1.3 Who Has the Power?

A DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEM REQUIRES MECHANISMS THAT ALLOW the public to influence the decisions of its political leaders. This influence may be exercised only intermittently, such as during elections, but in most democratic systems it is exercised almost continually through mechanisms such as political parties, interest groups, and, increasingly, public opinion polls and the media. The government of the United Kingdom is no different. Although some commentators have said that the United Kingdom is a democracy only once every five years (the statutory maximum term for a sitting Parliament), the day-to-day decisions of the British government are in fact influenced by popular demands and pressures, including through partisan institutions (the majoritarian style of UK politics tends to give substantial power to a single majority party until it is thrown out of office) and pressure groups. Furthermore, the government is attempting to provide more opportunities for participation at times other than elections. That said, the relative secrecy favored by the British government may protect it from the degree of external pressure on policy encountered by some other European countries.

Political Parties

Although British political parties do have discernible policy stances, even if sometimes these are adopted merely to oppose the stated policies of the other party, they are primarily "catchall parties," so any one party includes a relatively wide range of opinion. In this way, they differ from the more ideological parties found in most other European countries. The catchall feature is applicable to the parties even though Conservatives had an ideological bent during the 1980s and 1990s. After a series of electoral failures during that period, the Labour Party attempted to enhance its image as a broad, nonideological party by purging its more confrontational elements on the left and then revoking its commitment to public ownership of major industries. Labour's appeal to the middle class helped to produce three consecutive electoral victories in 1997, 2001, and 2005, making Blair and Thatcher the only two postwar leaders to win three consecutive parliamentary majorities. The Labour Party's policy changes, however, alienated some of its traditional supporters in the working class, who still wanted the party to advocate socialism and vehemently defend the interests of the industrial working class.

Perhaps the major difference between British and continental political parties is that the majoritarian style of the British parliamentary system means that the government is most likely to be formed by a single party—though the current Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government shows that a "hung parliament," in which no party controls a clear majority of seats, is a real possibility. More than in other countries, British elections tend to be about the performance of the party currently in government and the capacity of another (clearly identifiable) party to assume the role of government—the rare coalition

government is the exception to the rule.[1] Because of this characteristic, which, again, arises from the majoritarian nature of British parliamentary government, the responsibility for policies and performance is clearer in the British parliamentary system than in many others. One of the clear public concerns with the formation of the coalition government in 2010 was that the coalition partners negotiated a series of policy agreements; therefore, the public did not "vote for" the policies the coalition agreed.

The Party and Electoral Systems

The British party system has been described variously as a two-party system and as a two-and-one-half-party system. Historically, the dominant parties were the Tories (antecedents of today's Conservatives) and the Liberals, both of which emerged out of legislative factions dating from the seventeenth century. The Tories, who were identified with the more privileged sectors of society, committed themselves to the defense of existing institutions and policies, including the Crown and church at home and imperialism abroad. They also affirmed the need for a strong state, the primacy of "law and order," the sanctity of private property, and an evolutionary program of social change. The Liberals, by contrast, represented primarily the middle classes and positioned themselves ideologically as a party advocating free trade, home rule in Ireland, and social reform. The failure of the Liberals to accommodate the political and economic demands of Great Britain's rapidly growing class of industrial workers during the latter part of the nineteenth century prompted a coalition of trade union leaders, socialists, and more idealistic Fabians to form the Labour Party in 1900 as an extraparliamentary organization dedicated to a more radical course of reform. By the 1920s the Labour Party had displaced the Liberals as Great Britain's other large party.

Since that time, the United Kingdom has retained a predominantly two-party system in which ideological and regional "third parties" play an important indirect role in the political process. Today, the two major parties in the United Kingdom remain the Labour Party and the Conservative (Tory) Party. They are national parties in every sense of the term and almost always run candidates in virtually every parliamentary constituency in Great Britain, except the Speaker's.

The Liberals, now known as the Liberal Democrats, constitute a "half" party on the national level and are the current coalition partners in the Conservative-led government. The Liberal Democrats were formed out of two parties, the original Liberals and the Social Democrats, a moderate faction that broke away from the Labour Party in the early 1980s. The two parties formed the Liberal–Social Democratic Alliance based on their joint opposition to the radicalization of both Labour and the Conservatives, and they pledged not to nominate candidates against each other in national elections.[2] In 1987 the Alliance won twenty-two seats scattered from the Shetlands to Cornwall, with most of its support concentrated in Scotland and Wales. After that election, the party divided again, eliminating, at least in the short run, any real potential this centrist grouping had of presenting an electoral alternative to the free market neoliberalism of the Conservatives and the collectivism of the Labour Party. In 1988 the parties again merged as the Liberal Democrats and, despite a few years of troubled consolidation, have performed well in elections since 1992. In 1997 they won 17.2 percent of the popular vote and forty-six seats (an increase of twenty-six from the previous election), and in 2001 they increased their

share to 18.8 percent of the vote and fifty-two seats. In 2005 the Liberal Democrats won sixty-two seats by increasing their share of the vote by about 3 percent.[3] The 2010 election catapulted the Liberal Democrats into a coalition government with just 23 percent of the vote and fifty-seven seats—a loss of five seats.

As for the bigger picture, election results during the 1970s, party realignments during the 1980s, and the coalition government formed in 2010 reveal the emergence of a more complex multiparty system. Since the House of Commons continues to be dominated by the two largest parties, the smaller parties that constitute the additions to the two- (or two-and-a-half) party system have had some difficulty organizing themselves and presenting the electorate with viable alternatives for forming a government. Yet there has been some real change in the system. In some parts of the United Kingdom, one of the two major parties may actually be the third party in the electorate. This situation appears increasingly true for Conservatives in Scotland. In the 2001, 2005, and 2010 Westminster elections, Conservatives won just one seat in Scotland and in the Scottish Parliament Conservatives are the third party, holding just fifteen seats after the 2011 elections. Indeed, even Scottish Labour is in opposition in the Scottish Parliament. After the 2011 elections the Scottish National Party (SNP) formed the government (with an unprecedented 69 out of 129 seats), being the first party to win an outright majority of seats in the Scottish Parliament.

The SNP and Plaid Cymru, the Welsh national party, are the two main nationalist parties in United Kingdom that regularly win parliamentary seats (a third nationalist party, Sinn Fein, is discussed later in this section). These parties experienced a marked decline in their electoral fortunes in 1979, after the defeat of devolution referendums in Scotland and Wales. They made a minor comeback in the 1987 election, increasing their total from four to five seats, and then moved up to seven seats (four from Plaid Cymru) in 1992. The vote of the nationalist parties as a percentage of the vote in their regions also increased—to almost 14 percent for the SNP in Scotland in 1987, to 21.5 percent in 1992, and then to more than 22 percent in 1997. Electoral support declined 2001 to 20.1 percent and again in 2005 to 17.7 percent, but given the electoral system, the SNP actually gained two seats in Westminster. In the 2010 general election in Scotland the number of seats held by the SNP did not change, but the party increased its share of the vote by 2.3 percent. In Wales, Plaid Cymru increased its vote in 1987 (to 8 percent), 1992 (to almost 9 percent), 1997 (to almost 10 percent), and 2001 (to 14.3 percent), only to have it slip somewhat in 2005 to 12.6 percent and again in 2010 to 11.3 percent and three seats in Parliament.

Within their own regions, there is substantial variation in the vote for the nationalist parties. Often this variation is a function of factors such as the degree of urbanization (generally the nationalist parties do better outside the large urban areas) and industrialization of the constituency. Plaid Cymru received a high of 44.3 percent and a low of just 2.1 percent in Welsh constituencies in 2010. Overall, in 2010 Plaid Cymru commanded less than 10 percent of the vote in two-thirds of the Welsh constituencies. Before the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP vote ranged between 55.7 percent and 8.8 percent in Scottish constituencies in 1992, with only two constituencies returning less than 10 percent SNP votes. After the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, however, the SNP saw its share of the Westminster vote slip. In the 2010 Westminster elections, the SNP constituency vote ranged from a high of 45.7 percent to a low of just 7.7 percent. More to the point, the SNP vote was below 10 percent in five constituencies, but this represents a

slight improvement on the 2005 election result. Critics of the nationalist parties argue that now that Scotland and Wales have their own legislative bodies, these parties are less relevant in the British Parliament, and in 2010 the SNP again found itself struggling to explain its relevance in Westminster.

The partisan politics of Northern Ireland reflect the troubled history of that province and the religious and nationalist cleavages that divide the population. In 2010 four political parties and one independent won Westminster seats. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is a Protestant party with an intense dedication to the continuing union of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. Two of the other parties winning seats in Northern Ireland are primarily Roman Catholic, and they would like to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland to its south. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) is overwhelmingly Catholic and would like to unite all of Ireland as a single, socialist society. Despite its sectarian appeal, the SDLP is a secular (constitutional nationalist) organization. The other Catholic party is Sinn Fein, once regarded as the political arm of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Sinn Fein, led by Gerry Adams, is committed to the unification of Ireland. The big winner in the 2010 general election in Northern Ireland was the DUP, with eight seats. Sinn Fein held its five seats, and the SDLP also broke even (together, the nationalists hold eight seats). The Alliance Party, a nonsectarian party seeking to "heal the divisions" in Northern Ireland by having the nationalists and unionists find common ground, won one seat in Westminster, as did a unionist independent.

General elections in the United Kingdom are held under a single-member district, plurality system. Each constituency elects a single representative (member of Parliament [MP]), and all that is required for election is a plurality—that is, the individual with the most votes wins whether receiving a majority or not. Such a system has the advantage of usually producing majorities for Parliament, and although no British party since 1945 has won a majority of the popular votes, parliamentary majorities have been produced by each election except those in February 1974 and May 2010. Although some are popular with the broad national electorate, the smaller parties are severely disadvantaged by this electoral system. Partly for that reason, the Liberal Democrats have advocated proportional representation (PR) as a more equitable means of selecting MPs. Because the Liberal Democrat vote is spread widely across Great Britain, that party is more disadvantaged by the current system than are the nationalist parties whose votes are more concentrated. In 2005 the Liberal Democrats received just 9.5 percent of the seats in Parliament with 22.1 percent of the vote, and in 2010 they received 8.8 percent of the seats with 23 percent of the vote. In contrast, in 2010 the Conservatives won 47 percent of the seats with 36 percent of the vote, and Labour won about 40 percent of the seats in Westminster with just 29 percent of the popular vote. As part of the coalition agreement struck between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives agreed to put forward a referendum on switching to the nonproportional alternative vote (AV) system.[4] That referendum went to the British electorate in 2011, with a decisive 68 percent of voters rejecting the change.

Despite the overwhelming majority of the public in favor of retaining first-past-the-post elections for Westminster, in other elections the United Kingdom is beginning to experiment with PR. Elections for the European Parliament are run on a closed-list PR basis. Elsewhere, members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and the Welsh assembly are elected

using a mixed-member proportional system that elects a portion of the parliamentarians using single-member districts and the rest through a closed-list proportional system. The Northern Ireland Assembly that sprang from the Good Friday agreement is elected entirely by means of the single transferable vote system, the same complex system used in the Republic of Ireland. The single transferable vote is now used for Scottish local council elections as well. Finally, the mayor of London is elected using a supplementary vote system. These are interesting experiments, but as long as the existing Westminster electoral system continues to benefit the parties in power, it is unlikely to be changed.

One clear change in the British system of parliamentary representation is the reduction in the number of Westminster constituencies in Scotland that took effect with the 2005 elections. Historically, Scotland and Wales were overrepresented, with more parliamentary seats than might be expected on the basis of population, in part because both regions have more rural areas. Meanwhile, Northern Ireland was significantly underrepresented until 1980. The justification for this misdistribution of parliamentary seats was that Scotland and Wales, because of their national identity and history, were deemed to have special interests requiring greater representation. By contrast, Northern Ireland was underrepresented because, until 1972, it had substantially greater self-government, with its own parliament sitting at Stormont, than did other parts of the United Kingdom. With the imposition of direct rule from Westminster, that justification was no longer valid. And with subsequent changes in the distribution of seats, Northern Ireland's representation began to resemble that in Great Britain, albeit still lower than that in Scotland and Wales (see Table 1-2).

The Scotland Act, the law passed by the British Parliament that created the Scottish Parliament in 1997, called for the number of Westminster seats in Scotland to be reduced after the creation of the Scottish Parliament. This partial equalization in the apportionment of seats across regions of the United Kingdom was one of the compromises made during the negotiations establishing the parliament in Scotland. Because the Scottish Parliament now exercises legislative authority over matters of "domestic" policy within Scotland, it was agreed that a "fairer" distribution of Westminster seats was in order. But because only limited authority devolved to the National Assembly for Wales in the Wales Act (1997), no changes were made to the size of the Welsh Westminster delegation.

One aspect of the British electoral system that differentiates it from the US system and most European systems is the importance of by-elections. If a seat becomes vacant during the life of a Parliament, an interim election (by-election) is held to fill the seat. As well as ensuring full membership of the House of Commons, by-elections are seen as something

Table 1-2 Average Electorate Per Parliamentary Seat: United Kingdom, 2010

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
2010				
Seats	533	59	40	18
Average electorate per seat	72,127	66,593	57,040	66,146

Source: House of Commons, *Sizes of Constituency Electorates*, 2011, www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05677.pdf.

of an ongoing vote of confidence by the people, and poor electoral performance can be quite embarrassing for a sitting government. Gordon Brown's government, for example, was plagued by a series of by-election defeats in Norwich North, Glenrothes, and Glasgow East, among others. By-elections were also used as gauges of Margaret Thatcher's electoral strength, as well as that of the Liberal–Social Democratic Party Alliance, and they became one component of the evidence used in deciding when to call the 1987 election. By-elections also can lead to the loss of a parliamentary majority, as occurred in Parliaments sitting between October 1974 and 1979 and 1992 to 1997.

Elections to the European Parliament and local council elections are similar barometers of public opinion toward the government in power. The 2004 European Parliament election was widely regarded as a referendum on the Blair government's support of the Iraq War. Turnout for this election (at 38.2 percent) was up from the 1999 election (at 24 percent).[5] And the Labour Party received its lowest vote share in any election since 1918. The outspoken UK Independence Party (UKIP), by contrast, increased its number of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from three to twelve, pushing it to third place in the United Kingdom's European delegation. Similarly, the anti-immigrant, anti-Europe British National Party won two seats in the European Parliament elections of 2009. By-elections and the "second-order" European and local elections create opportunities for the electorate to send messages to sitting governments as well as cast protest votes between general elections.

The Two Major Parties

Although many voters may choose other parties, only two parties—Labour and Conservative—can usually be expected to form a UK government, even if these governments may depend on the explicit or implicit support of smaller parties, as did the Conservative Party in May 2010. When it became clear on the evening of the election count that the Conservatives would not win an outright majority, speculation ensued that either Brown's sitting Labour government would attempt to cobble together a coalition of all the small parties or that the Conservatives might try to form a minority government. Instead, David Cameron and Nick Clegg agreed to a power-sharing coalition government with the Liberal Democrats having a significant but clearly junior role in the government. This was a more formal agreement than that between John Major and the Ulster Unionists when Major depended on the Ulster Unionists to stave off defeat toward the end of his government in 1997.

A great deal divides the two major parties in Great Britain, but in many ways they are similar. Both are essentially elite, or caucus, parties in that, compared with their electoral strength, they have a relatively small mass membership. The parties are also aggregative—both cover a range of social and political opinion and consequently have internal ideological divisions as well as disagreements with the other party. Finally, compared with decentralized American parties, both are relatively centralized and disciplined, although not so easy to discipline as some continental parties in which parliament members lack direct links with constituencies.

The Labour Party

The roots of the British Labour Party lie in the Industrial Revolution. The Labour Party is the principal representative of the working class in British politics, although its support is broader than just industrial labor. Indeed, all elections since the 1997 elections demonstrated that the

Labour Party has substantial appeal among almost all segments of society. Historically, the Labour Party professed socialism as a major portion of its program, but it is an aggregative party that includes many adherents who do not accept socialism as the goal of the party or society. "New Labour," for example, is very muted in speaking about socialism and has given up public ownership of the major means of production as a significant policy goal.

Ideological cleavages within the Labour Party are highly visible and intense. For much of the 1980s, intraparty factionalism prevented the party from being a viable competitor to the Conservatives. In response, party leader Neil Kinnock sought to create a more moderate image and heal some of the strife within the party. In the early 1990s the Labour Party dropped its campaign pledge of unilateral nuclear disarmament so it might appear stronger in foreign affairs, and it moderated its stances on the renationalization of privatized industries, as well as its earlier criticism of the European Union. In other words, it has behaved like a party in a two-party system should—seeking the electoral center—but it has found that center farther to the right than it had been. Tony Blair, the Labour Party's leader from 1994 to 2007, moved the party even more to the right on traditional class issues. Following his urging, in 1995 the party dropped its commitment to Clause Four of the party's constitution of 1918 and with that a commitment to government ownership of principal means of production and distribution.[6] Blair also has sought to broaden the appeal of the party to women and minorities. The party pledged to nominate female candidates for half of the safe Labour and winnable marginal seats in the 1997 election.[7] Gordon Brown, Blair's successor as prime minister, did not, despite initial hopes of party members on the left, significantly move Labour away from the political center.

The organization of the Labour Party outside Parliament becomes clearer once one understands the role that labor unions have traditionally played in the party. The British Labour Party originally was an alliance of trade unions and socialist organizations, with unions traditionally the dominant element in that coalition. Currently, many party members and the majority of the party's financial base come from the labor movement. Therefore, when one speaks of the membership of the Labour Party, one is really speaking of the unions, although the voting strength of the unions in the annual conference of the party has been substantially reduced by changes in the party constitution. Moreover, individual party members, through socialist organizations and constituency parties, now have influence that is much greater than their numerical strength. Their power was increased by a change in the party's constitution in 1980 involving the election of the party leader through an electoral college that has a disproportionate share of constituency party members, albeit still dominated by the parliamentary party.

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Labour Party supervises party operations outside Parliament and, to an increasing extent, manages the whole party. Of the thirty-three members of this committee, twelve are direct representatives of labor unions and six represent the constituency parties. The remaining members are the leader and deputy leader of the party, the treasurer (who is elected by the annual party conference), three members of the Labour parliamentary party, three government representatives, two Labour councillors, the leader of Labour members of the European Parliament, a Young Labour representative, and two representatives of the socialist societies in Britain. Because of major voices in the NEC and the annual conference that belong to those other than elective politicians, the actions of the Labour NEC are less predictable and manageable than those of the Conservative Party's executive committee. This instability is especially

true when the Labour Party is the opposition party and the leader lacks the power of office. The bureaucratic arm of the party is the Labour Party secretary and his or her staff. As noted, the party bureaucracy is closely controlled by the NEC. This control extends to having subcommittees of the NEC supervise various sections of the party organization such as research, press and publicity, and finance.

The Labour Party has regional organizations, but these organizations do not have the degree of importance of their equivalents in the Conservative Party. Until the 1980 changes in the party's structure, Labour's constituency parties lacked even the autonomy granted to their equivalents in the Conservative Party. These constituency parties now have the right to reselect their candidates before each election, removing that power from the central party. This power has led to the selection of some extreme left-wing candidates and some further division within the party. For example, in a 1991 Liverpool by-election the moderate Labour candidate was opposed by a "real Labour" candidate from Militant Tendency, the extreme left of the party. Since 1997, however, control over candidate selection has shifted in an awkward start-and-stop fashion toward the central party. In 1997 Labour adopted the all-women short list for candidates and gave some constituencies only lists of approved female candidates. This policy was stopped after a legal challenge on the basis of ("positive") sex discrimination. In 2002, however, the Labour-controlled Parliament passed the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act, once again making all-women short lists possible.

The power of the unions in the Labour Party's annual conference has markedly declined. Of the approximately four thousand participants in these autumn affairs, more delegates represent constituency parties than unions. Voting is not based on the number of delegates present, however, but on the number of dues-paying party members represented by those present. Unions formerly held the balance of power, controlling approximately five-sixths of all votes but presently their members cast about one-half of the votes.

At times, the annual conference has attempted to force its views on the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). The formal statements of the party do, in fact, indicate that the annual conference has the right to make binding policy decisions for the PLP, but party leaders from the inception of the party have been unwilling to be controlled by policy pronouncements of those out of office, especially when there is a Labour government. The tension arises from the fact that Labour began as a movement that created a parliamentary party to serve its interests, so there is a greater tradition of mass party control than in the Conservative Party, which began as a faction in Parliament.

The conflict over the Commission of Inquiry mandated by the 1979 annual conference initiated tensions, both institutional and ideological, between segments of the Labour Party that continue to permeate the party. This commission was charged with investigating the structure and constitution of the Labour Party, especially questions of the authorship of the party manifesto, the reselection of parliamentary candidates in each constituency prior to each general election, and the election of the party leader by a more broadly constituted body than the PLP. All these issues pitted the ideological left of the party, based in constituency organizations, against the ideological right in the PLP, especially the leadership of the PLP (then most prominently James Callaghan and Denis Healey). These issues came to a head after the 1980 annual conference accepted the commission's report, which favored the stand of the left, whereupon Callaghan resigned as party leader. The provisions of the new constitutional arrangement for electing a party leader were finally decided, and Michael Foot—a representative of the left, although a less divisive one than most—was elected leader. These changes in

the Labour Party led to the defection of what became the Social Democrats from the party, and they seemed to be pushing the Labour Party further left than had been true in the past.

Several disastrous electoral defeats under the left-leaning leadership gave the right and center an opportunity to reassert their case for a more centrist Labour Party dedicated to winning elections, not ideological wrangles. Even the modernized party could not win the 1992 election, however, and Neil Kinnock resigned and was replaced by John Smith. Smith's untimely death soon after his selection led to the selection of Tony Blair, a young, energetic, and reformist leader for the Labour Party.[8] Blair's subsequent success in transforming Labour into a more centrist "New Labour" party embracing neoliberal economic and social policies while distancing itself from organized labor was a principal factor contributing to Labour's landslide electoral victories in 1997 and 2001. With 44.4 percent of the popular vote in 1997 (compared with 34.4 percent five years earlier), Labour won 419 seats to displace the Conservatives as Britain's governing party for the first time since 1979. Popular support declined marginally in the June 2001 election to 42.2 percent, largely because of a low voter turnout, but with 413 MPs the Labour Party easily won reelection for a second full term. Prime Minister Blair promptly affirmed his determination to act on the party's campaign promises to improve public services, including education and health care, while cautiously exploring the prospect of Great Britain eventually joining the European Union's euro area, the group of European countries that use the euro as their common currency. Blair's electoral successes in 1997 and 2001 then fell victim to the Labour government's decision to join the US-led campaign that invaded Iraq in 2003. This issue deeply divided the country and Blair's party. The election of 2005 returned a weakened Labour government to power with a majority of sixty-six seats (the previous winning Labour majorities were 179 in 1997 and 167 in 2001). Labour lost forty-seven seats and won only 35.3 percent of the vote. With the electoral success of high-profile antiwar activists such as George Galloway, who won a constituency in London, it appeared that Labour and Blair were being widely chastised. After the election, Blair acknowledged that Iraq had been a "deeply divisive" issue and that the public had sent a message to which, he said, "I have listened and I have learned."[9] Despite the importance attributed by the media and prominent politicians to Iraq in influencing the 2005 British vote, postmortem analyses of the election indicate that the Blair government's economic performance and public service delivery, as well as evaluations of the party leaders, were the most significant factors leading to the election outcome.[10] Apparently, the influence of the Iraq War on the election of 2005 was indirect, operating through leadership evaluations.

Blair lasted as prime minister until June 2007, when his public support had so eroded that he stepped down, turning over the keys to Number 10 Downing Street to Gordon Brown. Brown had been the longest serving chancellor of the exchequer, in office from 1997 until becoming prime minister in 2007. Given the nature of parliamentary democracy in the United Kingdom, where the majority party selects the prime minister, Blair's relinquishing the premiership to Brown did not require a national election. In some ways, however, Brown's "coronation" as prime minister, without a national electoral mandate, served to undermine his credibility and political capital and set the stage for Labour's defeat in 2010.

The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party has its roots in the political conflicts of the eighteenth century, and to some degree those roots produce conflicts within the emerging character of the Conservative

Party today. In the late 1980s, the majority of adherents to the Conservative Party felt akin to conservative parties in Europe and North America, resisting government encroachments into the affairs of individuals. Traditionally, however, the Conservative Party advocated a strong central government, in part because of an elitist perception that the poor and less educated cannot be counted on to make proper decisions on their own and need guidance by their "betters." "Old Tories" therefore want significant government control over the private sector, albeit control used to preserve the interests of the upper classes, or at least to preserve the existing social order.[11]

"New Tories," or Thatcherite Conservatives, tend to advocate greater freedom for individual and business activities, and consequently they advocate a diminished role for government in economic and social life. Today, long after Thatcher's time in office, there are conflicts within the party over the meaning of conservatism. The leader of the party in 2000, William Hague, appeared closer to the Thatcherite wing than to the Old Tories, and he faced a formidable challenge in attempting to balance views within the party to win elections with a public that had grown skeptical of the perceived extremism of the party during the Thatcher and Major years. David Cameron, however, who became leader of the Conservatives in 2005, shifted the party to the middle, seeking to rebrand the party as one concerned with green issues and social mobility.

The Conservative Party is an elite party, both in terms of the socioeconomic characteristics of the bulk of its adherents and in terms of the relationship between party members and the party's voting strength. As with all of the parties, the number of British citizens voting for the Conservative Party is many times greater than its formal membership. The party is now thought to have some approximately 130,000 to 170,000 members, down from more than 1 million not too many years ago.[12] Still, it remains a relatively small mass organization compared with its ability to organize voters and to manage national campaigns. The elitism of the party is further typified by the domination of the party by the parliamentary party and perhaps even more by the leader. The party does have some democratic structures, but in practice a small leadership group tends to be dominant.

The Conservative Party outside Parliament has two major components. The first is a mass organization headed by the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations in England and Wales; there are similar bodies in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The governing body of the National Union is its Party Board, which has twenty members.

The territorial organization of the Conservative Party is similar to the national organization. Within each of the twelve provincial area councils, the party is organized by constituencies, each with a leadership structure similar to that of the national party. The constituencies are also served by agents responsible for the administrative functions of the party (this is also true of the Labour Party). The constituency parties are important, because it is at this level that most funds are raised and local campaigning is managed. Also, the constituency must decide to accept candidates offered to them by the national party or to develop candidates of their own who will be acceptable to the national party. Over time, constituency parties have grown more assertive and are now willing to deselect even sitting MPs as their candidates, or to retain candidates opposed by the party leadership. However, under the *Fresh Future* reforms introduced during William Hague's leadership, Conservative Central Office (now the Conservative Campaign Headquarters, or CCHQ) gained more power to intervene in areas such as candidate selection in return for the party membership being allowed a final say in the election of the party leader. The

Conservative Party is a highly centralized organization, where most power over day-to-day issues such as policymaking and strategy is in the hands of the party leader (especially when the party is in opposition). This led William Hague to observe during the 2010 coalition negotiations that "the Conservative Party is like an absolute monarchy, but this is qualified by regicide."[13]

Assisting the local and national officers is the Central Office, the second major component of the Conservative Party outside Parliament. This office, which is directed by the chair of the party organization, employs various professional workers, including those in the Conservative Research Department. The major officials in the Central Office are appointed by the party leader, and it is from this direct connection with the party leadership that the Central Office derives most of its authority. Indeed, this connection highlights the overriding fact that the Conservative Party is largely a party based on Parliament. A leader must pay attention to the mass members of the party, but the real control over a leader is exercised by the party in Parliament, not the mass membership.

The basis of Conservative Party organization in the House of Commons is the 1922 Committee, composed of all Conservative members of the Commons other than ministers when the party is in government. The 1922 Committee has exercised considerable power over Conservative leaders, and that power appeared to be increasing before Thatcher became prime minister. The leader of the Conservative Party does not have to stand for annual election but can be challenged every year. Five of the sixteen leaders of the party since 1902 have been forced out of the leadership by backbenchers, either by direct vote or by their obvious disapproval. Serving as prime minister for more than a decade and having molded the party in her own image did not prevent Thatcher from being removed from office when a majority of Conservatives in the House of Commons considered her policies to be poorly conceived and to be leading them toward electoral problems.

In addition to exercising control over the leadership, another function of the party in Parliament is to maintain the voting discipline of the party members. The Conservative Party leadership can "deny the whip" (expel a member), but it does so only rarely. The eight Tory MPs who abstained on an important vote on European Union policy in late 1994 were disciplined. Michael Howard, who was party leader from 2003 to 2005, denied the whip to MP Howard Flight in 2005 (and removed him from his constituency's Conservative ticket just forty-two days before the election) for saying at a private dinner that the Conservatives would dramatically cut government spending if elected. Flight initially attempted to fight off Howard, saying that his constituency would put him forward as an independent Conservative, but the constituency party quickly announced that it would accept the leader's decision. By contrast, over the past fifteen years some Conservative members have resigned the whip, and one conservative MP "crossed the aisle" to Labour in 2007, when Gordon Brown took over as leader of the Labour Party. Until the 1990s, the Conservative Party was not beset with the deep internal splits that have plagued the Labour Party, and the Conservatives have found it less necessary to employ the available sanctions, although conflicts over European Union policy, in particular, have raised internal tensions. Also important for conflict management within the Conservative Party are certain genteel traditions, such as not taking votes in the 1922 Committee but instead reading the sense of the meeting.

Selection of party leader was traditionally left almost entirely to the parliamentary party, although there were provisions for constituency parties and other concerned groups

within the party to make their views known. This method entailed a ballot of all Conservative MPs, with provisions for runoff elections among the leading candidates. The party broadened the selection process in 1998 by establishing a two-stage process. First, the parliamentary MPs taking the Conservative whip use a series of ballots to select their top two candidates for the leader position. Then an electoral college consisting of all party members elects the party leader from these two candidates. In September 2001 a majority of 61 percent of the party's 318,000 eligible members utilized the procedure to elect Iain Duncan Smith—an erstwhile skeptic of European integration—over Kenneth Clarke, a former chancellor of the exchequer who had advocated closer ties with the European Union. Duncan Smith succeeded William Hague, who had announced his resignation after the party's loss in the June 2001 election. By 2003 a lack of confidence in Duncan Smith's leadership had led to his ouster through a ballot of Conservative MPs. To avoid a split in the party, only one candidate, Michael Howard, was nominated to replace Duncan Smith. After the parliamentary elections in 2005, Howard announced that he would step down as leader, thereby sparking a contest between the moderate and "euro-skeptic" wings of the party for the leadership position. A hard-fought four-way contest ensued, with David Cameron, the self-described "modern compassionate conservative," the clear winner.

Crucial divisions within the party over domestic social and economic policy and, even deeper, Europe's and Great Britain's role in an expanding and ever more powerful European Union were an important factor in the disastrous showing of the Conservatives in the 1997 election, when the party's share of the vote plummeted to 31.4 percent from 41.9 percent in 1992 and the number of Conservative MPs fell from 336 to 165. The Conservatives gained one seat in the June 2001 election, but popular support for the party was the second lowest since 1880, and the number of its supporters at the lowest level since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1929. Despite using the hot-button issues of immigration, asylum seekers, and the proposed European constitution to chip away at Labour's parliamentary majority in 2005, the Conservatives barely increased their share of the vote (32.3 percent) over the previous two contests. The 1997, 2001, and 2005 defeats prompted a change of party leadership and intense internal debates over fundamental policy issues. Cameron's initial approach was to remake the Conservative "brand," emphasizing more moderate social policies and promoting green issues and a more "compassionate conservatism" to attract younger, more socially moderate voters. Although this approach garnered (significant) criticism from traditional Conservatives, the party, at the end of 2009, was substantially ahead of Labour in public opinion polls.

The 2010 election demonstrated that Cameron's strategy of policy moderation resonated with the British electorate, if not with the more conservative members of his party. In May 2010 the Conservative Party gained ninety-seven seats to make it, with 307 seats, the largest single party in the House of Commons but not large enough to constitute a majority. As has been said elsewhere in these chapters, in the wake of the "hung parliament," the Conservatives joined in coalition with the Liberal Democrats to form the government. Both parties announced the coalition agreement, which struck a compromise between some of the parties' rather divergent policy positions, with a great deal of enthusiasm. In practice, however, significant tensions and differences have, at times, dominated the coalition government as it has wrestled with real-world, unexpected events such as

economic and political turmoil in Europe and an agenda driven by a policy of economic austerity at home.

Voting and Elections

Elections are a crucial driving force of democratic politics. Or are they? Certainly, all conventional analyses of British politics assume that government policies are decided by the clash of political parties over issues. In like manner, voters are assumed to be both interested in politics and to make their choices among parties on the basis of issues. This section looks at the evidence about voter turnout and the reasons for voting choices and then asks a few pertinent questions about the role of elections in policy choice in the United Kingdom.

But first a look at several salient features of British elections is in order. Elections for the House of Commons are national in character, but in fact they are national elections conducted in individual constituencies. Although it is clear who will be prime minister should one party or the other win, only one constituency actually votes for the prospective prime minister—the constituency he or she will represent. Also, British constituencies are quite small compared with electoral districts in most Western countries. As of the 2010 election, the average English MP had an electorate of 72,127 people, the average Scottish MP roughly 66,593 people, and the average Welsh MP about 57,040 people. By way of contrast, the average member of the National Assembly in France represents more than 100,000 people and the average legislator in the United States about 600,000 people.

In addition to size differences, the expenses of constituency campaigning in Great Britain are regulated during certain periods so that a candidate in 2010 could not spend more than £25,000, plus either 7 pence per elector for rural constituencies and 5 pence per elector in urban constituencies from January 1 to April 12, 2010.[14] Under the new spending limits that went into effect with the 2001 election, parties are limited to spending no more than £30,000 ($56,262) per contested constituency during this period. These spending restrictions, combined with the short campaign period (usually six weeks or less) and the difficulty encountered in purchasing electronic media time other than for the limited party political broadcasts provided free on all networks, ensure that British campaigns are very different from those in the United States. An average major-party candidate contesting an election in an urban constituency of 93,000 people would be limited to spending no more than £11,800 ($20,556) for the duration of the election campaign. When the expenditure allowed the parties is added, the total on average that could be spent per candidate contesting an urban constituency of 93,000 is £41,800 ($72,819). The average US House candidate spends about $890,000, and the average Senate candidate spends around $4.8 million.[15] These figures do not even include what the parties and other interests spend to support House and Senate candidates. Despite the concerns about the escalating party spending in British election campaigns, they remain relatively inexpensive.

A final difference is that in Great Britain the parties control the selection of candidates more centrally than American parties do, although this control has been softening over time. Partially in response to the expenses scandal and partly to fulfill Cameron's desire to attract new voters to the Conservative Party, in August 2009 the Conservatives held Britain's first open primary to select one constituency's parliamentary candidate. Voters in the Totnes constituency selected a physician with no political experience to replace the incumbent, Anthony Steen, who, at the outbreak of the expenses scandal, infamously accused voters of

jealousy over his "very, very large" house.[16] Despite this innovation, it is unclear how widely primaries may be used in future candidate selection contests. Traditionally, new prospective candidates would have to be accepted by the constituency party, with the Central Office exercising a largely advisory role. Candidates already sitting for a seat in Parliament, or who stood for a seat in the constituency in the previous election, have not needed to be reselected in the Conservative Party, whereas now they must be reselected in the Labour Party.

Voter Turnout

British citizens tend to vote more readily than American citizens, although not so readily as citizens in most other Western democracies. Turnout is also relatively evenly distributed across the country. As is true for most other countries, the abstainers are concentrated in the working class, although it is unclear exactly what impact this "differential turnout" between the social classes has on British election outcomes. In their foundational work on British electoral behavior, David Butler and Donald Stokes asserted that the difference in turnout among members of different social classes could influence election outcomes.[17] Survey analysts, however, have noted more recently that the individual-level data seem to indicate that sources of differential turnout between members of different social classes may vary with the context of each election. Therefore, it is difficult to come up with any definitive statement of how working-class or middle-class abstainers may influence electoral outcomes in general and over time.[18] Survey data have also shown that people who own their own homes, married people, individuals with higher levels of educational attainment, and older people tend to vote at higher rates—a similar pattern to that found in other established democracies.[19]

Much was made over the drop in turnout in the 2001 election. From 1945 to 1997, the average British voter turnout was 76.3 percent, with a high of 83.9 percent in 1950 and a low of 71.4 percent in 1997. In 2001 voter turnout fell to 59.4 percent. A slight bounce occurred in 2005, with turnout reaching 61.3 percent, and in 2010 turnout went up to 65 percent. Why the drop in 2001? Political pundits claimed that either voter apathy or distrust of elected officials was the likely explanation. But the survey evidence reveals a somewhat different story. Evidence from the British Election Study shows that people were dissatisfied enough with the performance of Labour to stay home but not enough to feel inclined to vote (heavily) for the opposition. Further, the general impression seemed to be that the election was a foregone conclusion, so interest in the election was somewhat lower than in previous years. These factors, along with growing generational gaps in feelings of civic duty, led to voters staying away from the polls in 2001.[20]

Partisan Choice by Voters

As well as deciding whether to vote, a voter must decide for whom to vote. From the substantial research devoted to determinants of the partisan choice of voters, four interacting factors have emerged: social class, regional patterns of residence, demography, and issues. Members of the social classes are not evenly spread across the country; more working-class voters live in Scotland, Wales, and the industrial north and Midlands of England, and more middle- and upper-class voters live in the southeast or southwest of England.[21] The issues to which citizens are assumed to respond also have different impacts on members of different social classes, on different ethnic and age groups, and on residents of different regions of the country.

Social Class

The pioneering studies of Butler and Stokes identified social class as an important factor in explaining voting in Great Britain. As noted earlier, much of British politics has been conceptualized in class terms. And although there is strong evidence that class remains a predictor of voting decisions, there is also evidence that it is no longer as overwhelming as often believed.[22] In general, importance of social class as a predictor of party support has declined in recent elections as voters have become more attuned to particular issues, personalities, and public service delivery.

Not surprisingly, members of labor unions are substantially more likely to vote Labour than are members of the working class as a whole. In 1997 approximately 60 percent of union members voted Labour, while only 44 percent of working-class voters who were not union members voted Labour. This was the case even though many of those not voting for Labour were in objectively worse socioeconomic conditions than the union members. Overall, the impact of union membership on voting has declined, in part because many union members who have jobs have begun to make middle-class incomes and have begun to behave politically more like the middle class. Moreover, aggregate trade union membership has fallen to approximately 26 percent of the workforce.[23]

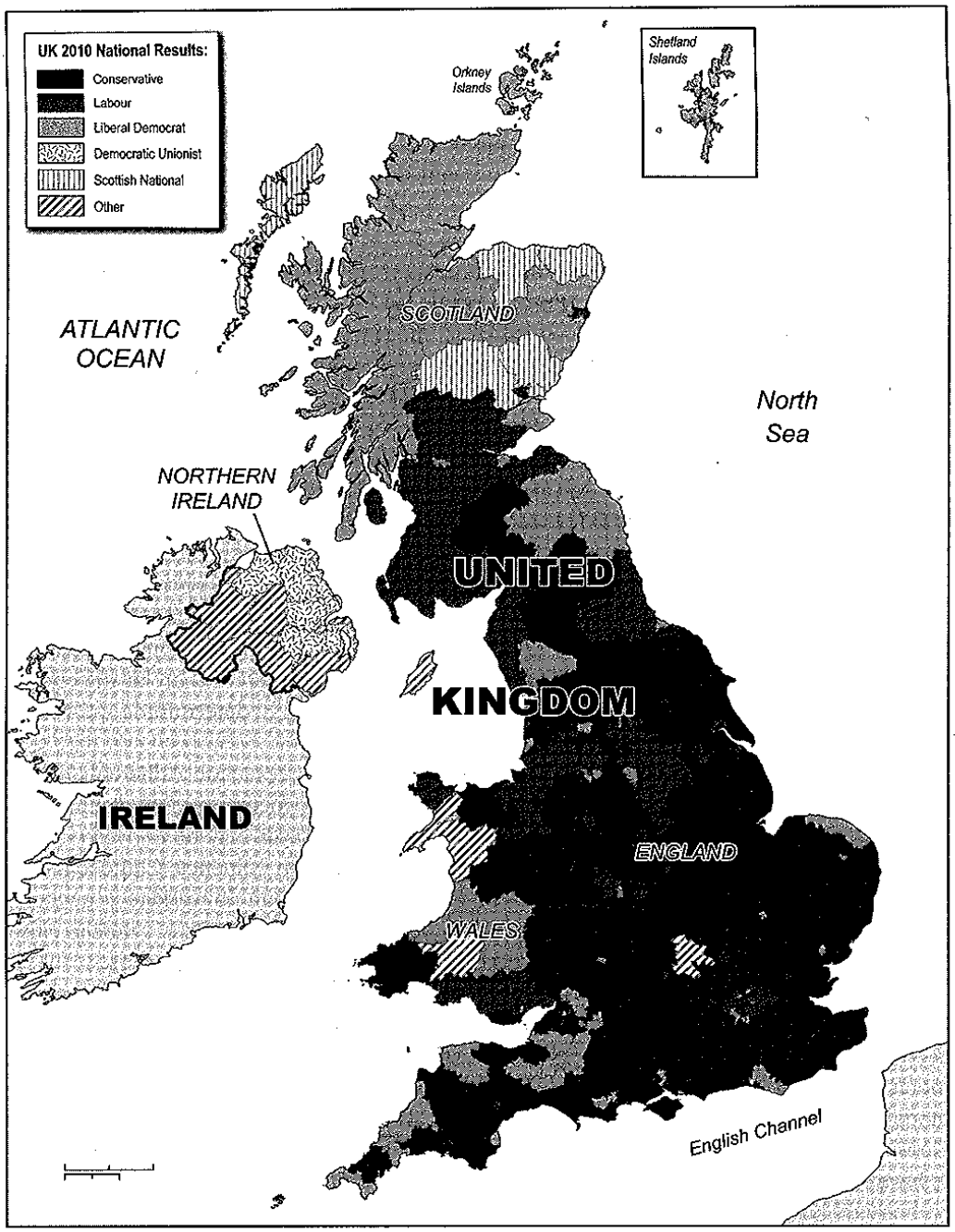
Despite its past dominance, social class has declined as a predictor of voting intention in the United Kingdom. Analysts argue that lifestyle factors have become more important in explaining patterns of voting behavior than simple membership in a social class. Indeed, Harold Clarke and his colleagues have recently demonstrated that the relationship between social class and voting behavior has weakened over time to the extent that "at the end of the twentieth century, class had come to play a very limited role in determining the voting preferences of the British electorate."[24]

Religiosity and religious affiliation also tend to affect voting behavior. Adherents of the Church of England tend to vote Conservative more often than do members of other churches. To characterize the Church of England as the Tory Party at prayer may be to overstate the identity of church and party, but church membership can have an influence. Catholic members of the working class tend to vote Labour more consistently than do workers as a whole. Even leaving aside the influence of Northern Irish politics on voting, Catholic voters in cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool are among the most consistent Labour supporters.

Finally, certain lifestyle characteristics are important in explaining why members of the working or middle classes tend to vote for or against the nominal interests of their class. Working-class voters living in council (public) housing, which varies considerably by region, are much more likely to vote Labour than are members of the working class living in other accommodations. Similarly, members of the middle class who own homes are more likely to vote Conservative than are their less-well-off colleagues. Finally, the receipt of social benefits appears to have some influence on voting, with those receiving benefits more likely to vote Labour.

Patterns of Residence

Where people live seems to affect their voting behavior. First, living in the Celtic fringe tends to predict voting. Leaving aside opportunities and motivations to vote for national or third-party candidates, the division of votes between the two major parties differs in different parts of the country. Wales and Scotland are the most heavily Labour portion of the United Kingdom. Indeed, were it not for Wales and Scotland, the Conservatives' strength in



Post-2010 Election Constituency in the United Kingdom

Source: "Election 2010," BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/election2010/results.

England would overwhelm Labour, making it highly unlikely Labour would ever control the House of Commons. The north of England has become more similar to the Celtic fringe, with the partisan divide (as well as the economic divide) in Great Britain now appearing to lie on a line from the Wash to Bristol Channel. Traditional class differences have persisted north of this divide, but those cleavages tend to have eroded south of that line.[25]

Second, rural voters tend to vote Conservative in greater proportions than urban voters. This difference is in part a function of the concentration of workers in urban industrial areas. In addition, the constituency within which a voter lives influences voting. This is especially true of prospective Labour voters, who tend to vote Labour in much greater proportions in safe Labour constituencies than in competitive, or safe Conservative, constituencies. This tendency is a function of the reinforcing effects of interactions with other Labour voters and of union efforts to mobilize the vote.

Demography

Voters with different fundamental demographic characteristics also appear to behave differently. Women have traditionally tended to support the Conservative Party more than men, although in recent years this gender gap seems to have dissipated (or even, according to some survey analyses, flipped).[26] In addition, the effect of gender appears to be less strong in Great Britain than in other European democracies, in part because voters have come to view the Conservative Party as somewhat moderate. The evidence of voting by age group is even less comforting to the Conservative Party. The relationship between age and voting Conservative is clear—the older the voter, the more likely he or she is to vote Conservative, which helps to explain David Cameron's attempt to rebrand the Conservative Party to make it more appealing to younger voters.[27]

Race and ethnicity are increasingly important issues for voting in Great Britain, where the minority population is growing. Because this population is also relatively young, its importance as a voting group will grow. One study predicts that ethnic minorities will make up one-fifth of the UK population within 40 years.[28] Labour tends to do very well among minority voters, especially in the industrial cities where they are generally concentrated. Moreover, a growing number of Labour politicians are from ethnic minority groups. Although the 2005 election saw the first black Conservative elected to the House of Commons, the Conservative Party's emphasis in that election on curtailing immigration and the number of asylum seekers allowed into Britain did not likely help to win it many voters from the ethnic minority community.

Issues

One assumption of democracy is that voters respond to candidates on the basis of the issues. British parties are at once centrifugal and centripetal. They express class differences more clearly than do US parties, but, as Labour did in the run-up to the 1997 election and the Conservatives seem to be doing under Cameron's leadership, they also move close enough to the political center to disguise some of their potential policy differences in order to gain votes. Although some issues divide voters, in Great Britain the majority of voters of both parties tend to be on the same side of most major political issues, with conflicts often being over how best to reach the common goals. Thus elections are increasingly about government performance in service delivery, rather than large ideological clashes.[29]

Within the parties, however, disagreement on the issues can be substantial. Labour supporters have split over the issue of education reform in England, and Conservatives are divided over the United Kingdom's place in the European Union. The level of agreement within parties has not always been higher than the level of agreement across parties. For example, the New Labour–Old Labour split over whether to enter the Iraq War was more significant than the split between Blair's New Labour faction and its Conservative opposition across the aisle. But perhaps more than any other ongoing issue, the role of the European Union in British public life and its implications for British sovereignty have tended to create cleavages both within and across the parties.

Despite the pressures toward greater ideological thinking by Conservatives and Labour's attempts to call its faithful back to the fold after years of defection, partisan identification has been declining in Great Britain. Strong identifiers with parties have decreased by more than 50 percent since the 1960s. A similar popular dealignment is also found in most other Western countries. It appears that voters are indeed more willing to spurn partisan labels and to make decisions in each election based on issues, candidates, performance in government, or whatever. Such a development makes the task of political leaders that much more difficult, because they are less able to count on a solid base of party identifiers when they begin their election campaigns.

Overall, there is no neat way to summarize Britons' voting behavior. The class model does not seem to fit the growing complexity of modern society, yet no other model adequately captures the complexity of the situation either. More important, some question whether elections and the choice of parties really have much consequence for government policies. In his classic study, political scientist Richard Rose concluded that differences that do result from elections are more matters of emphasis and the timing of policies than absolute differences in the content of policies.[30] Clearly, parties do make a difference, but as the parties compete for the ideological middle of the electorate, individual electors may look to party performance in government, rather than ideology, in deciding how to vote.

Pressure Groups and Corporatism

One factor that has contributed to the homogenization of policies between the two parties is the growing influence of interest groups in British politics. From the 1960s through the 1970s, there was in Great Britain, like in most industrialized countries, a movement toward "corporatism" in which interest groups were granted something approaching official status as generators of demands for policies and implementers of them once adopted. The role of interest groups in British policy is rarely acknowledged officially—the doctrine of parliamentary supremacy is still invoked—but in practice much public policy is influenced, or even determined, by such groups.[31] One consequence of Thatcherism, as confirmed by the succeeding governments, has been a move away from corporatism.[32] But no matter which party is in office, there are pressures for continuity of policies rather than change from one government to the next.

The policies made in conjunction with pressure groups tend to be made through stable patterns of interaction between civil servants and pressure group leaders and through institutionalized processes of advice for the ministries. Changes in government, therefore, would not substantially influence the basic dynamics of policymaking. In Great Britain, interest groups may not be as closely linked to policymaking as in Germany or Sweden, but the connections between government and groups are close and enduring.

Major Interest Groups

The various interest groups that affect British policymaking range from small pressure groups with narrow and largely noneconomic concerns, such as ecological groups and peace activists, to large, influential interest groups that seek to have their economic interests served through the policy process. The most obvious example of an economic group is the labor unions, although business and agriculture are also highly organized and politically effective. The clout exercised by the large economic groups is substantial, but small pressure groups also have been known to exercise substantial influence over policy.

Labor Unions

The largest and probably still the most influential of the interest groups are the unions, which represent 26 percent of the total labor force. Most of the unions are organized into one national federation, the Trades Union Congress (TUC). The Labour Party is directly linked to the TUC, which gained a reputation as one of the world's most vociferous labor movements because of the large number of strikes called in Great Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Unions were once a major counterforce to the power of government, and British elections were fought over whether the unions or the government actually ran the country, with ambiguous results. Indeed, the political power of the unions, combined with the threat of industrial action by their members, made them a formidable political influence until their decline in membership in the 1980s and 1990s and their loss of political influence under Blair.

Several factors help to explain the TUC's loss of some of its power. First, a declining proportion of the labor force belongs to unions. This decline in union membership has a generational component: In the 17 years up to 2012, the proportion of people in all age groups who are members of a trade union has fallen, except amongst the over 65s. Second is the shift from blue-collar to white-collar union membership. Although some white-collar unions have shown a willingness to use the strike weapon (e.g., those in the public sector), most are less militant than blue-collar workers. Third, the TUC has not been able to enforce any discipline on its own members. When the miners struck in 1985 and 1986, the TUC, after some negotiations with the government, urged them to return to work, but they refused. The failure of the miners to win concessions from the government weakened the trade union movement. Union militancy can still produce widespread and disruptive strikes (e.g., transportation strikes), but a good deal of the power appears to be gone. This loss of power was also evident in the willingness of the Labour government under Blair to almost ignore the unions when making policy.

Business and Management

Unlike the single large labor movement, business and management groups are divided into several groups. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) is the major management organization, but other general and specialized industrial groups speak for management as well. The linkage between management groups and the Conservative Party is not as close as that between the unions and the Labour Party, yet it certainly does exist. The Institute of Directors is another important group speaking for business. Although not really management per se, financial interests in the City of London also have a substantial influence over economic policy. These became especially apparent when financial deregulation during the Thatcher government helped the London Stock Exchange and other financial

markets to prosper. During the 1990s, several scandals and a general slowing of the economy reduced the influence of the City, and in 2009 the government had to take over failing banks to help prop up the economy in the face of the global economic problems.

Agriculture

Relatively few workers are employed in agriculture in the United Kingdom, but farmers and their colleagues in fishing are well organized and very effective. Even though the most important organization is the National Farmers Union (NFU), commodity groups ranging from beekeepers to dairy farmers are actively engaged in lobbying and other political activity. Agricultural groups traditionally have been successful in obtaining subsidies for their crops, and they were especially advantaged by Great Britain's entry into the European Community. They may have shifted a good deal of their lobbying focus to the European level in Brussels, but they are still effective in extracting subsidies and benefits from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in London and the Scottish government in Edinburgh. Similarly, the beleaguered fishing industry, concentrated mainly in Scotland, has shown a willingness to organize in an attempt to influence both the Scottish and British government responses to European Commission threats to impose a fishing ban in the North Sea.

Professional Organizations

The large number of professional organizations in the United Kingdom include groups such as the British Medical Association, Royal College of Nursing (a trade union affiliated with the TUC), and the British Association of Social Workers. These groups tend to be politically unaffiliated and traditionally more concerned with maintaining professional standards of practice than protecting the political and economic interests of their members. In the former role, professional groups frequently serve in a public capacity as the source and implementers of standards and as accrediting agencies for practitioners. Nevertheless, because the major employer of health care professionals and social service professionals is the government, these associations do press their own political interests. These interests are related to economic issues such as pay and working conditions, as well as social concerns such as the overall level of funding for and service in the National Health Service (NHS). The changes in the NHS imposed by both the Conservative and Labour governments provoked a good deal of opposition from these groups, including industrial action.

Education is another service area dominated by the public sector. The major education associations in the United Kingdom are at once professional associations and unions. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Association of University Teachers (AUT) are both affiliated with the TUC, and both have struck or threatened to strike. They are also vitally concerned with professional issues such as academic freedom and job security. The AUT was especially active during the Thatcher and Major years, attempting to ward off the effects of resource starvation and the higher student numbers produced by the government's higher education policy.

Pressure Groups

The huge number of pressure groups important to British politics almost covers the gamut of social issues. Three sets of groups have been particularly important: the peace movement groups, nature and environmental groups, and human rights groups.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) is the longest-lived of the peace movement groups; its first protests were in the 1950s against British nuclear weapons and US weapons on British soil. The CND has been joined by other peace and antinuclear groups in establishing a permanent protest of the United Kingdom's Trident nuclear missile system outside the submarine base at Faslane, Scotland.

With the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals at one end of a spectrum of tactics and radical antivivisection groups at the other, the nature and environmental movement has sought to protect wildlife in Great Britain and has been involved with similar issues throughout the European Union.

Among the groups promoting human rights are Amnesty International, Oxfam, Save the Children, Shelter, and a host of other social service and international aid organizations. Partially in preparation for a large-scale human rights demonstration targeting the 2005 G8 meeting at Gleneagles, Scotland, a grand coalition of these groups launched the Make Poverty History campaign calling for trade justice and forgiveness of developing country debt. The highlight of the campaign was the "Live 8" concerts held in ten countries across the globe.

Patterns of Influence

Like pressure groups in virtually all democratic systems, those in the United Kingdom have access to many different means of influencing government policies. Government in the United Kingdom is formally less receptive to interest groups than many other governments. It lacks institutionalized means of legitimating interest group involvement, and therefore the routes of exerting that influence may be somewhat more circuitous. The four major methods for pressure group influence in the United Kingdom are lobbying, direct sponsorship of MPs, direct representation on governmental bodies, and consultation with ministries.

Lobbying

Lobbying lawmakers is perhaps less common in the United Kingdom than in the United States, in part because party discipline makes it less likely to influence an MP's vote. Lobbying does occur, however, with the purpose of getting a voice, not a vote, in Parliament. MPs receive delegations from their constituencies and from nationally based organizations. Such delegations are particularly influential when a constituency has a single major economic interest. Most large companies, financial institutions, and even some pressure groups have their own in-house parliamentary affairs divisions or employ political consultants to represent their interests in Whitehall and Westminster. While most of these lobbying efforts are focused on the government and individual ministers, with the increasing willingness of MPs to act independently of their parties, more and more lobbyists target and contact individual backbench parliamentarians.[33]

Interest groups have increased their lobbying activities since the 1970s. This increase—to some degree—reflects the greater contact between the public and private sectors initiated by the Thatcher government. It also reflects the growth in communications opportunities and activities in contemporary society, as well as society's greater demands for participation and involvement. British government has always been subject to political pressure, but the lobbying is now more overt. Despite living in a democracy of long standing, the British population has been relatively quiescent, but that cultural pattern is rapidly changing.

Direct Sponsorship of Members of Parliament

In the United Kingdom, interest groups are allowed to sponsor prospective MPs. Groups do not contribute a majority of an MP's electoral and other expenses, but some do pay MPs to represent particular causes in Parliament such as American tobacco interests. A group may even keep an MP on a regular retainer as long as that relationship is registered with the Register of Members' Interests. Historically, in the days when MPs drew a trivial salary, sponsorship was especially important in the Labour Party as a means of permitting manual laborers to go to Parliament and still earn a reasonable living. Naturally, sponsorship implies some degree of control by the sponsor, although in cases such as union and working-class MPs, it is unlikely that the sponsor would ask the MP to do anything he or she would not otherwise have done. Occasionally, however, scandals over sponsorship and lobbying erupt, raising questions about the relationships between parliamentarians and their outside business relationships. For example, in early 2009 and again in 2013 it was learned that a few members of the House of Lords were accepting substantial fees (up to £120,000) to introduce parliamentary questions or even specific amendments to laws on behalf of clients. Such behavior is subjecting sponsorship to questioning and reconsideration.

Direct Representation on Governmental Bodies

In a comparative sense, the British government has experienced less of the corporatist pattern of interest intermediation that has characterized many other European countries. Nevertheless, interest groups have had direct and official links with government in several ways. In some instances, interest groups have been directly represented in the advisory committees attached to ministries. In others, pressure groups have actually composed the majority of public organizations, such as the former National Economic Development Council ("Neddy"), which was established under Conservative aegis in the early 1960s to promote economic growth through the cooperation of business, labor, and government. This experiment with corporatism was abolished in the late 1980s because of Thatcher's aversion to programs of this type. Finally, interest groups may actually administer programs for government, which the Law Society does with legal aid and agricultural groups do for some farm programs. In all of these cases, it is clear, first, that governments cannot readily ignore interest groups so closely tied to the public sector, and second, that many of the traditional ideas about the separation of state and society in Western democracies make little sense in the light of the greater use of private organizations for public purposes.

Consultation with Ministries

Less formally, government organizations frequently consult with interest groups. Interest groups have expert knowledge of their particular areas, and they are able to predict the reactions of their members to proposed policy changes. From such consultations, a government agency might not only improve the technical quality of its proposals but also gain legitimacy for them prior to enactment. In an era in which delegated legislation is increasingly important, a substantial amount of policy will be determined by consultations between civil servants and interest group members, with a consequent decline in the relative influence of political parties and elective politicians.

NOTES

1. Peter Hennessy and Anthony Seldon, eds., *Ruling Performance: British Governments from Atlee to Thatcher* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987).
2. David Denver, "The Centre," in *Britain at the Polls, 1992,* ed. Anthony King (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1993).
3. Despite this improvement in their electoral fortunes, the Liberal Democrats were thrown into a state of disarray in early 2006 when their leader, Charles Kennedy, was forced to step down after admitting that he had long suffered from alcoholism.
4. The AV system is referred to as instant runoff voting (IRV) in the United States. In practice, the main difference between AV (or IRV) and the single transferable vote (STV) is that STV makes use of multimember constituencies. Both systems ask voters to rank candidates in their order of preference.
5. BBC News, "European Election: United Kingdom Result," June 14, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk.
6. Nyta Mann, "Blair Set for Clause Four Victory," *New Statesman and Society,* March 10, 1995, 7–8.
7. Patricia Wynn Davies, "Labour to Impose All-Women Shortlists," *Independent,* September 27, 1995.
8. See Paul Anderson and Nyta Mann, *Safety First: The Making of New Labour* (London: Granta Books, 1999).
9. BBC Online, "Blair: I've Listened and Learned," May 6, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/vote_2005.
10. See Paul Whiteley et al., "The Issue Agenda and Voting in 2005," *Parliamentary Affairs* 9 (2005): 802–817.
11. The term *Old Tories* comes from Samuel H. Beer, *British Politics in a Collectivist Era* (New York: Knopf, 1965). For a useful discussion of the contemporary Conservative Party, see Paul Whiteley, Jeremy J. Richardson, and Patrick Seyd, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1994).
12. These figures are estimates; no definitive figures are available for Conservative Party membership. See: House of Commons, Membership of UK Political Parties, 2012, p.10, www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05125.pdf.
13. Quoted in David Laws, *22 Days in May: The Birth of the Lib Dem-Conservative Coalition* (London: Biteback, 2010), 102.
14. See Electoral Commission, *2010 Campaign Spending Report,* 2011, www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/109388/2010-UKPGE-Campaign-expenditure-report.pdf.
15. "US Campaign Spending Figures from the Center for Responsive Politics," www.opensecrets.org.
16. James Kirkup, "GP Becomes Tory Candidate in First 'Open Primary' Election," *Telegraph,* August 5, 2009, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/conservative/5972954/GP-becomes-Tory-candidate-in-first-open-primary-election.html.
17. David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1969).
18. See, for example, the discussion of turnout of Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrat supporters in Charles Pattie and Ron Johnston, "Voter Turnout at the British General Election of 1992: Rational Choice, Social Standing or Political Efficacy?" *European Journal of Political Research* 33 (1998): 263–283. Also see David Denver, Christopher Carman, and Robert Johns, *Elections and Voters in Britain,* 3rd ed. (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

19. David Denver et al., *Elections and Voters in Britain.*
20. Harold Clarke et al., "Britain (Not) at the Polls, 2001," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 1 (2003): 59–64.
21. See John Mohan, *The Political Geography of Contemporary Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
22. Mark N. Franklin, *The Decline of Class Voting in Britain* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1985); Anthony Heath et al., *Understanding Political Change: Britain Votes 1964–87* (Oxford, UK: Pergamon, 1988); Ivor Crewe, "Labor Force Changes, Working Class Decline and the Labour Vote," in *Labor Parties in Postindustrial Societies,* ed. Frances Fox Piven (Oxford, UK: Polity Press, 1991).
23. See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/204169/bis-13-p77-trade-union-membership-2012.pdf.
24. See Harold Clarke et al., *Political Choice in Britain* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 50.
25. In the south of England, unemployment appears more important as a predictor of voting than does the nominal occupation of an individual.
26. For an extensive discussion of voting behavior in the 2001 election, see Clarke et al., *Political Choice in Britain.* For an analysis of the 2010 election, see Paul Whiteley et al., *Affluence, Austerity and Electoral Change in Britain* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
27. There is some evidence that voters tend to behave somewhat more conservatively as they age, so these data do not mean that the same patterns necessarily will persist.
28. BBC News, "UK's Ethnic Minority Numbers 'to Rise to 20% by 2051,'" 2010, www.bbc.co.uk/news/10607480.
29. See Whiteley et al., *Affluence, Austerity and Electoral Change in Britain.*
30. Richard Rose, *Do Parties Make a Difference?* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1980).
31. Some scholars argue that groups are in many ways more central to policy than parties. See Jeremy Richardson and A. Grant Jordan, *Government under Pressure* (Oxford, UK: Martin Robertson, 1979). For a critique of British pluralism, see Samuel H. Beer, *Britain against Itself* (London: Faber, 1982).
32. See especially Table 5 in Alan Siaroff, "Corporatism in 24 Industrial Democracies: Meaning and Measurement," *European Journal of Political Research* 36 (1999): 175–205.
33. Philip Norton, *The British Polity,* 5th ed. (London: Pearson Longman, 2011).