some within Whitehall and others far from London. Those involved can be divided horizontally between ministries and executive agencies, and vertically between central government, local authorities, and other nondepartmental bodies that deliver particular public services.

Influence is contingent; it varies with the problem at hand. Decisions about war and peace are made in Downing Street by the highest-ranking political and military officials. In the Iraq War, Tony Blair's media advisor was also heavily involved. By contrast, decisions about whether a particular piece of land should be used for housing are normally made by local authorities far from London.

The Conservative and Liberal Democratic coalition has sought to reduce differences by having ministers from both parties serve within most government departments. However, most political decisions involve two or more government agencies. Therefore, discussion and bargaining between government departments is required before decisions can be implemented. The making of policy is constrained by disputes within government much more than by differences between the governing party and its opponents. Many tentacles of the octopus of government work against each other, as public agencies often differ in their definition of the public interest. For example, the Treasury wants to keep taxes down while the Ministry of Defense wants more money to buy expensive equipment.

While the center of central government has been pressing harder on other public agencies, Whitehall itself has been losing influence because of its obligations in the EU. The Single Europe Act promotes British exports, but it also increases the scope for EU decisions to regulate the British economy. Whitehall has adopted a variety of strategies in its EU negotiations, including noncooperation and public dispute. Ironically, these are just the tactics that local government and other agencies use when they disagree with Whitehall.

WHY PUBLIC POLICY MATTERS

However a citizen votes, she or he does not need to look far to see the outputs of government. If there is a school-aged child or a pensioner in the house, the benefits to the family are continuous and visible. If a person is ill, the care provided by doctors and hospitals are important outputs of public policy; so too are police protection and tight controls of land use in order to maintain greenbelts.

To produce the benefits of public policy, government relies on three major resources: laws, money, and personnel. Most policies involve a combination of all three resources, but they do not do so equally. Policies regulating individual behavior, such as marriage and divorce, are law-intensive; measures that pay benefits to millions of people, such as social security, are money-intensive; and public services such as health care are labor-intensive.

Laws are the unique resource of government, for private enterprises cannot enact binding laws, and contracts are only effective if they can be enforced by courts. The British executive centralizes the power to draft laws and regulations that are usually approved without substantial amendment by Parliament. Moreover, many laws give ministers significant discretion in administration. For example, an employer may be required to provide "reasonable" toilet facilities rather than having all features of lavatories specified down to the size and height of a toilet seat.

Public employees are needed to administer laws and deliver major services. The top civil servants who work in Whitehall are few. The number of people officially counted as civil servants and public employees has been reduced by privatization. Nonetheless, more than a fifth of the entire British labor force directly depends on public spending for their jobs. The single biggest public employer is the NHS.

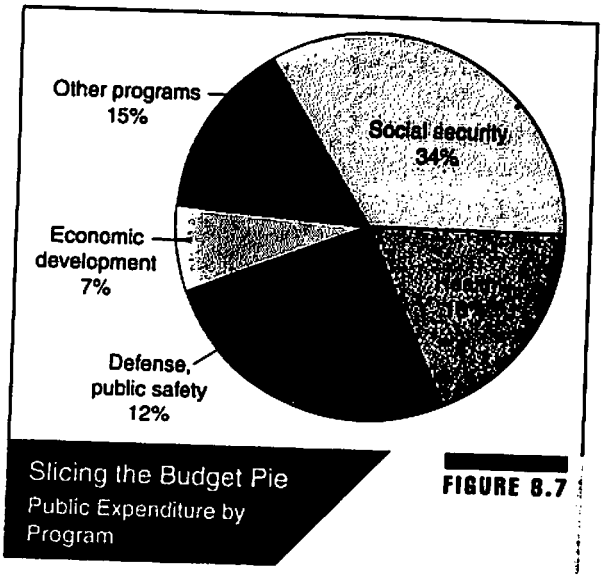
To meet the costs of public policy, British government collects up to two-fifths of the gross national product in taxation. Income tax accounts for 27 percent of tax revenue; the top rate of taxation is 50 percent on incomes over about $210,000 a year. Social security taxes are paid by deductions from wages and additional contributions of employers; these account for an additional 18 percent of revenue. Since there are no state or local income taxes, a well-to-do British person can pay taxes on income at a rate not much more than an American subject to federal, state, and local taxation in New York City.

Taxes on consumption are important, too. There is a value-added tax of 20 percent on the sale of almost all goods and services. Gasoline, cigarettes, and alcohol are taxed very heavily, too. Taxes on consumption in total account for about one-quarter of all tax revenue.

Since profits fluctuate from year to year, the government prefers businesses to pay taxes through Value Added Tax and on their total wages bill through the employer's contribution to social security. Taxes on the profits of corporations provide under a tenth of total tax revenue. Additional revenue comes from "stealth" taxes that ordinary citizens rarely notice and from taxes that do cause complaints, such as the council tax on houses. The government also raises money by taking a big cut from the National Lottery.

Social security programs are the most costly government policies; they account for one-third of total public expenditure (see Figure 8.7). They are also the most popular, transferring money from government to more than 10 million older people receiving pensions, in addition to millions of invalids, the unemployed, women on maternity leave, and poor people needing to supplement their limited incomes. Spending on health claims almost one-fifth of the public budget, and education one-seventh. Together, these three social welfare programs account for two-thirds of total public expenditure. Next in total spending are the classic responsibilities of government—defense and payment of interest on the national debt.

Since there is no item in the public budget labeled as "waste," any government wanting to make a big cut in public spending must squeeze existing programs—and big savings can be made only by squeezing popular programs. When Margaret Thatcher entered office in 1979, the public divided into three almost equal groups: those wanting to spend more and tax more, those in favor of cutting taxes even if it meant a reduction in public services, and a group wanting to leave things as they were. Thatcher's campaign to cut taxes and public spending initially produced a reaction in favor of public expenditure. During the New Labour government that followed, the pendulum swung back to an almost equal division between those who wanted to cut taxes and spending and those wanting to increase both, with the median group wanting to keep both as they were. Within weeks of taking office in 2010, the coalition government introduced substantial spending cuts. It said the need to do so was the fault of the big budget deficit left behind by the outgoing Labour government. Labour responded by charging that cutbacks in public spending would stifle economic growth, thus reducing tax revenue and increasing the government's deficit.



Slicing the Budget Pie
Public Expenditure by Program

FIGURE 8.7

POLICY OUTCOMES IN SOCIETY

In an open society such as Britain, social conditions reflect the interaction of public policies, the national and international economy, the not-for-profit institutions of civil society, and the choices that individuals and households make. Thus, the term *welfare state* is misleading. Total welfare in society is the sum of a "welfare mix," combining actions of government, the market, and the nonmonetized production of welfare in the household.[40]

Although commentators on British society often bemoan the country's economic decline relative to the United States and leading continental European countries, ordinary people do not compare their lives with those of people in other countries. The most important comparison is with their own past. Evaluating change across time shows great improvements in the living conditions of most people compared with their parents or grandparents. The longer the time span, the greater the improvement. Furthermore, in the production of such political "goods" as freedom from the state, confidence in the honesty of public officials, and administrative flexibility, British government has been an international leader. The great majority of people are proud of the achievements of Britain and would not want to be citizens of any other country.

Maintaining order within the United Kingdom is a unique responsibility of Westminster. In Northern Ireland, Whitehall has created a power-sharing government after a quarter century of negotiations with

Irish Republicans and armed Protestant groups about giving up violence. Since terrorist attacks by jihadists began in London in 2005, the British government has pursued a multiplicity of measures in an attempt to identify, isolate, and, as appropriate, arrest and jail those planning violence. One strategy has been to encourage moderate Muslim groups to engage in "self-policing" of their communities. Another has been to maintain surveillance on individuals and groups voicing fanatical opinions, including the endorsement of violence. A third has been to use extraordinary police powers to arrest and interrogate suspects.

In each of the past six decades, the British economy has grown. Compounding a small annual rate of growth over many decades cumulatively results in a big rise in living standards. Per capita national income has doubled in the lifetime of the median voter. Many consumer goods that were once thought of as luxuries, such as owning a car or one's own home or enjoying holidays abroad, are now mass-consumption goods. In addition, products unknown a few decades ago such as home computers and mobile phones are now commonplace.

Poverty can be found in Britain; the extent depends on the definition used. If poverty is defined in relative terms, such as having less than half the average wage, then about 10 percent of Britons are living in relative poverty. If poverty is defined as being trapped at a low income level for many years, then less than 4 percent are long-term poor.

In the past half century, small annual changes have compounded into cumulatively big changes over the generations. Infant mortality has declined by more than four-fifths since 1951. Life expectancy for men and for women has risen by twelve years. A gender gap remains, as women on average live five years longer than men. The postwar expansion of schools has significantly raised the quantity of education available. Classes are smaller in size, more than two-fifths of British youths go on to some form of further education, and many attend universities that did not exist in 1960. More than two-thirds of families now own their own home, and nine-tenths report satisfaction with their housing.

The outputs of public policy play a significant part in the everyday lives of Britons, and the benefits received are especially important for low-income families. During the year, the average family makes use of at least two major social programs. Everyone makes major use of publicly financed health and education services. Children at school and patients seeing a doctor do not think of themselves as participating in politics. Yet the services received are paid for by government and supervised by public officials. Social benefits such as free education, health care, and the guarantee of an income in old age are seen by many people as nonpolitical, and they do not want an election outcome to result in radical changes in familiar social policies.

When people are asked to evaluate their lives, they are most satisfied with their families, friends, homes, and jobs, while having just an average level of satisfaction with public services.[41] Public policies are evaluated differently. When opinion polls annually ask what people think next year will be like for themselves and their families, nine-tenths of the time, a majority say they expect the coming year to be all right for themselves, even when many expect economic difficulties for the country as a whole.

Satisfaction with the present goes along with acceptance of the principle of political change. However, there is no agreement about what direction change should take. Deputy Prime Minister and Liberal Democratic Party leader Nick Clegg introduced a set of electoral reforms, claiming that Britain is a "fractured democracy" because a party's share of MPs is not proportional to its share of votes. However, Prime Minister and Conservative Party leader David Cameron opposes abandoning the first-past-the-post electoral system, and some advocates of electoral reform criticize the AV system as an inadequate substitute for proportional representation. Party leaders at Westminster think that changes to devolved institutions in Scotland should strengthen its integration in the British political system, while the Scottish Nationalist government wants a weakening of ties and Scottish independence.

There is broad agreement about the need to make the British economy more competitive in a global economy. But even when goals are agreed on, such as achieving economic growth and reducing unemployment, there are differences of opinion about the particular policy that can best achieve the goal, and previous failures in sustaining a high rate of economic growth emphasize the difficulty of doing so. Politics in Britain is thus an ongoing debate about the direction, the means, and the tempo of adapting old institutions and inherited policies to the twenty-first century.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- How would you describe the unwritten constitution of Britain?
- What are the similarities and differences between being a president and being a prime minister?
- What are the nations of the United Kingdom, and how are they governed?
- What are the continents and countries with which Britain has the closest links?
- How would you describe the different parties that have seats in the House of Commons?
- What are the arguments for and against the use of the first-past-the-post electoral system in Britain?
- What policies claim the largest portion of public expenditures, and why?
- What are the main challenges facing the coalition government elected in the 2010 general election?

KEY TERMS

Cabinet
centralization
class
collectivist theory of government
Conservative Party
Crown
decentralization
devolution
Downing Street
first past the post
individualist theory of government
insider interest groups
Irish Republican Army (IRA)
Labour Party
Liberal Democratic Party
multiparty system
New Labour Party
Northern Ireland
official secrecy
outsider interest groups
Parliament
prime minister
privatization
quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organization (quangos)
Scotland
territorial justice
Thatcherism
trusteeship theory of government
United Kingdom
unwritten constitution
Wales
Westminster
Whitehall

INTERNET RESOURCES

Site of British government departments: www.direct.gov.uk.

Site of the House of Commons and of the House of Lords: www.parliament.uk.

Prime Minister's site: www.pm.gov.uk.

Comprehensive coverage of UK and global news: www.bbc.co.uk/news.

Commentaries on current proposals to reform government: www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit.

Reports of public opinion polls: http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/blog.

Official site of the Political Studies Association, the professional body of British political scientists: www.psa.ac.uk.

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ENDNOTES

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19. See Samuel H. Beer, *Modern British Politics*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).
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27. See Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain: Review of Voting Systems* (London: Stationery Office, Cm. 7304, 2008).
28. For details, see Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain.*


N
ATLANTIC OCEAN
North Sea
Irish Sea
English Channel
SCOTLAND
Wick
Inverness
Aberdeen
Glasgow
Edinburgh
NORTHERN IRELAND
Belfast
Tyne
NORTH
Leeds
NORTH WEST
Liverpool
Manchester
Mersey
Sheffield
EAST MIDLANDS
Norwich
EAST ANGLIA
Severn
WEST MIDLANDS
Birmingham
WALES
SOUTH EAST
Thames
Cardiff
London
SOUTH WEST
Portsmouth
Plymouth
BRITAIN
0 100 200 300 Miles
0 100 200 300 Kilometers

depression of the 1930s resulted in a conservative reaction in Britain (the formation of a "National" government), a moderate left reaction in the United States (the "New Deal"), a polarization and paralysis of public policy in France ("Immobilisme"), a moderate social democratic reaction in Sweden, and a radical right-and-left polarization in Germany, leading to a breakdown of democracy and the emergence of National Socialism. While the causes of World War II were complex, the pacifism of Britain, the demoralization and defeatism in France, the isolationism of the United States, and the nihilism and aggression of Germany were all fed by the devastating worldwide economic depression of the 1930s.

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