PART ONE

Early Developers

BRITAIN

MAP 3.1. Map of Great Britain.

3 Britain

Peter Rutland

Introduction

Britain is widely regarded as having a political system that is a model for the rest of the world. It is a vigorously competitive democracy in which the rule of law is firmly established and individual freedoms are well protected. The constitutional order has been functioning for centuries, undisturbed by wars or revolutions. The experience of countries in the "third wave" of democratization, during the 1970s and 1980s, seems to confirm that parliamentary systems are more successful than presidential systems in reconciling conflicting interests in society and, hence, promoting less violence and greater stability.

However, the British system entered into a profound crisis in the 1970s, from which it has not yet emerged. Social changes have eroded the class structure that was the foundation of the two-party system. No party won a clear majority in the 2010 general election, resulting in the first coalition government in sixty-five years. Parliamentary sovereignty has been weakened by the need to conform to the laws of the European Union (EU), which Britain joined in 1973. Other important constitutional developments since the 1990s include a stronger role for the judiciary as a check on executive power, and the introduction of parliaments for Scotland and Wales for the first time in three hundred years. However, successive governments have been unable to come up with a viable plan to reform the unelected upper chamber of Parliament, the House of Lords. Britain finds itself headed into the twenty-first century with a system whose basic features were laid down in the nineteenth century.

The sense of crisis goes beyond tinkering with political institutions. The July 2005 terrorist bombings on public transport in London raised doubts about the viability of Britain's multiculturalist approach to assimilating immigrants. Memories of empire and World War II, and the "special relationship" with the United States, make it psychologically difficult for many Britons to see themselves as active and committed citizens of the European Union (EU). British national identity is still very much a work in progress.

Moving from identity to interests, we see that Britain's entrenched social hierarchy led to a period of class warfare among capital, the state, and organized labor that lasted from

the early 1800s to the 1990s. This struggle polarized the political system, paralyzed public policy making, and hampered Britain's ability to adapt to a changing global economy. Only since Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour Party gave up its struggle to transform market capitalism in the mid-1990s has the country managed to shake off this legacy of social confrontation. In contrast with most of continental Europe, Britain has now embraced U.S.-style capitalism, with a lower level of social protection from the state. But prosperity remains elusive for a large and growing underclass.

The British Model

Britain pioneered the system of liberal democracy that has now spread in some form or other to most of the world's countries. Its political institutions – especially its legal tradition – had a very strong influence on the political system that was created in the United States.

The United States sees itself as the most pristine model of democracy because it introduced the first written constitution in 1787 and has lived under that same constitution for more than two hundred years. Britain, in contrast, lacks a formal written constitution, so it is hard to put a date on the introduction of liberal democracy to that country. The story usually begins with the **Magna Carta** of 1215, when powerful regional lords forced King John to sign a charter respecting their feudal rights in return for the taxes and troops they provided to the king. Parliament emerged as the institution through which the lords, and later common citizens, could negotiate their rights with the king. Under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, the parliament fought a civil war with the king in defense of these rights from 1642 to 1648, culminating in the execution of King Charles I. But the monarchy was subsequently restored. In the **Glorious Revolution** of 1688, the Protestant William of Orange deposed the Catholic king James II and took office as a constitutional monarch who accepted that ultimate sovereignty rested with the parliament. Since then, there have been no violent political upheavals in Britain.

One of the main virtues of the British model is its capacity to adapt gradually over time. The British model is based on an evolving set of social conventions, and not on a set of ideas captured in a single document. Many of these practices, such as the system of common law (a legal system based on judicial decision rather than legislation), jury trials, freedom of speech, a bill of rights, and the notion of popular sovereignty – were already established by the seventeenth century and formed the bedrock on which the U.S. Constitution itself was based. But many of the features of the contemporary British model cannot be found in the United States, such as **parliamentary sovereignty** (the idea that ultimate political authority rests with the parliament) and constitutional monarchy (a monarch who is the formal head of state, but with very limited political powers).

The British political system is a product of that country's unique history. There is an old story about the Oxford college gardener who, when asked how he kept the lawn so immaculate, replied: "That's easy, you just roll it every day … for 300 years." This raises the question of whether Britain's **Westminster model** of parliamentary sovereignty can ever be successfully "exported" elsewhere.

The U.S. model of democracy comes more ready for export. Its essence is captured in a short document, based on a fairly simple set of principles: the equality of all men, the rule of law, and the separation of powers. This has enabled the United States to play the leading role in the spread of democracy around the world since the end of World War II. It was U.S. – and not British – advisers who oversaw the writing of new constitutions in postwar Germany and Japan.

But the British model is no less important than the U.S. model in understanding the global spread of democracy. As the British Empire shrank after 1945, it left in its former colonies a series of democratic political systems modeled along British lines. Cross-national analysis shows that countries that were formerly British colonies are more likely to be stable democracies than are former French or Spanish colonies. India, for example, has remained a democracy for more than fifty years despite a very low level of economic development. The British ex-colonies in Africa do not fit this pattern, however. With the exception of Botswana, they have all slipped into periods of military or one-party rule since independence.

The Long Road from Empire to Europe

An Island Nation

If you ask someone from England the most important date in English history, they will almost certainly say 1066. That was when the invading Norman army of William the Conqueror defeated the Anglo-Saxon forces of King Harold at the Battle of Hastings. Britain has not been invaded since. The Spanish Armada was repulsed in 1588, as were Hitler's forces in 1940. Britons are proud of having preserved their sovereignty against foreign invasion for more than nine hundred years.

The fact that Britain is an island meant that it relied on the Royal Navy for its security and did not need a large standing army to protect itself from its neighbors. This meant that, unlike the absolutist monarchs of Europe, Britain's rulers did not have a large army that they could also use to put down social unrest. Instead, they had to meet popular discontent with compromise. (The United States, like Britain, also had no need of a standing army.) Whereas the European powers introduced compulsory military service during the nineteenth century, Britain did not implement a military draft until World War I. It was dropped in 1919, reintroduced in 1940, and finally abolished in 1960. Most other European countries still had compulsory military service until the 1990s.

The End of Empire

By the nineteenth century, Britain had become the dominant imperial power, and British colonies covered one-quarter of the planet in an empire on which "the sun never set." After World War I, Britain lost its position as global economic leader to the United States. Britain lacked the resources and ultimately the political will to fight the growing independence movements in its colonies. After 1945, Britain granted independence to India and Palestine,

then Malaya, and then its possessions in East and West Africa. As U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson observed in 1963, Britain "had lost an empire but not yet found a role." Most former British colonies joined the **British Commonwealth** (now called the Commonwealth of Nations), a loose association of fifty-three countries with a largely ceremonial role.

With the British Empire a receding memory, in 1982, Argentina's military rulers decided to seize the Falkland Islands, a British territory a few hundred miles off the Argentine coast. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sent a naval task force to liberate the islands, which was accomplished at the cost of 5,000 Argentine and 125 British lives. The **Falklands War** boosted Thatcher's waning popularity ratings and helped her win a second term as prime minister in 1983. The British Empire achieved symbolic closure in July 1997 when Britain returned Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China on the expiration of its ninety-nine-year lease on the territory.

Most older Britons look back at the empire with nostalgia, believing that British rule brought civilization in the form of railways and the rule of law to the more primitive corners of the globe. The uglier side of imperial rule was edited out of collective memory. There was no guilt over Britain's role in the transatlantic slave trade, the brutal suppression of the Kenyan "Mau Mau" revolt in the 1950s, or the 1842 war with China, whose goal was to force China's rulers to allow the import of opium.

Although Britain was no longer a global power, as one of the "big three" allied nations that won World War II, it was given one of the five permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council in 1945. It acquired nuclear weapons in the 1950s. The Labour Party advocated unilateral nuclear disarmament in the 1980s, a policy that it dropped in the 1990s. Despite fierce opposition from within his own Labour Party, Prime Minister Tony Blair decided to commission a new generation of submarine-launched missiles to replace the existent Trident system. The proposal passed the House of Commons in March 2007 thanks to support from the Conservative Party.

Britain owes its prominent role in world affairs since 1945 to its "special relationship" with the United States. This began with Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill during World War II and was carried over into the Cold War. As part of the U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance, Britain kept fifty thousand troops in West Germany until the end of the Cold War. Britain sent troops to support U.S.-led military actions in Korea in 1950 and Iraq in 1990 and 2003. There were some rocky periods in the relationship, however. The United States blocked the Anglo-French seizure of the Suez Canal in 1956, and Britain refused the U.S. request to send troops to Vietnam in 1965. The close partnership between Britain and the United States continued under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and U.S. President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, when they were united in opposition to the Soviet "evil empire."

Britain often put the special relationship with Washington ahead of deeper integration with Europe. In 2003, France and Germany refused to support the U.S.-led war in Iraq, but Tony Blair persuaded Parliament to send forty-five thousand British troops to take part in the invasion. As the war dragged on, Blair's resolute support of the United States became increasingly unpopular with the British public and within the Labour Party itself. Roughly one-third of the Labour Members of Parliament opposed the war from the outset.

The Reluctant European

Although Britain was one of the victors in World War II, it was economically drained by the struggle, and was neither able nor willing to become involved in building a new political structure on the shattered continent. In 1952, it refused to join the European Coal and Steel Community, an early forerunner of the European Union, fearing that plans for a common industrial policy would infringe on its national sovereignty. The European Economic Community (EEC, a broader European economic regional alliance launched in 1957) emerged as Britain's major trading partner, and its economic growth outpaced that of Britain. Twice during the 1960s, Britain tried to join the EEC but was rejected, mainly because Paris feared that British entry would weaken France's influence.

It was not until 1973 that Britain entered the renamed European Community. Much of the next decade was spent haggling over the terms of Britain's membership. In 1984, the Euroskeptic Margaret Thatcher won a reduction in Britain's high contribution to the common budget, half of which went to subsidies to inefficient European farmers. Thatcher warily signed the Single European Act (1986), which promoted the free flow of goods, labor, and capital but also introduced qualified majority voting in place of the veto that the larger countries formerly enjoyed. Thatcher favored free trade but opposed EU-mandated labor and welfare programs. She wanted a Europe of nation-states rather than a federal Europe ruled by supranational institutions that lacked democratic accountability. Many conservatives objected to the fact that the European Court of Justice had the power to invalidate British laws that contradict EU law. Thatcher's resistance to European integration caused splits within the Conservative Party and led to her removal as prime minister in 1990.

Britain, together with the Scandinavian EU member countries, declined to enter the economic and monetary union that was agreed to at Maastricht in 1991, when the EC renamed itself the European Union. Britain reluctantly incorporated EU regulations (the *acquis communautaire*) into British law, but refused to adopt the single European currency (the euro), which was introduced in stages beginning in 1999. Britain's links to Europe grew closer with the opening of the Eurotunnel for trains under the English Channel in 1995. In the next decade Britain's strong economic growth drew in millions of young job-seekers from Europe. By 2006, London was home to an estimated three hundred thousand Poles and three hundred thousand French.

Even as economic ties between Britain and the Continent continued to deepen, Britain was reluctant to pursue political integration with Europe. Britain was a strong supporter of "widening" the European Union to include the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, in part because it was thought this might delay a political "deepening" of the union. (Ten more countries joined the European Union in 2004, Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007 and Croatia joined in 2013, raising the number of members to twenty-eight.) But closer political union would undermine Britain's ability to run an independent, liberal economic policy and weaken its strategic alliance with the United States. A "federal Europe" would challenge the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, which lies at the very heart of the British political tradition.

Who Are the British? Contested Identities

We all have an image of who the British are: Lady Diana, the Beatles, Austin Powers, the Queen. The British seem to be confident and self-assured, even complacent. But this image of comfortable homogeneity is an illusion. Britain was always riven by deep social-class divisions at home and doubts over the viability and morality of its empire abroad. Britain's political identity as the country enters the twenty-first century is more fragile than outsiders usually suppose.

Despite nine hundred years of continuous self-rule, Britain's national identity remains contested and ill-defined. The political identity of many older Britons is tied to the empire that disappeared from the world atlas more than fifty years ago. Britain's reluctance to join its neighbors in European integration stems from the fear that such a step would undermine British identity. The Scots, Irish, and Welsh are still there to remind us that "British" should not be conflated with "English." Finally, the influx of immigrants from South Asia and elsewhere over the past forty years has changed the face of many British cities.

Forging a British Nation

"Britain" and "Great Britain" are synonyms, referring to the main island that includes England, Scotland, and Wales. The United Kingdom is the political unit that includes Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The 63 million inhabitants of the United Kingdom have a complex and shifting hierarchy of identities. They identify themselves as English, Scots, Welsh, or Irish, and at the same time they are aware of themselves as British subjects. Regional identities within each of the countries are also quite strong, with many counties and cities having distinct dialects and proud traditions. While the empire existed, the peoples of the British Isles were united in a common endeavor of mutual enrichment through global conquest. With the end of the empire, that powerful practical and ideological cohesive force is now lacking.

From the sixth to ninth centuries, England was settled by Anglo-Saxons, and Vikings from northern Europe. The French-speaking Normans displaced the Anglo-Saxon rulers in 1066 and set about creating a unified kingdom. By the end of the sixteenth century, a notion of the English people was quite firmly established – as reflected in the patriotic plays of William Shakespeare. Through the stick of conquest and the carrot of commerce, the English absorbed the Celtic peoples of Wales (1535), Ireland (1649), and Scotland (1707). Local parliaments were dissolved, and a unitary state was created and run from London.

The process of absorption was different in each of the three Celtic regions. English lords moved into Wales and took over the land, but the peasantry maintained their distinct Welsh identity. Today, about one-fifth of the three million residents of Wales still speak the distinctive Welsh language at home. In Scotland, while most of the lowland lords sided with London, the Highlanders put up a fierce resistance, culminating in their defeat at Culloden in 1745, the last battle fought on British soil. Most of the rebellious clans were deported to America. The Scottish elite played a leading role in the forging of the British nation and the

expansion of its empire. During the eighteenth century, Edinburgh, the Scottish capital, rivaled London as an intellectual center. It was there that Adam Smith developed the conceptual framework of liberal capitalism.

Like the Welsh, the five million Scots still maintain a strong sense of national identity, although the Gaelic language has almost disappeared. Scotland preserved its own legal and educational systems, independent from the English model. The Scottish National Party (SNP) believes that Scotland's identity would be best preserved through the creation of an independent Scottish state. Their cause was boosted during the 1960s by the discovery of oil and gas in the North Sea off eastern Scotland. Also during the 1960s, a nationalist movement, **Plaid Cymru,** arose in Wales. The nationalists won concessions from London in language policy: Welsh road signs, a Welsh TV station, and the teaching of the Welsh language in schools. Plaid Cymru routinely wins around 10 percent of the vote in Wales in elections.

Whereas the focus of Welsh nationalism is culture, the Scottish movement is primarily political. As a result, its support fluctuates, depending on the level of voter disaffection with the mainstream parties. The SNP usually wins between 12 and 20 percent of the vote but managed to garner 30 percent in 1974. This led the Labour government (1974–1979) to steer more public spending into the Celtic regions. The Labour Party also promised to create regional assemblies in each country with the power to pass laws and raise taxes, a reform known as **devolution**. Scots were split on the idea because the SNP still wanted outright independence. A referendum was held in 1979, and only 12 percent of Welsh and 33 percent of Scots voted in favor of a regional assembly.

The idea of devolution was dropped, but then it was revived during the 1990s by the Labour Party under its new leader, Tony Blair. In a 1997 referendum, 74 percent of Scots voted for a new Scottish parliament. In their referendum, the Welsh backed a Welsh parliament only by the slimmest of margins (50.3 percent to 49.7 percent), on voter turnout of only 50 percent. A proposal in a 2004 referendum to create a new elected regional assembly in North-East England was decisively rejected.

Many Britons fear (or hope) that the creation of the Scottish parliament will lead ineluctably to full independence for Scotland. Despite a number of scandals since they started work in 1999, the two new regional parliaments have been moderately successful, broadening the range of political participation and leading to more diversity in public policy. For example, in Wales (but not England), medical prescriptions are free, and in Scotland, students pay no tuition – while since 2012, English universities can charge students up to £9,000 per year. In elections to the Scottish parliament in May 2011, the SNP won a majority of seats for the first time. With 45 percent of the vote they earned sixty-nine seats, ahead of Labour with 32 percent (thirty-seven seats) and the Conservatives with 14 percent (fifteen seats). A referendum on full independence for Scotland will be held in 2014 – although polls show only a minority of Scots favor full separation. The U.K. government spends $1,600 ($2,500) per head more in Scotland than in England, which means that independence would come with a hefty price tag. It is unclear whether an independent Scotland would be able to keep the pound sterling as its currency, or would have to re-apply in order to join the EU as a new member.

The Irish Question

Catholic Ireland was brought under British control only after brutal military campaigns by Oliver Cromwell (1649) and William of Orange (1689). English lords took over the land, while Scottish Protestants established a colony in Ulster (present-day Northern Ireland). The English banned the Irish language, which survived only in the more remote regions. Unscrupulous landlords, cheap food imports from the United States, and the failure of the potato crop resulted in famine in the 1840s and a mass exodus. A growing movement for Irish independence was met with proposals for autonomy ("home rule") from London. These plans foundered initially over land reform and later because of opposition from the Ulster Protestants.

There was an abortive nationalist uprising in Dublin in 1916. After World War I, Ireland erupted into civil war. London granted independence to the southern Republic of Ireland in 1921, while maintaining Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland was granted its own parliament (Stormont), which was controlled by the 1.6-million-strong Protestant majority. The eight hundred thousand Catholics of the province lived in segregated housing estates and went to separate schools. The Protestants controlled the police force and steered jobs and public spending to their own community.

In 1968, a civil rights movement sprang up, demanding equal treatment for the Catholics and borrowing the tactics of the U.S. civil rights movement. Its peaceful protests were brutally dispersed by the Protestant police. The Irish Republican Army (IRA), a long-dormant terrorist group, mobilized to defend the Catholics, but their goal was for Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and join a united Ireland. In 1969, sixteen thousand British troops were sent in to police the province. Over the next three decades, Northern Ireland was wracked by a three-way "low-intensity" conflict among the British army, the IRA, and sundry Protestant paramilitaries. Riots, bombings, and assassinations became part of everyday life. The British government fought back with special courts and internment without trial. From time to time, the IRA planted bombs on the British mainland. All told, the conflict caused more than thirty-six hundred deaths and forty thousand injuries.

The British abolished the Stormont parliament in 1972, but efforts to introduce power sharing between Catholics and Protestants were blocked by Protestant **Unionists,** who staunchly defended remaining part of the United Kingdom. The Protestants feared exchanging their majority status in Ulster for minority status in a united Ireland.

Britain and Ireland drew closer as they both became further integrated into the European Union, and in 1985 London agreed to grant Dublin a direct role in any future peace settlement for the North. London promised the Unionists that Ulster would join a united Ireland only if a majority in the North voted in favor of it. Peace talks resumed in 1993, under the chairmanship of former U.S. senator George Mitchell. The IRA and Protestant paramilitaries promised to disarm, and in return their convicted comrades would be released from prison. Protestant and Catholic politicians in the North agreed to share power in an assembly elected by proportional representation. The "Good Friday" accord was approved in a referendum in 1998, winning 71 percent support in the North. Prisoner releases began,

but the IRA refused to disarm and Protestant leaders balked at sharing power with their Catholic counterparts.

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, the IRA sensed that world opinion was turning against terrorism, and they started to "decommission" some of their weapons under the supervision of an independent commission headed by a retired Canadian general. However, low-level sectarian violence continued, and in 2002 the London government suspended the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive for the fourth time since 1998 as relations between the leaders of the two communities broke down. Elections to the Assembly in 2003 saw further losses for the moderate parties that had championed the peace process (the Ulster Unionists and the mainly Catholic Social Democratic and Labour Party) at the expense of the intransigent Democratic Unionist Party and republican Sinn Fein. In 2005 the monitoring commission finally certified that the IRA had put all its weapons "beyond use." In March 2007 the hard-line leaders of both sides (Ian Paisley for the Democratic Unionists and Gerry Adams for Sinn Fein) agreed to form a united coalition government after the elections scheduled for May 2007, and sealed the deal with a historic handshake. Although clashes continue – especially around the Orange marches organized by Unionist groups – the peace seems to be holding.

Ireland was the first – and last – British colony. The Northern Ireland "Troubles" are a blot on British democracy and the most painful reminder of the legacy of empire.

A Multicultural Britain

Another important echo of empire was the appearance in the 1960s of a community of immigrants from Asia and the West Indies. These Asians and blacks broke the image of social and ethnic homogeneity that had prevailed in Britain for decades.

Facing a labor squeeze, as early as 1948 Britain started to recruit workers from Jamaica and Trinidad, former British colonies in the West Indies. These black workers were joined by a flow of migrants from India and Pakistan, a process accelerated by the expulsion of Asians from Kenya and Uganda in 1965. More restrictive immigration laws were introduced, which slowed but did not halt the flow. Between 1993 and 2011 the foreign-born residents in the United Kingdom rose from 3.8 million to 7.5 million, or 13 percent of the total population. Following Poland's entry to the EU. in 2004, Poles emerged as the second largest group of immigrants after Indians, with 600,000 recorded in the 2011 census. Four out of ten immigrants live in London, where in 2011 they made up 42 percent of the city's population. In 2011, one in four babies in the United Kingdom was born to an immigrant mother. Including community members born in Britain, the 2011 census recorded 1.9 million blacks (half African, and half from the Caribbean); 1.6 million Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, and 1.5 million Indians.

Race and ethnic diversity is not the only issue. The South Asian migrants are Hindus and Muslims, and their arrival posed a challenge to Britain's avowed status as a Christian nation. The Church of England is the established state religion, with the Queen as its official head, even though less than 10 percent of the British population are regular churchgoers. With the appearance of Muslim and Hindu pupils in the 1970s, most state schools stopped

their compulsory Bible classes, and new "faith schools" were opened for those religions. The new immigrants forced Britain to acknowledge the fact that it was in reality a secular, urban, individualist culture, and that its old self-images of queen, church, and empire were sorely outdated.

Immigration was also a political challenge. Many older Britons harbored racist attitudes from the days of empire, and some young workers saw the immigrants as a threat to their jobs and state housing. The racist National Front Party arose in the late 1960s, and there were occasional street battles between racist skinheads and immigrant youths from the 1970s to the present. The situation began to change as the first cohort of British-born blacks and Asians passed through the educational system and entered the professions. Whereas their parents had kept a low social and political profile, the second generation was more assertive in demanding a full and equal place in British society. But it took several decades before the new immigrant communities achieved political representation. In 1987, four minority candidates won seats in Parliament, rising to ten in 1997 and twenty-six in 2010 (4 percent of the total). Tony Blair appointed the first black minister in 1997, and he named a black woman to head the House of Lords.

In contrast to the policy of rapid assimilation of immigrants pursued in France, Tony Blair's Labour government adopted a policy of **multiculturalism,** encouraging immigrant groups to retain their own traditions and identities through separate educational, religious, and social institutions. London is now a vibrant, multicultural city. Intermarriage rates across racial lines are high (in comparison with the United States): around 50 percent for both blacks and Asians. The media deserve much of the credit for helping to redefine Britain as a multiracial community. However, accusations of racism in the police force were highlighted by the failure to prosecute the skinheads who killed a black youth, Stephen Lawrence, in London in 1997. In May 2001, race riots broke out in several northern cities, highlighting the tension in poor white and immigrant communities competing for scarce jobs and housing. During the 1990s, attention focused on the problems posed by an influx of asylum seekers, mainly from Eastern Europe but also from countries as far-flung as Afghanistan and Somalia. More than five hundred thousand entered the United Kingdom from 1991 to 2001, with ninety thousand arriving in 2002 alone. Four out of five applicants were rejected, but housing and processing them caused public outrage. The government responded by tightening border controls. To reduce regular immigration, a points system favoring highly -skilled immigrants was introduced in 2006.

After September 11th, attention focused on the activities of radical imams who were recruiting potential terrorists from young men who attended their mosques in England. These fears turned into horrible reality on July 7, 2005, when four young Moslem men set off bombs on three subway trains and a London bus, killing 52 and injuring 700. This was the first suicide bombing in Europe. There was a second attempted attack on July 21, but the three bombers failed to detonate their charges.

Three of the July bombers were born in Britain to families from Pakistan;, the fourth had been born in Jamaica. The fact that the bombers were born and raised in England was a profound shock to the British public. Radical Islamists felt alienated from British society and were opposed to U.K. involvement in the war in Iraq. Moslem community leaders

mobilized to try to reach out to the disaffected youth, while Prime Minister Blair pledged to "pull up this evil ideology by its roots." The government stepped up state funding to Muslim schools, and tried to liaise with "moderate" Muslims while marginalizing their "extremist" counterparts.

In an echo of the veil controversies in France, in 2006 an English teacher was suspended for wearing a full-face veil (*niqab*). Prime Minister Blair supported the school's decision, arguing that the veil was a "mark of separation." But while France and several other countries went on to ban wearing the *niqab* in public, it remains legal in Britain. There was also growing concerns about the practice of forcibly arranged marriages for young girls in South Asian immigrant communities.

Unfortunately, the July 2005 bombings could not be treated as an isolated incident. In a November 2006 speech Dame Eliza Buller, Director of the Security Service (MI5), said there were some 200 groups in Britain, with 1,600 members, intent on committing acts of political violence, while polls suggested that "over 100,000 of our citizens consider that the July 2005 attacks in London were justified." According to a Pew Global Attitudes Project survey released in June 2006, only 7 percent of Muslims in Britain saw themselves as British citizens first, while for 81 percent their primary identity was Muslim. Fifteen percent even believed violence against civilian targets could "sometimes" be justified.

The government pushed through bills increasing police powers to meet the terrorist challenge, which critics claimed amounted to an attack on civil liberties. The strict 2006 Terrorism Act made it a criminal offense to encourage others to commit acts of terrorism, including the glorification of terrorism, the circulation of terrorist publications, or training in terrorist techniques. Suspects can be held without charge for up to twenty-eight days. In November 2005 the Commons rejected the government's proposal to extend the detention for up to ninety days – the first time Blair's government was defeated in the House. Forty-nine Labour MPs (Members of Parliament) voted against the government. Also in 2005 the government introduced a bill to introduce compulsory national identity cards for all residents, including biometric information. The House of Lords rejected various versions of the bill twelve times before it was finally passed in 2006. In the 2010 election the Conservatives campaigned on a promise to cancel the scheme. A law was introduced abolishing the cards, and the data files of the National Identity Registry were destroyed in February 2011.

As public debates over the nature of British identity continued, 2005 saw the introduction of a new "Life in the U.K." test for citizenship, which included some fairly obscure questions about British institutions and cultural traditions (what date is St. George's Day?). The test was criticized for including some factual errors and for being too difficult. About one in three applicants failed – as did many native-born British who tried out the test online (including the present author).

In July 2012 London hosted the **Olympic Games**, which much to everyone's surprise were a resounding success. The feared transport logjams, airport workers' strikes, and terrorist attacks failed to materialize. Britain turned in its best performance since 1908, finishing in third place in the gold medals table. "Team GB" was a triumph of multiculturalism, with star performances from the Somalia-born runner Mo Farrah and heptathlete Jessica Ennis (whose father is Jamaican). **Danny Boyle's** stunning opening ceremony won accolades for

its wit and creativity. Boyle showed Britain's transformation from rural idyll to industrial hell to hip information society, linked together by what he described as the country's two main achievements – pop music and children's literature. Boyle's spectacle single-handedly turned around the debate on British national identity – at least for a while.

British Political Institutions

The British political system was traditionally seen as characterized by a high level of stability. Institutions evolved in order to defuse the deep conflicts in British society before they turn violent. The core features of what is known as the Westminster model – parliamentary sovereignty, prime ministerial government, and two parties alternating in power – have indeed remained basically unchanged for more than a hundred years. But the model has seen some important but uncoordinated reforms over the past two decades, in a process of profound structural change that is still unfolding.

The Path to Parliamentary Democracy

The U.S. political system is based on a written constitution, whereas the linchpin of the British system is the notion of parliamentary sovereignty. The parliament, representing the people, has the power to enact any law it chooses, unrestrained by a written constitution. Another difference is that the U.S. system strives for a separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In contrast, the British tradition of parliamentary sovereignty fused the executive with the legislature, while the House of Lords also served as the nation's highest court.

Parliamentary sovereignty rests on the notion of popular sovereignty, where voters get to choose their leaders through frequent direct elections. At first, in the eighteenth century, the number of voters who got to participate was very small, perhaps 2 percent of the population. It took two hundred years of social conflict before the franchise spread to the majority of citizens. The parliament was an institution originally designed to protect the interests of medieval nobles, but it subsequently came to be accepted by industrial workers as a useful instrument for the protection of their interests.

Regional *parlements* ("talking places") emerged in France as a forum for nobles to resolve disputes. The institution spread to England in the thirteenth century, providing a place for the king to bargain with his nobles. The monarch grew more powerful and came to be seen as the divinely chosen ruler of the kingdom (whose right to rule was subject to approval by the pope). In 1534, King Henry VIII broke with the Church of Rome and established a separate Church of England, with himself as head. The rhetoric of king and Parliament gradually shifted from divine right to that of serving the interests of the people and nation.

The upper chamber of Parliament (the House of Lords) was made up of **hereditary peers,** lords appointed by the monarch, whose title automatically passed down to their eldest sons. The lower chamber (the House of Commons) consisted of representatives elected by property owners in the public at large. Conflict between king and the parliament

over the right to raise taxes erupted into civil war (1642–1648). After a brief period of military-theocratic rule by Oliver Cromwell, in the **Glorious Revolution** of 1688, the parliament installed William of Orange as a constitutional monarch with limited powers. In the eighteenth century, the parliament's role developed into what has come to be known as the **Westminster model** (named after Westminster, the London district where the Houses of Parliament are located.). One of its most important features is the emergence of two distinct parties – Her Majesty's Government on one side and **Her Majesty's Opposition** on the other. The idea that one can disagree with the government without being considered a traitor was novel, and is still a rarity in many authoritarian regimes. The two-party system came be seen as integral to the Westminster model.

In his classic 1971 book *Polyarchy,* Robert Dahl argued that liberal democracy develops along two dimensions: contestation and participation. "Contestation" means that rival groups of leaders compete for the top state positions; "participation" refers to the proportion of the adult population who play an active role in this process through elections. Over the course of the twentieth century, many countries have made an abrupt transition from closed authoritarian regimes to competitive, democratic ones. In these cases, contestation and participation expanded simultaneously. In the British situation, however, the politics of contestation were firmly established long before mass participation appeared on the scene.

The House of Commons

The centerpiece of the British political system is the House of Commons, which consists of 646 MPs elected from single-member constituencies. The winner is the candidate who scores the largest number of votes, the same "first past the post" system as in the United States. Although a handful of members sit as Independents, the vast majority of MPs run for election as members of a political party. The Commons must submit itself for election at least once every five years in what is called a General Election. (If an MP dies or resigns between elections, an individual by-election is held for that seat.) After a general election, the leader of the party with a majority of MPs is invited by the Queen to form a government. If no single party has an absolute majority, party leaders negotiate and the monarch appoints a coalition government. That is what happened in 2010 – for the first time since 1935.

The best example of British democracy in action is **Prime Minister's Questions.** For thirty minutes once a week, the prime minister stands before the Commons and answers questions, largely unscripted, from MPs of both parties. The ritual often strikes foreign observers as rather silly. The questions are not really intended to solicit information but to score political points and make the other side look foolish. Members of Parliament from both parties shout, whistle, and laugh to express their encouragement or displeasure. The drama is enhanced by the fact that the two main parties sit on ranked benches facing each other, just yards apart. (Since 1989, question time has been televised.)

The spectacle seems juvenile, more akin to a college debate than a legislative assembly. However, the game has a serious purpose: public accountability. Week after week, the members of the government have to take the stand and defend their policies. It is a kind of collective lie-detector test in which the failings of government policy are ruthlessly exposed to

ridicule by the opposition. In the United States, in contrast, the separation of powers means that a sitting U.S. president never has to confront his political adversaries face to face. Once a year he goes to Congress to give a State of the Union address, with no questions allowed.

From Cabinet to Prime Ministerial Government

The head of the government is known as the prime minister (PM). The PM nominates a cabinet of about twenty ministers, who are appointed by the Queen to form Her Majesty's Government. There are another seventy to ninety ministers and deputy ministers without cabinet rank. Whereas U.S. cabinet members work for the president, their British counterparts are accountable to Parliament. All ministers are drawn from members of either the Commons or the Lords, and they must account for their actions to that body. On the other hand, individual ministerial appointees are not subject to confirmation by the legislature as in the United States.

The cabinet meets weekly in the PM's residence, **No. 10 Downing Street.** The PM chairs cabinet meetings, and votes are usually not taken. The most senior ministers are those heading the foreign office, the treasury, and the home office (dealing with police, prisons, etc.). The ministers rely on the permanent civil service to run their departments, with only a handful of personal advisers brought in from outside. The total number of outside appointees when a new government takes power is fewer than a hundred, compared with more than two thousand political appointees in the United States.

There is no clear separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches under the British system. On the contrary, the two are fused together. The public elects the House of Commons knowing that the majority party will form the executive branch. The PM comes from the party with a majority in the Commons, and this majority always votes according to party instructions. This means that the legislative program of the ruling party is almost always implemented. The government rules as long as it can sustain its majority in the Commons. A government will resign after defeat in the Commons on what it deems to be a vote of confidence.

This system gives the PM tremendous power, in what Lord Hailsham, a leading Conservative, called "an elective dictatorship." The power of the PM is augmented by the fact that he or she chooses when to call an election. The Commons can vote to dissolve itself at any time, leading to a general election just six weeks later. Thanks to having control over the majority party in the Commons, the prime minister can choose when to face the electorate. This gives a tremendous political advantage to the incumbent government. The PM carefully monitors opinion polls and economic data, and calls an election when support is at a peak (although an election must be called no later than five years after the previous election).

If the U.S. Congress is a *policy-making* legislature, Westminster is at best a *policy-influencing* legislature. In Britain, the government is responsible for introducing virtually all legislation: It is extremely rare for a bill proposed by an individual MP to make it into law. Members of Parliament are expected to vote in accordance with party instructions (the party "whip"), except when a vote is declared a matter of personal conscience. An MP who

defies the whip may be expelled from the party and denied its endorsement at the next election, which will usually prevent her or his reelection. Even so, in about 10 to 20 percent of votes in the Commons, a small number of rebels defy the party whip. The parliaments of 1974–1979 and 1992–1997 saw frequent revolts by dissident MPs from the ruling party, but they had only a marginal effect on the government's capacity to enact its program.

During the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher was PM, there were complaints that the PM was becoming too powerful, even "presidential," in her ability to dictate policy to her ministers. In particular, Thatcher took over direct control of foreign policy, at the expense of the foreign secretary. These complaints returned after Tony Blair became PM in 1997. After his re-election in 2001, Blair created special units for European and foreign/defense affairs inside the prime minister's office, further undercutting the role of the foreign office and defense ministry.

The upper chamber of Parliament, the House of Lords, has only limited capacity to block or delay government legislation. Any act that is passed in three readings by the Commons and Lords and signed into law by the Queen supersedes all preceding laws and precedents and traditionally was not subject to judicial review, since there was no written constitution to which they could appeal to declare a law invalid. The lack of a bill of rights troubled many liberal observers.

For centuries Britain had a unitary system of government: there was no federal structure that could block the powers of the Westminster parliament. There were separate ministries for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, whose main task was spending regional development funds. Eighty percent of the funding for local councils comes from the national government, and there are strict rules over how it can be spent. Margaret Thatcher was so annoyed by the policies of the Labour-controlled Greater London Council that she had parliament abolish the council in 1986. (It had been created only in 1964.) The New Labour government of Tony Blair set about reversing the centralization of the Thatcher years, creating a new Greater London Authority in 1999 and moving ahead with plans for the introduction of new parliaments in Wales and Scotland.

The Electoral System

Britain operates a first-past-the-post, or winner-take-all, electoral system, similar to that in the United States. Until recently this produced clear winners and strong alternating majority parties in the House of Commons. However, it is criticized for offering voters an exceptionally narrow range of alternatives (two) and denying third parties adequate representation.

Each of the 650 MPs is elected from a single-member constituency in which the candidate with the highest number of votes wins. This system works to the advantage of the two leading parties, which tend to finish first and second in every race. Britain's third-largest party, the Liberal Democrats, has 15 to 25 percent support in nearly every constituency in the country, but this is not enough to displace a Labour or Tory incumbent with 40 to 60 percent support. Hence, the Liberal Democrats win very few parliamentary seats.

Another problem is that the winner may well have only a plurality and not an absolute majority of the votes cast, because there are usually more than two candidates competing

for each seat. At the national level, there is no guarantee that the party that wins the most seats will have won a majority of the popular vote. In fact, no government since 1935 has gained more than 50 percent of the votes cast in a British election – yet this did not prevent those governments from having absolute control of the Commons and pursuing an aggressive legislative program.

The first-past-the-post system is unpredictable in translating voter preferences into parliamentary seats. Small differences in the votes gained by the rival parties can produce huge differences in the number of seats won. As a result some advocate the introduction of a system of proportional representation (PR), in which seats are allocated in proportion to each party's share of the national vote. In 1992, both Labour and Tories won more seats than they would have had under a PR system, whereas the Liberal Democrats got only one-fifth of the seats they would have had under PR. In 1997, the Liberal Democrats won twice as many seats as they did in 1992, even though they actually garnered fewer votes than in the previous election. The Conservatives (Tories) did worse in 1997 than they would have under PR, whereas Labour scooped up two-thirds of the seats with only 44 percent of the national vote.

In June 2001, Labour scored a second consecutive victory in national elections. They won 413 seats (6 fewer than in 1997), while their share of the vote slipped by 2.5 percent to 40.7 percent. The Conservatives polled 31.7 percent of the vote but garnered only 166 seats In May 2005 Tony Blair won an unprecedented third term. Even though he only narrowly led the conservatives, by 35.2 percent to 32.3 percent of the popular vote, this translated into 355 seats for Labour and only 197 for the Tories. The Liberal Democrats, with 22.0 percent of the vote, picked up a mere 62 seats.

The unequal relationship between votes and seats is exacerbated by the unequal geographical concentration of voters and the economic divide between the prosperous Southeast and the depressed North and West. Labour does well in London and in northern cities but usually wins few seats in the southern suburbs and rural areas. The gap in regional voting patterns actually increased during the 1970s and 1980s. As a result of this pattern, four out of five constituencies are "safe seats" that rarely change hands between parties in an election. Despite this, voter turnout was relatively high, usually 80 percent, although it slipped to 69 percent in 1997 and 57 percent in 2001, recovering to 65 percent in 2010.

Under the first-past-the-post system, minor parties with a regional concentration, such as the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, can win seats on their home turf. The third-largest party in Britain, formerly the Liberals and now called the Liberal Democrats, wins seats mainly in the alienated periphery where their supporters are concentrated: Scotland, Wales, and the southwest of England.

There have been growing calls for a reform of the British electoral system in order to make the results more representative of voter opinion. The Liberal Democrats have the most to gain from the introduction of European-style proportional representation. Britain now has some experience with the PR system. Elections to the European Parliament using the PR system have taken place in Britain since 1999. And the two new parliaments in Scotland and Wales are elected by PR (single-seat constituencies, topped up by additional members from a national party list to ensure proportionality).

Defenders of the existing British system argue that it produces a strong government with the power to implement its legislative program. Proportional representation would spread power among three or more parties, which would require coalition governments of more than one party. This may be undemocratic because in most countries coalition governments are usually formed in backroom deals that take place after the election.

In its 1997 election manifesto, Labour promised to hold a referendum on electoral reform, but it dropped the idea after the election. In the 2010 election neither Labour nor Tories won a clear majority, so the Tories formed a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. As a condition for joining the government, the Lib-Dems insisted on holding a referendum on electoral reform. They proposed a semi-proportional system called the Alternative Vote. This preserves single-member constituencies, but allows voters to rank order the candidates. The votes of losing candidates are redistributed according to their second preferences. The system is rather cumbersome: only three countries in the world currently use it (Australia, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea).The referendum took place in 2011, with both the Labour and Conservative parties campaigning for the status quo. Voters rejected the reform by 68 percent to 32 percent, with a turnout of 41 percent. Britain seems stuck with its archaic electoral system for the foreseeable future.

Political Behavior

In postwar Britain, the Labour Party was seen as representing industrial workers, and Conservatives the rural community and middle classes. In the decades after 1945 Labour lost the loyalty of the majority of workers at the same time as the working class itself was shrinking in size. In 1970, 56 percent of manual workers had voted Labour, but this was down to 33 percent by 2010. In 1970 manual workers made up 66 percent of the population, but a 2011 survey found 70 percent of respondents self-identifying as middle class, and only 24 percent as working class.

The decline of class politics led to the weakening of the two-party system of Labour versus Conservatives. The protracted economic crisis of the 1960s and 1970s eroded party loyalties as voters started to shop around for new ideas. In 1950, 40 percent of those polled "strongly identified" with a single party, but this figure had halved by 1992. Between 1970 and 2010 the combined vote share of the Labour and Tory parties shrank from 90 percent to 65 percent. Voting became less a matter of habit and more a matter of choice. Voter behavior became more volatile, harder to predict, and more likely to be swayed by party campaigns and media influence. Voter turnout fell, especially among young people.

Given the large number of "safe" seats, the parties focus their efforts on winning the "marginal" seats, those that may change hands at every election. In **marginal seats,** the parties canvas every household and record the voting intentions of each family member. On election day, party volunteers stand outside polling stations to record voters' registration numbers. The data are collated at party headquarters, and supporters who have not voted are reminded to go to the polls.

Tight limits on campaign spending have mostly prevented the spread of U.S.-style money politics in Britain. There are no limits on donations to national parties, however,

which has fueled repeated scandals. But it is the role of the media, rather than money, that has been the main source of controversy in British politics. The British are avid newspaper readers (average daily circulation is 14 million). In contrast with those in the United States, most British papers are not politically neutral but actively campaign for one of the parties. The papers are not controlled by political parties, as in much of Europe, but are owned by quixotic business magnates who enjoy playing politics. The Australian media magnate **Rupert Murdoch** owns 40 percent of Britain's newspapers through the News International corporation. Most of the British papers, including those owned by Murdoch, usually back the Tories. In 1995 Labour leader Tony Blair traveled all the way to Australia to plea for Murdoch's support in the 1997 election. He was successful: Murdoch switched his paper's allegiance to Labour, helping Blair secure a landslide victory in 1997. (In 2010 Blair became godfather to Murdoch's daughter.)

Unlike the press, radio and television stations are required to be politically neutral and there is a ban on paid political advertising on broadcast media. The BBC is state-financed, whereas the three other broadcast stations are commercially owned and depend on advertising for their financing. Murdoch owns a large stake in the leading satellite TV station, British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB).

A huge scandal erupted around Murdoch's newspapers in 2011, exposing serious corruption and abuse of office in the corridors of power. In 2007 it was discovered that journalists at ruthlessly competitive tabloid newspapers owned by Murdoch were routinely hacking into the voice mail of celebrities in the search for gossip. Two arrests were made in 2007, but neither the police nor the media followed up on the story. It was only after the liberal *Guardian* newspaper took the story to the *New York Times* in 2009 that the British press started to cover the scandal. Public outrage was ignited in 2011 by the revelation that the *News of the World* had hacked the voice mail of a child who had been abducted and killed – leading her parents to believe that she was still alive. Murdoch took the extraordinary step of closing down the paper, but it was too late. A parliamentary enquiry grilled the Murdochs, father and son, and turned up evidence of collusion of some police officials in the hacking and the cover-up. The head of London's Metropolitan Police was forced to resign, as was Andy Coulson, press secretary to Prime Minister David Cameron, who had been editor of the *New of the World* until 2007. By 2012, forty arrests had been made in the case, and News International had paid tens of millions of dollars in civil damages. Murdoch was forced to abandon his bid to take full ownership of BSkyB.

The Dignified Constitution: Lords and Monarch

Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the throne in 1953. She is the head of state but has only limited influence over the affairs of government: she "reigns but does not rule." The Queen meets the PM each week for a private chat over tea. The most important function of the monarch is to invite a potential prime minister to form a government, usually after a general election. If that government wins majority support in the Commons, the monarch's effective role is at an end.

The last time the monarch played a significant role in British politics was in 1910. The House of Lords blocked a high-spending welfare budget passed by the House of Commons. Liberal prime minister Herbert Henry Asquith called an election, which he won, and he asked the king to create enough new peers to tip the voting in the upper chamber. The Lords gave in and accepted a new law abolishing its right to delay bills involving public spending. They retained the right to return non-spending bills to the Commons, although if passed a second time by the Commons, such bills become law after a two-year delay (reduced to one year in 1949). A second chamber can be useful in scrutinizing laws passed on party lines in the Commons. For example, the Lords introduced substantial amendments to the 2001 Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Bill. Most democracies have a second chamber, usually elected to represent regional interests, as is the U.S. Senate. In addition to its legislative functions, the House of Lords also served as the highest court of appeal, with twelve specially appointed Law Lords.

However, the House of Lords is a bizarre anachronism. In a democracy, it does not make sense to give a legislative role to the descendants of medieval knights. The Lords consisted of 750 hereditary peers and 600 life peers. Hereditary peers are exclusively male, and they pass their title to their first sons. The system of life peers was introduced in 1958. They are mostly retired politicians, men and women, who are nominated by the PM and appointed by the Queen. Their heirs do not inherit their seat in the House of Lords. The average age of the Lords is sixty-nine.

The ultraconservative hereditary peers gave the Tories a guaranteed majority in the upper chamber, so the new Labour government elected in 1997 made reforming the House of Lords a priority. As a first step, in 1999 the number of hereditary peers able to sit in the Lords was limited to ninety-two. However, reform proved difficult because the House of Commons did not want to create a new elected second chamber that could rival its power. Blair was unable to come up with an acceptable plan: some in his party wanted to abolish the second chamber altogether. The prospect of an upper chamber that was appointed rather than elected raised fears of cronyism – and the sense that such a chamber would be redundant, a duplicate of the Commons. In 2003 the Commons voted down all the reform options on the table. In 2007 they voted in favor of a fully elected second chamber – but this was rejected by the House of Lords. The 2005 Constitutional Reform Act did remove the Law Lords from the House of Lords and created a new Supreme Court as the ultimate appeals tribunal.

In the coalition government that came to power in 2010, the Lib-Dems made Lords reform a top priority, favoring a fully elected upper house. A large group of Conservative MPs were resolutely opposed to any changes, however. The coalition government came up with a compromise proposal for an upper chamber of 300 hereditary peers (down from 800) with 240 elected (for a period of 15 years), and 60 appointed. However, in a procedural vote on the draft bill in July 2012, ninety-one Conservative MPs voted with the Labour Party to block an accelerated timetable for discussion of the bill.] Prime Minister David Cameron shelved the bill. Despite fifteen years of effort, Lords reform remains a chimera.

The idea of reforming the **monarchy** is not on the agenda. Having a ceremonial, nonpolitical head of state does not challenge the authority of Parliament, and few people advocate

abolishing the monarchy in favor of an elected or appointed president. The main argument is over money. Each year, the Commons votes a budget for the Queen and her extended family in recognition of their public duties. During the 1990s, as the royal family fell prey to divorce and scandal, the public began to wonder whether they were getting value for their money. Defenders of the monarchy argue that royal pageantry is good for the tourism industry.

The life of the royals is a reality TV soap opera that provides endless copy for the tabloid press in Britain and throughout the world. Princess Diana, the wife of Prince Charles, was probably the most well-known woman on the planet even before her dramatic divorce and untimely death in a 1997 car accident. Diana's death was a blow to the public image of the House of Windsor. However, Queen Elizabeth II soldiered on, marking her 60th Jubilee in July 2012. Shortly thereafter the eighty-five-year old queen attended the opening of the London Olympics, gamely taking part in a video sequence that culminated in her appearing to parachute into the stadium with James Bond. The monarchy had won back its public support.

Rival Interests and the Evolution of British Democracy

Political institutions in Britain evolved as a result of the competition between strong, well-organized social groups seeking to defend their respective economic and political interests. By the seventeenth century, British thinkers were describing the emergence of a "civil society" consisting of a dense network of independent social actors linked through mutual respect, accepted social norms, and the rule of law.

In class terms, British history was dominated by the powerful landowning aristocracy, which was later joined by a rapacious commercial bourgeoisie. This rising capitalist class, along with elements of the landed aristocracy, went to war against the king and his aristocratic supporters in the middle of the seventeenth century to decide which institution would rule – the monarch or the elected parliament. The institutions that emerged as a compromise in the wake of the civil war (parliamentary sovereignty and constitutional monarchy) have persisted to the present day. These institutions were embedded in a broad consensus of political values – respect for individual rights combined with loyalty to king and country.

Many social groups, such as peasants, religious minorities, and women, were shut out from civil society and struggled to find a political voice. In the nineteenth century, industrial workers forged a powerful trade-union movement and later a parliamentary political party to defend its interests. Each of these social classes (lords, peasants, capitalists, and workers) lived a different life, went to different schools, and even spoke different dialects. Everyone was fully aware of the existence of the class system and his or her family's location within it. They all "knew their place."

Despite this highly stratified social system, Britain emerged as a peaceful, stable democracy. The general level of social unrest and political violence (Northern Ireland excepted) has been quite low. Britain has functioned with the same set of political institutions, without coups or revolutions, since 1689. There are few nations in continental Europe that can

make such a claim. Germany has gone through four regimes since its formation in 1871, and France is on its fifth republic since 1815.

The Rights Tradition

An important part of Britain's consensus values was the recognition of individual rights and the notion of limited government. Over centuries, medieval England built up a body of common law, which is based on the precedents set by previous court cases rather than statute law. The rights protected by common law included the right to trial by jury and habeas corpus, which means protection against arrest without a court hearing (literally, the right to one's own body). Such rights to personal liberty and private property were spelled out in the Magna Carta, a contract that was presented to King John in 1215 by a few dozen leading nobles. The Magna Carta was designed to protect the privileges of a narrow and oppressive aristocracy, but it set the precedent for the sovereign's power being negotiated and conditional on services rendered. Over the ensuing centuries, the same rights were slowly extended to broader sections of the population. Even in the British system, statute law has priority over common law: laws passed by Parliament are not subject to judicial review.

The rights to personal liberty did not initially extend to religion. Although the 1689 Act of Toleration granted freedom of worship to those outside the Church of England, it was not until the 1820s that bans on Catholics and Jews serving in the military or in public office were lifted.

Unlike in the United States, the right to bear arms is not part of the British tradition. Restrictions on personal gun ownership are very tight. British police usually patrol unarmed, and guns are used in fewer than 100 murders per year in Britain (compared with some 10,000 in the United States). After the massacre of sixteen children by a deranged gunman in Dunblane, Scotland, in 1996, private possession of handguns was completely banned.

In recent decades Britain has introduced elements of a written constitution, because of its growing ties with Europe. In 1951, Britain ratified the European Convention on Human Rights, which created a supranational European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. Since 1966, British citizens have been able to appeal to that court (and the court has reversed British legal decisions in some fifty cases). In 1998, the Blair government introduced the Human Rights Act, which formally incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. This moved the United Kingdom closer to U.S.-style judicial review. Although the 1998 act gives judges the right to challenge laws, their decision has no force unless Parliament chooses to act on it. For example, the Law Lords declared the 2001 Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act, on the detention of terrorism suspects, in violation of the European Convention. But the law continued in force until it was replaced by the 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Act. The same thing holds true for decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. For example, in 2005 the court ruled that Britain must give prisoners the right to vote. The House of Commons voted in 2011 to defy the court and refused to pass enabling legislation. In May 2012 the European Court reaffirmed its

decision, and it assumed that eventually parliament will amend the law to give some prisoners the right to vote.

Perhaps the most important constitutional innovation of the Blair years was the creation of a new Supreme Court, which replaced the House of Lords as the court of final appeal. The court, which began working in 2009, consists of twelve judges appointed for life by an independent commission. It monitors the compliance of U.K. legislation with European law and ensures that ministerial regulations conform to the laws passed by Parliament. The Supreme Court has been much more willing to challenge decisions of the executive branch than were the Law Lords. For example, in July 2012 the court ordered the Home Office to present all its regulations regarding deportation of illegal immigrants to Parliament before they can be implemented. The court's defenders insist that it serves to bolster and not undermine the tradition of parliamentary sovereignty, in the face of an excessively powerful executive branch.

The Impact of Industrialization

In the seventeenth century Britain began to emerge as the preeminent maritime power, pulling ahead of Holland, Spain, and finally France Napoleon described England as a "nation of merchants" (often mistranslated as "a nation of shopkeepers").

Britain was the first country to experience the agricultural revolution. Peasants were driven from their subsistence plots to make way for extensive farming methods. Many of the peasants forced away from the land opted for emigration. About one-quarter of the population left the British Isles (some unwillingly, as convicts) for America, Canada, Australia, and other outposts of the empire. This provided a safety valve, reducing the surplus population and easing social discontent. In a TV interview, the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger was asked why there had never been a revolution in England. He replied that it was because all the people who did not like the place had left. Whereas the United States was formed as a nation of immigrants, Britain was a nation of emigrants.

Britain was also the first country to experience the Industrial Revolution, in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Industry and empire grew together. Britain became "the workshop of the world," selling its manufactured goods through its global trading network. However, British workers found themselves crowded into Dickensian slums and laboring long hours in the "dark satanic mills" evoked by Danny Boyle's Olympics opening ceremony. Britain's ruling elite feared that the example of the 1789 French Revolution could be replicated in Britain. Growing protests from the expanding working class were met with a mixture of repression and reform. The 1832 Reform Act loosened the property requirements for voting, but even then only 5 percent of the adult population was enfranchised. A two-party system emerged in the House of Commons, with reformist and reactionary elements grouping themselves into the parties of Liberals and Conservatives (also known as **Tories**). Further Reform Acts in 1867 and 1884 gave the vote to 20 percent and then 40 percent of the population. By giving most adult men the right to vote, Britain's ruling elite provided an outlet for workers' political frustrations and turned them away from political violence.

Trade unions started to form among craftsmen in the 1840s, and by the 1880s they were expanding to the masses of unskilled workers. In 1900, the unions formed the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) to advance their interests in Parliament. They realized that they needed legislative protection after a court case had threatened severe civil penalties for strike action. The LRC renamed itself the Labour Party and won fifty seats in the 1906 parliamentary election in alliance with the Liberal Party.

The Liberal government that ruled from 1906 to 1914 introduced the elements of a **welfare state,** such as rudimentary public health care, school meals, and public pensions. These measures were not merely a response to the rise of labor. They were also prompted by the shocking discovery that one-third of the recruits for the British army in the Boer War in South Africa (1899–1902) were medically unfit to serve. To match the mass armies of Germany and Russia, Britain would have to start looking after its workers. Joseph Chamberlain, the reform-minded cabinet minister who served as Colonial Secretary during the Boer War, advanced the philosophy of "social imperialism" – welfare spending in return for the workers' political loyalty in imperial ventures. This was clearly an echo of Otto von Bismarck's model of welfare capitalism in Germany. However, the program did not include equal rights for women. The Liberal government resisted a vigorous protest movement for a woman's right to vote (the Suffragettes). It would take the shock of World War I to change public opinion on the issue.

The British elite came through the Industrial Revolution with its medieval institutions remarkably intact. The aristocracy went from country house to London club, educating their sons at Oxford and Cambridge and sending them off to fight in the colonies in the family regiment. There were a few innovations during the nineteenth century. The new Harry Potter–style "public" schools (they were called "public" because in theory they were open to anyone who could pay the stiff fees) forged a new elite of like-minded young men through a rigid regimen of sport and Latin. In 1854, officials in government service were organized into a politically neutral career civil service, in which recruitment and promotion were to be based on merit rather than political connections.

Labour's Rise to Power

The bloodbath of World War I was a major challenge to the integrity of the British state. Britain would have lost the war had the United States not intervened. The conflict killed one in ten of the adult male population and drained the economy. Still, the British Empire survived, while the war caused the complete collapse of the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires.

In recognition of the people's sacrifices in the war, in 1918 all adult males were given the vote, irrespective of their property holdings, as were women over the age of twenty-eight. (The "flappers" – eighteen-to twenty-eight-year-old women – were enfranchised ten years later.) Thus, it was not until 1929 that "one person, one vote" was established in Britain, showing that democracy is a quite recent historical development.

The Labour Party came out of the 1924 election as the largest single party. Although they did not control a majority of seats in the House of Commons, they formed a minority

government. It had taken the trade unions only two decades to ascend from the political wilderness to the pinnacle of power. The euphoria was not to last, however. The 1924 government fell within a year, and economic recession triggered a decade of poverty and industrial conflict.

It was not until World War II that a major shift could be seen in the distribution of power within the British political system. British patriotism blossomed in 1939–1941, when the nation fought alone against Nazi-occupied Europe under a coalition government headed by Conservative prime minister Winston Churchill. In return, the people demanded a brighter future once the war was won. In 1942, the government released the Beveridge Report, promising full employment and state-provided health care, insurance, and pensions. This was not enough to satisfy the voters. In 1945, they turned out Churchill and for the first time in history elected a majority Labour government, although Labour won only 48 percent of the vote.

That government introduced a radical socialist program. Health care, jobs, and housing were seen as social rights to which everyone was entitled. The government introduced a comprehensive "welfare state" including a National Health Service, state pensions, state-funded higher education, and state-subsidized housing provided by local councils. (In 1945, one-third of Britons were still living in houses without bathrooms.) The government also had radical socialist goals that went beyond a welfare state, to challenge the very foundations of capitalism. One-quarter of private industry was taken into public ownership (or "nationalized"), including all coal mines, electric and gas utilities, steel mills, docks, railways, and long-distance trucking. The expropriated private owners, who were paid modest compensation, were powerless in the face of Labour's parliamentary majority. There was no constitution to protect their property rights.

The postwar government granted independence to India and Palestine, recognizing that Britain had neither the will nor the resources to fight to retain these colonies. Despite its socialist agenda the Labour government was not sympathetic to the Soviet Union, and supported the United States in forming NATO to oppose Soviet expansionism. They reintroduced the draft to help fight the Cold War. The new commitment to socialism at home and the Cold War abroad provided a new sense of purpose in the face of loss of empire.

The Postwar Consensus

During the 1950s, British politics slipped into a familiar pattern that would last until 1979. The Labour and Conservative parties alternated in power, and both accepted the basic institutions of postwar Britain. The Tories acquiesced in the retreat from empire and realized that it would be political suicide to try to dismantle the welfare state. Labour knew that the British public did not want more nationalization, not least because problems soon emerged in the management of state-owned industry. Both parties accepted Keynesianism, the economic analysis of John Maynard Keynes, who argued that state intervention with public spending could have prevented the Great Depression of the 1930s.

This consensus left little for the two parties to debate. Anthony Downs in his 1957 book *An Economic Theory of Democracy* offered one powerful explanation for the convergence of

the parties over time. In a two-party system, Downs reasoned, leaders will compete for the "median voter" in the middle of the policy spectrum. Hence, both party programs will tend to converge on the center.

During the 1950s and 1960s, successive governments managed to avoid another depression. However, it proved difficult to "fine-tune" the economy by adjusting interest rates and the money supply to ensure economic growth, low inflation, and full employment. These efforts produced a debilitating "political business cycle." Conservative governments tried to lower inflation, triggering a recession and causing voters to switch their support to Labour. The succeeding Labour government would try to inflate the economy through public spending, causing inflation and eventually a debt crisis, when international investors deserted the British pound sterling (as happened in 1967 and 1976).

Despite the introduction of the welfare state, relations between workers and employers were tense and confrontational. Unlike in Germany or Scandinavia, after the war there was no attempt to introduce corporatist institutions, such as works councils, to give labor a say in the management of private industry. With unemployment held at 3 to 4 percent, workers were able to threaten strike action to push for better wages and conditions. The economy was plagued by waves of strikes, which came to be known as the **"British disease."** British industry was slow to adopt the latest technology, and Britain was overtaken in industrial output by Germany, France, Japan, and even Italy. London was still a major center of international banking, however, and the British economy became increasingly dependent on the financial sector. The easy profits from banking, or the prestige of a career in the civil service, tended to draw the "brightest and best" away from careers in industry.

The 1960s were not all gloom and doom. A new youth subculture was invented in Britain and exported to the rest of the world. Music and the arts flourished in "swinging" London, putting Britain back on the world map as a cultural superpower. By the end of the 1970s, Britain was earning more from exports of rock music than it was from steel.

The 1964–1970 Labour government tried to address the problem of industrial stagnation by promoting tripartite negotiations among the state, employers, and unions to set prices and incomes. But Labour could not challenge the power of the unions. The unions financed the Labour Party, and their 10 million to 12 million members dominated the 250,000 individual party members in elections to choose parliamentary candidates and the party's National Executive Committee. Industrial unrest led to the Labour Party's defeat in 1970, and a prolonged strike by coal miners brought down the Tory government in 1974. The 1974–1979 Labour government was undermined by a wave of strikes by garbage collectors, railway workers, and nurses that culminated in the 1978 "winter of discontent."

Exasperated by the dominant role of unionists and left-wing radicals in their party, a group of centrist Labour leaders broke away to form a new **Social Democratic Party (SDP).** Their centrist program appeared to reflect the views of the majority of voters. However, the winner-take-all party system makes it very difficult for third parties to gain a foothold in Parliament. In the 1983 election, the SDP-Liberal alliance won 26 percent of the votes (only 2 percent less than Labour) but won only 23 of the 635 seats in the House of Commons at that time. The SDP eventually merged with the Liberal Party to form the Liberal Democrats.

By the end of the 1970s, the British model seemed to be in irreversible decline. The economy stagnated, while inflation hit double figures. Journalists began to write about the "ungovernability" of Britain and a system "overloaded" with the demands of competing interest groups.

Thatcher to the Rescue?

At this point, change came from an unexpected source – the Conservative Party. In 1975, the Conservatives selected Margaret Thatcher as their new leader. Thatcher was an aggressive intellectual with an iron will and razor-sharp debating skills. Unusual for a Tory leader, she came from humble social origins – her father was a grocer. She worked as a research chemist before switching to a legal career to have more time to raise her children.

Thatcher was influenced by the writings of the libertarian Friedrich Hayek and the monetarist Milton Friedman. Her philosophy of popular capitalism drew heavily upon U.S. ideas of rugged individualism and free-market economics. Her aim was to minimize state interference in the economy and society. "Thatcherism" had a profound impact on British society, shattering the postwar consensus on the welfare state and locking Labour out of power for eighteen years.

Thatcher's new approach caught the attention of the British public and gave the Conservatives a clear victory in the 1979 election. She had ambitious plans to deregulate the economy, to privatize state-owned industry, and to follow a tight monetary policy in order to control inflation, whatever the effect on unemployment. Unlike in the United States, the New Right in Britain did not have a social agenda (abortion had been legal since 1967).

Thatcher's first task was to break the power of the trade unions. She introduced new legislation to make it more difficult to call strikes (requiring pre-strike ballots and cooling-off periods). She doubled spending on police and equipped them with riot gear so that they could take on rock-throwing strikers. Thatcher used the courts to seize the assets of the coal miners' union when they mounted an **illegal strike in 1984,** and she went on to shut down most of the state-owned coal mines. By 1990, the number of coal miners had fallen from 300,000 to 50,000. Thatcher broke the back of organized labor, and labor unrest shrank to historically unprecedented levels.

Economic growth was sluggish during Thatcher's first term, and it was probably only her victory in the 1982 Falklands War that won her re-election in 1984. One of her most successful policies was allowing tenants to buy public housing with low-cost mortgages. From 1979 to 1989, home ownership leapt from 52 percent to 66 percent of all households. She privatized the leading state-owned industries: British Telecom, British Gas, and the electric and water utilities. The top personal income tax rate was cut from 90 percent to 40 percent. Workers were encouraged to opt out of the state pension system and invest in a private retirement account. A deregulatory program for the financial markets in 1983–1986, called the "Big Bang," enabled London to reinforce its position as the world's leading international financial center.

By the late 1980s, the economy was growing, living standards were rising, and productivity and profits were booming. However, inequality was rising. Average incomes

rose 37 percent during 1979–1993, but the earnings of the top 10 percent of the population leaped by 61 percent while those of the bottom decile fell 18 percent. Unemployment climbed to 10 percent from a level of 5 percent in the 1970s, but fell again to 5 percent by 1989. Still, one-third of the population lived in poverty, and there arose a large underclass of jobless youth, which led to a surge in drug use and crime. Ironically, demographic changes and the rise in unemployment caused state welfare spending to rise during the Thatcher years despite her intention to cut public spending.

In 1988, Thatcher introduced an ambitious "New Steps" program to change the way state services were delivered. State agencies had to introduce cost accounting for each stage of their operations. State services were contracted out to private companies or voluntary agencies through competitive tendering. Local governments, the National Health Service, and the education system were forced to adopt these reforms. Individual schools were encouraged to opt out of local-authority financing and receive direct grant funding. From 1979 to 1993, the number of civil servants was slashed by 30 percent, and about 150 new semi-independent government agencies were created. The reforms increased efficiency and cut costs but led to increased corruption. They triggered widespread protests, especially over the unpopular "poll tax," introduced in 1988, that replaced the former local property tax with a flat per capita tax.

The Fall of Thatcher

Thatcher secured re-election to an unprecedented third successive term in 1989. However, after ten years in power strains were beginning to show in the upper ranks of the Conservative Party. Many traditional conservatives disliked Thatcher's radical reforms, and her authoritarian style alienated many colleagues. Her vocal opposition to further European integration, such as the introduction of a single currency, lost her the support of the internationalist wing of the party. Between 1979 and 1992, membership in the Conservative Party slumped from 1.5 million to 500,000. Her popularity steadily eroded, dipping to 29 percent in 1990, and she came to be seen as an electoral liability.

Thatcher's departure came not with a bang but with an uncharacteristic whimper. At that time, the Conservative leader was selected by an annual ballot of MPs. Usually, no candidates ran against the incumbent. In 1990 ex-defense minister Michael Heseltine ran against her. Thatcher beat Heseltine in the first round by 204 votes to 152 (with 16 abstentions). Under party rules, a candidate winning less than two-thirds of the vote has to face a second round. Even though she would almost certainly have won, Thatcher chose to resign, partly in order to clear the way for her chosen successor, **John Major.**

Major, like Thatcher, came from humble origins. His father was a circus trapeze artist turned garden-gnome manufacturer. Major left school at sixteen to be a bus-ticket collector, and later worked his way up from bank teller to bank director before entering politics. Major was a wooden figure who lacked Thatcher's charisma. Despite a deep recession that began in 1990, Major won the 1992 election, thanks mainly to the inept Labour campaign.

Major pressed ahead with privatization of British Rail and the nuclear power and coal industries. But the Conservative Party was badly split over Europe, with a hard-core

right-wing opposing further integration. The British public was skeptical about the Brussels bureaucracy but generally favored EU membership. In 1990, Britain joined the **Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM),** the precursor to the single European currency. But in 1991 Britain opted out of the "social chapter" of the Maastricht treaty on European integration. This would have introduced the EU's generous labor legislation to Britain (longer vacations, shorter working hours) and was opposed by employers.

The key turning point in the Major administration was September 1992, when the British pound came under attack from international speculators. Despite desperate government efforts, the pound was forced to leave the ERM. This left the government's financial strategy in ruins, and Major's approval rating plummeted from 49 percent to 25 percent. Conservative Party credibility was further battered by a series of sex and corruption scandals. The biggest policy disaster came with the 1996 discovery that "mad cow" disease (BSE), an incurable disease that attacks the brain stem, had spread from cattle to humans, killing fourteen people. The government initially downplayed the problem and delayed ordering the mass slaughter of cattle. (A government minister even appeared on TV feeding hamburgers to his daughter.) Eventually all of Britain's cattle had to be killed and burned.

Clearly, the Tories had been in power for too long. But was Labour in a fit state to replace them?

The Rise of New Labour

After the 1992 election, the Labour Party feared that it would never be able to defeat the Tories and might even be overtaken by the Liberal Democrats as the main opposition party. In 1994, the party selected the young, charismatic Tony Blair as its new leader. Blair set about fashioning a new Labour Party that would recapture the voters who had defected to the Tories.

Following their defeat in 1979, the Labour Party was split between parliamentary leaders anxious to improve the party's electoral chances and trade-union bosses keen to retain their control over the party. The party's 1918 constitution had given Labour MPs the right to choose the party leader, but in 1981 an electoral college was introduced, with 40 percent of the votes in the hands of the trade unions. In 1983, **Neil Kinnock** became the Labour leader, and he waged a vigorous campaign to diminish union power and expel left-wing militants from the party.

After their defeat in 1987, the Labour leadership started to expunge leftist policies from the party program, dropping their commitment to reverse Thatcher's privatizations, to strengthen union power, and to give up Britain's nuclear weapons. Intraparty reforms shifted the balance of power away from union bosses toward the parliamentary leadership. The union vote at the annual party conference was cut from 90 percent to 50 percent, while the share of union contributions in the party budget fell from 80 percent to 40 percent thanks in part to an influx of cash from sympathetic business interests. The unions had been weakened by Thatcher's defeat of the miners and by changes in the economy. The share of manufacturing in total employment fell from 38 percent in 1956 to 19 percent in 1990, and

the proportion of the workforce in unions fell from a peak of 53 percent in 1978 to 30 percent in 1995.

Kinnock resigned following the humiliating 1992 electoral defeat. In 1994 Tony Blair took over as party leader. Blair, a deeply religious, forty-one-year-old lawyer from a middle-class background, sought to turn Labour into a modern European social-democratic party of the center. Britain had become a society of "two-thirds haves and one-third have-nots," and Labour would never get back into power by appealing to the "have nots" alone.

But what would "New Labour" stand for? New Labour agreed with Margaret Thatcher that free markets are the best way to create prosperity, and they even accepted her reforms of public-sector management. In 1995, the Labour Party finally removed from its constitution Clause IV (put there in 1918), which called for state ownership of industry. But it would not be enough simply to steal Thatcher's reform agenda. Blair used American-style focus groups to try out new ideas, before hitting on the formula of the **"Third Way.**" As Andrew Marr explained *(The Observer,* August 9, 1998): "The Third Way can be described by what it is not. It isn't messianic, high spending old socialism and it isn't ideologically driven, individualist conservatism. What is it? It's mostly an isn't." The state should stay out of economic management while providing moral leadership, investing in education and welfare, and devolving power to the regions. The centrist Third Way was encapsulated in the Labour slogan "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime."

Tony Blair described New Labour as a "pro-business, pro-enterprise" party, albeit one with a compassionate face. He stressed the values of community and moral responsibility in contrast with Thatcher's brazen individualism. (Famously, the "Iron Lady" had once said, "There is no such thing as society.") Blair also appealed to British patriotism. He even said in May 1998: "I know it is not very PC [politically correct] to say this, but I am really proud of the British Empire."

New Labour was also more open to women. In 1993, the party decided that half of the new candidates selected by local parties for the next parliamentary election must be chosen from women-only short lists. (In 1996, a court struck down this rule as discriminatory.) As a result of these efforts, in the 1997 election 102 women were elected as Labour MPs. The total number of woman MPs from all parties rose from 60 in 1992 to 120 in 1997, dropping to 118 in 2001 and rising to 141 in 2010 (22 percent of the total).

Blair used an expensive and sophisticated U.S.-style media campaign to sell the party to the public. Along with a New Labour, there was to be a New Britain: sophisticated, multicultural, and hip (from "Rule Britannia" to "Cool Britannia"). Labour's main slogan was the patriotic "Britain Deserves Better." Campaign innovations included posters above urinals in pubs, saying "Now wash your hands of the Tories." In a bid to reassure the voters that their tax-and-spend policies were behind them, Labour pledged to maintain the Conservative government's spending limits for at least two years after the election. No new welfare initiatives were planned beyond a new scheme to make 250,000 unemployed youths take up government-sponsored jobs as a condition to qualifying for welfare benefits.

Labour won a landslide victory in the May 1997 election. The Conservatives lost half their seats, and 10 percent of voters switched from Tory to Labour – the largest swing in the past century. Major went down to defeat despite a strong economic recovery, scotching

the widely held notion that British election results are driven by economic performance. In June 1997, he was replaced as party leader by the thirty-six-year-old William Hague.

Voters did not choose Labour because they preferred Labour's program to that of the Tories, as the parties' policies were nearly identical. Rather, the Tories were seen as divided, corrupt, and inept, whereas New Labour was trusted to do a more competent job of governing the country.

The only significant policy difference between the two parties was over Europe. Most Tory MPs were skeptical about European integration. As recently as 1983, the Labour Party had called for Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, which it saw as a capitalist plot. But Blair was adamantly pro-Europe, although he promised to hold a referendum before taking Britain into the single European currency.

One of the first acts of the new Labour government was the granting of independence to the Bank of England, a striking example of their rejection of the old policies of Keynesian demand management. Since its founding in 1694, the Bank of England had followed government advice in setting interest rates. From now on, like the U.S. Federal Reserve, the independent board of directors could fix rates as they pleased in order to prevent a rise in inflation. The head of the treasury, Gordon Brown, followed a tight monetary and fiscal policy, although he borrowed heavily to fund higher spending on health, education, and welfare.

Blair at the Helm

On June 7, 2001, the Labour government won a second consecutive landslide victory, while the Conservative Party scrambled to hold onto second place. People started to wonder whether the Conservatives, once the "natural party of government," would ever manage to win an election again. William Hague resigned as Conservative Party leader in the wake of the electoral defeat. Previously, Tory leaders had been elected by Tory MPs. In 2001, for the first time, the MPs picked the two leading contenders, and the party's 320,000 members selected the final winner. The pro-European Kenneth Clarke lost to Iain Duncan Smith.

In September 2003, Labour lost the Brent by-election, the first such loss since Tony Blair became party leader in 1994, but the Conservatives finished third behind the Liberal Democrats. In October 2003, the Conservative Party congress removed the ineffective Duncan Smith as leader and replaced him with the centrist Michael Howard.

Tony Blair proved to be a skilful political leader, asserting strong control over the Labour Party and steering public opinion in what David Goodhart has called a "media driven popular democracy." Blair used this power to pursue an ambitious agenda of domestic and foreign reform, with mixed results.

On the home front, Blair's New Labour forged ahead with the most ambitious **constitutional reforms** that Britain has seen in the past hundred years. First, there was the decentralization of power through the creation of Scottish and Welsh parliaments. Second was the plan to reform the House of Lords, which resulted in a deadlock over whether to have an elected or appointed upper chamber. The third major reform was the introduction of a bill of rights and judicial review through the European Court of Human Rights. Finally,

in 2003, a new department for constitutional affairs was introduced that will take over the judicial appointment process. This meant the abolition of the post of lord chancellor, who formerly served as head judge, speaker of the House of Lords, and member of the cabinet, fusing all three branches of government in a single individual.

Blair introduced these reforms in a top-down manner, without extensive public comment and without a clear conception of how the new system would work. Constitutional expert Vernon Bogdanor noted (in *Prospect,* April 20, 2004): "We are transforming an uncodified constitution into a codified one, but in a piecemeal and pragmatic way." Lord Neuberger, the second president of the new Supreme Court, joked that it had been created "as a result of what appears to have been a last-minute decision over a glass of whisky."

On the **foreign policy** front, Blair developed a close partnership with U.S. president Bill Clinton, whose views matched Blair's own, and he had ambitious goals for Britain in helping to shape a new, more just world order at America's side. Blair supported NATO's war to force Yugoslav troops out of Kosovo in 1999. Blair continued with this strategy when Clinton was replaced as U.S. president by the conservative George W. Bush. Blair even supported Bush's plan to build a missile-defense system, which led to the United States withdrawing from the 1972 treaty with Russia barring such a system's deployment. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, Blair expressed unequivocal support for the war on terror, sending British troops to take part in the war in Afghanistan. In return, Blair hoped to persuade Bush to tackle the roots of terror by restarting the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians

Things came to a head with the **Iraq war**. Blair persuaded the British Parliament that Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass destruction that could be launched on forty-five minutes notice, according to an intelligence report released in September 2002 (later known as the "dodgy dossier"). Blair encouraged Bush to go through the United Nations, first sending U.N. weapons inspectors into Iraq in August 2002 and then going back to the U.N. for endorsement of military action in February 2003. Blair failed to foresee the strong Franco-German resistance, which forced the United States to go ahead with the invasion without U.N. support. British public opinion was against going to war without U.N. approval. In February 2003, 750,000 people marched through London in opposition to the war, the largest protest gathering in British history. Parliament approved military action on March 18, 2003, although one-third of Labour MPs voted against.

Criticism focused on the "45 minutes" chemical weapons claim contained in the "dodgy dossier." The BBC reported that Blair's advisers had "sexed up" the intelligence claims in the dossier. A defense-ministry weapons expert, David Kelly, admitted that he was the BBC's source and committed suicide on July 17, 2003. The subsequent **inquiry by Lord Hutton,** a senior judge, exonerated the government of any wrongdoing but led to the resignation of the two top BBC executives. The subsequent insurgency in Iraq, and obviously inadequate planning for postwar reconstruction, added to the criticism heaped on Blair. But he had managed to survive the biggest political crisis of his career.

Meanwhile, relations between the United Kingdom and Europe were in the doldrums. Tony Blair welcomed the draft EU constitution in July 2003, having successfully resisted attempts by some EU members to extend majority voting to foreign affairs and taxation,

which would have threatened Britain's capacity to pursue independent policies in these areas. The rejection of the new draft constitution by French and Dutch voters in 2005 was something of a relief to Blair, as it meant he did not have to put the measure before the British public. Back in 1997, Blair had promised to hold a referendum to take Britain into the euro-zone. Public skepticism about abandoning the pound sterling for the euro caused Blair to postpone the vote. Thanks to vigorous lobbying, Blair managed to beat out Paris and win London the right to host the 2012 Olympics.

New Labour had only limited success in delivering the promised improvements in public services through decentralization and increased competition. The public remained very dissatisfied over the quality of the health and education services, not to mention the accident-prone railways. (In 2001, the privatized Railtrack collapsed and was taken back into public ownership.) British society saw a surge in petty crime, causing Blair to introduce tough measures to crack down on "anti-social behavior." The 2004 Civil Partnership Act legalized civic unions for gay couples, and by the end of 2006 fifteen thousand couples had registered. In 2003, Blair introduced legislation allowing universities to charge fees of up to £3,000 per year. Previously, not only were universities free, but all students also received state grants to cover living expenses. The economy grew at a steady 2.7 percent 1997–2006, while unemployment was held to 5.5 percent, below the EU average. Pensioner poverty fell by one-third and child poverty by one-sixth, but the Gini coefficient, a measure of overall income inequality, did not budge during Labour's decade in power. Labour ramped up public spending on health and education, increasing government spending from 39 percent of GDP in 1997 to 42 percent in 2006. Globalization of the economy meant that the British state, like all states, had less discretion in national economic policy than it did during the 1950s and 1960s. Increasingly, British policy was driven by informal networks of transnational corporate elites not represented in the institutional structures of the Westminster model.

As voters became disillusioned with the mainstream political parties and turned toward "postmaterialist" values, there was an increase in political activism outside the traditional channels. The environmentalist group **Greenpeace** saw its membership swell tenfold to more than four hundred thousand, in part thanks to media coverage of their spectacular protests. Groups protesting new road construction and defending animal rights continued to be active throughout the 1990s. However, environmental issues did not really transform the agendas of the mainstream political parties, and no viable Green Party emerged. Conservative rural interests opposed to a proposed ban on fox hunting managed to draw more than four hundred thousand people to a rally in 2004.

New Labour itself also moved away from the collective interest politics of previous decades toward identity politics and a focus on the individual citizen and consumer. Labour Party membership fell from 405,000 in 1997 to 280,000 in 2002, and 190,000 in 2013. Having abandoned its traditional working-class ideology, it became increasingly difficult to say what exactly Labour stood for. Blair's government swung between cynical populism and lofty idealism, argued David Goodhart, editor of *Prospect* magazine (June 19, 2003).

Despite discontent with the war in Iraq and poor public services, Blair was able to win a third term in the May 2005 election, but Labour squeaked home with 35 percent support,

the lowest share of the vote of any government in British history. Tory leader Michael Howard closed the gap with Labour by campaigning for tougher immigration rules, but the divisions in his party prevented him from attacking Blair's pro-European policies.

The Blair government was dogged by a series of scandals. The most serious was the legal investigation that was launched in 2006 over the possible "sale" of peerages by Blair's top fund-raiser, Lord Levy, in return for loans to the Labour Party. Increasingly, Blair came to be seen as a liability rather than an asset for the Labour Party. In 2004 Blair stated he would not be running for a fourth term, and in September 2006 he announced that he would resign within a year. (The declaration came after a letter signed by sixty-seven Labour MPs calling on him to resign.)

The obvious successor was **Gordon Brown**, a dour Scottish academic who had headed the Treasury since 1997 and who took much of the credit for Britain's steady economic performance. Back in 1994 the two men had met at the Granita restaurant in Islington and struck a deal. Brown agreed not to run against Blair for the post of party leader, in return for a promise that Blair would step down and hand the leadership to Brown at some future point. Whatever the precise terms of the "**Granita pact**," once in office the two men feuded bitterly behind the scenes. As Treasury Secretary, Brown jealously guarded control over the government's social and economic policies, severely limiting the power of Blair as prime minister.

In June 2007 Blair resigned, and the Queen invited Gordon Brown to form a government. Power passed from one prime minister to another without the voters being consulted. Brown was under pressure to call a snap election in the fall of 2007 to legitimate his rule, but he declined, as opinion polls showed the Conservatives with a clear lead over Labour, for the first time in a decade. The financial crisis that struck in 2008 further eroded the government's popularity. Brown took a leading role in international efforts to stem the global financial breakdown, coordinating the bank bailouts and subsequent stimulus spending.

The scandals continued. In May 2009, the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper exposed fraud in the expense claims filed by MPs. Taxpayers found themselves billed for everything from fictional second homes to moat cleaning. Four former Labour MPs and two Tory peers were jailed for falsifying their expenses. It was the 2000 Freedom of Information Act that made possible the disclosure of MP expenses. The act was intended to restrain the executive branch, but it ended up dealing a serious blow to the reputation of the House of Commons.

Coalition Government

By 2005 the Conservative Party was anxious to return to power after thirteen long years in opposition. Deeply divided over ties to the European Union, the party feared being overtaken as the main opposition party by the Liberal Democrats.

In the wake of the 2005 election, Howard was replaced as leader of the Conservative Party by the thirty-nine-year old **David Cameron**. For the first time, the Conservative leader was chosen by a ballot of the entire party membership. Cameron promised to make people "feel good about being Conservative again." After graduating from Eton and Oxford,

Cameron went straight to work for the Conservative Party, and spent his entire career in politics. Despite his traditionalist origins (at Oxford he joined one of the more reactionary dining clubs), Cameron projected a modern image. Charismatic and gregarious, he admitted to having smoked pot, sometimes cycled to work, and took paternity leave when his wife gave birth. He was a self-styled "compassionate conservative" who nevertheless took a traditional stance on many issues: he supported the war in Iraq and opposed further European integration. Cameron promised to reverse the government's ban on foxhunting and the introduction of identity cards. In many respects, he was the Conservative equivalent of Tony Blair, a determined centrist. Critics argued that the emphasis on Cameron's charisma came at the expense of programmatic coherence, in a party deeply divided between liberal centrists and Thatcherite hardliners. The May 2010 general election resulted in a divided or "**hung" parliament** where no single party had a majority of the seats. (see Table 3.1). One wag described the result as a "three-way car crash." The Tories won a mere 36 percent of the popular vote, against 31 percent for Labour and 23 percent for the Liberal Democrats. The Tories had 306 seats, 20 short of what they needed to form a majority government. The Liberal-Democrats, with 57 seats, were the kingmakers. Their natural ideological ally was Labour, but their personable young leader, Nick Clegg, disliked Gordon Brown, and people were tired of seeing Labour in power. (Also, a coalition of Labour and Lib-Dems would have been ten seats short of a majority, and would have needed support from some of the smaller parties.) After five days of feverish talks, Cameron persuaded Clegg to join a coalition government with the Tories. Clegg became deputy prime minister and about half of all the Lib-Dem parliamentarians were rewarded with government positions. Cameron promised Clegg that the government would reform the House of Lords and hold a referendum on changing the electoral system. The Lib-Dems pointed to the unfairness of a system that gave them only 8 percent of the seats despite having won 23 percent of the votes.

At forty-three, Cameron was the youngest British prime minister since 1812. He positioned himself as the "heir to Blair," forging a modernization coalition with the Lib-Dems that would restore the Tories to their rightful place as "the natural party of government." (Between 1886 and 1997 the party was in power for 77 of 111 years.) More sober observers noted that the coalition gave the Tories the majority they had been denied them by the electorate, and was needed by Cameron to balance against the hard right of his own party who were opposed to his modernization agenda.

This was the first time that Britain had seen a coalition government since World War II. No one quite knew what to expect. Many Lib-Dem voters, who included many disillusioned Labour supporters, were aghast at seeing their party enter power with the Conservatives.

One of the most important actions of the coalition was a new law introducing fixed-term elections at five-year intervals. The Liberal Democrats insisted on this reform as a way of removing the power of PM Cameron to terminate the coalition and call an election at any time. In the future, 55 percent of MPs would have to support a motion to dissolve parliament.

At first the coalition was presented as a meeting of minds, but over time it became clear that it was essentially transactional in nature – and the Tories failed to deliver on their side of the bargain. As described previously, the government held a referendum on

Table 3.1 May 2010 United Kingdom General Election

	Seats	% seats	% votes
Conservatives	306	47.1	36.1
Labour	258	39.7	29.0
Liberal-Democrats	57	8.8	23.0
Democratic Unionist	8	1.2	0.6
Scottish Nationalist	6	0.9	1.7
Sinn Fein	5	0.8	0.6
Plaid Cymru	3	0.5	0.6
UK Independence	0	0	3.1
British National	0	0	1.9

electoral reform in 2011, in which voters rejected the alternative vote system favored by the Lib-Dems (and opposed by both Conservatives and Labour). A backbench revolt caused the government to abandon plans to reform the House of Lords in 2012. The Lib-Dems retaliated by refusing to support boundary changes – which may have been worth twenty seats to the Tories in the next election. Polls indicated a drastic drop in support for the Lib-Dems, so it is likely that the next election will see the return of the two-party system.

Soon after taking office the coalition government launched an unpopular **austerity program** in a bid to trim the fiscal deficit, which had caused government debt to balloon from 30 to 70 percent of GDP since 2000. However, this looked increasingly unwise in the face of the persisting economic recession. In 2012 Britain entered a double-dip recession, and the cumulative loss in GDP exceeded that experienced during the 1930s. In December 2010 the government pushed through an unpopular hike in student tuition– something the Lib-Dems had campaigned against in the election. The fees were tripled to £9,000 per year. Cameron set out to shrink the bureaucratic state that had been expanded by the Blair government to balance the workings of the market economy. He launched an ambitious reform of the welfare system, seeking to fix a cap of £26,000 annual benefits per family, and introduced elected commissioners to oversee police operations, but he lost his way over health-care reform and green policies.

Senior military figures complained that cuts in defense spending would make it impossible for Britain to repeat operations such as its participation in enforcing the Libyan no-fly zone in 2011. In August 2013, Cameron lost a vote in the House of Commons on the question of using force to punish Syrian President Assad for having used chemical weapons against his own population. Thirty Conservatives and nine Liberal Democrats joined the opposition in voting against the government's motion.

Managing the coalition was no easy task. Cameron and Clegg had to negotiate a common position for their two parties while staving off revolts from their respective backbenchers. The government was forced to retreat over several issues in the 2012 budget, from a tax on take-out food to a proposed fuel tax increase. Much of the trouble has come from truculent Tory backbenchers. For example, MP Nadine Dorries called the prime minister and chancellor "two posh boys who don't know the price of a pint of milk." There were growing complaints that Cameron was ineffective as a manager. Given that voters were increasingly judging governments by their competence rather than their ideology, these were serious concerns. Revelations continued to surface in the ongoing Murdoch phone hacking scandal, and regarding misbehavior by banks that contributed to the 2008 crash. Most notably, in July 2012 it was revealed that Barclays and other banks had been rigging the LIBOR interbank lending rate.

August 2011 saw the most serious unrest in London since the Brixton riots of 1981. The trouble began in Tottenham after the shooting by police of a black resident during a routine arrest. Mayhem spread to two-thirds of London's boroughs and half a dozen other cities, with unprecedented scenes of arson and looting of neighborhood shops. The riots were facilitated by social media that enabled flash mobs to congregate in areas where there was no police presence. The police were criticized for being slow to deploy in adequate numbers and for their reluctance to use force. Thanks to Britain's extensive network of public security cameras, more than four thousand rioters were subsequently arrested, and sentenced to long jail terms. The rioters were predominantly young, nonwhite males from areas of high poverty. The emergence of such a criminal underclass was taken as evidence of what Cameron called a "broken society" in the inner cities. Thankfully, the national mood was revived by the success of the 2012 London Olympics.

Cameron distanced himself from EU efforts to save the euro in the face of the insolvency of the Greek and Spanish governments. At an acrimonious summit in Brussels in December 2011, Cameron cast the sole negative vote, blocking a bailout deal and forcing euro managers to find a workaround. Cameron was opposed to a proposed financial transaction tax that could have harmed London's banks. The veto dismayed Cameron's Lib-Dem partners, who were pro-Europe. Polls show a majority of voters favor leaving the European Union Cameron bowed to pressure from his own right-wing and pledged to renegotiate Britain's terms of membership and hold a referendum on whether Britain should stay in the EU European leaders told Cameron that there was no chance of renegotiating Britain's EU treaty, while Liberal Democrats blocked the government's efforts to introduce a bill mandating a referendum by 2017. One of the main issues was a demand to end unrestricted movement of labor within the EU, since the flood of workers from Poland, Bulgaria and Romania was blamed for driving down wages and driving up unemployment.

The Conservative Party found itself under increasing pressure from the UK Independence Party (Ukip), a right-wing populist party founded in 1993, that David Cameron described in 2006 as a party of "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists." Ukip's main demand was immediate withdrawal from the EU, a stance that attracted increasing numbers of Tory voters. In the 1999 elections to the European Parliament Ukip won 7 percent of the vote and was awarded three seats, rising to 16.5 percent of the vote and 12 seats in 2009. In the 2010 general election

Table 3.2 Key Phases in Britain's Development

Time Period	Regime	Global Context	Interests/ Identities/ Institutions	Developmental Path
1688–1832	Constitutional monarchy, Parliamentary Sovereignty	Imperial expansion	Elite consensus on values, interests	Capitalism, limited state
1832–1914	Parliamentary sovereignty, Electoral Democracy	Global hegemony based on naval power	Extension of franchise	Industrialization, free trade, gold standard
1918–1945	Rise of Labour Party, three-party system, Coalition Governments	Hegemony weakened, struggling to retain empire	Intense social conflict	Defensive
1945–1973	Two-party Competition	Retreat from Empire, Cold War, U.S. alliance, exclusion from Europe	Keynesianism, welfare-state consensus	Slow growth
1973–1979	Two-party Deadlock	Entry into European Union, global recession	Severe labor unrest, N. Ireland conflict	Crisis
1979–1987	Margaret Thatcher Dominant	Economic globalization, second Cold War	Organized labor crushed	Neoliberalism: deregulation, privatization
1987–2010	Tony Blair's New Labour dominant, Constitutional Reform	Economic globalization, European integration, war on terror	Economic boom, Scottish devolution, Lords reform, worries over immigration	Neoliberalism, reformed welfare state, multiculturalism, citizens' rights
2010–12	Coalition of Tories and Lib-Dems	Economic crisis	Political deadlock, Murdoch media scandal	Politics of austerity, search for new model

the party polled just 3.1 percent, but in local elections in May 2013 it took 23 percent of the vote – ahead of the Liberal Democrats with 14 percent, and close behind the Tories with 25 percent and Labour at 29 percent. After that shocking result, right-wing Tories were proposing an electoral pact with Ukip in the 2015 general election in order to avoid splitting the anti-EU vote. It looks increasingly unlikely that British politics will return to its classic pattern of two strong parties alternating in government any time soon,

CONCLUSION

Britain has a robust and successful political system that seemed to have recovered, under the government of Tony Blair (1997–2007), from the economic stagnation and class warfare of the 1970s and 1980s. But the lasting impact of the 2008 recession, and the instability of policy making under the 2010 coalition government, once again raise questions about the viability of Britain's adversarial political system. The Westminster model is no longer the "envy of the world," as was complacently assumed by many Britons during the nineteenth century.

The major challenge facing Britain is the same one that confronts the other European countries: crafting transnational institutions to manage the global economy while maintaining the capacity to tackle social problems that arise at the national level, and also preserving a sense of national unity and common purpose. Britain has been a follower rather than a leader in the process of international institution-building (such as the European Union), which is a reflection of its diminished role in the international system since the end of its empire. Its bold embrace of a multicultural national identity was challenged, but not dislodged, by the terrorist attacks of July 2005. For all of the stumbles and setbacks, the British model of tolerance and reasoned debate can still serve as an example for the rest of the world.

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IMPORTANT TERMS

Danny Boyle – film director (*Slumdog Millionaire*) and producer of the opening ceremony at the 2012 London Olympic Games.

British Commonwealth – cultural association linking fifty-three former colonies of Britain.

"British disease" – a high level of strike activity caused by powerful trade unions taking advantage of low unemployment to push for higher wages.

Devolution – the creation of regional assemblies in Wales and Scotland, debated since the 1970s and introduced in 1999.

Euro – currency unit introduced in January 1999 for Germany and the ten other members of the European Monetary Union. The German mark is now officially just a denomination of the euro, which fully replaced all national member currencies except for the British pound, in July 2002.

European Union (EU) – now an organization of twenty-seven European countries. It originated as the six-member European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and became the European Economic Community in 1958, gradually enlarging its membership and becoming known as the European Community (EC) until the Maastricht treaty of 1991 came into effect in 1993 and enlarged its authority and changed its name to the European Union.

Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) – the common currency band of European Union currencies, which Britain joined in 1990 and was forced to leave in 1992.

Falklands War – the 1982 conflict that resulted after Argentina had seized the British-owned Falkland Islands and a British naval task force was sent to recapture them.

Glorious Revolution – the 1688 removal of the Catholic king James II by Protestant William of Orange, who accepted the principle of parliamentary sovereignty.

Granita Pact – a 2004 deal in which Gordon Brown promised to support Tony Blair as leader of the Labour Party.

Greenpeace – an environmental action group that saw its membership expand during the 1980s.

David Cameron – the leader of the Conservative Party since 2006 and prime minister since 2010.

Hereditary peers – members of the House of Lords appointed by the monarch and whose title automatically passes down to their sons.

Her Majesty's Opposition – the second-largest party in the House of Commons, which is critical of the government but loyal to the British state as symbolized by the monarch.

"Hung parliament" – one in which no single party has an absolute majority of the seats in the House of Commons.

Hutton inquiry – investigation into the government's actions leading Britain into the 2003 war with Iraq.

Keynesianism – a philosophy of state intervention in the economy derived from the work of John Maynard Keynes, who argued that the Great Depression could have been avoided by increasing state spending.

Magna Carta – the contract guaranteeing the rights of noble families that King John agreed to sign in 1215.

John Major – Conservative Party leader who replaced Margaret Thatcher as prime minister in 1990 and resigned after losing the 1997 election.

"Marginal" seats – those seats in the House of Commons that are closely contested and are likely to change hands between parties in an election (the opposite of "safe" seats).

Multiculturalism – a policy of encouraging immigrant groups to retain their own traditions and identities through separate educational, religious, and social institutions.

Rupert Murdoch – the Australian-born magnate who owns one-third of Britain's newspapers and has considerable political influence.

1984 miners' strike – the coal miners' strike that was defeated by Margaret Thatcher, clearing the way for legislation limiting the power of trade unions.

No. 10 Downing Street – the prime minister's residence and the place where the cabinet meets.

Parliamentary sovereignty – the power of Parliament, representing the people, to enact any law it chooses, unrestrained by a written constitution or the separation of powers.

Plaid Cymru – the nationalist party in Wales that advocates more rights for the Welsh people, including use of the Welsh language.

Prime Minister's Question Time – the thirty-minute period once a week during which the prime minister stands before the House of Commons and answers questions from MPs.

Social Democratic Party (SDP) – a group of moderate socialists who broke away from the Labour Party in the early 1980s.

"Third Way" – the new, moderate philosophy introduced by Tony Blair after he became Labour Party leader in 1994.

Tory – the colloquial name for a member of the Conservative Party.

Unionists – the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland, who want to keep the province part of the United Kingdom.

Welfare state – the program of state-provided social benefits introduced by the Labour Government of 1945–1951, including the National Health Service, state pensions, and state-funded higher education.

Westminster model – the British system of parliamentary sovereignty, prime ministerial government, and two parties alternating in power.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were the main features of the bipartisan consensus in British politics that lasted from the 1950s to the late 1970s?
2. Why did some observers argue that Britain was "ungovernable" in the 1970s?
3. Which aspects of British society were the targets of Margaret Thatcher's reforms?
4. Why did Tony Blair mean by the "third way"?
5. What factors have been holding Britain back from greater participation in the European Union?
6. When did most British citizens get the right to vote, and why?
7. Does the lack of a written constitution make it easier, or harder, for Britain to introduce political reform?
8. How does the power of the prime minister compare with that of the U.S. president?
10. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the first-past-the-post electoral system compared with proportional representation? Is Britain likely to introduce PR in the near future?