

Chapter 4: Great Britain

THE BASICS

Great Britain

Size	244,820 sq. km (about the same size as California)
Climate	Mild, but over half the days are overcast or rainy
Population	61 million
GDP per capita	\$31,800
Currency	£1 = US\$1.998
Ethnic composition	92% White, 8% other
Religion	Predominantly Anglican, but 9 million Roman Catholic, 1 million Muslim, 1.5 million other Protestant, 400,000 Sikh, 350,000 Hindu, 300,000 Jewish
Capital	London
Form of government	Constitutional monarchy
Head of state	Queen Elizabeth II
Head of government	Prime Minister Gordon Brown (2007)



The End of the Blair Decade

Successes and popularity of first term did not last

- Dissatisfaction with Labour
- Unpopularity of Iraq war
- Gordon Brown became PM in June 2007 Labour Party
- David Cameron became PM in May 2010 Conservative Party

Thinking about Britain:

- Key questions
 - Gradual change
 - Relative economic decline
 - UK as dependent on world events rather than master of them
 - Thatcher redefinition of politics
 - Impact of Blair and “New Labour”

TABLE 4.1 Britain's Decline International Rank in GNP per Capita

COUNTRY	1939	1960	1974	1995	2000	2006
UNITED STATES	1	1	3	5	3	1
GREAT BRITAIN	2	6	14	18	14	8

Source: Data for 1939, 1960, and 1974 from Walter Dean Burnham, "Great Britain: The Collapse of the Collectivist Consensus," in Louis Maisel and Joseph Cooper, eds., *Political Parties: Development and Decay* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1978), 274; data for 1995 from World Bank, *World Development Report 1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 189; data for 2000 from www.worldbank.org, accessed 19 June 2001 and 24 June 2007.

Thinking about Britain:

- The basics
 - The Kingdoms
 - One of world's most densely populated countries
 - No longer an “all white” country
 - Welfare state is still strong
 - Social class remains a powerful force

The Evolution of the British State

- Sequential, rather than simultaneous, tasks of British
 - Building the nation state
 - Defining the role of religion
 - Establishing liberal democracy
 - Industrial revolution
- Maintained legitimacy without constitution

The Evolution of the British State

- The Broad Sweep of British History
 - King and Parliament sharing power for over 700 years
 - Religion removed from politics after 16th and 17th centuries
 - Growth of Parliamentary power; decline of Royal power
 - Capitalism and urbanization promoted democratic reforms
 - Modern parties established in late 19th century

TABLE 4.2 Key Events and Trends in British History

YEAR	EVENT
1215	Magna Carta signed
1532–36	Reformation; establishment of Church of England
1642–60	Civil war and Restoration
1688	Glorious Revolution
1701	Act of Settlement
Early 1700s	Emergence of prime minister
1832	Great Reform Act
1911	Reform of House of Lords
1928	Right to vote for all adults

The Evolution of the British State

- The Collectivist Consensus
 - WWII coalition government became an informal agreement on many issues
 - Beveridge Report of 1942 formed core of “Collectivist Consensus” (social welfare program)
 - Post-war political cleavages were class based more than policy based

TABLE 4.3 The Collectivist Years and Beyond

YEAR	EVENT
1942	Beveridge Report published
1945	Labour elected
1948	National Health Service created
1951	Conservatives return to power
1964	Labour returns to power
1972	Heath government forced into U-turn
1974	Labour wins two elections without a working majority
1979	Thatcher elected
1990	Thatcher resigns, replaced by John Major
1997	Blair elected

British Political Culture

- The civic culture and the collectivist years
 - high levels of legitimacy
 - great civic tolerance
 - patriotic enthusiasm

British Political Culture

- The politics of protest: toward an uncivic culture?
 - growing unrest in 1970s
 - Northern Ireland a battlefield
 - Urban race riots
 - Radicalization of unions in face of growing unemployment and economic decline
 - Renewed activism of anti-nuclear, anti-war movements
 - polarization of politics and alienation of the center

British Political Culture

- The civic culture holds
 - Dangers of protest were fleeting
 - Economic recovery of the 1980s eased many problems
 - skepticism toward politicians grew

British Political Culture

- Will there always be a Britain?
 - Identification with the UK has declined in past 40 years
 - Resurgence of support for regional parties in Scotland and Wales
 - Devolution (regional parliaments)
 - Monarchy's loss of influence and prestige
 - Increasing racial diversity (most born in the UK)
 - Growing importance of the EU

Political Participation

- Parties primary vehicle for participation for over 100 years
 - Party manifestos (platforms) have been very important in past
 - All major parties have become “catch-all” parties

TABLE 4.4 British Prime Ministers since 1945

NAME	PARTY	YEARS IN OFFICE
Clement Attlee	Labour	1945–51
Winston Churchill	Conservative	1951–55
Anthony Eden	Conservative	1955–56
Harold Macmillan	Conservative	1956–63
Alec Douglas Home	Conservative	1963–64
Harold Wilson	Labour	1964–70
Edward Heath	Conservative	1970–74
Harold Wilson	Labour	1974–76
James Callaghan	Labour	1976–79
Margaret Thatcher	Conservative	1979–90
John Major	Conservative	1990–97
Tony Blair	Labour	1997–2007
Gordon Brown	Labour	2007–

Political Participation

- The Conservatives
 - Traditionally pragmatic politicians
 - Historically practiced “noblesse oblige”
 - Elitist and effective party organization
 - Opening organization to more democratic processes led to Thatcher’s election
 - Since Thatcher, party has struggled to find success

Political Participation

- Labour
 - Began as alliance of unions, socialists, and cooperative associations in the early 20th century
 - Led by pragmatic politicians for 70 years
 - Economic crisis and New Left activists led to leadership by party's left wing
 - Leaders more interested in electoral success than ideology were chosen in mid-'80s
 - New Labour, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and younger, more moderate leaders took over in mid-1990s

TABLE 4.5 British General Election Results since 1945

YEAR	CONSERVATIVES		LABOUR		LIBERAL DEMOCRATS		OTHER	
	VOTES	SEATS	VOTES	SEATS	VOTES	SEATS	VOTES	SEATS
1945	39.8%	213	48.3%	393	9.1%	12	2.7%	22
1950	43.5	299	46.1	315	9.1	9	1.3	2
1951	48.0	321	46.8	295	2.5	6	0.7	3
1955	49.7	345	46.4	277	2.7	6	1.1	2
1959	49.4	365	43.8	258	5.9	6	1.0	1
1964	43.4	304	44.1	317	11.2	9	1.3	0
1966	41.9	253	47.9	363	8.5	12	1.6	2
1970	46.4	330	43.0	288	7.5	6	3.1	6
1974 (Feb)	37.8	297	37.1	301	19.3	14	5.8	23
1974 (Oct)	35.8	277	39.2	319	18.3	13	6.7	26
1979	43.9	339	37.0	269	13.8	11	5.3	16
1983	42.4	397	27.6	209	25.4	23	4.6	21
1987	42.3	376	30.8	229	22.6	22	4.3	23
1992	41.8	336	34.4	271	17.8	20	6.0	24
1997	30.6	165	43.2	419	16.7	45	9.7	30
2001	31.7	166	40.7	413	18.3	52	8.5	28
2005	32.3	198	35.3	356	22.1	62	10.3	30

Note: Others consist almost exclusively of regional parties in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Liberals includes Liberals up to 1983, Liberal–Social Democratic Alliance in 1983–87, and Liberal Democrats in 1992. The total number of seats varies from election to election, with a low of 625 in 1950 and 1951 and a high of 659 in 1997.

Political Participation

- The Liberal Democrats
 - Product of 1987 merger of Liberal and Social Democratic parties
 - Plurality elections prevent it from winning as many seats as their percentage of national vote would seem to entitle it
 - Currently challenging the Conservatives as second-largest party
- Minor parties

Political Participation

- The British electorate
 - Long time class-based politics upset by radicalism and Thatcher victories
 - Rather than realignment, it was a dealignment
 - Labour victories probably the result of voter “fatigue” with Conservative government and Labour’s success in appealing to middle class and post-materialist voters

TABLE 4.6 The Changing Role of Class and Gender in British Politics (percentage voting Labour)

YEAR	WORKING CLASS	WOMEN
1974 (Oct.)	57	38
1979	50	35
1983	38	26
1987	42	32
1992	45	34
1997	58	49

Source: Adapted from Dennis Kavanaugh, *Thatcherism and British Politics: The End of Consensus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 168; Philip Norton, *The British Polity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1994), 91–92; and David Sanders, “The New Electoral Background,” in *New Labour Triumphs: Britain at the Polls*, ed. Anthony King et al. (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1997), 220.

Political Participation

- Interest groups
 - Trades Union Council and Confederation of British Industries are dominant peak associations
 - Lobbying must be done at highest levels where bills are drafted

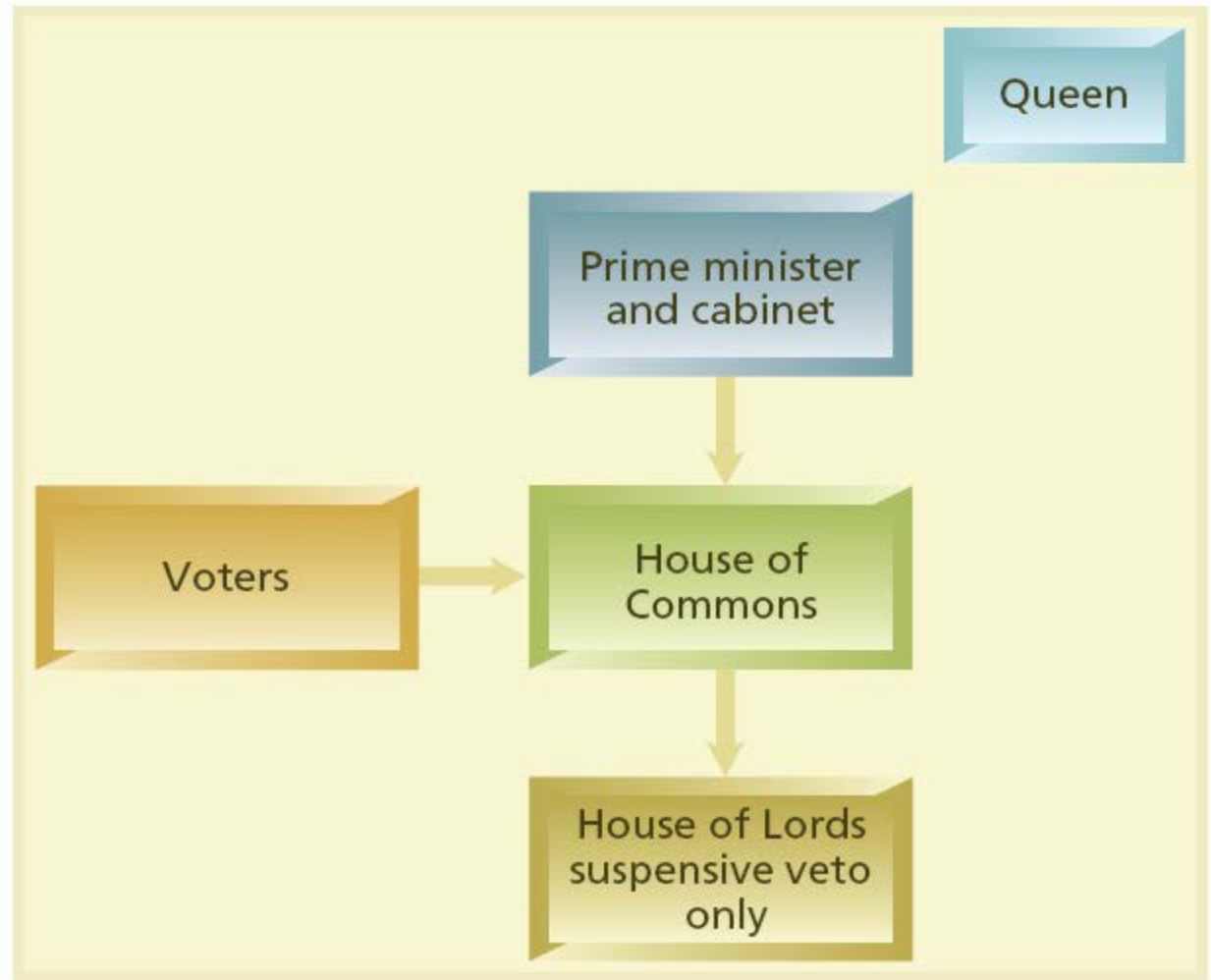
The British State: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities

- The Monarchy and the Lords: visible but powerless
- Parliamentary sovereignty, sort of
 - Real power lies with leadership of majority party
 - Collective responsibility is key to power
- Cabinet government?
 - Ministers rely on expertise of senior civil servants
 - Top ministers and PM's personal advisors make broad policies

TABLE 4.7 The British and American States

FEATURE	UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES
Basic constitutional arrangements	Unwritten Unitary Fusion of powers Relatively strong	Written Federal Separation of powers Relatively weak
Executive	Dominant Recruited from Parliament	Power to persuade Recruited everywhere
Legislature	Mostly debating Party voting	Making laws Coalition-based voting

FIGURE 4.1 Decision Making in Britain



The British State: Enduring Myths and Changing Realities

- The rest of the state
 - Civil servants act as administrators, not policy makers
 - Regulatory agencies oversee former government corporations
 - QUANGOs make a great deal of policy and regulation
 - While courts have potential to be more active, they have never exercised a policy-making role

Public Policy: The Thatcher and Blair Revolutions

- Domestic politics
 - From nationalization to privatization
 - New Labour's "humane face" on social welfare reform
 - Traffic tax in London to pay for public transport investment

Public Policy: The Thatcher and Blair Revolutions

- Foreign policy
 - Europe
 - Should the UK join European Monetary Union?
 - Should the UK ratify the new EU treaty (constitution)?
 - Iraq: How to respond to massive public opposition?

Feedback

- Centralized, professional media
- BBC and independent broadcasters offer thorough political coverage
- Conclusion: Blair's legacy and British democracy

Learning Objectives

After mastering the concepts presented in this chapter, you will be able to:

- Gain general knowledge of the history of the political system in the United Kingdom. Recognize the importance of *Magna Carta* and the role of monarchy in Great Britain.
- Understand the concept of gradualism while analyzing the development of British political system.
- Define civic culture and civil society and assess the importance of both in the British political system.
- Understand the position of *Euroskeptics*
- Recognize devolution and its impact on the development of British state.
- Define patterns of collective responsibility in the British executive government.
- Describe British cabinet government.

Learning Objectives

After mastering the concepts presented in this chapter, you will be able to:

- Comprehend the role of the political opposition in the British parliament and define the 'shadow cabinet' in the functionality of British legislature.
- Understand the nature of 'parliamentarian sovereignty.'
- Describe the work of British parliament
- Recognize the specification of British electoral system. Learn the difference between 'winner-take-all' and proportional representation electoral systems.
- Describe the impact of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair governments on the political and economic system in the United Kingdom.
- Understand the impact of nationalization and privatization on economic and political development of the British state.