

**POPULATION**

63.2 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 regularly speak Welsh and about 60,000 speak Gaelic; among immigrants, about 1,000,000 use an Indian language as their home language and 550,000 speak Polish

RELIGION

National census: Christian 37.2 million, of which the majority are nominally Church of England; Muslim 2.8 million; Hindu 900,000; Sikh 500,000; Jewish 300,000; other 300,000; no religion 16,000,000; no reply 5,000,000

CHAPTER 8

Politics in Britain

Richard Rose

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 8.1** Discuss the domestic and international challenges currently facing Britain, focusing on its coalition government and increased globalization.
- 8.2** Describe recent changes in British politics, from the development of the welfare state through left/right conflict over Thatcherism to less confrontational government under Tony Blair and David Cameron.
- 8.3** Identify the ways in which Britain is a “multinational state.”
- 8.4** Explain the structure of British government and list the duties of Cabinet ministers and civil servants.
- 8.5** Summarize the collectivist and individualist theories of government, using examples from Britain.
- 8.6** List the five main influences on political socialization in Britain.
- 8.7** Contrast British citizens’ participation in political versus nonpartisan activities.
- 8.8** Discuss the paths to elective office and high-ranking civil service jobs in Britain.
- 8.9** Describe the relationships, including privileged access, between various interest groups and Britain’s governing parties.
- 8.10** Discuss the emergence of the multiparty system and how this is limited by the first-past-the-post electoral system.
- 8.11** Describe the “Whitehall obstacle race.”
- 8.12** Discuss the roles of the central and local British governments and public and privatized institutions in delivering services.
- 8.13** Summarize the roles of laws, money, and personnel in Britain’s public policies.
- 8.14** Identify the effects of global interdependence on Britain’s economy and thus on its political capabilities.

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 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 India, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Just as Alexis de Tocqueville traveled to America in 1831 to seek the secrets of democracy, so we can examine Britain to learn more about causes of durable representative government. The limitations of the British model are shown by the inability of its institutions to be translated to countries gaining independence from the British Empire. Even more striking is 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 non-democratic forms of government. Whereas the oldest British people have lived in the same political system all their lives, the oldest Germans have lived under at least four constitutions, two democratic and two undemocratic.

At no point in history did representatives of the British people meet to decide a constitution setting out their form of government, 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 traditional institutions. However, the creation of a modern system of government does not get rid of the problems of governing.

Current Policy Challenges

8.1 Discuss the domestic and international challenges currently facing Britain, focusing on its coalition government and increased globalization.

The outcome of the 2010 general election presented 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 and automatically forms a government. However, in 2010, no party won the 326 seats needed to have a majority in the House of Commons. The **Conservative Party** under the leadership of David Cameron won 307 seats, Labour won 258 seats, and the **Liberal Democratic Party** came third with 57 seats. The result was a coalition government with the Conservative leader, David Cameron, the **prime minister**, and the Liberal Democratic leader, Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister.

Since no member of parliament had ever served in a coalition government before, the biggest challenge the partners face is to keep the coalition together.



Two People, Two Party Leaders, One Coalition Government

An election outcome 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).

Doing so has been helped by the enactment of a law giving the House of Commons a fixed term of five years, instead of leaving the choice of an election date with the prime minister. This makes it hard for either coalition partner to break the coalition up for its electoral advantage. The two leaders have benefited by becoming nationally prominent, and many of their senior colleagues have also gained advantages that go with office. However, both parties are subject to internal tensions. Conservatives, especially those who are Thatcherite and see Liberal Democrats occupying government offices that they would like, complain that the coalition has kept the government from adopting more Thatcherite policies. Liberal Democrats cite this complaint as proof that they have had a positive effect on how Britain is governed. However, Clegg has come under fire from Liberals because the party broke an election pledge by accepting the introduction of high university tuition fees, and failed to secure an electoral reform that would benefit the party.

In addition, globalization raises a challenge to the doctrine of the sovereignty of Parliament, which British interpret 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, the chief political and economic problems facing British government today cannot be dealt with by unilateral actions of British government. Many top ministers now spend as much as one day a week at meetings in other countries and are in almost daily contact with leaders of other countries whose actions influence Britain.

The British economy today imports food and raw materials and exports manufactured goods and sophisticated services in fields such as banking and education. The British pound sterling (£) is an international currency, but statements by the prime minister 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. At the beginning of 2014, the value of one pound fluctuated around \$1.60 and it fluctuates with the ups and downs of the euro too.

In the decade before the global financial crisis of 2008, the British economy grew by two-fifths; this was higher than the average growth of European Union countries and similar to that of the United States. The 2008 global financial crisis has substantially affected

Britain. The decline in demand from major trading partners has hurt exports, and the rise in the price of energy and food has driven up every household's cost of living. The Bank of England cut interest rates to below 1 percent and generated hundreds of billions of pounds of credit in hopes of stimulating economic growth with limited success. Banks threatened with bankruptcy have been taken into state ownership. Inflation has pushed up prices more than wages. Economic difficulties have reduced tax revenue, thus leading to an increase in the government's deficit.

Since the crisis hit Britain while a Labour government was in power, the Conservative-led coalition with Liberal Democrats that took office in 2010 could initially blame their problems on their predecessor. However, a change of the parties in power did not change the problems facing the new government. There are built-in pressures to increase public expenditure, because an aging population requires more health care, longer life increases the cost of pensions, and an educated population demands better education for their children. There are problems in boosting exports because other countries are under pressure to save more and spend less.

The first priority of the coalition government has been to cut the deficit in the belief that this will stimulate private sector investment and consumption and lead to economic growth regaining its precrisis level. In pursuit of this objective, it has cut public expenditure on a range of public services. This is congenial to Conservatives, who favor smaller government, but the effect has been limited since big-spending programs in health, education, and pensions are politically popular and are entitlements to which Britons have a right by law. Successive budgets have not resulted in the country's deficit falling, nor has growth been sufficient to restore the economy to the state it was in before the 2008 crisis. The government now blames the world recession as the cause of its difficulties, while the **Labour Party**, now in opposition, blames the coalition government.

Globalization also challenges the country's leaders to answer the question, "Where in the world 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. After World War II, the British Empire was transformed into the Commonwealth, a free association of fifty-three sovereign states with members

on every continent. Its independence from London is shown by the absence of the word “British” from the name of the Commonwealth. Members range from Antigua and Australia to India, Pakistan, and Zambia. They differ from each other in wealth, culture, and 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. Since 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. The reduction in British defense spending means that the chief contribution that Britain can make to an American-led military coalition is political, that is, to contribute some forces to American action that is being taken in pursuit of general values and not just the American national interest. An all-party House of Commons committee concluded that the idea of a special relationship should be abandoned as misleading. Britain 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 agrees.²

Since 1973, Britain has been a member of the European Union (EU). The Channel Tunnel makes the rail journey to Paris shorter than travel 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. Collectively, EU countries are now Britain’s major trading partner. Government ministers spend an increasing amount of their time negotiating about everything from the EU regulation of European banking to whether British beer should be served in metric units or by the traditional measure of a British pint.

Britain’s governors have never shown the commitment to the EU of founder nations such as Germany and France. There is approval of EU measures to promote a single market but opposition to moving toward an ever closer union. The coalition government has sponsored an Act of Parliament requiring a national referendum to be held on any further changes in EU treaties. The Conservative Party is divided between those who are skeptical of the benefits the EU brings

and a hard core that would like Britain, like Norway, to have trade relations but not political ties to it. The Labour Party tends to view EU measures in terms of party advantage. The Liberal Democrats are very pro-EU but fewer in number. Most British voters do not regard EU membership as important.

Both Britain and the Brussels headquarters of the EU now face a challenge of conflict management. A majority of EU member states favor greater political integration in order to prevent the recurrence of the financial crisis in the eurozone. Since unanimous approval is required for the EU to gain new powers through a treaty, Brussels sees Britain as threatening a veto of the expansion of EU powers. Anti-EU pressure within the Conservative Party has been reenforced by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) drawing support from Conservative voters by its advocacy of withdrawal from the EU. Prime Minister David Cameron has pledged to seek renegotiation of the terms of British membership if reelected in 2015 and then call a referendum on whether or not Britain should remain in the EU. Other EU member states are unwilling to renegotiate what they regard as a British claim for special treatment. Hardcore eurosceptics favor British withdrawal from the European Union.

The Legacy of History

8.2 Describe recent changes in British politics, from the development of the welfare state through left/right conflict over Thatcherism to less confrontational government under Tony Blair and David Cameron.

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 an institution that aristocrats used to advance their interests against the reigning monarch. Today, it is a popularly elected institution deciding which party is in charge of government.

The 1940–1945 wartime coalition government led by Winston Churchill laid the foundations for the introduction of a welfare state. The Labour Party elected in 1945 introduced a comprehensive National Health

Service and state ownership of many major industries. Between 1951 and 1964, Conservative governments led by Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, and Harold Macmillan maintained a consensus about the mixed economy welfare state. Economic growth, full employment, and low inflation brought consumer prosperity, and free university education began to expand. 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 Conservative government that followed was to make Britain a member of the European Union. However, in trying to limit unprecedented inflation by controlling wages, Heath risked his authority in a confrontation with the left-wing National Union of Mineworkers,

which struck for higher wages. 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; he won a slight 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 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; it stressed letting people make decisions in the market rather than relying on government to promote their well-being (see Box 8.1). While proclaiming the virtues of the market and attacking big government, Thatcher did not impose radical spending cuts on

BOX 8.1

The Meaning of Thatcherism

Margaret Thatcher succeeded against the odds of class and gender. She was the first member of her family to go to university and won a place at Oxford. She studied chemistry and then qualified as a lawyer, both heavily male professions. When elected to the House of Commons in 1959, she was one of 25 women MPs; there were 605 male MPs. When elected Conservative leader in 1975, she was the first female leader of a British political party, and in 1979, became the country’s first female prime minister. She was also the first party leader in modern British history to win three successive general elections.

Among British prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher has also 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. 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. 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.

As long as she was in charge, Thatcher believed in strong government. She was prepared to “handbag” (that is, assert her personal authority) colleagues in Cabinet and civil servants. The autonomy of local government was curbed. In foreign policy, she was a formidable opponent of EU influence on what she saw as Britain’s national interests. The 1982 Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands, a remote British colony in the South Atlantic, led to a brief and victorious war there. Following her departure from office, Conservatives divided between Thatcherites, who sought to push market-oriented and anti-EU measures farther, 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.

Sources: See Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); and Richard Vinen, *Thatcher’s Britain* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

popular social programs. Thatcher's ideology did not win favor with 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.³

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 later, his economic policy, which was 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 within the Conservative ranks and the rise of a reinvigorated Opposition undermined Major's authority.

After four successive election defeats, in 1994, the Labour Party elected Tony Blair as leader. He offered to replace the party's traditional socialist program with a vague Third Way philosophy modeled on that of President Bill Clinton. Blair pledged a pragmatic government that would do "what works" and appealed to the voters to "trust me." The strategy was electorally successful (see Box 8.2). Thanks to the unpopularity of the Conservative opposition, Blair led Labour to three successive election victories, even though the party's vote fell from 43 percent in 1997 to 35 percent by 2005.

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. Laws protecting individual human rights were adopted, but in the wake of terrorist attacks, the government sought to limit some rights in ways that drew protests from

BOX 8.2

The Electoral Success of Tony Blair

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, studied law at Oxford, and had parents who were Conservatives. Unlike his wife, Cherie Blair, Blair had shown no interest in party politics, let alone the Labour Party, until after he graduated from Oxford. After becoming a Labour MP in 1983, he took the side of those who wanted to reform the party. His unorthodox background helped him gain the party leadership against Gordon Brown, a traditional Labour man. Blair's goal was to win elections by appealing to middle-class voters and thereby become prime minister. He succeeded.

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. Many media-oriented political advisors with little or no prior experience of government were brought into government. Political advisors used the prime minister's authority to push government ministers and civil servants to produce good headlines. 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."

Sources: See Tony Blair, *Tony Blair: A Journey* (London: Hutchinson, 2010); Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (London: Allen Lane, 2006); and Peter Mandelson, *The Third Man* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).

civil liberties groups. Blair welcomed such criticism as proof of his toughness. He also promoted changing the delivery of state-financed health and education services by introducing more market mechanisms. Many doctors, teachers, and public employees were demoralized or angered by these changes. In 2006, university teachers staged their first nationwide strike.

In international affairs, Blair succeeded in bonding with Republican President George W. Bush as well as with Bill Clinton. He borrowed arguments from Washington to quash opposition to British commitment to the Iraq War. Blair's popularity fell to the point at which he was more highly regarded in the United States than in Britain. When Labour's support fell in the opinion polls, he came under pressure to resign from within the Labour Party and did so in 2007.

The Labour Party unanimously elected as its leader Gordon Brown, who had been chancellor of the Exchequer for a decade. Brown boasted that the extent of economic growth, low inflation, and low unemployment while he was in charge of the British economy meant that he had ended the economic cycle of "boom and bust." The global economic crisis punctured this claim and left his government with difficult decisions about how to limit the resulting damage. 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. In May 2010, Brown led his party to defeat; Labour's 29 percent share of the popular vote was its second lowest since 1918.

After losing three successive elections, the Conservative leadership was desperate to gain office. For half a century, Liberal Democratic leaders claimed they wanted to be a party of government. A hung Parliament (that is, a House of Commons in which no party has an absolute majority) gave the Liberals an opportunity to gain office. The Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties formed the country's first coalition government since World War II (see Box 8.3). Conservative MPs head most government departments, with a Liberal Democrat as their deputy, but Liberal Democrats are in charge of major departments concerned with such issues as the environment and business. A thirty-six-page coalition pact required policy concessions by both parties.⁴

In opposition, the new leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband, has the task of explaining to Labour voters and would-be Labour voters where the party now stands.⁵ This has required him to admit that previous Labour governments made some mistakes in fields such as immigration policy and the management of

BOX 8.3

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 sought 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 being pro-European, 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.

Sources: See Peter Snowdon, *Back from the Brink* (London: Harper Press, 2010); and Robert Hazell and Ben Yong, eds., *The Politics of Coalition*. Oxford: Hart, 2012).

the economy. Left-wing critics respond to this diagnosis by arguing in favor of reaffirming traditional Labour policies; however, doing so is unlikely to gain the support of middle-of-the-road electors who are dissatisfied with the government's performance but uncertain whether Labour would be any better. A further complication is that even if Labour wins the most MPs at the next election, it might not have a majority, thus facing it with the alternatives of trying to govern with a minority of MPs or forming a coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

The Environment of Politics: One Crown but Five Nations

8.3 Identify the ways in which Britain is a “multinational state.”

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 of the nine counties of what was once the

province of Ulster; the other three are part of the Republic of Ireland. Following a rebellion against the Crown in 1916, a separate Irish state was created 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 citizens, it is a multinational state, because people differ in how they describe themselves (see Table 8.1). In England, people often say they are English or British without considering the different meanings of these terms. This does not happen elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In Scotland, more than two-thirds see themselves as Scots. In Wales, a majority 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. An Act of Parliament gave responsibilities for some policies to elected assemblies in Scotland and in Wales, and they came into being in 1999. The revenue of both assemblies has been assigned as a share of UK tax revenue according to a complex and contested formula related 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 Parliament mix the traditional British **first-past-the-post electoral system** and proportional representation. After the 1999

TABLE 8.1

National Identities

Identities of people vary by nation.

	<i>Nation of Residence</i>			
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
British	43%	19%	34%	39%
English, Scots, Welsh, Northern Irish	42%	70%	54%	34%
Other, don't know	15%	11%	12%	27%*

*Identifies as Irish

Source: Data analysis by Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

and 2003 Scottish elections, Labour formed a government in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. At the May 2007 Scottish Parliament election, the Scottish National Party (SNP) won one more seat than Labour and formed a minority Scottish government. In 2011, the SNP won an absolute majority, 69 of the Parliament's 129 seats. The remaining seats were divided between Labour (37), Conservatives (15), Liberal Democrats (5), and others (3).

Under the leadership of Alex Salmond as first minister, the SNP has demonstrated that it is capable of governing. It continues to promote independence, holding a referendum in September 2014 to vote on the question "Should Scotland be an independent country?" The SNP case for independence is that the country's 5 million people would be better governed by its own Parliament rather than by a British government that lacks majority support in Scotland. The parties forming the UK coalition government in 2010 won the vote of barely one-third of Scots, compared to almost two-thirds of English voters. The SNP argues that by European standards, Scotland has more people than nine member states of the European Union and a population equal to that of Denmark and Finland. The Better Together campaign for the rejection of independence emphasizes the costs and uncertainties of secession from the United Kingdom much more than the positive benefits of being subject to a Parliament in London. Public opinion polls consistently show that the median bloc of Scots want substantially more devolution from London than currently exists, while rejecting independence.

The Welsh Assembly in Cardiff has powers over a variety of local and regional services. It is bilingual, conducting its affairs in English and in Welsh. By comparison with Scotland, its powers of legislation are limited. The Assembly is elected by a mixed first-past-the-post and proportional representation ballot. Labour has consistently been the biggest party at each election, but has sometimes had to depend on Plaid Cymru for support in forming a government. This is possible because Plaid Cymru (the Welsh-language party) does not demand independence as the Scottish National Party does. After the 2011 Assembly election, Labour held thirty seats, the Conservatives fourteen, Plaid Cymru eleven, and the Liberal Democrats five; Labour took control on its own.

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 more than half 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 in the Catholic minority did not support this regime, wanting instead 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. Political violence has killed more than 3,700 people since. 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 1972, the British government abolished the Stormont Parliament, placing government in the hands of a Northern Ireland Office under a British Cabinet minister.

Intensive negotiations in which London and Dublin offered incentives to Irish Republicans and put pressure on Ulster Unionists to agree to a power-sharing form of government. Whatever the outcome of a Northern Ireland election, government offices must be shared between a majority of MPs representing the minority pro-Irish Catholics as well as a majority of pro-British Protestant MPs. This has been described as "a unique form of devolution-involuntary coalition."⁶ A power-sharing government was initially formed in 2007 with Dr. Ian Paisley, an outspoken Unionist and Protestant, as first minister, and Martin McGuinness, a Sinn Féin politician associated with the IRA, as deputy first minister, plus representatives of the Ulster Unionist Party and the Social Democratic and Labour Party. Following the 2011 Assembly election, a five-party power-sharing executive was formed with Peter Robinson, the Democratic Unionist party leader, as first minister, and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin as deputy first minister.

While there is no agreement about national identity within the United Kingdom, 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, 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.”⁷ However, changes in United Kingdom institutions 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 UK seats and formed a majority government. In 2010, the Conservative Party won an absolute majority of seats in England as well as having a big lead in votes there. However, because of its weak support in other parts of the United Kingdom, it fell short of an absolute majority.

A Multiracial Britain

For centuries, England has received a relatively small but noteworthy number of immigrants from other parts of Europe. The Queen 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. The relatively prosperous British economy attracts workers from Eastern European parts of the EU. In addition, 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. Political



Younger Generation Is the Most Multiracial Generation

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

disturbances around the world have resulted in 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 do not always uphold. In consequence, by the 2011 census, one in eight British residents was foreign-born and less than half the population of London are British-born and white and a substantial fraction have been born outside the United Kingdom.

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, and EU membership makes it difficult to restrict immigration from the continent of Europe. The government has tried to make deportation of illegal immigrants easier. Nonetheless, it admits that there are hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants in Britain.

Official statistics define the minority population by the one characteristic that they have in common—they are not white. The population in this catchall category has risen from 74,000 in 1951 to approximately 8 million in the latest census. The Electoral Commission now issues information about how to vote in twelve different languages besides English, ranging from Arabic to Urdu.

Nonwhite immigrants are a heterogeneous category of people, divided by culture, race, language, 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 Britishborn 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 received training in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan. The government has greatly increased police powers to use in pursuing alleged terrorists and has justified shoot-to-kill practices 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 foster a sense of Britishness by giving lessons about Britishness to immigrants wanting British passports. However, it has found it difficult to decide what being British means. For example, does it require a knowledge of British history, knowing how to claim welfare benefits and meet obligations such as paying taxes, or being able to write in English? British-born offspring of immigrants automatically gain citizenship. Whether they choose to adopt British ways is much influenced by family and ethnic background and by the character of their local community. Almost half live in areas where ethnic minorities are in the majority.

Many immigrants and their offspring are being integrated into electoral politics, since residential concentration makes their votes important in some parliamentary constituencies. A disproportionate number of minority ethnic people have voted Labour. There are now hundreds of elected minority ethnic councillors in local government, and both the Conservative and Labour parties are promoting the nomination of minority ethnic candidates. The twenty-seven minority ethnic MPs in the Commons today come from diverse backgrounds—India, Pakistan, the West Indies, Ghana, and Aden—and include three Muslim women.⁸

The Structure of Government

8.4 Explain the structure of British government and list the duties of Cabinet ministers and civil servants.

The term *government* is used in many different senses in Britain. People may speak of the Queen's government to emphasize enduring and nonpartisan

features; they may refer to a Conservative or Labour 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, separately elected executive institutions are found in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland too (see Figure 8.1).

Descriptions of a government often start with its constitution. However, Britain has never had a written constitution. 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. In the words of a constitutional lawyer, J. A. G. Griffith, "The Constitution is what happens."⁹

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 British constitution can be changed by a majority vote in Parliament, where the government commands a majority. The government of the day can also change it by acting in an unprecedented manner and claiming that this is a new custom. Hence, the policy relevance of the American Constitution is much greater than that of the British constitution.

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. Courts do not have the power to declare an Act of Parliament unconstitutional; judges simply ask whether the executive acts within its authorized powers.

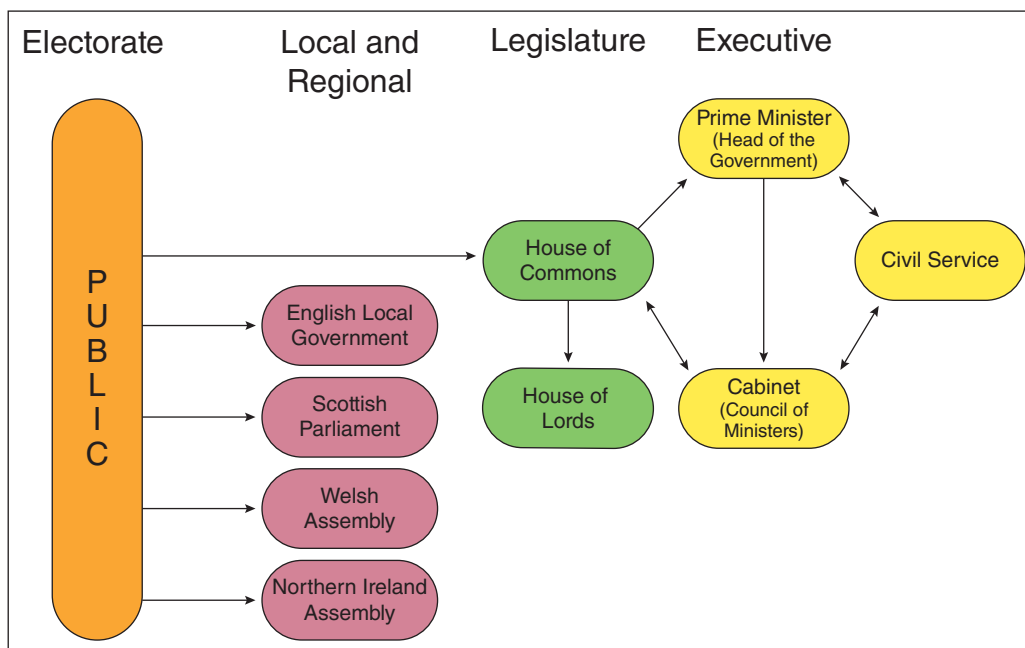


FIGURE 8.1

Popular influence must focus on Westminster

Structure of the British Government.

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

Source: Adherents as defined in Encyclopedia Britannica 2009.

Many statutes delegate broad discretion to a Cabinet minister or to a public authority. Even if the courts rule that the government has improperly exercised its authority, the effect 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 have been infringed must seek redress through the courts by invoking the European Convention on Human Rights and the 1998 British Human Rights Act, adopted to give the Convention the effect of law in Britain.

The **Crown** is the abstract concept that Britain uses in place of the continental European idea 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. Queen Elizabeth II is the ceremonial head of state; having been the monarch since 1952 makes her a symbol of tradition. The heir to the throne is her eldest son, Prince Charles. The Queen does not influence the actions of what is described as Her Majesty's Government; she 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. 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. Seven prime ministers since 1945—Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, James Callaghan, John Major, and Gordon Brown—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, since 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.¹⁰
- **Patronage:** To remain prime minister, a politician must keep the confidence of a party, or in the case of coalition leader David Cameron, the confidence of two parties, the Liberal Democrats

as well as Conservatives. The prime minister can silence potential critics by appointing them to posts as government ministers, who sit on front bench seats in the House of Commons. MPs not appointed to a post are backbenchers, some of whom ingratiate themselves with their party leader in hopes of becoming a government minister. In dispensing patronage, a prime minister can use any of four criteria: (1) personal loyalty (rewarding friends), (2) cooption (silencing critics by giving them an office so that they are committed to support the government), (3) representativeness (for example, appointing a woman or a minority ethnic MP), or (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 that involve the exchange of rapid-fire comments 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. Attending important debates in the Commons and occasionally mixing with MPs in its corridors and tea rooms helps the prime minister 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 must 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 Treasury ministers who want to cut taxes in order to boost their popularity.

While the formal powers of the office remain constant, individual prime ministers have differed in their electoral success, how they view their job, and their impact on government (see Figure 8.2). 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

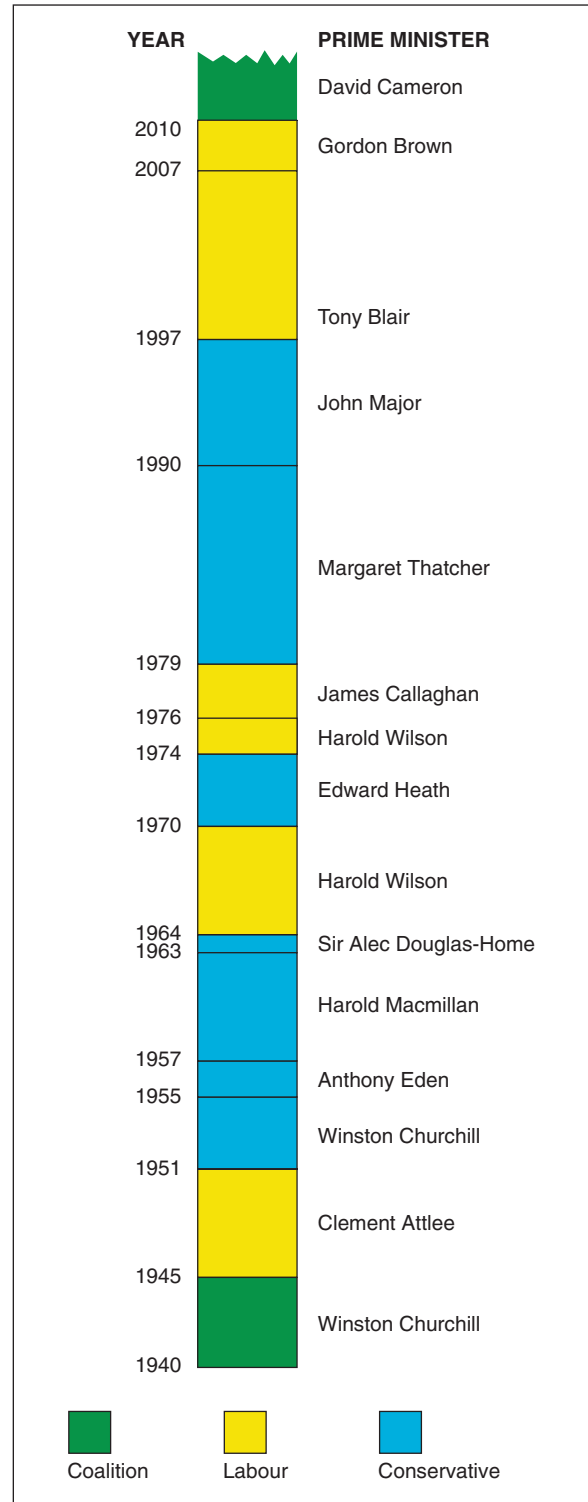


FIGURE 8.2
Long and short-term Tenures at Downing Street
Prime Ministers and Governments since 1940.

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 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 short time in office. 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 cooperation, but economic troubles and strikes 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. 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 won office by campaigning appealingly, and this was his priority in office too. Blair used his status as an election winner and control of ministerial patronage to silence potential critics in Cabinet. As the Treasury minister making decisions about departmental budgets, Gordon Brown used this power of the purse to build up support to secure his succession as prime minister. However, his personal style in that office lost him the support of Cabinet colleagues and of public opinion. Brown's critics were unwilling to mount an open challenge to his position, which is difficult to do under the party rules, and Brown led the government to electoral defeat.

The personalization of campaigning, encouraged by the media, has 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). 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 the party's 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. A prime minister

TABLE 8.3

Prime Minister and President

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

	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.

can be confident that a parliamentary majority will endorse the government's legislative proposals, whereas the president is without authority over Congress. Moreover, the prime minister is at the apex of a unitary government, with powers not limited by a federal structure or by the courts and a written constitution.¹¹

In the coalition government created in 2010, the role of deputy prime minister, held by Nick Clegg, is far more important than that of an American vice president because the Conservative prime minister needs the support of Clegg's Liberal Democratic Party to have a parliamentary majority. When disagreements arise between the two parties on policy issues such as the European Union or curbing illegal or unethical media practices, David Cameron must consult with Clegg to agree on measures that both parties can support, or they must decide how to air their differences in public without breaking up the coalition government.

A coalition government gives new meaning to the doctrine of collective responsibility. Coalition leaders who have competed against each other at the previous election and expect to compete at the next election are expected to support each other in the Commons. 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. However, political confrontation makes news, and journalists are always looking for signs of disagreement to publicize.

The compromises of coalition government tend to moderate the positions of both parties, and this has been congenial to the electoral strategy of David Cameron and Nick Clegg. The midterm review of their government was entitled "The Coalition: Working Together in the National Interest." However, this approach does not satisfy all their committed partisans. Since backbench Conservative and Liberal Democratic MPs are not bound by collective Cabinet responsibility, they may criticize a coalition policy when they dislike a compromise. Right-wing Conservatives complain that the government has not done enough to cut taxes and spending and to distance Britain from the European Union. Liberal Democrats who incline to the left favor boosting public spending in an effort to stimulate economic growth, and all in the party are disappointed that the coalition has not delivered electoral reform or created an elected House of Lords.

The Cabinet and Cabinet Ministers

The Cabinet consists of senior ministers appointed by the prime minister and, in the coalition government, by sharing offices among coalition partners. In Britain, ministers must be members either 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."¹²

The Cabinet is the forum in which leading members of the governing party, many with competing departmental interests and personal ambitions, meet together to ensure agreement about major government policies. A half century ago, there were usually two Cabinet meetings a week, and when there were major disagreements among ministers, it took time to arrive at a political agreement. 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 in order to air different party views on major issues and arrive at an agreement.

Coalition policy building starts in government departments. In most departments, the minister in charge and a deputy are from different parties. Thus, before a departmental position can be established on issues where party differences are greater than department interests, the 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 inter-departmental differences reflect partisan differences, competing claims of the coalition partners must be resolved by the Conservative and Liberal Democratic leaders in order to maintain the coalition's unity. The convention of Cabinet responsibility requires that all Cabinet ministers give public support to what the government does or refrain from public criticism even if they oppose a policy in private. However, ministers unwilling to share responsibility may leak their views to the press rather than resign.

Cabinet ministers are important as department heads, because 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 (see the

section on Centralized Authority and Decentralized Delivery of Policies: The members of the coalition Cabinet represent the following departments and positions:

- **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:** Lord Chancellor and Justice; Home Office
- **Social services:** Health; Education; Work and Pensions; Culture, Media and Sport
- **Territorial:** Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs; Communities and Local Government; Northern Ireland; Scotland; Wales
- **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; Paymaster General and Cabinet Office

Government departments vary greatly in their size and in the interests that they affect. The Department of Business, Innovation, and Skills has 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 many 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, creating conflict between departments. Regardless of party, the Defense minister presses for increased spending, while Treasury ministers oppose this. Cabinet ministers resolve many differences in Cabinet committees or by informal talks between the ministers most concerned.

A minister has many roles: initiating policies, selecting among alternatives brought forward from within the department, and avoiding unpopular decisions. A minister is responsible for actions taken by thousands of civil servants nominally acting on the minister's behalf, including agencies to which Whitehall contracts 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 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 authorized by Acts of Parliament. The largest number of civil servants are clerical staff with little discretion; they carry out the routine activities of a large bureaucracy. Only if these duties are executed satisfactorily can ministers have the opportunity to make effective policies.

The most important group of civil servants is the smallest: the few hundred higher civil servants who advise ministers and oversee the 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." In short, top civil servants are not apolitical; they are bipartisan, ready to work for whichever party wins an election. They are expected to be able to think like politicians in order to anticipate what their minister may want and how the opposition party and the media will react.

The relationship between ministers and higher civil servants is critical in giving direction to a

government department. 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."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, meaning that they did not have to make a profit. Management was made the buzzword in Whitehall. Businessmen were brought in to advise ministers and civil servants about how to get more value for money when administering policies. These changes have continued under subsequent Labour and coalition governments. Parts of government departments have been "hived off" to form separate public agencies, with their own accounts and performance targets.

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 grades to pupils. Moreover, independent agencies can show their independence by criticizing a government department. 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, and its reports publicize when the Treasury is missing its targets for economic growth and cutting the deficit.

Government ministers of all parties want quick changes to satisfy their personal and partisan desire to be seen to be making an immediate impact. Tony Blair has called for civil servants to learn from companies that "reinvent themselves every year, almost month to month" and complained that "Rules of propriety are almost becoming an obstacle."¹⁴ This clashes with the civil service view that their duty is to avoid cutting corners to justify a government policy, as Blair did in mobilizing support for the Iraq war. The politician's desire for instant impact, fed by pressures from

around-the-clock media, also conflicts with the civil service awareness of how many years it can take to turn a pledge given to the media into an Act of Parliament that public officials can implement in order to have an impact on the ground. Politicians seek to resolve the conflict by bringing more outsiders into government in high-level positions, while civil servants have the option of quitting Whitehall to take jobs, often at a higher salary, in the private or not-for-profit sector.

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 lack Whitehall experience. When departmental policies attract criticism, some ministers and even more advisors are now ready to blame civil servants rather than take responsibility themselves (Box 8.4).

Both ministers and senior civil servants have been prepared to mislead Parliament and the public. When accused in court in 1986 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 Role of Parliament

In many parliaments, MPs sit in a half circle, symbolizing degrees of difference from left to right. By contrast, the House of Commons is an oblong chamber in which MPs supporting the government sit on one side and their adversaries sit opposite them on the other side. In the great majority of House of Commons divisions, MPs vote along party lines. 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."¹⁵ If a bill or a motion identified as a vote of confidence in the government is defeated, coalition government legislation provides for a 14-day period in which the vote may be reversed or a new government formed that does have the confidence of Parliament. The Opposition cannot expect to alter major government decisions because it lacks a majority of votes in the Commons. It accepts the

BOX
8.4

Friction in Whitehall

A newly elected government is full of ambitious ministers impatient to make a name for themselves and their government, and optimistic about changing the way Britain is governed. However, major changes can only occur with the assistance of civil servants in turning election pledges into legislation, organizing the administration of new policies, and training established staff in how new measures ought to be delivered.

The civil service claims to be a Rolls-Royce of government because of the intellectual quickness of its leaders, as demonstrated in the TV series *Yes, Minister*. Both Conservative and Labour ministers reject the comparison of the civil service with a smoothly running Rolls-Royce. Civil servants dislike being attacked in public and bullied in private by ministers who have far less experience of how government works than they do. One complaint is that politics has become too political; that is, ministers are happier looking to media experts for advice on policies

that will win them positive headlines than to civil servants who can detail the faults and risks in notions that make good sound bites.

The friction between ministers of all parties and civil servants reflects long-term structural changes in what government can do. Civil servants lack the experience of managing costly and massive operations, such as installing computer systems in a department, or multi-billion pound contracts for military equipment. Ministers whose lives are bound up in Westminster have little appreciation of the way in which their scope for choice is constrained by their predecessors' choices, a shortage of money, personnel and time, and the interdependence of what they do and what is done in the world beyond Westminster.

Sources: See Richard Rose, "Responsible Party Government in a World of Interdependence," *West European Politics*, in press, 2014; and Rachel Sylvester and Alice Thomson, "Whitehall at War," *The Times* (London), January 14–15, 2013.

frustrations that go with minority status because it hopes to win a majority at the next election.

Whitehall departments draft bills that are presented to Parliament, and few amendments to legislation are added 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. Furthermore, even though the U.S. president can ask Congress to legislate, the president cannot determine the language of a bill or the outcome of a vote there.

The first function of the Commons is to weigh political reputations. MPs continually assess their leader's ability to win or lose the next election. They also assess the performance of ministers, potential ministers, and coalition partners. MPs can force a minister to explain and defend what he or she is responsible for. If the minister's answers are unconvincing, the minister will lose political influence or even be dropped by the prime minister.

Second, backbench MPs can demand that the government do something about an issue. 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 that the parliamentary commissioner for administration (also known as the ombudsman, after the Scandinavian original) investigate complaints about improper administration. Committees scrutinize policies by interviewing civil servants and



The Mother of Parliaments

Parliament has met in London by the River Thames for more than 800 years, and the clock tower of Big Ben is famous as a symbol of democracy in Canada and Australia as well as in Europe.

ministers and taking evidence from interested groups and experts. However, as a committee moves from discussing details of administration to issues of government policy, this raises a question of confidence in the government. A committee is then likely to divide 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.¹⁶ An MP may decide to be a party loyalist, voting as the leadership decides without participating in deliberations about policy. The MP who wishes for 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 or by having a flamboyant appearance. 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 have received generous expense allowances, including the upkeep of a second home, since many divide their time between London and their constituency outside London. Details of claims leaked to the press showed that MPs were claiming expenses for everything from cleaning the moat around their country house to remodeling a London flat that was quickly sold at a large profit. Hundreds of MPs paid back some expenses rather than defend their claims, and a few have been convicted for fraud in claiming expenses.

Backbench MPs perennially demand changes to make their jobs more interesting and to give themselves 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. Today, hereditary peers elect ninety-two of their number to sit there; the remainder retain their title but do not have a seat in Parliament. More than five-sixths of the members of the Lords are life peers appointed for achievement in one or another public sphere. Recognition can be given because of previous service as a government minister, and a prime minister can “fast track” a few exceptional individuals into a ministerial post by making them life peers. Peers may be drawn from business, trade unions, or the not for profit sector, or may have been major financial donors to a political party. No party has a majority of seats in the House of Lords; less than one-third of peers are Conservative and one-third Labour. More than

one-quarter of peers are cross-benchers who do not identify with any party.

The government often introduces relatively non-controversial 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 disabled people or pornography. The Lords cannot veto legislation, but it can and does amend or delay the passage of some government bills. The transformation of the Lords into an assembly of people chosen by merit rather than heredity has given its members greater confidence in voting to send bills back to the House of Commons for reconsideration before they can become Acts of Parliament if the House of Commons overrides their opposition.

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. The Liberal Democrats made the popular election of the House of Lords a clause in the coalition agreement with the Conservatives. However, the party's proposals have not been adopted. The last thing the government of the day wants is a reform that gives an upper chamber that it does not control enough electoral legitimacy to challenge government legislation. Likewise, MPs do not want a second chamber to compete with their unique claim to be popularly elected.

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.

Whitehall's abuse of powers has been protected from parliamentary scrutiny by legislation on **official secrecy**. The Whitehall view is that "The need to know still dominates the right to know."¹⁷ 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, because it can make government appear uncertain or divided. The introduction of a coalition government is loosening these restrictions. The need to consult more widely

and openly among ministers and MPs in two parties makes unauthorized leaks to the media more likely.

The Courts and Abuses of Power

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 hand 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, judges say that it should pass a new Act of Parliament that changes the law.

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 Supreme Court consists of a president and eleven justices appointed by a panel of lawyers. It is 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 with laws that are not in conflict with those elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

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. Parliament remains the supreme authority, deciding what government can and cannot do. Britain's membership in the EU offers judges additional criteria for deciding cases, since the United Kingdom is now bound to act in accord with EU laws 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.

Terrorist activities challenge conventional norms about individual rights and the collective interests of the state. 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 much later 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 pursuing 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 to leak official documents with the intention of preventing government from carrying out a policy that the leaker believes to be unethical or inadvisable. In one well-publicized case, a Ministry of Defense official leaked to the House of Commons evidence that questioned the accuracy of government statements about the conduct of the Falklands War. He was tried on the charge of 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; the official was acquitted.¹⁸

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, Cabinet ministers, leading civil servants, and political advisors, all of whom share in what has been described as the "village life" of Whitehall.¹⁹ 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 health or education as it is for agriculture or defense.

Within each Whitehall 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 activities know less about the department's work than its career civil servants. However, they have the political advantage of knowing the minister better.

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, as Margaret Thatcher demonstrated. But to say that the prime minister makes the most important decisions invites 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 in 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."²⁰ Moreover, in a coalition government, major decisions cannot be made by a single politician because they require inter-party agreement.

Political Culture and Legitimacy

8.5 Summarize the collectivist and individualist theories of government, using examples from Britain.

Political culture refers to values and beliefs about how the country ought to be governed (see Chapter 3). 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 limits on what government should and should not 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 freedom of choice in sexual matters. Today, the most significant limits on the scope of public policy are practical and political. For example, 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 to spend on 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 party in government because it justifies doing whatever it wants to do. The opposition party rejects this theory while it is not in office.

The **collectivist theory of government** sees government as balancing the competing demands of sectors of society. From this perspective, parties advocating group or class interests are more authoritative than individual voters.²¹ Traditional Conservatives emphasize harmony between different classes in society, each with its own responsibilities and rewards. For socialists, group politics has been about promoting 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, institutions that are broader than the state. Liberal Democrats emphasize the freedom of individuals to live their own lifestyle free from government regulation of social behavior.

The legitimacy of government is shown by the readiness of the British people to conform to basic obligations such as paying taxes and cooperating with public officials. Dissatisfaction with government policies can stimulate popular protest, but the legitimacy of government means that protesters usually act within lawful bounds. 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.

British people make many specific criticisms of government. In reaction to changing standards of elite behavior, such as MPs making excessive claims for

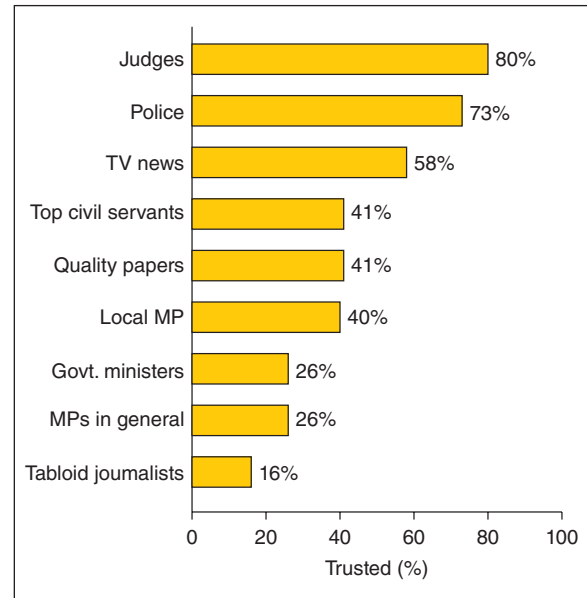


FIGURE 8.3
Most MPS Not Trusted

Source: Committee on Standards in Public Life Survey, 2010. Number of respondents: 1,900.

expenses and Cabinet ministers trashing the reputation of colleagues with whom they compete, citizens have become distrustful of many political institutions. Only one-quarter of Britons trusts MPs in general, and even fewer trust the tabloid press that claims to represent the voice of the people (Figure 8.3). The most trusted public institutions today are those that maintain order. This has been the case since the 2008 economic crisis too.²²

The symbols of a common past, such as the monarchy, are sometimes cited as major determinants of legitimacy. However, 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 symbolizes 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 without defects. 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.”²³ In the words of the English writer E. M. Forster, people give “two cheers for democracy.”

Political Socialization and Participation

8.6 List the five main influences on political socialization in Britain.

Socialization influences the political division between those who participate in politics and those who do not. Since political socialization is a lifetime learning process, the loyalties of voters are shaped by an accumulation of influences over many decades. Chronologically, the family’s influence comes first; political attitudes learned within the family become intertwined with primary family loyalties. However, social change means that the views parents transmit to their children may not be relevant by the time their offspring have reached middle age. For example, a religious identification learned in childhood, such as Church of England or Catholic, no longer has relevance compared to distinctions between Christians and Muslims.

The electorate at any given point in time combines generations who were socialized in very different circumstances. Today, there are still some who remember World War II and were old enough to vote for or against Winston Churchill. The parents of the median voter by age were socialized when Britain effectively had a two-party system, while the median voter by age has always been offered an effective choice between three or more parties. At the next general election, the youngest voters will have been infants when Tony Blair became prime minister in 1997.

Family and Gender

A child may not know what the Labour, Conservative, or Liberal Democratic Party stands for, but if it is the party of Mom and Dad, this can be enough to create a youthful identification with a party. However, the influence of family on voting is limited, because more than one-third of adults do not know how one or both

of their parents usually voted, or else their parents voted for different parties. Among those who report knowing which party both parents supported, just over half vote as their parents have. In the electorate as a whole, less than one-third know how both parents voted, and vote for the same party.²⁴

As adults, men and women have the same legal right to vote and participate in politics and men and women tend to have similar political attitudes. For example, more than half of women and half of men favor capital punishment, and a substantial minority in each group oppose it. At each general election, the votes of women are divided in much the same way as the votes of men (see Table 8.5). However, socialization into gender roles leads to differences in political participation. Two-thirds of local government councillors are men; one-third are women. Women make up almost half the employees in the civil service but are concentrated in lower-level clerical jobs; women hold about one-third of the top appointments in the civil service. In 2010, a total of 143 women were elected to the House of Commons, but it remains more than three-quarters male. The initial coalition Cabinet had four women Cabinet 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 that 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 (Table 8.5). Education is much more strongly related to active participation in politics: The more education a person has, the greater his or her chances of having a political career. More than one-third of MPs went to

fee-paying private schools. University graduates make up three-quarters of the members of the House of Commons. The expansion of universities has broken the traditional dominance of Oxford and Cambridge; one-quarter of MPs went to these two institutions. The concentration of university graduates in top political jobs is a sign of a meritocracy, in which persons qualified by education have replaced an aristocracy based on birth and family.

Class

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

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, more than half reject placing themselves in either the middle class or the working class.

The relationship between class and party has weakened. No party now wins as much as half the vote of middle-class or of skilled or unskilled manual workers (see Table 8.5). 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, and cultural values, ethnicity and tastes in consumption vary independently of occupation.²⁵ Thus, a host of social and economic characteristics can now influence voting. At each level of the class structure, people who belong to trade unions are more likely to vote Labour than Conservative. Housing also creates neighborhoods with political relevance. People who live in municipally built council houses occupied principally by the working class 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. Television is the primary source of political news. The law forbids selling advertising to politicians, parties, or political causes. 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 radio stations. The government of the day controls the renewal of the licenses of television companies and sets the annual fee that every viewer must pay for noncommercial BBC programs, currently about \$220 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.

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*), which 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. Newspapers are now run as money-making activities rather than as the means of influencing public opinion. While most papers lean toward one party, if the party that they normally support becomes very unpopular, they tend to follow their readers and lean toward a party that is rising in popularity.

The Internet and use of new social media by a majority of Britons have 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 use Twitter and e-mail to communicate with targeted audiences, and MPs' hard drives overflow with communications from constituents and interest groups. Politicians are vulnerable to having opinions expressed in informal e-mails leaked to the press and embarrassing actions appear on YouTube.

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 seek celebrity by harassing MPs and ministers on the air. In pursuit of embarrassing stories, the popular press has engaged in illegal telephone tapping and has also paid bribes to the police for confidential information. These practices have led to the jailing of reporters and corrupt police and a major inquiry into their abuses chaired by Lord Leveson. His report recommended establishing a statutory body independent of the press to investigate complaints about media activities that violate privacy or harass innocent people in pursuit of headlines. The media has opposed regulation as a threat to freedom of the press.

Any party that is unpopular with the public is inclined to think it is the victim of media bias. 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.

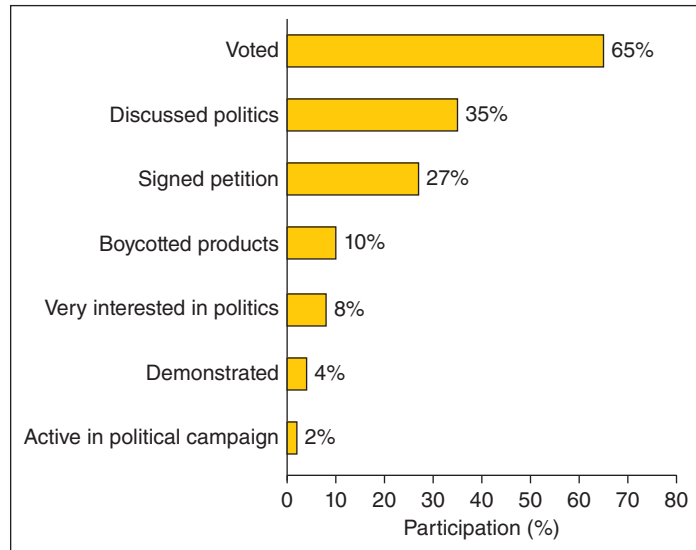


FIGURE 8.4
Participation in Politics

Most Britons are only voters.

Source: *Audit of Political Engagement 9: the 2012 Report*. London: Hansard Society, Part One. Sample survey of 1,163 respondents about their activities in the past two to three years.

Political Participation

8.7 Contrast British citizens' participation in political versus nonpartisan activities.

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 of those who vote say they feel close to a political party.

Although there are many ways in which Britons could participate in politics, a majority of citizens are only voters and more than half say they have little or no interest in politics (Figure 8.4). Britons are much more inclined to participate in voluntary associations that they regard as nonpartisan, such as Oxfam, which is concerned with reducing world poverty. Even though questioned about activities over a time period that included a general election, barely one-third said that they had discussed politics in the past two or

three years. Just over one-quarter had signed a petition on a public issue, while one in ten reported boycotting a product because of objections to the conditions in which it was produced. The percentage describing themselves as very interested in politics was one in twelve Britons. Only 4 percent say they have participated in a demonstration in the past few years. The concentration of the media in central London means that a political demonstration there in which 10 thousand people participate will get national publicity.

Political Recruitment

8.8 Discuss the paths to elective office and high-ranking civil service jobs in Britain.

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 and then to parliamentary candidate for a constituency that their party normally wins. After leaving university, individuals enter the civil service by passing a highly competitive entrance examination; promotion is based on achievement and approval by seniors. Intermittently, other individuals 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 requires nomination as a parliamentary candidate, which is done by a constituency party committee. 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 working for an MP in the House of Commons or party headquarters, and then look around the country for nomination for a winnable seat. Unless he or she has a strong political sponsor, finding a safe seat 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. Population movement because of a change in constituency

boundaries is a bigger threat to an MP than losing the support of voters.

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 or coalition leaders must distribute about a hundred jobs among approximately 200 MPs in the governing party who 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 are not in Parliament but have special skills or the confidence of the prime minister can be given ministerial appointments along with 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. However, long periods of being in Opposition meant that in 2010, leading Cabinet ministers were starting at the top; they had not previously held even a junior post in government. Those inexperienced in government included David Cameron and Nick Clegg, and this was previously true too of Labour ministers such as Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. During the life of a Parliament, the average minister can expect to stay in a particular job for about two years before the prime minister undertakes a reshuffle of offices, dismissing some ministers and moving others to different departments to learn about a fresh set of issues and political interests.

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.”²⁶

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 Civil Service Commission tests candidates for their ability to summarize lengthy prose papers, to fit specific facts to government 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 over half a century or more, since the head of the civil service usually started 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 partisans whose job is to mobilize political support for the Cabinet minister for whom they work. They are recruited on the basis of who they know in government. Because their background is in party politics and the media, such advisors bring to Whitehall skills that civil servants often lack and that 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 dismissal.

Experts in a given subject area, such as environmental pollution or education, can be appointed as political advisors on the basis of what they know. 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 heads 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 field of work and profession. However, when government action impinges on their work, they become involved in politics, offering ministers advice and criticism of policies affecting them.

Selective Recruitment

Nothing could be more selective than an election that results in one person becoming prime minister of a country and less than two dozen people becoming ministers in charge of government departments. 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. Because politics is today a full-time occupation, aristocrats, business people, or trade union leaders can no longer expect to translate their high standing in other fields into an important political position. 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 discussions of public policy. Leadership in organizations outside Whitehall gives such individuals freedom to act independently of government. However, the interdependence of public and private institutions is now so great that sooner or later they become intermittent public persons.

Organizing Group Interests

8.9 Describe the relationships, including privileged access, between various interest groups and Britain's governing parties.

Civil society institutions 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. Their scope varies enormously, from the narrow concerns of an association for the blind to the encompassing economic interests of business organizations and trade unions. Some groups have material objectives, whereas others advocate causes such as reducing violence on television.

The heads of Britain's 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 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 went wrong in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, it created diplomatic problems. The City of London claims privileged access because of the substantial impact financial services have on the British economy, not all of which are positive, as the 2008 economic crisis demonstrated. 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 Confederation of British Industries has members drawn from all sizes and kinds of businesses. The Institute of Directors represents individuals directing large and small businesses.

The members of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) are 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. 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 public sector workers are union members.

Britain has many voluntary and charitable associations, from clubs for supporters of a football team to the Automobile Association. It is also home to a number of internationally active nongovernmental organizations, such as Amnesty International, concerned

with political prisoners worldwide. The latter organizations not only try to bring pressure 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 controls government. 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. Business is not formally linked to the Conservative Party, but the party's commitment to private enterprise is congenial to it, and businessmen are substantial donors. Notwithstanding common interests, both trade unions and business groups demonstrate their autonomy by criticizing their partisan ally if it acts against their interests.

Party politicians seek to distance themselves from interest groups. Conservatives know that they can only win an election by gaining the votes of ordinary citizens as well as prosperous businesspeople. Tony Blair saw the union link as an electoral handicap because union members are a minority of the public, and even though they tend to vote Labour, a significant minority do not. He sought to make the Labour government appear friendly to business 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 left the Labour Party.

To lobby successfully, interest groups must identify the 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.²⁷ However, interest groups do not expect to spend a great deal of time in Downing Street. Their contacts are usually with officials in government departments concerned with issues of little public or partisan 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, gaining information about possible changes in

government policies, and influencing the making and implementation of policies. Whitehall departments are ready to consult with groups that can provide information about what is happening outside government, cooperate in implementing policies, and support government initiatives. As long as the needs of Whitehall and interest groups are complementary, they can bargain as professionals sharing common concerns and negotiate an agreement.

The more committed members are to an interest group's goals, the more confidently leaders can speak for a united membership. 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. Today's consumers are difficult to organize; for example, drivers of Ford cars are a category rather than a social group. Individuals have a multiplicity of identities that can be 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."²⁸

Group members who care about an issue can disagree 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. **Insider interest groups** representing children or mothers 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.²⁹ Green interest groups face the dilemma of campaigning for fundamental environmental changes that are currently out of bounds politically, or they can become insiders working to achieve incremental policy changes. **Outsider interest groups** are unable to get far in Whitehall when their demands are inconsistent with the party in power. They often campaign through media-oriented activities. To television viewers, their

demonstrations appear as evidence of their importance; in fact, they are often signs of a lack of insider political influence.

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 representatives of business, trade unions, and government in tripartite institutions to discuss such controversial issues as inflation and unemployment. Corporatist bargaining assumed a consensus on political priorities and that each group's leaders could deliver the cooperation of those whom they claimed to represent. In practice, neither Labour nor Conservative governments found it easy to reach a consensus, and interest group leaders were often unable 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 them, it practiced state distancing; the government kept out of such market activities as wage bargaining, price setting, 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 by requiring a vote of members to authorize a strike as legal. The sale of state-owned industries has removed government from immediate responsibility for the operation of major industries. Labour Chancellor Gordon Brown gave the Bank of England responsibility for monetary policy. The 2008 economic crisis was met by the government taking ownership of very troubled banks, but its goal is to privatize them when they recover.

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 employment.

Party System and Electoral Choice

8.10 Discuss the emergence of the multiparty system and how this is limited by the first-past-the-post electoral system.

British government is party government. The candidates on the ballot in each parliamentary constituency are chosen by party members, and the party members also have a vote on the choice of party leader. The prime minister is not popularly elected but gains office by being the leader of the party with the most MPs. Nonentities who belong to major parties find it easier to get elected to Parliament than well-known people who choose to run as independents.

A Multiplicity of Choices

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 the 2010 election, the winner in two-thirds of seats took less than half the vote and, in one English constituency, received only 29 percent 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. 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. The combined Conservative and Labour share of the vote dropped to 75 percent. The Liberal Democrats and Nationalist parties have maintained their strength. In recognition of this, the 2010 televised election debates gave equal attention to

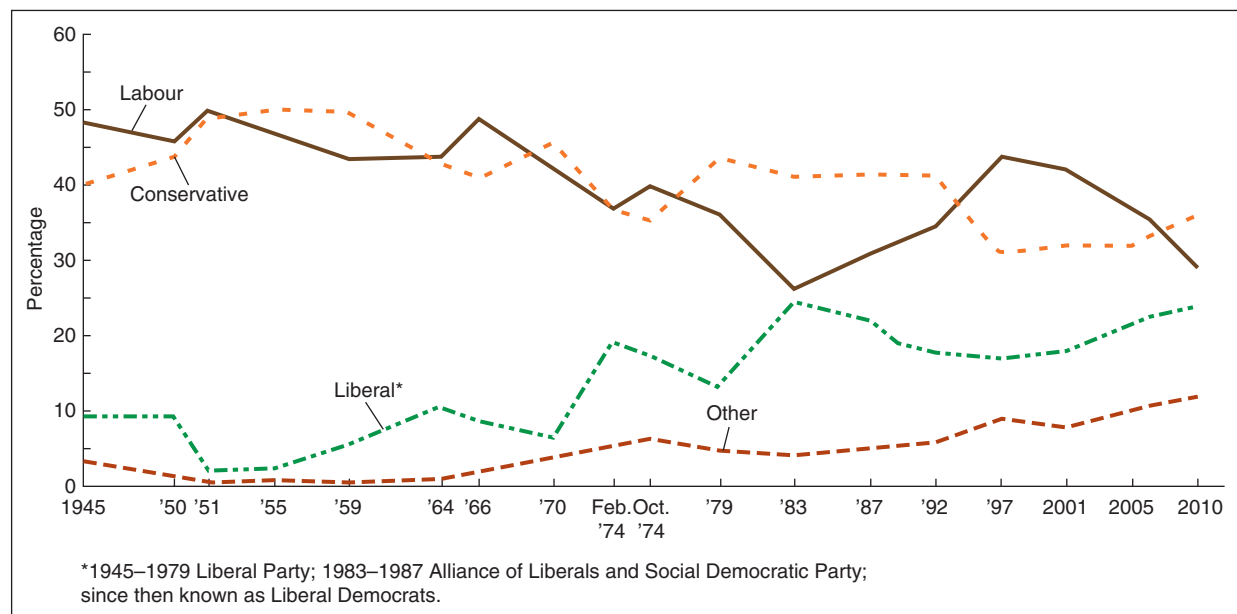


FIGURE 8.5
Ups and Downs of Electoral Fortunes of Parties
Votes Cast in General Elections since 1945.

Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Conservative leader David Cameron, and Liberal Democratic leader Nicholas Clegg.

- The number of parties competing successfully for votes varies between the nations of the United Kingdom. In England, three parties—Labour, Conservatives, and Liberal Democrats—compete, and in 2010, the anti-EU United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) contested almost all seats too. In Scotland and Wales, there are normally four parties, including the Scottish National and Plaid Cymru (Welsh Nationalist) parties, respectively. In Northern Ireland, at least five parties contest seats, two representing Unionist and Protestant voters, two representing 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, together they won only 65 percent of the popular vote (see Table 8.4). No party has won half the popular vote since 1935.
- The two largest parties in the House of Commons are often not the two largest parties at the constituency level. In more than one-quarter of constituencies, one or both of the two front-running parties were neither Labour nor Conservative in 2010.
- 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.
- 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.

The distribution of seats in the House of Commons is different from the distribution of the share of votes because of how votes are unevenly distributed across constituencies. 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 with 29 percent of the popular vote (see Table 8.5 and Figure 8.6). The Liberal Democrats gained just under 9 percent of MPs with 23 percent of the popular vote.

British members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected by proportional representation, and this produces very different results. In 2009, the United Kingdom Independence Party came second in the vote to the front-running Conservatives; Labour came third; 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, neither UKIP nor the British National Party won a single seat at Westminster.

Defenders of the first-past-the-post electoral system argue that proportionality is not a goal in itself. The current system is justified because it usually manufactures an absolute majority of seats for a single party, thus clearly fixing responsibility for government. In countries using proportional representation,

TABLE 8.4

The 2010 Election

Party vote percentages by nation in 2010.

	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 Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

Source: General Election 2010: Preliminary Analysis. House of Commons Library Research Paper 10/36.

TABLE 8.5**Social Differences in Voting**

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

	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	37%	29%	22%	12%
Unskilled manual	31%	40%	17%	12%

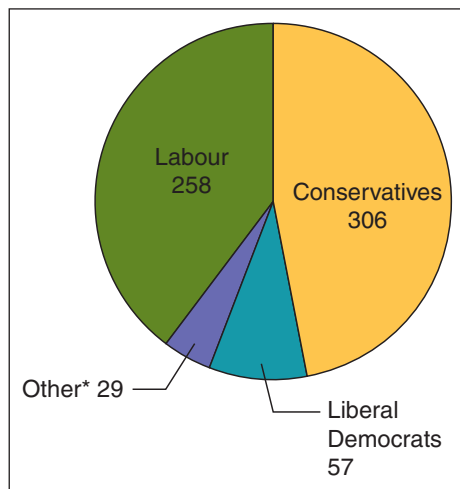
Source: Ipsos MORI, *How Britain Voted in 2010* (www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemId=2613); analysis of all who said they were absolutely certain to Vote or had already voted, interviewed March 5 to May 19, 2010 ($n = 5,927$).

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, on the grounds that it is fair in matching a party's share of the popular vote to its share of MPs. In a proportional representation system, the Liberal Democrats would expect to win more than double the number of seats that they take in a first-past-the-post ballot. As the price of coalition, the Conservatives agreed to a referendum on a change to the alternative vote electoral system that 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. A national referendum in 2011 rejected this change: 68 percent endorsed the first-past-the-post system and only 32 percent endorsed the alternative vote.

Elections that do not affect the composition of the Westminster Parliament make use of a variety of electoral systems.³⁰ The mayor of Greater London is elected by the alternative vote, and all members of the Northern Ireland Assembly are elected by proportional representation. The Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly use a mixed electoral system: Some representatives are elected by

**FIGURE 8.6****Seats in the House of Commons**

The government moves to the right in 2010.

*Includes six Scottish Nationalists, three Welsh Plaid Cymru, eight Northern Ireland Democratic Unionists, five Sinn Féin, three Northern Ireland Social Democratic and Labour, one Green, and three others.

Source: Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832–2012* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2012), 60.

the first-past-the-post method and some by proportional representation.

Political parties are often referred to as “machines,” but this description is very misleading, since 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. Party officials have to work hard to keep together three different parts of the party: those who vote for it, the minority of members 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.³¹

Each party has an annual conference at which members debate policy and a headquarters that provides year-round services to party leaders and to constituency parties. Constituency parties are significant because each selects its own parliamentary candidate. 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. Under David Cameron, the Conservatives have taken a similar initiative and increased the number of their women and minority ethnic MPs.

The Liberal Democrats have built up the party by winning council seats at local government elections and targeting House of Commons 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-seven in 2010, while its share of the popular vote has scarcely altered.

Party Appeals

The class-based terminology of “left” and “right” is common in ideological descriptions of parties, but 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.

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 differences in contemporary British politics often cut across party lines.

The party preferences of the British electorate cannot be explained by social differences; all classes, age groups, and gender categories divide their support among four different parties (Table 8.5). While it is the case that the Conservatives come first among middle-class voters, in 2010 the party secured well under half the vote of this group. Labour came first among unskilled manual workers, but its poor performance in 2010 meant that the Conservatives secured more votes among skilled manual workers. There is a tendency for older Britons to favor the Conservative party, but it is not matched by younger voters favoring Labour. The under-25 age group divided almost equally between all three major parties at the 2010 election. Men and women voted much the same too.

Any attempt to impute a coherent ideology to a political party is doomed to failure, because they are not organized to debate political philosophy but to win votes from an electorate that has become skeptical of politicians. 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 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, they were captioned “A Future Fair for All,” “An Invitation to Join the Government of Britain,” and “Change That Works for You.”³²

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.³³ MPs who rebel against their party whip are usually so extreme and

insufficient in number that government bills are not threatened with defeat.

Centralized Authority and Decentralized Delivery of Policies

8.11 Describe the “Whitehall obstacle race.”

8.12 Discuss the roles of the central and local British governments and public and privatized institutions in delivering services.

The United Kingdom is a unitary state with political authority centralized in Westminster. Decisions taken there are binding on all types of public agencies, including local government. The powers of elected bodies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are those delegated by the authority of an Act of Parliament at Westminster, and it retains the power to alter them. In addition, Whitehall has centralized control of taxation and public expenditure to a degree unusual among other unitary states in Europe.

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 better-off to poorer parts of the country. In addition, ministers emphasize that they are accountable to a national electorate of tens of millions of people, whereas local councillors 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

There are many reasons why ministers do not want to be in charge of delivering the services that their department initially introduced. 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 action, for example, when there is evidence of declining standards in schools or a flood following torrential rains.

For ordinary individuals, the actions of government are most evident when services are delivered locally: at a school, at a doctor’s office, or rubbish collection at their doorstep. However, Whitehall departments usually do not deliver policies themselves. Most are delivered by agencies outside Whitehall, and five-sixths of public employees work for non-Whitehall agencies.³⁵ Making and delivering public policies thus involves intragovernmental politics.

Whitehall

A minister anxious to gain attention by introducing a popular bill in Parliament cannot do so on his or her own. Criticism by the opposition party is of less concern than attacks from MPs within the government’s ranks. In a single-party government, approval of 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.

Running the Whitehall obstacle race is the first step in intragovernmental politics. Most new policies must take into account their likely effects on existing policies that are likely to be administered by several different departments and affect non-Whitehall public agencies. Before a bill can be put to Parliament, the Cabinet minister sponsoring it must negotiate an agreement with ministers in other departments about how the principles of a new measure affect existing programs and party policy and how it will be implemented. 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. For example, the debate about whether to make London’s biggest airport, Heathrow, bigger still or add runways at airports farther from populous suburbs has been running for more than two



Whitehall: A Long Street Full of Obstacles

Whitehall starts at Admiral Nelson's statue in Trafalgar Square and extends to the tower of Parliament's Big Ben, seen in the distance.

decades. It will take another decade to add a new runway, and longer still to build a new airport.

Because of Treasury control of public expenditure, before a bill can be put to Parliament, the Treasury must authorize the additional public money it requires. Even when the economy is booming, the Treasury seeks to guard against spending commitments that threaten to increase taxation, and when the economy is in trouble, more spending threatens an increased budget deficit. In the words of a veteran Treasury official, "the Treasury stands for reality."³⁶

Devolution to Elected Officials

Local government councillors 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, and to abolish local authorities and create new units of government with different boundaries. Both Conservative and

Labour governments have used these powers to the full. Changes in local government boundaries reflect 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). The government sponsoring the change is also well aware of the partisan effects of local government reorganization.

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. Most local councillors are part-time politicians, paid from a few thousand pounds to £20,000 a year for time spent on council business. London is exceptional in having a directly elected mayor; Conservative and

Labour mayors have used the office as a platform to promote London and their personal views. However, Whitehall refuses to give London the taxing and spending powers that American local government enjoys.³⁷

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. 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. There is a property tax on houses but not land; central government has set limits on its use. The Thatcher government introduced a poll tax on local residents in place of a property tax; it produced a political backlash, and the traditional property tax was reinstated.³⁸ The funding of local government services remains a contentious issue: Cabinet ministers do not want to be generous in funding local services for which councillors rather than they may claim visible credit.

Education illustrates the reluctance of central government to trust local government. It is authorized by an Act of Parliament, principally financed by central government, and two Cabinet ministers share overall responsibility for education. However, local government has managed schools. Dissatisfaction with local government has led Labour and Conservative governments to create city academies, secondary schools independent of local government but still dependent on Whitehall for funding. The Whitehall department responsible for schools employs only 1 percent of the people working in education. Success depends on actions taken by teachers in the classroom. Government policies designed to help specific groups of the population are even more fragmented (Box 8.5).

Nonelected Institutions

Executive agencies delivering many major public services are headed by appointed rather than elected officials. 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

BOX 8.5

Young People must Integrate Policies that Institutions Divide

At election time, parties make special appeals to young people. But in government, the responsibility for providing public services for young people is divided among many departments. Schools are usually the responsibility of local government. Universities are independent of government; however, they are subject to central government financial pressures and regulations. Examination boards are separately organized. After-school sports and cultural activities are the responsibility of a different ministry.

On leaving school, a young person typically seeks a job, but economic conditions that are the responsibility of the Treasury influence whether jobs are available. Training youth in blue-collar or white-collar skills is affected by what employers are willing to provide.

Employers complain that too many young people lack a good basic and practical education, while government complains that employers are unwilling to spend enough money on training. International comparisons show British vocational education tends to be below continental European standards.

Government policies fail to reach one-sixth of British youths classified as NEETS, that is, Not in Education, Employment, or Training. For some youths, not immediately pursuing a career can be a temporary phenomenon before settling down. However, this group is also most at risk of engaging in behavior that leads to arrest, a police record, or even a jail sentence.

Source: See "NEETS Characteristics, Costs and Policy Responses in Europe" (Dublin: European Foundation, 2012).

government picks up the bill, the Treasury, as the monopoly purchaser, regularly seeks to squeeze the cost of providing increasingly expensive health care.

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, ministers get the blame. For example, the UK Border Agency, responsible for processing hundreds of thousands of visa and immigration files, got so far behind in this work and made so many mistakes that in 2013, the Home Secretary decided it would be better to abolish it and return the work to the Home Office rather than have to answer for an agency that it did not directly control.

Advisory committees provide the expertise of individuals and organizations involved in programs for which Whitehall departments are responsible. Civil servants responsible for agricultural policies can turn to advisory committees for detailed information about farming practices of which they lack firsthand knowledge. Because advisory committees have no executive powers, they usually cost very little to run. Representatives of interest groups are glad to serve on such committees 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 different types of tribunals is in the hands of a quango, the Council on Tribunals.

Turning to the Market

After winning the 1945 election, the socialist leaders of the Labour government acted on their belief that government planning and ownership was better for

promoting economic growth and full employment than a market that had delivered depression in the 1930s. It nationalized many basic industries, such as electricity, gas, coal, the railways, and airlines. Some state-owned industries consistently made money, while others consistently lost money and required big state subsidies. Government ownership politicized wage negotiations and investment decisions, to the embarrassment of both Labour and Conservative governments.

The Thatcher government initiated the privatization of many government-owned industries and some administrative agencies. Selling council houses to tenants at prices well below their market value was popular with tenants. Thatcher sold off British Petroleum, British Airways, Jaguar, British Telecom, Rolls Royce, British Steel, Rover, and a host of other firms. 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 that 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 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 has the power to fix price increases at a lower rate than inflation in order to encourage increased efficiency. Although the government no longer owns an industry, when things go wrong, 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. It was taken back into public ownership.

The economic crisis of 2008 produced revelations of illegal activities and gross negligence in the financial sector involving hundreds of millions or billions of pounds. Most revelations result in cash fines of

up to hundreds of millions of pounds on banks and investment companies, and in a few cases, criminal charges have led to malefactors going to jail. Some revelations have come from the United States, where federal agencies have fined British-owned companies for practices carried out on both sides of the Atlantic. The showing up of the weakness of existing regulatory agencies has led to demands for British government to act to restrain financial malpractice and fears that European Union restraints may preempt Britain's authority, to the detriment of financial interests in the City of London.

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. Traditionally, intragovernmental relations between Whitehall departments and representatives of local authorities and other public agencies arrived at consensual understandings on the basis of trust. However, the Thatcher government preferred to contract out public services to new public agencies and private sector companies controlled by laws and the supply of finance. The Labour government intensified the use of targets to be met by agencies receiving public money. The coalition government endorses the idea too, in order to keep more spending off its own books.

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 from the private sector services 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 deal with 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 in order for private management 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 for their children all the public services to which they are entitled. Tony Blair promoted "joined up" government that would link the provision of related services so that they could be more easily accessed by individuals. 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 the behavior of millions of employees of a multitude of public sector organizations.

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. Institutions 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 increase political consensus by having ministers from two parties vet policies. However, political decisions involving two or more government agencies still require discussion between government departments. 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 costly military equipment.

The influence of the government on the economy depends on how the private sector responds as well as on policies approved by Parliament. The incentives of the two groups often point in opposite directions. In response to economic crisis, the coalition government has encouraged private sector firms to invest more and consumers to spend more in order to boost economic growth. However, economic uncertainties encourage businesses and ordinary households to spend cautiously and reduce rather than increase their debts. Legislation about taxation is intended to generate revenue, but the complexities of taxation create many loopholes that allow businesses and the well-to-do to reduce the taxes they pay while respecting the law.

While the center of central government has been pressing harder on other public agencies, Whitehall itself has been losing influence, because of its European Union obligations. 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.

Policy Performance

8.13 Summarize the roles of laws, money, and personnel in Britain's public policies.

In more than half a century, changes in public policies have gradually supported big changes in British society. Since 1951, infant mortality has declined by more than four-fifths. Life expectancy for men and for women has risen by twelve years. The postwar expansion of schools

has significantly raised the percentage of youths completing secondary school, and more than two-fifths of British youths go on to universities, many of which did not exist half a century ago. Long-term economic growth has meant that many consumer goods that were once thought of as a luxury, such as owning a car or your home, are now mass consumption goods.

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 not 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 education and health care are labor intensive as well as costing lots of money.

Laws are the unique resource of government, because private enterprises cannot enact binding laws, and contracts are only effective if they can be enforced by courts. Whitehall departments have 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 in written regulations about 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 very few compared to millions of public employees. The number of 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 National Health Service.

To meet the costs of public policy, British government collects almost two-fifths of the gross national product in taxation. Income tax accounts for 27 percent of tax revenue; the top rate of central government taxation is 45 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. 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 make tax payments through Value Added Tax and the employer's contribution to social security. Taxes on the profits of corporations provide less than one-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 measures; they account for 36 percent of 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, and to millions of the sick and invalids, the unemployed, women on maternity leave, poor people needing to supplement their limited incomes, and a very small fraction of people who abuse the system in order to claim benefits. Spending on the National Health Service claims almost one-fifth of the public budget, and education claims 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, economic activities such as transport, and payment of interest on the national debt.

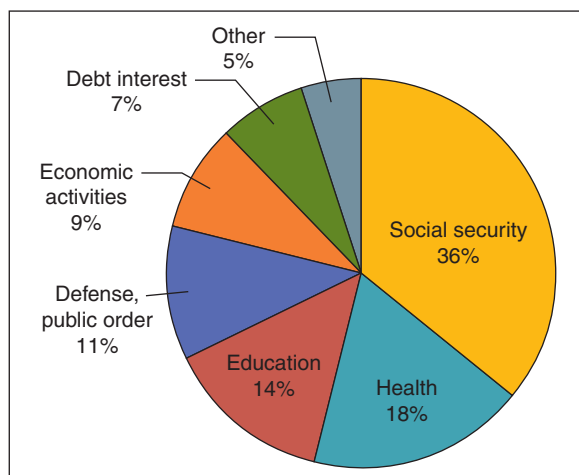


FIGURE 8.7
Slicing the Budget Pie

Public Expenditure by Program.

Source: Adapted from *Public Spending Statistics February 2013* (London: H.M. Treasury, 2013), table 8.

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 British Social Attitudes survey found that 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 third in the middle wanting to leave things as they were. The Thatcher government's campaign against government spending produced a big backlash; by the end of her term of office, more than three-fifths favored higher spending financed by higher taxes.

During the Labour government that followed, the pendulum swung back; less than a third of the public favored higher taxes and spending. A year after the coalition government began introducing spending cuts to reduce the deficit, only 9 percent of the public favored cutting spending and taxes, while 36 percent favored more spending even if it meant higher taxes. The majority endorsed leaving things as they were. However, the government cannot readily do this because of population pressures to increase spending on health, education, social security, and debt interest, while an unfavorable economic climate reduces tax revenue but not tax rates.

Policy Challenges in a World of Interdependence

8.14 Identify the effects of global interdependence on Britain's economy and thus on its political capabilities.

A half century ago, an American secretary of state issued a big challenge to Britain's governors; he said the country had lost an empire but not yet found a role in the world. Britain's governors have responded by seeking to maintain a leadership role like that enjoyed in World War II. This strategy has been called "punching above our weight." While Britain's political, economic, and military assets have remained relatively constant, in the twenty-first century, other countries and continents have become collectively much weightier. Globalization has created policy interdependence; even countries weightier than Britain can no longer command followers.

Interdependence is most obvious in the economy: Britain is a trading nation in which its ability to pay for

the food and goods it imports depends on the strength of its exports. Although commentators bemoan the country's economic decline relative to the United States and China, ordinary Britons 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 material living conditions of most people compared with that of their parents or grandparents.

The City of London is no longer just the financial center of Britain; it is one of the world's most important financial centers. Institutions there are global leaders in exchanging currencies, whether pounds, dollars, euros, or yen; the London Stock Exchange is the biggest in Europe; hundreds of foreign banks have major offices in London; and British-based banks have a presence around the world. The 2008 economic crisis demonstrated that interdependence has a down side, since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in New York had a big impact in the City of London.

Britain's economy is not affected by the global financial crisis in the same way as the great majority of European countries because it is not a member of the EU's common currency area, the eurozone. Instead, the British government and the Bank of England can decide financial policies on their own. However, this has also meant that Britain cannot influence the steps that eurozone countries are taking to strengthen the political and economic unity of the EU in ways that the City of London fears may be to its disadvantage and cause a shift of financial activity to Frankfurt am Main in Germany.

A major challenge to Britain's governors today is to come to terms with the country's membership in the European Union. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, has pledged to renegotiate and loosen the terms of Britain's EU membership. However, it takes two to negotiate, and both EU officials and major countries such as France and Germany have no interest in reducing the unity of the EU by granting Britain special favors. Conservative MPs who favor withdrawal from the EU point to Norway as a prosperous non-EU member state. However, in order to maintain trade with EU countries, Norway is subject to many EU laws and regulations that it cannot influence. The Liberal Democrats are in the minority in wanting to increase Britain's engagement with Europe. The Labour Party has avoided taking sides, but if it heads the British government after the 2015 general election, it cannot avoid engagement with EU institutions and other member states. It will find that their leaders collectively have more weight than Britain.

Even though the Westminster Parliament remains the supreme legal authority of the United Kingdom, its authorization of elected assemblies has introduced interdependence in claims for political legitimacy. Scottish Nationalists argue that by winning a majority of seats in the Edinburgh Parliament, they have a better right to speak for Scots than the Westminster Parliament. Even if the SNP loses the 2014 referendum on independence, it will still seek the transfer of much greater powers from Westminster. If a Labour government was formed thanks to the big advantage Labour



A Stronghold of Global Capitalism Policy Challenges in a world of interdependence

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.

has in Scottish seats, while the Conservatives have the most seats in England, the latter could turn the SNP argument around to claim Labour had no right to govern England. In Wales, the nationalist party lacks the popular support to make such a claim. In Northern Ireland, Irish Republicans have never accepted that Westminster has a legitimate right to govern there and for more than three decades the IRA used violence to advance its claim. The compromise Northern Ireland executive maintains the formal claim of the authority of the Westminster Parliament, but informally it gives equal recognition to the legitimacy of the Republican movement and of Unionists who accept Westminster's authority.

As long as the economy is growing, interdependence can be a "positive sum game," since all may enjoy some benefits and the government enjoys a boost in tax revenue that can be spent to improve the economic circumstances of those who are less well off. However, the failure of the economy to grow since the economic crisis has meant that interdependence involves the distribution of costs. The Gini index that measures inequality had already been growing significantly in the 25 years previously under both Conservative and Labour governments. Although unemployment has not risen as much in Britain as in continental European countries, the crisis has meant that average incomes have risen slower than inflation. This hits low-income Britons more than the very visible London-based financial elite whose income from salaries and bonuses can be well over £1 million in a year.

The constraints on public expenditure arising from a growing deficit and political resistance to tax increases has given immediate political significance to the fact that 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. David Cameron sought to capitalize on this distinction by promoting a vision of the Big Society, in which people were themselves prepared to take initiatives to deal with problems in their community rather than turn to government. The idea has had little impact on the big problems that Cameron faces in government, because community groups cannot fund a modern hospital, build a new rail link or airport terminal, or decide about how to regulate banks in the City of London. Following Tony Blair's rejection of Socialism, the Labour Party has not argued for a big expansion of government policies, a tactic that would leave it vulnerable to awkward questions about how new policies would be financed.

Ironically, the one thing that politicians ought to be able to do something about—improving the system of government—appears to be beyond the reach of all parties. In 1973, when an opinion poll first asked Britons their views of the political system, 48 percent expressed general approval and 49 percent said it could be improved quite a lot or a great deal. Since then, popular satisfaction with the system of government has fluctuated around a downward trend. Shortly after the 2010 general election, 28 percent expressed themselves generally satisfied as against 69 percent dissatisfied.³⁹ This does not mean Britons are dissatisfied with democracy in principle, but it does show substantial reservations about how it works in practice and about the politicians who are meant to make it work.

Privately and sometimes publicly, British politicians share their views. After a few years in office, they are ready to cite the constraints of the system they have inherited and, increasingly, the constraints of the world of interdependence as explanations of why they have not succeeded as much as they had promised. As a former Conservative minister said of his Labour successors, "They inherited our problems and our remedies."⁴⁰

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?

INTERNET RESOURCES

Prime Minister's website: www.Number10.gov.uk.

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

Gateway to national statistics: www.statistics.gov.uk.

UK and global news: www.bbc.co.uk/news.

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

Public opinion polls: <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk>.

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

KEY TERMS

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

SUGGESTED READINGS

Allen, Nicholas, and John Bartle, eds. *Britain at the Polls 2010*. London: Sage Publications, 2010.

Bale, Tim. *The Conservative Party from Thatcher to Cameron*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2011.

Butler, David. E., and Gareth Butler. *British Political Facts*, 10th ed. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Campbell, Rosie. *Gender and Voting Behaviour in Britain*. Colchester, England: ECPR Press, 2006.

Flinders, Matthew. *Delegated Governance and the British State: Walking without Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Geddes, Andrew. *Britain and the European Union*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Geddes, Andrew, and Jonathan Tonge, eds. *Britain Votes 2010*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Hazell, Robert, and Ben Yong, eds. *The Politics of Coalition: How the Conservative-Liberal Government Works*. Oxford: Hart, 2012.

Hood, Christopher. *The Blame Game: Spin, Bureaucracy and Self-Preservation in Government*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Jones, Bill. *Dictionary of British Politics*, 2nd rev. ed. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2010.

Jordan, Grant, and William A. Maloney. *Democracy and Interest Groups*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Jowell, Jeffrey, and Dawn Oliver, eds. *The Changing Constitution*, 7th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Keating, Michael. *The Government of Scotland*, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Page, Edward C., and Bill Jenkins. *Policy Bureaucracy: Government with a Cast of Thousands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Park, Alison, ed. *British Social Attitudes Survey: The 28th Report*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012.

Quinn, Thomas. *Electing and Ejecting Party Leaders in Britain*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Rallings, Colin, and Michael Thrasher. *British Electoral Facts, 1832–2012*. London: Biteback Publishing, 2012.

Rhodes, R. A. W. *Everyday Life in British Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rose, Richard. *The Prime Minister in a Shrinking World*. Boston: Polity Press, 2001.

———. *Representing Europeans: A Pragmatic Choice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Rose, Richard, and Phillip L. Davies. *Inheritance in Public Policy: Change without Choice in Britain*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

Social Trends. London: Stationery Office, annual.

Whitaker's Almanack. London: J. Whitaker, annual.

Whiteley, Paul. *Political Participation in Britain*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Wilson, David, and Chris Game. *Local Government in the United Kingdom*, 5th ed. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.