Chapter Eight
Politics in Britain
Country Bio: United Kingdom

- Pop: 59.6 million
- Territory: 94,525 sq. miles
- Year of Independence: 12th century
- Constitution: unwritten; partly statutes, partly common law and practice
- Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II
- Head of Government: Prime Minister Tony Blair
- Language: English, plus about 600,000 who regularly speak Welsh and 60,000 who speak the Scottish form of Gaelic

- Religion:
  - Anglican: 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
  - Did not state a religion: 4.4 million
United Kingdom

- Old democracy
- Britain did not become a democracy overnight.
  - Evolution not revolution
  - Democratization was a slow process
  - Contrasts with the dominant European practice of countries switching between democratic and undemocratic regimes
Policy Challenges Facing Britain

- Thatcher and Blair governments
  - Opened Britain up to international trade
  - Forced the British economy to become more competitive

- Problems
  - Maintaining economic growth
  - Fighting crime
  - Multiculturalism
  - Blair government: too much “emphasis on selling”
  - Who will succeed him in the Labour Party?
  - What of the Conservative Party?
    - Cameron
Policy Challenges Facing Britain

- Liberal Democratic Party
  - Closest approximation to a “left” party that Britain has today
- General Election
- Where does Britain belong? How should it act?
  - Leading world power or small neutral country?
    - 49% favored being a small neutral power; 34% world power
Policy Challenges Facing Britain

- British Empire
- Commonwealth
  - Antigua and Australia to Zambia and Zimbabwe differ from each other in many ways including their commitment to democracy.
- Special relationship with U.S.
- Britain’s world position has declined
- European Community (1957) – now the EU
  - Britain did not join until 1973.
  - Created more policy challenges: beer in metric units or a British pint
The Environment of Politics

- One Crown but five nations
  - United Kingdom
    - Great Britain and Ireland created in 1801
    - Great Britain, the principal part of the UK was divided into England, Scotland and Wales.
      - Wales
      - Scotland
      - Northern Ireland
    - The remainder of Ireland rebelled against the Crown in 1916 and a separate Irish state with its capital in Dublin was recognized in 1921.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Identities</th>
<th>England</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>Northern Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English, Scots, Welsh, Irish</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, don't know</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes 21 percent identifying as Ulster

The Environment of Politics

- A union: a political system having only one source of authority, the British Parliament
- National identity – UK is a multinational state
- Historically, Scotland and Wales have been governed by British Cabinet ministers accountable to the Westminster Parliament.
  - In May, 1999, a Scottish Parliament with powers to legislate, tax, and spend was first elected to sit in Edinburgh.
    - 129 seat Parliament
    - Mixed system: first pas the post and proportional ballots.
- Welsh Parliament (1999)
  - 60 seat Welsh Assembly; Mixed system
- Northern Ireland is the most un-English part of the UK
  - Formally a secular polity
  - National identity questions: Catholics and Protestants
  - In turmoil since 1968; IRA
  - British policy in N.Ireland has been erratic
  - Good Friday Agreement
A Multiracial Britain

- Relatively small but noteworthy number of immigrants from other parts of Europe
- The worldwide British Empire was multi-racial but not democratic.
  - It is now a multiracial commonwealth.
  - These immigrants have only one characteristic in common: they are not white.
  - 2001 census estimated the nonwhite population of the UK had risen from 74,000 to 4.6 million
  - 2006 the Home Office minister (immigration control) admitted that there were hundred of thousands of illegal immigrants in Britain.
  - British born offspring of immigrants largely see themselves as British, but many do not. Only 2/5s of Chinese identify as Chinese.
- Since 9/11 Labour’s focus has been to stress the integration of immigrant families into the British way of life.
- Response to terrorist attacks: increase police powers; restrictions on asylum seekers; deportation made easier
The Legacy of History

- Britain has a long past; limits current choices
  - General positive legacy
  - Great continuity of political institutions
- When did it develop a modern system of government?
  - No agreement on this question
  - Queen Victoria’s reign (1837-1901)
The Legacy of History: Developments since WWII can be divided into five stages

- 1944 - Churchill: mixed economy Keynesian welfare state
- 1951-1965 – Churchill and the Conservative Party maintained a consensus about the welfare state – led to consumer prosperity. Failure to seize the Suez Canal.
The Legacy of History: Developments since WWII can be divided into five stages

- Early 1960s – age of “hyper-innovation” – Labour Party- “Let’s go with Labor”
  - 1970s Heath’s Conservative government – Britain becomes member of the European Community
- Fourth stage: Thatcher’s radical break with both the Wilson and Heath policies
  - Thatcher never won more than 43% of the total vote but division within the other parties helped her win.
  - But public spending continued to grow in her era.
  - Autocratic governing style; replaced by John Major
- Fifth state; Tony Blair – Labour leader in 1994.
  - 2nd longest serving prime minister of the past century
  - Successor
The Structure of Government

- Descriptions of a government often start with its constitution.
  - England never had a written constitution.
  - Unwritten constitution
    - Vagueness makes it flexible
    - Few constraints in an unwritten constitution compared to a written one
      - U.S. Constitution amendment procedure
      - Britain: can be changed by majority vote in Parliament or by the government of the day choosing to act in an unprecedented manner
      - English courts claim no power to declare an act of Parliament unconstitutional.
## Comparing an Unwritten and a Written Constitution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Britain (unwritten)</th>
<th>United States (written)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origins</strong></td>
<td>Medieval customs</td>
<td>1787 Constitutional Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
<td>Unwritten, indefinite</td>
<td>Written, precise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final power</strong></td>
<td>Majority in Parliament</td>
<td>U.S. Supreme Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bill of individual rights</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amendment</strong></td>
<td>Ordinary vote in Parliament; unprecedented action by government</td>
<td>More than majority vote in Congress, states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy relevance</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Crown and Government

- Crown rather than a constitution symbolizes the authority of government.
  - Monarch only ceremonial head of state.
- What constitutes the Crown?
  - Government
  - Government officials
  - Whitehall
  - Downing Street
  - Parliament
  - Collectively referred to as Westminster
The Prime Minister

- Prime minister
  - Primus inter pares
  - Imperatives of the prime minister
    - Winning elections
    - Campaigning through the media
    - Patronage
    - Parliamentary performance
    - Making and balancing policies
The Cabinet and Cabinet Ministers

- 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.
- No longer a place for collective deliberation about policies.
- Remain important as department heads
- Major Whitehall departments differ greatly from each other
  - Home Office – Home Secretary
  - Treasury – Chancellor of the Exchequer
- Political reputation of Cabinet ministers depends on their success in promoting the interests of their department in parliament, in the media and in battles within Whitehall.
The Civil Service

- Largest number of civil servants are clerical staff with little discretion.
- The most important group of civil servants is the smallest
  - Advise ministers and oversee work of their departments
  - Top civil servants are bipartisan, being ready to work for whichever party is the winner of an election
  - Thatcher: focus on making civil service more businesslike
    - Save money for tax cuts
  - Blair continued to focus on businesslike civil service but with the goal of providing more public services without raising taxes.
The Role of Parliament

- The principal division in Parliament is between the party with a majority of seats in the House of Commons and the opposition party.
  - If a bill or motion is identified as a vote of confidence in the government, the government will fall if it is defeated.
  - MPs from the majority party generally vote as the party leadership instructs
    - Only by voting as a bloc can their party maintain control of government
    - If you vote against, it is a “rebellion”
  - Whitehall departments draft bills presented to Parliament
  - Government rather than Parliament sets the budget
The Role of Parliament

- Functions of MPs
  - First, weigh political reputations
  - MPs in the governing party have private access to the government ministers.
    - Role of the whip
  - Third, publicizing issues
  - Scrutinizing legislation
  - Examine how Whitehall departments administer public policies
The Role of Parliament

- House of Lords
  - Unique as a second chamber because it was initially composed of hereditary peers
  - 1999 the Labour government abolished the right of all but 92 hereditary peers to sit in the House of Lords
    - Big majority of its members are life peers who have been given a lifelong title for achievement in one or another public sphere
    - No party has a majority there
    - 750 members
  - Government often introduces relatively noncontroversial legislation in the Lords if it deals with technical matters
  - Uses the Lords as a revising chamber to amend bills
  - Lords cannot veto legislation, but it can and does amend or delay the passage of some government bills
The Role of Parliament

- The limited influence of both houses of Parliament encourages proposals for reform.
- Controversies around the House of Lords
  - Necessary but...
  - Legitimacy issues
Government as Network

- Within the Whitehall network, a core set of political figures are especially important in determining policies.
  - Prime minister
  - Chancellor of the Exchequer, head of the Treasury
Political Culture and Legitimacy

- Trusteeship theory of government
- Interest group theory
- Individualist theory
The Legitimacy of Government

- Evidenced by the readiness of the British people to comply with basic political laws
- Not related to economic calculations
- Symbols of a common past, such as the monarchy, are sometimes cited as major determinants of legitimacy.
- Habit and tradition
Abuses of Power

- Power of the government to get away with mistakes is supported by
  - Official secrecy
  - Doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility
- Examples of misleading parliament and the people
- Distrust of elected representatives
- Decline in ministerial accountability to parliament
Trust in Political Institutions

Culture as a Constraint on Policy

- The values of the political culture impose limitations on the scope of public policy.
  - Cultural norms about freedom of speech prevent political censorship.
  - Today, the most significant limits on the scope of public policy are practical and political.
    - Health care limited by the economy and the reluctance to raise taxes
Political Socialization

- Socialization influences the political division of labor.
  - Family and Gender
  - Education
  - Class
  - Mass Media
Political Participation

- The wider the definition of political participation, the greater the number who can be said to be involved.
- The most politically involved are no more than 1/10 of the electorate.
- Those who say they are interested in politics, take part in a demonstration or are active in a party or pressure group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Liberal Democrat</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>−3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–59</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 plus</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>−21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower middle</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled manual</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled manual</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>−16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>−5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: British Election Survey, 2005; number of reported voters—2,787.
Political Recruitment

- The most important political roles in Britain are those of Cabinet minister, higher civil servant, partisan advisers, and intermittent public persons (experts).
- Each group has its own recruitment pattern.
- Selective recruitment
Organizing Group Interests

- Civil society (institutions independent of government) has flourished in Britain for centuries.
  - Confederation of British Industries
  - Big business-direct contacts with Whitehall and with ministers
  - Trades Union Congress
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage naming first</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime minister</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet ministers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior civil servants</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior civil servants</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior ministers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Lords</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backbench MPs (less than 1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pressure Group View of Who Holds Most Power**

What Interest Groups Want

- Most interest groups pursue four goals:
  - Information about government policies and changes in policies
  - Sympathetic administration of established policies
  - Influence on policymaking
  - Symbolic status

- Reciprocal benefits to government
  - Cooperation in administering and implementing policies
  - Information about what is happening in their field
  - Evaluation of the consequences of policies under consideration
  - Support for government initiatives
Organizing for Political Action in Civil Society

- Insider pressure groups
- Outsider pressure groups
- State-distancing strategy
  - Less reliance on negotiations with interest groups and more on independent authority of the Crown
Party System and Electoral Choice

- A general election must occur at least once every five years
- Within that period, the prime minister is free to call an election at any time.
- Winner is the candidate who is first past the post (plurality)
- The winner nationally is the party that gains the most constituency seats.
- Two party system
- Multiparty system
- To win a substantial number of seats in the House of Commons, a party must either gain at least one-third of the popular vote nationally or concentrate its votes in a limited number of constituencies.
  - The distribution of seats in the House of Commons different from the distribution of the share of votes
  - May have as little as 35 percent of the popular vote
Control of Party Organization

- Much of the work of party organizations is devoted to keeping together three disparate parts of the party:
  - Those who vote for it;
  - The minority who are active in its constituency associations;
  - And the party in Parliament.
Control of Party Organization

- Each British party leader is elected by rules that differ from party to party.
  - Labor Party
    - Electoral college composed of three groups: Labour MPs, constituency party members, and trade unions
  - Conservative Party
    - Until 1965 the party leader was not elected but “emerged” as a result of consultation among senior MPs and peers. Since then they have elected their leader.
    - First a ballot among Conservative MPs; then the two MPs with the most votes are then voted on by the party membership at large
  - Liberal Democrats
    - Have a small central organization
    - Candidates for leadership are nominated by Liberal MPs and the leadership is determined by vote of the party’s membership.
  - Party leader is strongest when he or she is also prime minister.
Party Images and Appeals

- While the terminology of the left and right is part of the language of elite politicians, it is rejected by the great majority of British voters.
  - Median voter tends to choose the central position
  - Only a tenth place themselves on the far left or far right
  - Much consensus among voters on a variety of issues
  - Big divisions in contemporary British politics often cut across party lines
    - European Union
    - Iraq War
  - Parties increasingly emphasize collectivist economic interests and consensual goals.
Party Images and Appeals

- In office, the governing party has the votes to enact any parliamentary legislation it wishes, regardless of protests by the opposition.
  - For every government bill that the opposition votes against on principle in the House of Commons, three are adopted with interparty agreement.
- New governments must also enforce the laws enacted by the previous governments.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Prosperity With a Purpose</td>
<td>Let’s Go With Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Action, not Words</td>
<td>Time for Decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>A Better Tomorrow</td>
<td>Now Britain’s Strong—Let’s Make It Great to Live In</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Firm Action for a Fair Britain</td>
<td>Let Us Work Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Putting Britain First</td>
<td>Britain Will Win With Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>The Conservative Manifesto</td>
<td>The Labour Way Is the Better Way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>The Challenge of Our Times</td>
<td>The New Hope for Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>The Next Moves Forward</td>
<td>Britain Will Win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>The Best Future for Britain</td>
<td>Time to Get Britain Working Again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>You Can Only Be Sure</td>
<td>Because Britain Deserves Better Than the Conservatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Time for Common Sense</td>
<td>Ambition for Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>It’s Time for Action</td>
<td>Britain Forward not Back</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Central Authority and Decentralized Delivery of Policies

- In a unitary state, political authority is centralized.
  - They are binding on all public agencies through Acts of Parliament and regulations prepared in Whitehall.
- Delivery of services
  - Turning good intentions into a program takes time and money.
  - Running the Whitehall obstacle race is the first step in intra-governmental politics.
- Because of Treasury control of public expenditure, before a bill can be put to Parliament, the Treasury must authorize the additional expenditures required, because increased spending implies increased taxation.
- A departmental minister must pilot a bill through Parliament.
  - If controversial, attacks from the Opposition and a host of amendments designed to test the minister’s understanding of a policy.
- Minister may also negotiate agreement with public agencies outside Whitehall, and with affected interest groups.
Central Authority and Decentralized Delivery of Policies

- Local government is subordinate to central government and in Scotland and Wales to devolved representative assemblies.
- Local council elections are fought on party lines.
- Local government is usually divided into two tiers of county and district councils, each with responsibility for some local services.
  - Jumble of more or less local institutions delivering such public services as education, police protection, refuse collection, housing, and cemeteries.
- Central government financial grants are the largest source of local government revenue.
- Both Conservative and Labour parties are centralist.
  - Centralization is justified in terms of territorial justice.
Central Authority and Decentralized Delivery of Policies

- Devolution
- Executive agencies
  - National Health Service (NHS)
- Quangos
  - Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organizations
    - Advisory Committees
    - Administrative Tribunals
- Turning to the Market
  - Privatization
Central Authority and Decentralized Delivery of Policies

- Civil service has relied on trust in delivering policies.
- Trust has been replaced by contracts.
- Theory of British government is centralist.
  - All roads lead to Downing Street; influence is contingent - it varies with the problem at hand
- Public policy matters
- Government relies on three major resources to produce the benefits of public policy: laws, money, and personnel.
  - Social security most costly program of the British government
  - Stealth taxes
Public Expenditure by Program

Policy Outcomes and Changes in Society

- In an open society, like that of Britain, social conditions are a consequence of the interaction of public policies, the national and international economy, the not-for-profit institutions of civil society, and individual and household activities free of state control.
  - Defense is a unique responsibility of government.
  - Crime prevention
    - Policing AND whether there are lots of unemployed youths ready to violate the laws in pursuit of money.
  - British economy has grown since WWII.
  - Living standards are high.
  - Everyone makes use of publicly financed health and education services.
Policy Outcomes and Changes in Society

- Popular expectations
  - Generally low
    - Decades of economic difficulties have lowered expectations of what government can do to make the economy grow or prevent unemployment.
    - British people do not hold government responsible for what is most important in their lives
      - Personal circumstances are evaluated very differently from public policy.