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Chapter 5

Politics in England

RICHARD ROSE

Country Bio—United Kingdom

POPULATION: 59.2 million
TERRITORY: 94,525 sq. mi
YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE: from twelfth century
YEAR OF CURRENT CONSTITUTION: unwritten; partly statutes, partly common law and practice
HEAD OF STATE: Queen Elizabeth II
HEAD OF GOVERNMENT: Prime Minister Tony Blair
LANGUAGE(S): English, Welsh (about 600,000), Scottish form of Gaelic (about 60,000)
RELIGION: Anglican 26.1 million, Roman Catholic 5.7 million, Presbyterian 2.6 million, Methodist 1.3 million, Other Christian 2.6 million, Muslim 1.5 million, Hindu 500,000, Sikh 330,000, Jewish 260,000, Other 300,000, no religion 7,700. The remainder refused to report a religion in the 2001 census.

In a world of new democracies, England is different, because it is an old democracy. Unlike new democracies in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia, England did not become a democracy overnight due to the collapse of a dictatorship. It became a democracy by evolution rather than revolution. Democratization was a slow process that occurred over the centuries. The rule of law was established in the seventeenth century; the accountability of the executive to parliament was established by the eighteenth century; political parties organized in the nineteenth century; and, even though competitive elections had been held for more than a century, the right of every adult man and woman to vote was not recognized until the twentieth century.

The evolution of democracy in England also stands in contrast to the dominant European practice of countries switching between democratic and undemocratic regimes. Whereas the oldest English person has lived under the same constitution all his or her

life, the oldest Germans have lived under four or five constitutions, two democratic and two or three undemocratic.[1]

The gradual evolution of political institutions means that at no point in history did representatives of the English people meet together to decide what kind of government they would like to have, as happened in the American constitutional convention of the 1780s, and in dozens of new democracies in the past two decades. Politicians have been socialized to accept institutions as a legacy from their predecessors; these are the rules of the game by which they compete for office. Ordinary citizens have been socialized to accept established institutions too.

The influence of British government can be found in places as far-flung as Australia, Canada, India, and the United States. Just as Alexis de Tocqueville travelled to America in 1831 to seek the secrets of democracy, so might we journey to England to seek the secrets of stable representative government. Yet its limitations as a model are shown by the failure of many of the attempts to transplant its institutions to countries gaining independence from the British Empire, and even more by the failure of its institutions to bring political stability in Northern Ireland.

CURRENT POLICY CHALLENGES

When Tony Blair became prime minister in 1997, he declared a desire to create a New Britain, a "cool Britannia" having more in common with the world of pop stars and Princess Diana than the world of Winston Churchill. Yet rebranding a country is not as easy as rebranding pop groups or designer fashions.

To win office Blair created what he called a "New" Labour party with a vague Third Way philosophy, offered as an alternative to socialism as well as to unfettered capitalism, and modelled on the strategy of President Bill Clinton. In setting out Labour's manifesto, Blair proclaimed, "We are proud now to be the party of modern, dynamic business, proud now to be the party of law and order, proud now to be the party of the family, and proud now to be the party pledged not to increase income tax."[2] He pledged a pragmatic government that would do "what works," and appealed to the voters to "trust me."

By his lifestyle and rhetoric, Blair has shown that he believes in opportunity for all, and especially for aspiring Britons whose votes are critical for winning reelection. However, winning elections has challenged Blair to deliver campaign promises (Box 5.1). Blair now recognises: "In opposition announcement is the reality. For the first period of time in government, there was a tendency to believe the same situation applied. It doesn't. The announcement is only the intention."[3]

Blair's government has benefited from an abnormally lengthy economic boom, providing additional public revenue without raising taxes. This is important, as an aging population requires more health care, an educated population demands better education for their children, and a more prosperous society wants a better environment to match improved housing. The Labour government has sought to achieve greater efficiency by imposing more centralized controls and performance targets on public sector agencies.

From the right, the *Conservative Party* attacks the government for not being radical enough in promoting private initiatives and for overriding constitutional conventions. The *Liberal Democrats* criticize the government for not raising taxes a little in order to have more money to spend in raising health and education standards and for undermining legal protections of human rights. Tony Blair is content to be attacked from both sides, believing that centrist policies will best maintain the support of most voters.

While the Blair administration has promoted decentralization to Scotland and Wales, critics charge that his "control freak" mentality is centralizing too much power in the hands of prime ministerial advisers who concentrate on promoting favorable headlines in the media and pushing civil servants to produce what makes for good headlines. Moreover, in the wake of terrorist attacks the government's adoption of wide-ranging powers to control the population have been criticized by civil liberties groups as anti-liberal, a charge the prime minister accepts as proof of his toughness.

In a changing world, the big question is: Where does England belong? Geographically, it is an offshore island of Europe. *Insularity* is one of its most striking cultural characteristics. Although the *United Kingdom* is a member of the European Union, the government's commitment to the European Union remains limited. Blair has pledged to put British interests "first, second, and last" in negotiations about the European Union. However, any attempt by Blair to cooperate with the other 24 member states of the European Union will inevitably result in compromises that British critics of the European Union will denounce as "giving away" Britain's sovereignty.

Historically, the country's ties are with English-speaking countries on other continents, including the United States. By deciding to ally himself with President George W. Bush in the war in Iraq, Blair has shown that today, as in Winston Churchill's time, a special relationship with the United States is valued more than ties to Europe.

Box 5.1 Accomplishments and Frustrations of Tony Blair

Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party in opposition with the goal of winning elections. To make the party electable, he abandoned traditional commitments to the trade unions and to socialist values and centralized power in the prime minister's office. The strategy of refashioning the Labour Party has produced three successive election victories.

The Labour government has maintained Margaret Thatcher's principle of avoiding any increase in income tax. Much of the credit for managing the economy went to his Treasury minister, Gordon Brown. The government also implemented Labour's long-standing programme of constitutional reforms, including the devolution of powers to elected assemblies in Scotland and Wales, and enacting human rights legislation.

In foreign policy Blair's chief initiative has been cooperation in military action with the United States. After the 9/11 terrorist attack, he has allied Britain with policies of President George W. Bush, notwithstanding major opposition in Parliament. Although claiming to want Britain to be at the heart of Europe, Blair has not sought to adopt the euro in place of the pound and has refrained from campaigning for measures to increase British support for the European Union.

Labour won the 2005 election even though it took only 35 percent of the vote. Distrust in Blair was blamed for this fall in vote and it encouraged speculation about when he would resign during his third term in office. Concurrently, Blair has pledged education, health, and pension reforms that can only show their consequences years after he has left office. Blair has explicitly rejected the liberalism of the 1960s and endorsed measures reducing legal and judicial restraints on government action.*

*Cf. Tony Blair, *New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996); Anthony Seldon, *Blair* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

THE CONSTRAINTS OF HISTORY

The Making of Modern England

The legacy of the past limits current choices, and England has a very long past. For much of its history, England was governed by the rule of law but the government was not democratic. However, the establishment of lawful procedures to check the arbitrary authority of the King made possible the gradual evolution of a democratic political system.

Compared with its European neighbors, England has been fortunate in solving many of the fundamental problems of governance early. The Crown was established as the central political authority in medieval times. The supremacy of the state's power over the church was settled in the sixteenth century when Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church to establish the Church of England. The power struggle between Crown and Parliament was resolved by a civil war in the seventeenth century in which Parliament triumphed and a weakened monarch was then restored. Parliament became able to hold the Crown accountable by the eighteenth century, but Parliament represented only a small portion of the population.

There is no agreement among political scientists about when England developed a modern system of government.[4] A constitutional historian might date the change at 1485, the start of the centralizing Tudor monarchy; an economic historian from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution about 1760, and a frustrated reformer might proclaim

at it hasn't happened yet. The most reasonable dgment is that modern government developed ıring the very long reign of Queen Victoria from 837 to 1901, when government institutions were :eated to cope with the problems of a society that ras increasingly urban, literate, industrial, and criti- al of unreformed institutions.

The 1832 Reform Act started a gradual process of enfranchising the masses. A majority of English nales got the right to vote by 1885. Concurrently, Conservative and Liberal party organizations be- gan to contest elections nationwide. The right to vote was extended to all adult men and women in 1918. The *Labour Party*, founded in 1900 to secure the representation of manual workers in Parliament, first briefly formed a minority government in 1924.

The Industrial Revolution created a demand for government to make cities safe and healthy. In the mid-nineteenth century aristocratic institutions of governance were transformed into a system that could enact and implement laws on public health and education and collect the taxes needed to pay for new public services. The 1906 Liberal government introduced old-age pensions and unemployment insurance; slowly these programs were expanded. The gross national product (GNP) increased greatly, and the share claimed by government increased even more. In 1890 public spending was equal to 8 percent of GNP; in 1910 the share had risen to 12 percent and by 1920 to 26 percent. For the past half century, public spending has fluctuated around two-fifths of the gross national product. The creation of a modern system of government does not make the problems of governing disappear. England emerged on the winning side in two world wars, but its political influence was reduced. Political developments since can be divided into five stages.

First, during World War II an all-party coalition government led by Winston Churchill laid the foundations for a *mixed economy Keynesian welfare state*. The government created full employment to fight the war and rationed food to ensure "fair shares for all." From this coalition emerged the Beveridge Report on social welfare, John Maynard Keynes's Full Employment White Paper of 1944, and the Butler Education Act of 1944. These three measures—the first two named after Liberals and the third after a Conservative—were landmarks in the development of the British welfare state. The fair shares policy was continued by the Labour government of Clement Attlee elected in 1945 and the National Health Service was established. Coal mines, gas and electricity, railways, and the steel industries were nationalized (that is, taken into government ownership). By 1951 the Labour government had exhausted its catalog of agreed changes.

In the second stage, the Conservatives, in office from 1951 to 1964, maintained a consensus on social policy. Administrations under Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, and Harold Macmillan were anxious to assure the electorate that they could be trusted to conserve a widely popular welfare state. Keynesian techniques for promoting economic growth, full employment, and low inflation showed evidence of success. Rationing was ended and living standards rose.

The third stage commenced in the early 1960s with a flood of books on the theme "What's wrong with Britain?" Continuities with the past were attacked as the dead hand of tradition. Politicians promoted managerial activism. Labour, Liberal, and Conservative politicians denounced "stagnation" and competed in prescribing activist measures, ushering in what Michael Mora has described as an age of "hyper-innovation."

The Labour Party won the 1964 election under Harold Wilson campaigning with the vague activist slogan, "Let's go with Labour." New titles were given government department offices, symbolizing a desire to change for its own sake. Behind the entrance of these restyled offices, the same people went through the same routines as before. The economy did not grow as predicted, and in 1967 the Wilson government was forced to devalue the pound and seek a loan from the International Monetary Fund. Labour lost the 1970 election.

The major achievement of the 1970–1974 Conservative government under Edward Heath was to make Britain a member of what was then the European Community and is now the European Union. Doing so divided his own party and the opposition. In trying to limit unprecedented inflation by controlling wages, Heath risked his authority in a confrontation with the National Union of Mineworkers. The result was a stalemate, and industry working a three-day week because of a shortage of coal. The prime minister called an election. The "Who Governs?" election of February 1974 showed many voters rejecting both major parties. The Conservative share of the vote dropped to 38 percent and Labour's to 37 percent, while the Liberal vote more than doubled to 19 percent. Due to anomalies in the electoral system, Labour won the most seats in the House of Commons, but no party had an absolute majority there. Labour formed a minority government, with Harold Wilson again prime minister. A second election in October 1974 gave Labour a bare majority. Inflation, rising unemployment, and a contraction in the economy caused this policy to collapse. James Callaghan succeeded Wilson as prime minister in 1976. Keynesian policies were abandoned in 1977 when Labour again relied on a loan from the International Monetary Fund to stabilize the pound.

The 1979 general election was won by the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher, the first woman to serve as prime minister of a major European country. She ushered in the fourth stage, making a radical break with the past. She regarded the economic failures of previous governments as arising from too much compromise and too little conviction. "The Old Testament prophets did not say 'Brothers, I want a consensus.' They said: 'This is my faith. This is what I passionately believe. If you believe it too, then come with me.'"[5] Above all, she believed that the market rather than government should make the most important decisions in society (Box 5.2).

Divisions among opponents enabled Thatcher to lead her party to three successive election victories although never winning more than 43 percent of the total vote. Militant left-wing activists seized control of the Labour Party. Under Michael Foot its 1983 election manifesto was described by a Labour MP as the longest suicide note in history. In protest, four former Labour Cabinet ministers formed a centrist Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981 and made an alliance with the Liberal Party. After Thatcher's third successive election victory in 1987, the SDP leadership merged with the Liberals to form the Liberal Democrats.

While preaching against big government, Thatcher did not court electoral defeat by imposing

Box 5.2 The Meaning of Thatcherism

Among British prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher was unique in giving her name to a political ideology, *Thatcherism*. She believed in strong government—as long as it was in her hands. In foreign policy she was a formidable proponent of what she saw as Britain's national interest in dealings with the European Union and in alliance with President Ronald Reagan. The 1982 Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands, a remote British colony in the South Atlantic, led to a brief and victorious war against Argentina. Thatcher was also quick to assert her personal authority against colleagues in the Cabinet and against civil servants.* The autonomy of local government was curbed by central government, and a property tax on houses replaced by a poll tax on each adult.

Thatcher's central conviction was that the market offered a cure for the country's economic difficulties. As Milton Friedman, the Nobel Prize-winning monetary economist, noted: "Mrs. Thatcher represents a different tradition. She represents a tradition of the nineteenth-century Liberal, of Manchester Liberalism, of free market free trade."† In economic policy the Thatcher administration experienced both successes and frustrations. Her anti-inflation policies succeeded but unemployment doubled. Industrial relations acts gave members the right to elect their union's leaders and vote on whether to hold a strike. She introduced what were described as "businesslike" methods for managing everything from hospitals and universities to museums, hoping to reduce public spending and taxation.

*Cf. Dennis Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British Politics* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

†"Thatcher Praised by Her Guru," *The Guardian* (London), March 12, 1983.

radical cuts on the biggest spending and most popular programs of the government. In consequence, public spending continued to grow in the Thatcher era. It was 40 percent of the gross domestic product in her last full year in office. While the Conservative majority in Parliament endorsed Thatcher's policies, it did not win the hearts and minds of the electorate. When voters were asked on the tenth anniversary of Thatcher's period in office whether or not they approved of "the Thatcher revolution," less than one-third responded yes.[6]

Within the Conservative Party, Thatcher's increasingly autocratic treatment of Cabinet colleagues created resentment, and during her third term of office this was reinforced by unpopularity in opinion polls. In autumn 1990, disgruntled Conservative members of Parliament (MPs) forced a ballot for the party leadership. In the first round, the prime minister won just over half the votes of Conservative MPs. But under the party's complicated rules for electing a leader, this was not enough to confirm Thatcher in office; she resigned. In the subsequent ballot, Conservative MPs elected a relatively unknown John Major as party leader.

In his first electoral test in 1992, John Major won an unexpected and unprecedented fourth consecutive term for the Conservative government. Shortly after the 1992 election his economic policy of a strong British pound crashed under pressure from foreign speculators. Major was criticized by Thatcherites in the Conservative Party for agreeing to the Maastricht Treaty on expanding the powers of the European Union. Although personally above suspicion, Major's administration was plagued by the exposure of Conservative MPs' *sleazy* behavior, involving sex, money, or both. By 1993 Major reached the lowest popularity rating in the history of the Gallup Poll. The Major government held onto office and Thatcherite economic policies such as the privatization of the coal mines and railways were pursued.

A fifth stage in postwar British politics opened after Tony Blair became Labour leader in 1994. Blair was elected leader because he did not talk or look like an ordinary Labour Party member. Instead of being from a poor background, he was educated at boarding school and studied law at Oxford. Instead of having grown up in the Labour movement, his parents were Conservatives, and he joined the Labour Party due to the encouragement of a girlfriend, Cherie Booth (now his wife and a very successful lawyer). His qualities appealed to middle-class voters whose support Labour needed to move from opposition to government. Labour won a landslide majority in the House of Commons in the 1997 election, even though it received a smaller share of the popular vote than Margaret Thatcher in 1979, because the Conservative vote fell to its lowest share since 1832. In June 2001, Blair led Labour to another landslide victory over a demoralized opposition. But the longer he has been in office the more he has expressed frustration with the obstacles that British government creates to his hopes for changing Britain overnight.

Blair's decision to commit Britain to go to war in Iraq in 2003 alongside the United States caused a bitter division within his party. Official inquiries into the "spin" that Blair gave for going to war showed that he had exaggerated or misread intelligence briefings, and opinion polls showed that a majority of Britons no longer trusted Blair. Under pressure from Labour critics, Blair has had to interrupt foreign policy forays to show that he is concerned about improving social conditions in Britain.

The continuity of England's political institutions through the centuries is remarkable. Prince Charles, the heir to an ancient Crown, pilots jet airplanes, and a medieval-named Chancellor of the Exchequer pilots the British pound through the deep waters of the international economy. Yet symbols of continuity often mask great changes in English life. Parliament was once a supporter of royal authority. Today Parliament is primarily an electoral college deciding which party leader is in charge of government.

THE ENVIRONMENT OF POLITICS

One Crown but Five Nations

The Queen of England is the best known monarch in the world, yet there is no such entity as an English state. In international law, the state is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom was created in 1801 as the climax of a process of expansion begun in the twelfth century. Great Britain, the principal part of the United Kingdom, is divided into three parts: England, Scotland, and Wales. *Scotland* was once an independent kingdom; since the 1707 Act of Union, there has been a common Parliament for the whole of Great Britain. However, the Scots have retained separate legal, religious, and educational institutions. *Wales* was joined with England in the sixteenth century and administered thereafter as if it were a part of England. Its most distinctive feature is the ancient Welsh language. The fourth part of the United Kingdom, *Northern Ireland*, consists of six counties of Ulster. The remainder of Ireland broke away to form a separate state in 1921 as the culmination of a rebellion against the Crown launched in Dublin in 1916.

In national identity, the United Kingdom is a multinational state as its citizens differ in how they describe themselves (see Table 5.1). In England people often are confused about the difference between being English or British and use the terms interchangeably. When asked to give their national identity, a majority describe themselves as English. In Scotland, more than half see themselves as Scots. In Wales, where three-quarters of the population does not speak Welsh, more than half say they are Welsh. In England, Scotland, and Wales, at least one-third see themselves as primarily British. Just as people in Texas can see themselves as both Texans and Americans, many see themselves as having a secondary British identity as well as well being English, Scots, or Welsh. In Northern Ireland, people divide into two nations. Most Catholics see themselves as Irish while the great majority of Protestants see themselves as British.

The parties competing for seats differ in each nation of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is extreme, for British parties do not contest seats there. In Scotland, four parties compete. In the 2005 general election the Labour Party won more than two-thirds of the seats with two-fifths of the vote in competition with the Liberal Party, the pro-independence Scottish National Party, and the fourth-place Conservative Party. In Wales, the nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, came fourth in votes. The most distinctive feature of Welsh politics is the high Labour vote.

Historically, Scotland and Wales have been governed by British Cabinet ministers accountable to the Westminster Parliament. Under pressure from nationalist parties campaigning for independence, the Labour Party adopted a policy of creating elected Assemblies in Scotland and in Wales. Referendums on devolution were held in September 1997. In Scotland, 74 percent voted in favor of a Scottish

TABLE 5.1 National Identity

	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland	
				Prot.	Catholic
THINKS OF SELF AS:					
British	38	35	33	67	15
English	57	2	8	—	—
Scottish	2	52	—	—	—
Welsh	1	—	57	—	—
Ulster	—	—	—	20	6
Irish	1	11	—	8	69
Other, don't know	1	10	2	5	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Richard Rose, *The Territorial Dimension in Government: Understanding the United Kingdom* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1982), p. 14.

ıent in Edinburgh while Welsh voters en-
an Assembly in Cardiff by 50.3 percent.
Parliament in Scotland with powers to legis-
ıx, and spend was first elected in May 1999
a system of proportional representation. In
:ond election to the 129-seat Parliament held
y 2003, the Labour Party won 32 percent of
:oportional representation vote and 50 seats
ıe pro-independence Scottish National Party
d 27 seats with 21 percent of the vote. The
:rvative Party won 13 percent of the vote and
ats, and the Liberal Democrats 10 percent of
ote and 17 seats. The Green Party, Scottish So-
ts, and other parties together won 17 seats and
st one-quarter of the vote. As the party with the
seats, Labour provides the First Minister, but
hieve a majority in the Scottish Parliament, it
ıeeded to form a coalition government with the
ral Democrats.
After the May 1999 Welsh Assembly election,
our formed a minority government. In the May
3 election, Labour's share of the vote went up to
ercent and it won half of the 60 seats in the As-
bly. In second place was the Welsh Nationalist
y (Plaid Cymru), with 12 seats and 20 percent
he vote. The Conservatives gained 11 seats with
percent of the vote and Liberal Democrats won
eats with 13 percent of the vote. Powers over
lsh legislation and total public expenditure re-
in in the hands of a British Cabinet minister.

Northern Ireland is the most un-English part of
: United Kingdom. Formally, it is a secular polity,
t differences between Protestants and Catholics
out national identity dominate its politics.
otestants, comprising about three-fifths of the
pulation, want to remain part of the United King-
m. Until 1972 the Protestant majority governed
rough a home-rule Parliament at Stormont, a sub-
b of Belfast. Many of the Catholic minority did
ot support this regime; they wanted to leave the
nited Kingdom and join the Republic of Ireland,
hich in its constitution claimed the territory of
lorthern Ireland.

Since the start of demonstrations by Catholics
gainst discrimination in Northern Ireland in 1968,
t has been in turmoil. Demonstrations turned to
treet violence in August 1969, and the British Army intervened. The illegal *Irish Republican Army (IRA)* was revived and in 1971 began a military campaign to remove Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. In retaliation, Protestants organized illegal armed forces too. Since August 1969, more than 3,200 people have been killed in political violence. After adjusting for population differences, the deaths from political violence are equivalent to more than 110,000 political deaths in Britain or more than 500,000 deaths in America.

British policy in Northern Ireland has been erratic. In 1969 the British Army went into action to protect Catholics. In 1971 it helped intern hundreds of Catholics without trial in an unsuccessful attempt to break the IRA. In 1972 the British government abolished the Stormont Parliament, placing government in the hands of a Northern Ireland Office under a British Cabinet minister. In 1985 the British government took the unprecedented step of inviting the Dublin-based government of the Republic of Ireland to participate in institutions affecting the governance of part of the United Kingdom.

A stable agreement about Northern Ireland requires the acceptance by paramilitary organizations on each side of the religious divide as well as of parties solely committed to parliamentary politics. In 1994 the IRA announced a cessation of its military activity, and Sinn Fein, the party political wing of the Irish Republican Movement, agreed to talks. Protestant paramilitary forces also ceased activities. On Good Friday, 1998, an agreement was reached for an elected power-sharing executive and cross-border institutions involving both Dublin and Belfast. The basic principle of the agreement, power-sharing, is the opposite of British government. Whereas in Westminster the majority party in the Commons can form a government on its own, in Northern Ireland government must be a coalition of representatives of both Protestants and Catholics.

The election of a Northern Ireland Assembly in June 1998, led to a power-sharing executive including the Ulster Unionist Party, the nonviolent Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and Sinn Fein, a party linked politically with the IRA. The Democratic Unionist Party led by Dr. Ian Paisley did not join the administration. When the IRA failed to produce sufficient tangible evidence that it was decommissioning arms, the power-sharing executive collapsed Northern Ireland is once again under "temporary" direct rule from Westminster, and a 45 million dollar bank robber and a brutal murder by the IRA have questioned Sinn Fein's commitment to a non-violent resolution of the conflict. In the 2005 election, the Democratic Unionist Party won the most seats and Sinn Fein came in second.

The United Kingdom is a union—that is, a political system having only one source of authority, the British Parliament. However, institutions governing the United Kingdom are not uniform. Distinctive administrative institutions exist in Scotland and Wales, and *devolution* increases their political legitimacy by creating popularly elected assemblies. Northern Ireland has always been the subject of exceptional legislation.

Even though there is no agreement about what being English means, there is no doubt about which nationality is the most numerous. Politics in England is the focus of this chapter because England dominates the United Kingdom. Its population constitutes five-sixths of the total of the United Kingdom, and the remainder is divided among three different nations. No United Kingdom government will ever overlook what is central to England, and politicians who wish to advance in British government must accept the norms of English society. During the 1997 election campaign, Blair reminded Scottish voters, "Sovereignty rests with me, as an English MP, and that's the way it will stay."[7]

A Multiracial England

Through the centuries England has received a relatively small but noteworthy number of immigrants from other parts of Europe. The Queen herself is descended from royalty who came from Hanover, Germany, to assume the English throne in 1714. Until the outbreak of anti-German sentiment in World War I, the surname of the royal family was Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. By royal proclamation George V changed the family name to Windsor in 1917. Most post-World War II immigrants have been attracted to England by jobs. Since the late 1950s job seekers have been arriving from the West Indies, Pakistan, India, and other parts of what was once the British Empire and is now a multiracial Commonwealth. In addition, there is a substantial inflow and outflow of people from Australia, Canada, the European Union, and the United States spending a few years in England for study or work.

The new Commonwealth immigrants have only one characteristic in common: they are not white. Beyond that, immigrants share neither culture nor religion. West Indians speak English as their native language and have a Christian tradition; immigrants from India and Pakistan are Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs and most speak English as a second language. The smaller number of African immigrants are divided by nationality. Chinese from Hong Kong have a distinctive culture too. Altogether, more than half of New Commonwealth immigrants have come from the Indian subcontinent, a quarter are black people from the Caribbean or Africa, and about a tenth are Chinese or other Asians from outside the Indian subcontinent.

The 2001 census estimated the nonwhite population of the United Kingdom had risen from 74,000 in 1951 to 4.6 million, almost 8 percent of the population. Public opinion has opposed unlimited immigration of nonwhites, and both Conservative and Labour governments have passed laws limiting the number of nonwhite immigrants.

With the passage of time the nonwhite population is becoming increasingly British born and educated. This makes the important issue: What is the position of British-born offspring of immigrants? Whatever their country of origin, they differ in how they see themselves: 64 percent of Caribbean origin identify as British, as do more than three-fifths of Pakistanis, Indians, and Bangladeshis, and two-fifths of Chinese. Laws to encourage better race relations and antidiscrimination measures have been enacted. However, provisions for enforcement by the courts are very weak in comparison with American legislation. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, the Labour government has shifted emphasis from promoting multiculturalism to stressing the integration of immigrant families into the British way of life.

Immigrants and their offspring are being integrated into electoral politics, as residential concentration makes local politicians aware of their impact as a voting bloc. There are now hundreds of elected nonwhite councillors in local government; a dispro-

ortionate number are Labour. The 15 nonwhite MPs in the Commons today come from diverse backgrounds: India, Pakistan, Aden, Ghana, and the West Indies.

Political disturbances around the world have added a fresh issue, an increasing number of immigrants who claim to be refugees from trouble areas in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa. Some have valid credentials as refugees whereas others have been smuggled to England and arrive with false papers. In response to popular concern, the Blair government has promised to be tougher in enforcing asylum laws.

Insularity and Involvement

For centuries the English Channel has represented a literal as well as a symbolic gulf between England and continental Europe. The opening in 1994 of the Channel Tunnel linking England and France has not closed the gap. More than half of Britons say they do not feel at all European, and only 23 percent say that they feel strongly or somewhat European. Depending on circumstances, politicians claim that England is close to the United States, or to the Commonwealth countries scattered around the globe, or to Europe.[8]

Insularity is not to be confused with isolation. Britain is a member of more than 125 different international bodies, including the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO. The British Empire has been replaced by a free association of 54 sovereign states—the Commonwealth—with members on every continent. The independent status of its chief members is shown by the absence of the word "British" from the name of the Commonwealth. Commonwealth countries from Antigua and Australia to Zambia and Zimbabwe differ greatly from each other in wealth, language, culture, and religion, and in their commitment to democracy.

Britain's foreign policy since the end of the Second World War has been a story of contracting commitments. Britain took a lead in establishing NATO to involve the United States in the protection of Western Europe from the Soviet Union. Militarily, it has been dependent on high-tech hardware bought from the United States while retaining an armed force with upwards of 300,000 persons in uniform, including a major military presence in Iraq since 2003. Blair sees Britain's role as a key link in the creation of "one polar power which encompasses a strategic partnership between Europe and America."[9]

However, there has been limited popular support for the country acting like a global policeman. When a Gallup Poll asked whether people would rather Britain were a leading world power or a small neutral country like Sweden or Switzerland, 49 percent chose being a small power as against 34 percent wanting the country to be a world power.[10] Whereas military force is rarely used, economic transactions are continuous. England depends on world trade, importing much food and many raw materials. To pay for imports, England exports a wide range of manufactured goods, as well as "invisible" services provided by financial institutions in the city of London.

Speeches by the prime minister and head of the Treasury do not determine the foreign exchange value of the pound. This is decided in international markets in which currency speculators play a significant role. The value of the British pound in exchange for the dollar has ranged from above $2.50 to less than $1.25. In spring, 2005 the pound's value fluctuated around $1.90.

As England's world position has declined and the importance of countries such as Germany and France has risen, the government has looked to Europe. In a jet age, the English Channel is no longer a barrier to travel to the European continent. Television and the Internet carry news, sports, and entertainment across national boundaries. Economic ties have grown. For example, the Ford Motor Company links its manufacturing plants in England with factories across Western Europe, just as it links Ford factories between American states. Public opinion and politicians have remained divided about what role Britain can or should play in Europe. When the European Community was established in 1957, Britain did not join, because the government considered the country distant from the problems of continental neighbors ravaged by war. It joined in 1973.

European politics has grown in significance, symbolized by the Community changing its name to the European Union. Powers to promote a Single European Market enable the EU to impose regulations affecting British business and limit the scope for London to give subsidies to industries and firms in trouble. British ministers spend an increasing amount of their time negotiating with their opposite numbers in other countries of the European Union on matters ranging from political fundamentals to whether British beer should be served in metric units or by the traditional measure of a British pint.

The British government cannot insulate the country from changes in the world. English people cannot choose to be a small, rich country like Switzerland or Sweden. The effective choice today is between England being a big, rich country or a big, relatively poor European country. Exchanging nominal sovereignty to participate in the European Union presents no problems to governments in small countries, which have always recognized the influence of bigger neighbors. However, it is a shock to many British politicians who pride themselves on Britain's traditional involvement in three different international settings, the Commonwealth, Europe, and a "special relationship" with the United States.

The diversity of political outlooks within the European Union is so great after its enlargement to 25 member states that government ministers can normally find allies for any British cause. But to do so the government must be fully committed to involvement in the European Union. Seven years after becoming prime minister, Tony Blair has yet to convince fellow EU members that Britain is no longer an island but an integral part of Europe. The indictment of the American diplomat, Dean Acheson, a generation ago continues to ring true: "Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role."[11]

THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

We must understand what government is as precondition of evaluating what it does. Descriptions of a government often start with its constitution. However, England has no written constitution. At no time in the past was there a break with tradition that forced politicians to write down how the country should be governed.

The *unwritten constitution* of England is a jumble of acts of Parliament, judicial pronouncements, customs, and conventions about the rules of the political game. The vagueness of the constitution makes it flexible, a point that political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair have been ready to exploit to increase their own power. Instead of giving written guarantees to citizens, as the American Bill of Rights does, the rights of English people are meant to be secured by trustworthy governors. In the words of a constitutional lawyer, J. A. G. Griffith, "The Constitution is what happens."[12]

Comparing the written American and the unwritten English constitution emphasizes how few are the constraints of an unwritten constitution (Table 5.2). The U.S. Constitution gives the Supreme Court the final power to decide what the government may or may not do. In England, by contrast, the final

TABLE 5.2 Comparing an Unwritten and a Written Constitution

	England (unwritten)	United States (written)
Origins	Medieval customs	1787 Constitutional Convention
Form	Unwritten, indefinite	Written, precise
Final power	Majority in Parliament	Supreme Court
Bill of individual rights	No	Yes
Amendment	Ordinary vote in Parliament; unprecedented action by government	More than majority vote in Congress, states
Centrality in political debate	Low	High

uthority is Parliament, where the government of the lay commands a majority of votes. The Law Lords ınd the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council can esolve disputes about the interpretation of Acts of ?arliament but not declare an Act unconstitutional. The Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution allows anyone to seek redress in the courts for infringement of personal rights, whereas in England an individual who believes his or her personal rights are infringed by an act of Parliament had no redress through the courts until the Blair government, instead of preparing a British code of rights, simply incorporated the European Convention of Human Rights into the laws of Britain. Whereas amendments to the U.S. Constitution must receive the endorsement of well over half the states and members of Congress, the unwritten constitution can be changed by a majority vote in Parliament, or by the government of the day choosing to act in an unprecedented manner.

English courts claim no power to declare an act of Parliament unconstitutional. Courts ask whether the executive acts within its statutory powers. Many statutes delegate broad discretion to a Cabinet minister or public authority; the courts hesitate to question how the executive exercises its delegated discretion. Even if the courts rule that the government has improperly exercised its authority, the effect of such a judgment can be annulled by a subsequent act of Parliament retroactively authorizing an action.

The *Crown* rather than a constitution symbolizes the authority of government. However, the monarch is only a ceremonial head of state. The public reaction to the accidental death of Princess Diana was a media event but it was not a political event like the assassination of President Kennedy. Queen Elizabeth II does not influence the actions of what is described as Her Majesty's Government. While the queen gives formal assent to laws passed by Parliament, she may not publicly state any opinion about legislation. The queen is expected to respect the will of Parliament, as communicated to her by the leader of the majority party in Parliament, the prime minister.

What constitutes the Crown? No simple answer can be given. The Crown is a symbol to which people are asked to give loyalty. It does not refer to a particular community of people. The idea of the Crown combines the dignified parts of the constitution, which sanctify authority by tradition and myth, with the efficient parts, which carry out the work of government.

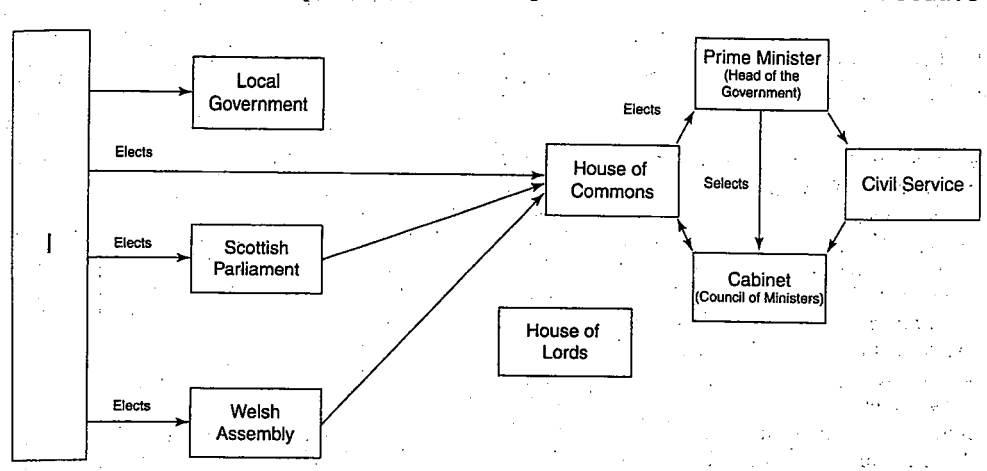
In everyday political conversation, English people talk about government, not the constitution. The term *government* is used in many senses (Figure 5.1). People may speak of the Queen's government, to emphasize enduring and nonpartisan features, or they may refer to Tony Blair's government to stress its personal and transitory features, or to a Labour or Conservative government to emphasize partisanship. The term government officials usually refers to civil servants. Collectively, the executive agencies of government are often referred to as *Whitehall*, after the London street in which many major government offices are located. *Downing Street*, where the prime minister's residence is located, is a short and narrow street off Whitehall. *Parliament*—that is, the popularly elected House of Commons and the nonelected House of Lords—is at the bottom end of the street called Whitehall. Collectively, these institutions are often referred to as *Westminster*, after the district in London in which they are located.

What the Prime Minister Says and Does

Within the Cabinet, the *prime minister* occupies a unique position, sometimes referred to as primus inter pares (first among equals). But as Winston Churchill once wrote, "There can be no comparison between the positions of number one, and numbers two, three or four."[13] However, the preeminence of the prime minister is ambiguous. A politician at the apex of government is remote from what is happening on the ground. The more responsibilities attributed to the prime minister, the less time there is to devote to any one task. Like a president, a prime minister is the prisoner of the political law of first things first. The imperatives of the prime minister are as follows.

1. *Winning elections.* A prime minister may be self-interested but he or she is not self-employed. To become prime minister, a politician must first be elected leader of his or her party. The only election that a prime minister must win

FIGURE 5.1 Structure of the British Government



that as party leader. Six of the eleven prime ministers since 1945—Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, James Callaghan, and John Major—initially entered Downing Street during the middle of a Parliament rather than after a national election. In the 17 elections since 1945, the prime minister of the day has ten times led the governing party to victory and seven times to defeat.

2. *Campaigning through the media.* A prime minister does not need to attract publicity; it is thrust upon him or her by the curiosity of television and newspaper reporters. Media eminence is a double-edged sword. When the news is bad, such as rising unemployment or popular concern about crime, the news puts the prime minister in an unfavorable light. While the personality of a prime minister remains relatively constant, during a term of office his or her popularity can fluctuate by as much as 30 or 40 percentage points in public opinion polls.[14]
3. *Patronage.* To remain prime minister, a politician must retain the confidence of his party. He can silence potential critics by appointing a quarter of MPs in the governing party to jobs in the government as ministers or junior ministers; they sit on front bench seats in the House of Commons. MPs not appointed to a post are backbenchers; many ingratiate themselves with the party leader in hopes of becoming a government minister. In making ministerial appointments, a prime minister can use any of four different criteria: (a) personal loyalty (rewarding friends); (b) co-option (silencing critics by giving them an office so that they are committed to support the government); (c) representativeness (for example, appointing a woman or someone from Scotland or Wales); and (d) competence in giving direction to a government department.
4. *Parliamentary performance.* The prime minister appears in the House of Commons weekly for half an hour of questions from MPs, engaging in rapid-fire repartee with a highly partisan audience. Unprotected by a speechwriter's script,

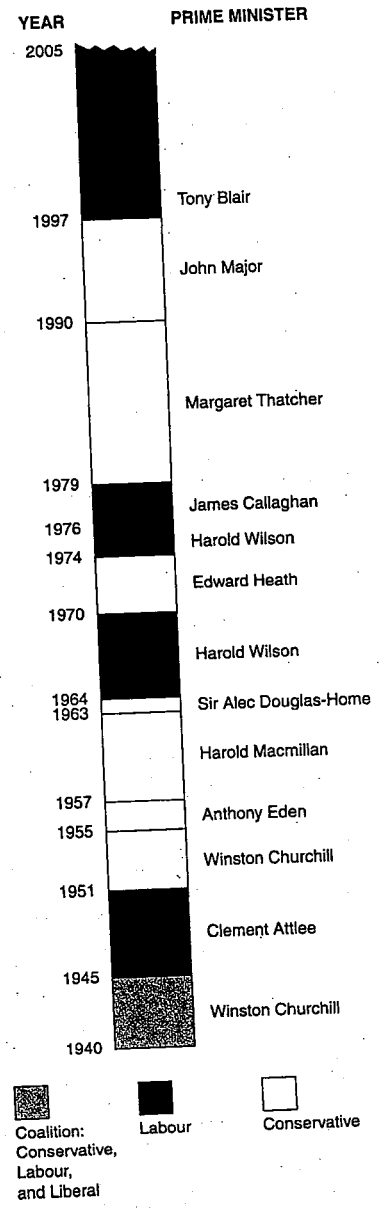
the prime minister must show that he or she is a good advocate of their views or suffer loss of support. He or she occasionally makes statements to the House.

Making and balancing policies. Leading government is a political rather than a managerial task. When a prime minister asks an awkward question or gives advice, no Cabinet minister can ignore it. Foreign affairs are the overriding concern of a prime minister, because of the need to deal with heads of governments around the world. When there are conflicts between international and domestic policy priorities, the prime minister is the one person who can strike a balance between pressures from the world "out there" and pressures from the domestic electorate. The number of "intermestic" policies (that is, problems combining both an international and domestic element) is increasing.

While the formal powers of the office remain nstant, individual prime ministers have differed how they view their job, and in their political cirmstances (see Figure 5.2). Clement Attlee, Labour rime minister from 1945 to 1951, was a nonssertive spokesperson for the lowest common deominator of views within a Cabinet consisting of ery experienced Labour politicians. When an aging Vinston Churchill succeeded in 1951, he concenrated on foreign affairs and took little interest in lomestic policy; the same was true of his successor, Anthony Eden. Harold Macmillan intervened strategically on a limited number of domestic and international issues, while giving ministers great scope on everyday matters. Alec Douglas-Home was weak because he lacked knowledge of economic affairs, the chief problem during his administration.

Both Harold Wilson and Edward Heath were initially committed to an activist definition of the prime minister's job. However, Wilson's major initiatives in economic policy were unsuccessful. In 1974 the electorate rejected Heath's aggressive direction of the economy, and Wilson won office promising to replace confrontation between management and unions with political conciliation. James Callaghan, who succeeded Wilson in 1976, also emphasized consensus.

FIGURE 5.2 Prime Minister and Governments Since 1940



Margaret Thatcher had strong views about many major policies; associates gave her the nickname TINA because of her motto: There Is No Alternative. Thatcher was prepared to push her views against the wishes of Cabinet colleagues and civil service advisers by any means necessary. In the end, her "bossiness" caused a revolt of Cabinet colleagues that helped bring about her downfall, and made colleagues welcome John Major in place of a hectoring leader. However, his conciliatory manner was often interpreted as a sign of weakness, and sniping from ministers led Major to refer to his Cabinet colleagues as "bastards."

Tony Blair has carried into Downing Street the priority he gave to campaigning while in Opposition, and brought with him a media staff of "spin doctors" under the leadership of a pro-Labour tabloid journalist, Alastair Campbell. A former editor of *The Times* has charged that Campbell has "imposed the fixations of the press on a compliant government."[15] The media staff are unprecedented in their number, professional skills, and readiness to assert themselves. The emphasis is on "soft" media appearances, for example, on breakfast chat shows, rather than on tough confrontations with the Opposition in the House of Commons. In addition, Blair has brought a large policy staff into Downing Street, and given senior staff formal authority to give orders to civil servants and informal sanction to tell Cabinet ministers what the prime minister wants. This has led to charges of government by "Tony's cronies" and of the politicization of civil servants, who are expected to generate the headlines that Number Ten wants. Producing the policies needed to back up headline-seeking statements is much more difficult, as the prime minister has learned.

Blair's innovations in campaigning and in Downing Street have led to criticisms that he has created a presidential system. However, by comparison with an American president, a British prime minister has less formal authority. The president is directly elected for a fixed four-year term. A prime minister is chosen by colleagues for an indefinite term—no longer than the life of a Parliament—and is thus less secure in office. The president is the undoubted leader of the federal executive and can dismiss Cabinet appointees with little fear of the consequences; by contrast senior colleagues of a prime minister, such as Gordon Brown, are potential rivals for leadership and are kept in Cabinet to prevent them from challenging the incumbent from outside it. With the support of the Cabinet and the majority of the party's MPs, a prime minister can be far more confident than a president that major legislative proposals will be enacted into law. Although the president is the chief executive branch of the federal government, the White House is without authority over Congress, state and local government, and the judiciary. The prime minister is at the apex of a unitary government, with powers not limited by the courts or by a written constitution.

The Cabinet and Cabinet Ministers

The *Cabinet* consists of senior ministers, members of either the House of Commons or House of Lords and appointed by the prime minister. As ministers are leading figures in the majority party in Parliament, they contribute to what Walter Bagehot described as "the close union, the nearly complete fusion of the executive and legislative powers."[16]

The Cabinet has historically been the forum in which the prime minister brought together leading members of the governing party, many with competing departmental interests and personal ambitions, to ensure agreement about major government policies. This was possible because the convention of Cabinet responsibility requires that all Cabinet ministers and their deputies give public support (or at least, refrain from public criticism) of what the government is doing, even if they have opposed a policy in private. A minister who is unwilling to share responsibility has been expected to resign office, and it is rare for a minister to resign because of policy differences.

The Cabinet is no longer a place for collective deliberation in policy. A half century ago there were almost two Cabinet meetings a week with many taking several hours to arrive at a political consensus. By the time of John Major shorter meetings occurred less than once a week. Tony Blair has further reduced meetings and cut their average length to under an hour. Instead of being a forum for consultation, Cabinet meetings are now a forum in which Number Ten exhorts ministers to produce good

Box 5.3 Departmental Organization and Reorganization

ritish government departments are multipurpose administrative units created as a result of the growth of overnment and brought together through a series of eorganizations justified by efficiency, policy, fashion, or political expediency.* For example, since 1964 responsibilities for trade, industry, and technology have been placed in departments labelled Trade and Technology, then Trade and Industry, separate departments for Trade and for Industry, and once again reunited as a single Trade and Industry department. Each time that the title on the front door of the department was changed, most officials and programs continued as before. The Cabinet of Tony Blair in January, 2005 had the following departments:

1. External affairs: foreign and commonwealth office; Europe; defence; international development
2. Economic affairs: treasury; trade and industry; transport
3. Law: Lord chancellor and law Officer's department; home office; constitutional affairs
4. Social services: health; social security; education and skills; work and pensions; culture, media, and sport
5. Territorial: environment, food and rural affairs; communities and local government; housing and planning; some parts of constitutional affairs; the Northern Ireland Office
6. Managing government business: Office of Deputy Prime Minister, Leader of the House of Commons; Chief Whip in the House of Commons; Leader of the House of Lords; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

*See Richard Rose, *Ministers and Ministries: A Functional Analysis* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1987).

news and bury bad news. Cabinet ministers remain important as department heads, for most decisions of government are taken within departments, and departments are responsible for overseeing all the services of government, which are usually delivered by public agencies distant from Whitehall and subordinate to it (Box 5.3).

The most important departments are the Treasury, which is responsible for taxing, spending, and managing the economy; the Home Office, responsible for police, immigration, and security; and the Foreign Office, although its head often acts as a subordinate to the prime minister. Other departments are prominent when their subject matter is in the news: for example, if there is a rail crash then the minister for Transport answers for what has happened.

Major Whitehall departments differ greatly from each other. For example, the Home Office has a staff approximately ten times larger than the Treasury. Because of the importance of the economy, however, the Treasury has more senior civil servants. The Home Office has more staff at lower levels because of the scale of its routine tasks involving supervision of police, fire, prison, drugs, cruelty to animals, control of obscene publications, race relations, and so on. The Treasury concentrates on one big task, the management of the economy. The varied tasks of the Home Secretary make him or her much more vulnerable to adverse publicity if, for example, a convicted murderer escapes from prison. But the job of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the minister in charge of the Treasury, is more important politically, insofar as economic performance affects the governing party's electoral fate. Moreover, Gordon Brown, the current Chancellor, has a power base in the Labour Party independent of Tony Blair and is often described as his potential successor.

A minister has many roles; initiating policies, selecting among alternatives brought forward from within the department, or avoiding a difficult or unpopular decision. A minister is responsible for actions taken by thousands of civil servants nominally acting on the minister's behalf and must answer for agencies to which Whitehall is increasingly contracting out responsibility for delivering public services. In addition, a minister is a department's ambassador to the world outside, including Downing Street, Parliament, the mass media, and pressure groups. Not least, Cabinet ministers are individuals with ambitions to rise in politics.

The typical minister is not an expert in a subject but an expert in parliamentary politics, willing to deal with any department that offers opportunities to further his or her political career. A minister learns on the job. Usually, an MP is first given a junior post as an Under Secretary, with limited policy responsibilities. He or she may then be promoted to Minister of State, a position with broader and more important departmental duties, for example, looking after primary education in the Department of Education. The final step up the career ladder is to become head of a department and a full member of the Cabinet.

The political reputation of Cabinet ministers depends on their success in promoting the interests of their department in parliament, in the media and in battles within Whitehall. Cabinet ministers are willing to go along silently with their colleagues' proposals in exchange for endorsement of their own measures. However, ministers often have to compete for scarce resources, making conflict inevitable between departments. Regardless of party, the defence and education ministers will press for increased spending while treasury ministers oppose such moves. Cabinet ministers prefer to resolve their differences in Cabinet committees including all ministers whose departments are most affected by an issue or by lobbying Downing Street for the prime minister's support.

Tony Blair's concern with continuous campaigning by presenting good news through the media has led him to give his personal staff at Downing Street greater influence over what ministers say and do—insofar as it attracts media attention. However, Blair does not have any more time during the week to go into the details of policy, and because he has never been a departmental minister, his public remarks sometimes show naivete about how government actually works.[17]

The Civil Service

Although government could continue for months without new legislation, it would collapse overnight if hundreds of thousands of civil servants stopped administering laws and delivering public services.

The largest number of civil servants are clerical staff with little discretion; they undertake the routine activities of a large bureaucracy. Only if these duties are executed satisfactorily can ministers have the time and opportunity to make new policies. The most important group of civil servants is the smallest: the few hundred higher civil servants who advise ministers and oversee work of the departments. Top British civil servants deny they are politicians because of the partisan connotations of the term. However, their work is political because they are concerned with formulating, revising, and advising on policies. A publication seeking to recruit bright graduates for the higher civil service declares: "You will be involved from the outset in matters of major policy or resource allocation and, under the guidance of experienced administrators, encouraged to put forward your own constructive ideas and to take responsible decisions."

Top civil servants are not apolitical; they are bipartisan, being ready to work for whichever party is the winner of an election. Their style is not that of the professional American athlete for whom winning is all-important. English civil servants have grown up playing cricket; its motto is that winning is less important than how one plays the game. The relationship between ministers and higher civil servants is critical. Ministers expect higher civil servants to be responsive to their political views and to give advice consistent with their outlook and that of the governing party and Downing Street. Civil servants like working for a political heavyweight who can carry the department's cause to victory in interdepartmental battles. A busy politician does not have time to go into details; he or she wants a brief that can catch a headline or squash criticism. Civil servants prefer to work for a minister who has clear views on policy, but they dislike it when the views proclaimed will get the department into trouble later because they are impractical.

In the traditional Whitehall model, both ministers and civil servants concentrated on political management rather than administrative concerns. Civil servants were expected to think like politicians, anticipating what their minister would want and objections that would be raised by Parliament, pressure groups, and the media. Ministers were also

cted to think like civil servants, recognizing all obstacles to achieving politically desirable s, and scaling down their ambitions when ways d not be found to overcome these obstacles. Thatcher government introduced a new phe-ıenon in Whitehall: a prime minister who be-ed civil servants were inferior to business peo- because they did not have to "earn" their ıg—that is, make a profit. Management was le the buzzword in Whitehall, and departments e supposed to be run in a businesslike fashion, ieving value for money so that the government ld profit politically by cutting taxes. Parts of ernment departments were "hived off" to form arate public agencies, with their own accounts l performance target, However, when an ncy's task is politically sensitive, such as the ırking of national school examinations, the edu-ion minister cannot avoid blame if there are ma- errors in marking examinations.

The Blair government has continued That-erite attempts to make the civil service more busi-sslike, in hopes it can thereby provide more pub- services without raising taxes. In addition, it has ade political advisers important in formulating olicy, leading to criticisms from the independent fficial Committee on Standards in Public Life. ome civil servants fear that efforts to "modernize" ıe civil service are a mask for appointing officials ho are pliable in the hands of ministers.

After years in office, Tony Blair has attacked the onsequences of government by political advisers nd spin doctors. In a leaked memo to Cabinet inisters he has criticized them for "too often" ushing out policies "in ignorance of the risks," thus naking the government look bad.[18]

The Role of Parliament

The principal division in Parliament is between the party with a majority of seats in the House of Commons and the opposition party. The government gets its way because its members are the leading politicians in the party with a majority in the Commons. If a bill or a motion is identified as a vote of confidence in the government, the government will fall if it is defeated. MPs in the majority party almost invariably vote as the party leadership instructs, because only by voting as a bloc can their party maintain control of government. The instrument by which party discipline is imposed is known as a *whip*. This word actually has a double political meaning. It refers, on the one hand, to a member of parliament whose responsibility is to enforce party discipline. Each party will have a number of such offices, with the top officer known as the chief whip. On the other hand, the word "whip" also refers to a document issued by these party officials, on a weekly basis, which tells the party members how to vote on upcoming bills and how important each of these bills is. In nine out of ten votes in the Commons, voting is 100 percent along party lines. If a handful of MPs votes against the party whip or abstains, this is headlined as a rebellion. The government's state of mind is summed up in the words of a Labour Cabinet minister who declared, "It's carrying democracy too far if you don't know the result of the vote before the meeting."[19]

Whitehall departments draft bills presented to Parliament. Only a very small percentage of amendments to legislation are carried without government backing. Moreover, the government rather than Parliament sets the budget for government programmes. The weakness of the British House of Commons stands in marked contrast to the U.S. Congress, where each house controls its own proceedings independent of the White House and can be at loggerheads when different parties control each branch. An American president may ask Congress to enact a bill but cannot compel a favorable vote.

The first function of the Commons is to weigh political reputations. MPs continually assess their colleagues as ministers and potential ministers. A minister may win a formal vote of confidence but lose status if his or her arguments are demolished in debate.

Secondly, MPs in the governing party have private access to government ministers. The whip is expected to listen to the views of dissatisfied backbench MPs and to convey their concerns to ministers. In the corridors, dining rooms, and committees of the Commons, backbenchers can tell ministers what they think is wrong with government policy. However, MPs are unwilling to vote against their party if it threatens to bring down the

government. The opposition cannot expect to alter major government decisions because it lacks a majority of votes in the Commons. The opposition accepts the frustrations going with its minority status for the life of a Parliament, because it hopes to win a majority at the next election.

Publicizing issues is a third function of Parliament. Debates in the House of Commons are losing importance; only one-sixth of backbenchers regularly listen to their colleagues' speeches in the House of Commons. An MP has much more access to the mass media than an ordinary citizen. Television has access to Parliament, but news programs usually show only sound bites.

Talking about legislation is a fourth function of the House of Commons. Backbench MPs can demand that the government do something about an issue. The procedures of the Commons force a minister to explain and defend a bill in detail. In theory a government bill can be substantially amended or even withdrawn as a consequence of criticism in Parliament—but such incidents are rare. Laws are described as acts of Parliament, but it would be more accurate if they were stamped "Made in Whitehall."

Fifth, MPs scrutinize how Whitehall departments administer public policies. An MP may write to a minister, questioning a departmental decision called to his or her attention by a constituent or pressure group. MPs can request the parliamentary commissioner for administration (also known as the ombudsman, after the Scandinavian prototype) to investigate complaints about maladministration. Committees scrutinize administration and policy, interviewing civil servants and ministers. However, as a committee moves from discussing details to questions of political principle, it raises the question of confidence in the government. Party loyalty usually guarantees that the government will not lose a committee vote.

A newly elected MP contemplating his or her role as one among 646 members of the House of Commons is faced with many alternatives. An MP may decide to be a party loyalist, voting as the leadership decides, without participating in deliberations about policy. The MP who wishes more attention can make a mark by brilliance in debate, by acting as an acknowledged representative of a pressure group, or in a nonpartisan way—for example, as a wit. An MP is expected to speak for constituency interests, but constituents accept that their MP will not vote against party policy if it is in conflict with local interests. The only role that an MP rarely undertakes is that of lawmaker.

Among modern Parliaments, the House of Lords is unique because none of its members (who are referred to as "peers") are elected. More than one-eighth of the members of this second chamber have inherited a peerage from an ancestor who may have received it several centuries ago. Others serve in the House of Lords because they are senior judges or bishops of the Church of England. But today a large majority of the members of the House of Lords are life peers who have been given a title later in life for achievement in one or another public sphere, including membership in the House of Commons. In 1999 the Labour government abolished the right of all but 92 hereditary peers to sit in the House of Lords. No party has a majority there. Among its 704 members, one-third are Conservative, one-third are Labour, 69 Liberal Democrats, and the remainder divide into a number of nonparty categories.

The government often introduces relatively noncontroversial legislation in the Lords if it deals with technical matters, and it uses the Lords as a revising chamber to amend bills. In addition, the Lords can discuss public issues on matters of partisan controversy or on such cross-party topics as pornography or the future of hill farming. The Lords cannot veto legislation, but it can and does amend or delay the passage of some government bills. The limited influence of both houses of Parliament encourages proposals for reform. Backbench MPs perennially demand changes to make their jobs more interesting and to give them more influence. Labour MPs, especially women elected since 1997, have criticized procedures inherited from past centuries as inappropriate for the new millennium. However, the power to make changes rests with the government rather than the House of Commons. Whatever criticisms MPs made of Parliament while in opposition, once in Cabinet party leaders have an interest in existing arrangements that greatly

the power of Parliament to influence or stop ministers do.

While all parties accept the need for some kind cond chamber to revise legislation, there is no ement about how it should be composed or t its powers should be. Many politicians argue an elected upper house, but the last thing the rnment of the day wants is a reform that gives upper chamber enough legitimacy to challenge ouse of Commons that invariably endorses gov- nent legislation.

vernment as a Network

ship of state has only one tiller—but more than pair of hands give it direction. In an era of big rnment, power does not rest in a single individ- or office; it is manifest in a network of relations hin and between a network of institutions. Poli- naking involves the interaction between prime nister, ministers, and leading civil servants, all of iom share in what has been described as the "vil- ge life" of Whitehall—and this English village is smaller and more intimate than the city full of liticians inside the Washington beltway.[20]

Within the Whitehall network, a core set of po- ical figures are especially important in determining olicies. The prime minister is the single most impor- nt person in government. Since there is no written onstitution, a determined prime minister can chal- nge the status quo and seek to turn government to esh ends. For example, Margaret Thatcher entered ffice with a large agenda of market-oriented policies hat she wished to promote, and stamina and deter- nination to push through policies against opposi- ion from Cabinet colleagues as well as civil servants.

To say that the prime minister makes the most mportant decisions and departmental ministers the econdary decisions begs the question: What is an important decision? Decisions in which the prime minister is not involved affecting such issues as so- cial security are more numerous, require more money, and affect more lives than most decisions taken in Downing Street. Scarcity of prime minister- ial time is a major limitation on the influence of the prime minister. In the words of one Downing Street official, "It's like skating over an enormous globe of thin ice. You have to keep moving fast all the time."[21]

The head of the Treasury, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, takes many decisions with broad politi- cal ramifications too about measures to promote economic growth, taxation, and public expenditure. Chancellor Gordon Brown is extremely influential on domestic policy because he heads the depart- ment deciding how much spending ministers can spend and he has a base of support among Labour MPs independent of the prime minister. Within each department, the permanent secretary, its highest-ranking civil servant, usually has much more knowledge of a department's problems than does a transitory Cabinet minister.

In his first term, Tony Blair emphasized making Whitehall a campaigning organization, trebling the number of policy advisers attached to Downing Street and departments, and raising the priority given to managing news and staging media events. By "loaning" his authority to staff to use in discus- sions with civil servants and ministers, he has in- creased the collective influence of Downing Street within government. But the use of the prime minis- ter's name by powerful advisers has also created ad- verse media publicity due to a "war of leaks" be- tween political advisers.

In his second term, Blair gave priority to sup- porting antiterrorist actions of President George W. Bush. His argument for going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq invoked high moral principles; the meth- ods that his spin doctors and political advisers used to make the case produced two public inquiries into the use and abuse of military intelligence. The sec- ond, chaired by a former head of the civil service, concluded of Blair's method of government: "We are concerned that the informality and circum- scribed character of the government's procedures which we saw in the context of policy-making to- wards Iraq risks reducing the scope for informed collective political judgment."[22]

POLITICAL CULTURE AND LEGITIMACY

Politics is about the articulation of conflicting be- liefs about who should govern and what govern- ment should do. There are three different political justifications of who should be involved when im- portant political decisions are made.

The *trusteeship theory of government* assumes that leaders should take the initiative in deciding what is in the collective public interest. It is summed up in the epigram, "The government's job is to govern." Tony Blair can argue that as head of the majority party in parliament he has the legiti- mate right to decide what government does. The trusteeship doctrine is always popular with the party in office because it provides a justification for doing whatever the government wishes. The opposi- tion party rejects this theory because it lacks the power of government.

The *interest group theory of government* sees government's role as balancing the demands of competing groups and classes in society. From this perspective, parties and pressure groups advocating group or class interests are more authoritative than individual voters.[23] Traditional Conservatives em- phasized harmony between different classes in soci- ety, each with its own responsibilities and rewards. The socialist vision of group politics emphasized class divisions between trade unions and business, each seeking to use government to advance their in- terests, with the former having more votes and the latter more financial capital. With changes in British society, party leaders have distanced themselves from organized interests as they realize that votes are cast by individuals rather than business firms or trade unions.

The *individualist theory* of representation em- phasizes that political parties should represent peo- ple rather than organized group interests. In the 1980s Margaret Thatcher was an outspoken advo- cate of economic individualism, regarding each per- son as responsible for his or her achievement of welfare through the marketplace. She even went so far as to declare, "There is no such thing as society." Liberal Democrats put more emphasis on individ- ual freedom from collective constraints. Tony Blair has similarly accepted offering individuals more choice in public services. However, individuals are rarely offered a referendum allowing them to vote directly on what government does—and holding a referendum and determining the question put is in the hands of the government of the day. The powers of British government are limited by cultural norms concerning what government should and should not do. In the words of one High Court judge: "In the constitution of this country, there are no guar- anteed or absolute rights. The safeguard of British liberty is in the good sense of the people and in the system of representative and responsible govern- ment which has been evolved."[24]

However authority is justified, the great major- ity of English people find it inconceivable that there should be a fundamental change in the way the country is governed. Even Nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales do not reject parliamentary in- stitutions; what they want is an independent Parlia- ment for Scotland and for Wales.

The unresponsiveness of government to Parlia- ment has encouraged popular protest—but the le- gitimacy of government means that protest is usu- ally kept within lawful bounds. For example, the latest World Values Survey in Britain found that nearly everyone said they had or might sign a peti- tion and half said they had or might participate in a lawful demonstration, but only one-sixth said they had or might consider an illegal occupation of a building or factor.

The legitimacy of government is evidenced by the readiness of the English people to comply with basic political laws. Law enforcement does not require large numbers of armed police. In proportion to its popu- lation, England's police force is smaller than that of America, Germany, or France. The crimes that occur in England are antisocial actions such as street violence, rather than political crimes against the state, such as assassinations. The one notable exception is Northern Ireland, where many major crimes, from murder to bank robbery, are carried out with the political objec- tive of overturning an elected government.

The legitimacy accorded to the government is not the result of economic calculations about whether the British form of parliamentary democracy "pays" best, as rational choice theories propound. During the depression of the 1930s, British Commu- nist and Fascist parties received only derisory votes, while their support was great in Germany and Italy. Likewise, inflation and unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s failed to stimulate extremist politics.

The symbols of a common past, such as the monarchy, are sometimes cited as major determi- nants of legitimacy. But surveys of public opinion

w that the Queen has little political significance; popularity derives from the fact that she is non-itical. The popularity of a monarch is a conse-ence, not a cause, of political legitimacy. In rthern Ireland, where the minority denies the le-imacy of British government, the Queen is a sym-l of divisions between British Unionists and Irish publicans who reject the Crown.

Habit and tradition appear to be the chief ex-anations for the persisting legitimacy of authority. survey asking people why they support the gov-nment found that the most popular reason was t's the best form of government we know." Au-ority is not perfect or even trouble free: It is val-ed on the basis of experience. Winston Churchill elivered a very English justification of the country's emocracy when he told the House of Commons: No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all vise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the vorst form of government, except all those other orms that have been tried from time to time."[25]

Abuses of Power

The government of the day can only claim its authority is legitimate if it acts within the rule of law. In constitutional theory, Parliament can hold ministers accountable for abuses of power by the government. In practice, Parliament is an ineffective check on executive power, because the executive consists of the leaders of the majority party in Parliament. When a member of the government is under attack, the tendency of MPs in the governing party is to close ranks in defense of a colleague. The power of the government to get away with mistakes is supported by official secrecy. The Whitehall view is that information is a scarce commodity that should not be given out freely; publicity about policymaking is not in the "public (sic)" interest, for it can make government appear uncertain or divided about what should be done. Politicians often hide their deliberations behind the veil of collective Cabinet responsibility. The Whitehall view is restrictive: "The need to know still dominates the right to know."[26] Secrecy remains strong because it serves the interests of the most important people in government, Cabinet ministers and civil servants. The Public Information Act of 2005 reduced the executive's power to keep secret the exchange of views within the Whitehall network, but whitehall remains far behind the open government practices of Washington.

Both ministers and senior civil servants are prepared to mislead parliament and the public. William Waldegrave, the Conservative minister nominally responsible for open government, told a Commons select committee in 1994 that "in exceptional cases it is necessary to say something that is untrue in the House of Commons."

When accused in court of telling a lie about the British government's efforts to suppress an embarrassing memoir by anex-intelligence officer, the then head of the civil service and secretary to the Cabinet, Robert Armstrong, described the government's statements as "a misleading impression, not a lie. It was

Box 5.4 Conflicting Loyalties Among Civil Servants

The inability of Parliament to hold the government of the day accountable for palpable misdeeds disturbs senior civil servants who know what is going on and risk becoming accessories before the fact if they assist ministers in producing statements that mislead Parliament. Some even challenge the doctrine that a civil servant must support a minister, whatever the official's personal opinion. In one well-publicized case, a Ministry of Defence official, Clive Ponting, leaked to the House of Commons evidence that questioned the accuracy of government statements about the conduct of the Falklands War. He was indicted and tried for violating the Official Secrets Act. The judge asked the jury to think about the issue this way: "Can it then be in the interests of the state to go against the policy of the government of the day?" The jury concluded that it could be; Ponting was acquitted. However, most senior civil servants are unwilling to become whistle-blowers challenging actions of ministers, thereby jeopardizing their own careers.

*Graham Wilson and Anthony Barker, "Whitehall's Disobedient Servants? Senior Officials' Potential Resistance to Ministers in British Government Departments," *British Journal of Political Science* 27, No. 2 (1997): 223–46.

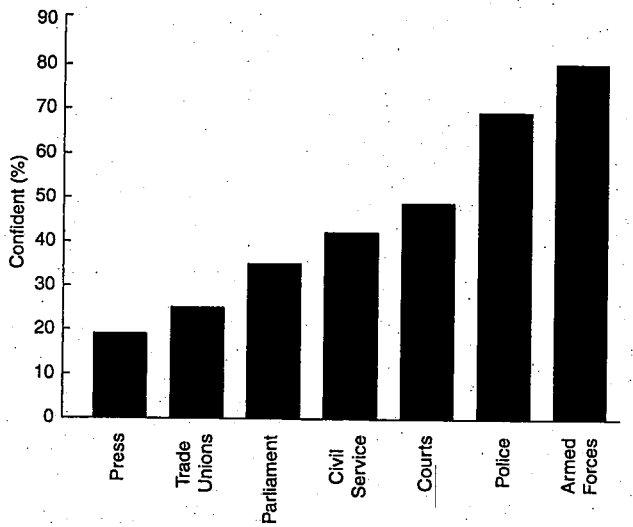
being economical with the truth." Abuses of executive power have created tensions for civil servants who believe that their job is not only to serve the popularly elected government of the day but also to prevent abuse of the powers of governance. This has led civil servants at times to leak official documents with the intention of preventing government from carrying out a policy that the leaker believes to be unethical or inadvisable (Box 5.4).

Citizens have reacted to changing standards of political behaviour by distrusting their elected representatives. Only a third of Britons report that they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in Parliament. The press and trade unions, institutions that theories of civil society describe as important in holding government accountable, are trusted by even fewer people. The most trusted public institutions today are those that maintain authority, led by the armed forces and the police (Figure 5.3).

The decline of ministerial accountability to parliament has encouraged the courts to become more active in making rulings against the elected government of the day. Judges today are ready to find grounds to nullify the way that ministers exercise their powers when they regard actions as going beyond what is authorized in an Act of Parliament. Britain's membership in the European Union and adherence to the European Convention of Human Rights offers additional grounds for nullifying actions by ministers. Such decisions are embarrassing for the government of the day while not involving a frontal challenge to the authority of an Act of Parliament.

Terrorist activities challenge conventional norms of the uses and abuses of power, and successive British governments have faced such challenges since the civil rights demonstrations of 1968–1969 were superseded by violent and murderous actions by illegal Protestant and Catholic groups, including the Irish Republican Army, which regards its use of violence as a legitimate means of liberating Northern Ireland from British rule. Their violence has

FIGURE 5.3 Trust in Political Institutions



Source: Ronald Inglehart, et al., World Values Survey and European Values Survey, 1999–2001. Ann Arbor: Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research. Interviews conducted in Great Britain, October–November 1999 (N = 1000).

n met by Crown forces "bending" the law. On ody Sunday, 1971, British soldiers shot and ed Irish protesters peacefully demonstrating in ıdonderry. In England police have fabricated evi- ıce or extracted confessions from some suspected IRA terrorist violence, with the result that convic- ns have sometimes been voided subsequently by ırts on appeal.

ulture as a Constraint on Policy

ıglish people simultaneously value their form of vernment while making many specific criticisms ıout how it works. In the phrase of the English riter E. M. Forster, they give "two cheers for demo- acy." The values of the political culture impose mitations on the scope of public policy. Cultural orms about freedom of speech prevent political ensorship. In the "swinging 1960s," laws against omosexual relations were repealed and abortion egalized, and AIDS has been treated as a disease ather than as a cause of shame or moralizing. Cul- ural expectations also influence what politicians nust do. Regardless of party preference, the great najority of British people believe that government ought to provide education, health services, and so- cial security. Today, the most significant limits on the scope of public policy are practical and politi- cal. Public expenditure on popular policies such as the health service is limited by the extent to which the economy grows and the reluctance of the Labour or Conservative governments to raise more money for health care by increasing taxes or by im- posing limited charges of some sort for the use of health services.

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Socialization influences the political division of la- bor. At an early age children learn about social dif- ferences relevant to politics; a small proportion be- come interested in politics, a larger proportion become apathetic, and the median person takes some but not that much interest in politics. The pre- dispositions that a young person forms by the time she or he is old enough to vote are modified by adult experience. A middle-aged English person has voted in five or six general elections and is likely to evaluate subsequent political events in the light of what has already been learned.

Family and Gender

The family's influence comes first chronologically; political attitudes learned within the family be- come intertwined with primary family loyalties. A child may not know what the Labour or Conserva- tive party stands for, but if it is the party of Mom and Dad this can be enough to create identification with a party.

The influence of family on voting is limited; 36 percent do not know how one or both of their parents usually voted, or their parents voted for opposing par- ties. Among those who report knowing which party both parents supported, just over half vote as their parents have done. In the electorate as a whole, only 35 percent say that they know how both parents voted and that they voted for the same party.[27] Children also acquire a religious identification from their parents but except in Northern Ireland, religion no longer has a substantial influence on voting, and there are no groups comparable to the American religious right.

Children learn different social roles according to gender, yet as adult citizens men and women have the same legal right to vote and participate in politics. Bipartisan interest in appealing to women is illustrated by the 1976 Sex Discrimination Act, prohibiting discrimination in employment. It was enacted by a Labour government following a report by a Conservative government.

Today all political parties seek the votes of women, since women are a majority of the elec- torate. However, parties do not want to offend men, for even though they are a minority, they constitute 48 percent of the electorate. Whether politicians are talking about economic, social, or international is- sues, they usually stress common concerns of both men and women. At each general election, women divide between parties in much the same way as men (Table 5.3).

Men and women tend to have similar political attitudes. On most political issues women divide into two contrasting groups, and the same is true of men. For example, more than half of women and half of men favor capital punishment and a substan- tial minority in each group oppose it. Even on the is-

TABLE 5.3 Social Differences and Voting (percentage of voters in 2005)

	Labour	Conservative	Liberal/Democratic	Other
Gender				
Women	37	33	23	7
Men	36	33	23	9
Difference	1	0	0	2
Age				
18–34	37	28	27	8
35–54	41	29	22	8
55+	32	41	20	8
Difference, young/old	5	13	7	1
Class				
Middle	33	36	24	7
Working	41	29	20	9
Difference, top/bottom	8	7	4	2

Source: YouGov post-election online panel survey of 3,749 electors, weighted to represent the British population, and published in the *Daily Telegraph*, London, 9 May 2005.

sue of sex and nudity in the media, which registers a substantial difference of 20 percentage points, both women and men differ among themselves. Gender differences are less important than class, age, or edu- cation as an influence on party loyalties.

Gender differences do, however, lead to differ- ences in political participation. Even though women constitute more than half the electorate, men are almost twice as likely as women to be local government councillors. Women constitute almost half the employees in the civil service, but they are heavily concentrated at lower-level clerical jobs; women hold about 10 percent of the top appoint- ments in the civil service. A record number of women candidates stood for the Commons in 2001 but male candidates still outnumbered women by a margin of more than four to one. A total of 125 women were elected to the House of Commons, but it remains more than four-fifths male.[28]

Education

Even though individuals have different IQs, each vote counts equally in the ballot box. Yet education has traditionally assumed inequality. The majority of the population was once considered fit for only a minimum of education; in today's electorate the oldest voters left school at the age of 14 and the me- dian voter by the age of 17. The highly educated are a small fraction of the population; they expect and are expected to play a leading role in politics.

Within the state system, the great majority of pupils attend comprehensive secondary schools, which recruit students of all levels of ability. Within the school, pupils are often divided into an acade- mic stream being taught at a more advanced level than the average American high school education, and many who leave with only a basic education. Less than 6 percent of young persons attend "public" schools, that is, fee-paying schools which are private. Whereas half a century ago England had few univer- sities, today almost one-half of young persons are in post-secondary institutions, many of which lack the facilities of established research universities.

The stratification of English education used to imply that the more education a person had, the more likely a person was to be Conservative. This is

longer the case. People with a university degree its equivalent are currently less likely to vote nservative than people with a minimum of edu- on. The minority who are most educated now ide their vote between all three big parties, with Liberal Democrats doing relatively well.

Education is strongly related to active participa- n in politics. The more education a person has, greater the possibility of climbing the political lder. People with a minimum of education con- tute more than half the electorate but less than lf of all local government councillors and less an 2 percent of all MPs. Whereas at one time aduates of Eton, Harrow, and other leading public hools predominated in Cabinet, today less than a ird of all MPs have attended public schools.

The relatively small percentage of university aduates in the country constitutes 70 percent of l MPs. The expansion of universities has broken ie dominance of Oxford and Cambridge; barely ne-third of graduate MPs went to these two tradi- onal institutions. The concentration of graduates om many different British universities in top jobs s a sign of a meritocracy, in which governors quali- ied by education replace an aristocracy based on birth and family. Yet leading posts can still go to hose who have a common touch, as indicated by ittendance at a state secondary school. John Major ittended state secondary schools and did not go to university. Whereas the Labour prime minister Tony Blair went to Scotland's major fee-paying public school, the three Conservative leaders he defeated electorally all went to state schools.

Class

The concept of *class* can refer to occupational status or serve as a shorthand term for income, education, and prestige. Occupation is the most commonly used indicator of class in England. Manual workers are usually described as the working class and nonmanual workers as the middle class.

Historically, party competition has been interpreted in class terms; the Conservative Party has been described as a middle-class party, and Labour as a working-class party. One reason why class appears relatively important in England is the absence of big divisions on race, religion, or language, as in the United States, Canada, or Northern Ireland. Today, the upper class no longer commands deference and celebrities owing their prominence to television and achievements in sports, rock music, or making money are better known than Dukes or Earls. Tony Blair is comfortable mixing with rock musicians and with the new rich from the entertainment industry.

Most Britons have a mixture of middle-class and working-class attributes. The mixed class group has been increasing, as changes in the economy have led to a reduction in manual jobs and an increase in middle-class jobs. Many occupations such as computer technicians and office workers now have an indeterminate status and voting behavior. The relationship between class and party has become limited.

No party now wins as much as half the vote of middle-class electors, and Labour wins just two-fifths the vote of manual workers (Table 5.3). Due to the cross-class appeal of parties, only two-fifths of voters were middle-class Conservatives or working-class Labour voters. The Liberal Democrats and other smaller parties draw a fifth or more of the vote in every class. Less than one in seven voters conforms to the stereotype of a middle-class person (nonmanual occupation, above-average education, homeowner, no trade union membership, and subjective identification with the middle class), or its counterpart working-class stereotype.

Socioeconomic experiences other than occupation also influence voting. At each level of the class structure, people who belong to trade unions are more likely to vote Labour than Conservative. Housing creates neighborhoods with political relevance. About one-sixth of voters live in local government-owned houses clustered together on a housing estate specifically identified as such. Labour wins more than half of the vote of local council tenants, while, regardless of class, Conservatives do relatively well among homeowners.

Mass Media

The mass media tends to reenforce differences arising from class and education. The British press is sharply divided into a few quality papers, such as *The Times, The Guardian, Daily Telegraph, The Independent* and *The Financial Times,* that carry news and comment at an intellectual level higher than American newspapers, and mass circulation tabloids that concentrate on trivia and trash such as *The Sun,* Britain's biggest selling newspaper. Most papers tend to lean toward one party but not uncritically so. When the Conservatives became unpopular with the electorate in the 1990s, some newspapers that were previously pro-Conservative sought to follow their voters in admiring Tony Blair. He actively courted the support of right-wing newspapers but following his fall in popular approval during the Iraq War former press allies became vocal critics.

Historically, radio and television were a monopoly of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Seeking to educate and to elevate, the BBC was also very respectful of all forms of authority, including government. The introduction of commercial television in the 1950s and commercial radio in the following decade has made all broadcasting channels populist in competing for audiences. There are now five channels plus cable TV and a great variety of radio stations. The law forbids selling advertising to politicians, parties, or political causes.

Current affairs programs often seek audiences by exposing alleged failings of government, and TV personalities make their names by the tough cross-examination of politicians of all parties. However, the government of the day controls the renewal of broadcasting licenses and, in the case of the BBC, the annual fee of about $200 that every viewer must pay for noncommercial BBC programs. Broadcasters try to avoid favoring one party, recognizing that over a period of years control of government and decisions about licenses and fees are likely to change hands between parties. Public opinion polls show that television is the primary source of political news and it is much more trusted than the press. Since political socialization is a lifetime learning process, the loyalties of voters are shaped by an accumulation of influences. In the course of a lifetime, an individual develops values expressing what government ought to do. These political values are independent of family and socioeconomic interests. Economic values concerned with trade unions, the welfare state, business, and privatization influence choices between parties. "New" noneconomic values such as protecting the environment and morality account for little variation in the vote, because parties usually lack a distinctive and well-established position.

How the government handles current issues affects the economy and public expenditure, but the judgments that people make about government performance reflect their preexisting values, and this is particularly true of popular evaluations of party and leader images. The influence of such current issues and ephemeral personalities is often overrated, for those who focus on today's events forget that voters have had a lifetime to learn which party they prefer.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND RECRUITMENT

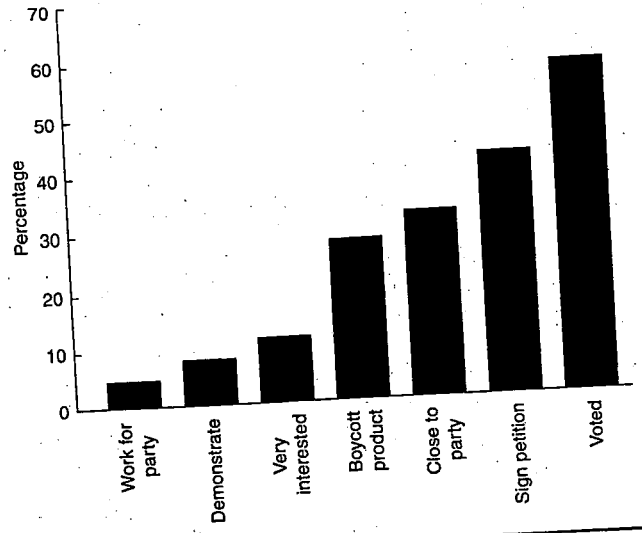
Participation

If political participation is defined as paying taxes and drawing benefits from public programs, then everyone is involved, for public policies provide benefits at every stage of life, from maternity allowance to mothers through education, employment and unemployment benefits, health care, and pensions in old age.

An election is the one opportunity people have to influence government directly. Every citizen aged 18 or over is eligible to vote. Local government officials register voters, and the list is revised annually, ensuring that nearly everyone eligible to vote is actually registered. Turnout at general elections has averaged 77 percent since 1950. However, in the 2001 election it fell to 59.4 percent. The Labour government responded by experimenting with voting by post, sending ballots to all persons whose names are on the electoral register. When this was tried in the 2004 European Parliament election, three-fifths of those sent a postal ballot did not send it back and there were well publicized cases of fraud. In 2005 turnout was 61.3 percent.

The wider the definition of political participation, the greater the number who can be said to be at least indirectly or intermittently involved in politics (Figure 5.4). Two-fifths have signed a petition on a public issue; a third say that they feel close to a political party. Political values can also be reflected in refusing to buy a product: one-quarter say that

FIGURE 5.4 Participation in Politics



Source: Roger Jowell and the Central Coordinating Team, European Social Survey 2002/03. London: Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University. Interviews conducted in the United Kingdom, September 24, 2002 to February 4, 2003 (N = 1908).

politics has affected their shopping by leading them to boycott a product. The most politically involved are a tenth or less of the electorate, those who say they are very interested in politics, took part in a demonstration, or are active in a party or pressure group. If holding or contesting public office is the measure of political participation, the proportion is less than 1 percent of the electorate.

Although political activists are a minority of the electorate, their actions are the focus of much political news. Because of the concentration of the media and politics, a London-based protest with a few thousand people can get press coverage, even though those participating are only one-one-hundredth of 1 percent of the electorate.

Political Recruitment

The most important political roles in Britain are those of Cabinet minister, higher civil servant, and intermittent public person, analogous to informal advisers to an American president. Each group has its own recruitment pattern. To become a Cabinet minister, an individual must first be elected to Parliament and spend years attracting positive attention there. Individuals enter the civil service shortly after leaving university by passing a highly competitive entrance examination; promotion is based on achievement and approval by seniors. Intermittent public persons gain access to ministers and civil servants because of their expertise or position in organizations outside politics, or because they are personally trusted by leading politicians.

In all political roles, starting early on a political career is usually a precondition of success, because experience is positively valued. But aspiring Cabinet ministers are not expected to begin in local politics and work their way gradually to the top at Westminster. Instead, at an early age an individual becomes a "cadet" recruit to a junior position such as a parliamentary assistant to an MP or a "gofer" for a Cabinet minister. This can lead to a central political role after gaining skill and seniority.

Geography is a second major influence on recruitment. Ministers, higher civil servants, and other public persons spend their working lives in London. A change at Downing Street does not bring in policymakers from a different part of the country, as can happen in the White House when a president from Texas succeeds a president from Arkansas. Since London is atypical of the cities and towns in which most British people live, there is a gap between the everyday lives of policymakers and the majority on whose behalf they act.

Cabinet Ministers

For a person ambitious to be a Cabinet minister, becoming an MP is the necessary first step. Nomination for a winnable or safe seat in the House of Commons is in the hands of local party selection committees. A candidate does not have to be resident in the constituency in which he or she is nominated. Hence, it is possible for a young person to go straight from university to a job in the House of Commons or party headquarters, and then look around the country for a nomination for a winnable seat, a process that takes years. Once selected for a constituency in which his or her party has a big majority, the MP can then expect to be re-elected routinely for a decade or more.

After entering the House of Commons, an MP seeks to be noticed. Some ways of doing so—for example, grabbing headlines by questioning the wisdom of the party leadership—make it difficult to gain promotion to ministerial rank. Other approaches assist promotion, such as successfully attacking opposition leaders in debate or being well informed about a politically important topic. So too does showing loyalty to the party leader.

Only Members of Parliament can become Cabinet ministers. Yet experience in the Commons does not prepare an individual for the work of a minister. An MP's chief concerns are dealing with people and talking about what government ought to do. A minister must also be able to handle paperwork, relate political generalities to specific technical problems facing a ministry, and make hard decisions when no alternative is popular.

The restriction of ministerial appointments to experienced MPs prevents a nationwide canvass for appointees. A prime minister must distribute about 100 jobs among approximately 200 MPs in the governing party who have had experience in Parliament and not ruled themselves out of consideration for office on grounds of parliamentary inexperience, old age, political extremism, personal unreliability, or lack of interest in office. An MP has a better than even chance of a junior ministerial appointment if he or she serves three terms in Parliament. Exceptionally, Tony Blair has given peerages and ministerial posts to personal supporters who thus depend on loyalty to him rather than to their standing with their constituency electorate and Labour Party.

A minister learns on the job. Usually, an MP is first given a junior post as an Under Secretary and then promoted to Minister of State before becoming a full member of the Cabinet. In the process, an individual is usually shuffled from one department to another, having to learn new subject matter with each shift of departments. The average minister can expect to stay in a particular job for about two years, and never knows when the accidents of politics—a death or an unexpected resignation—will lead to a transfer to another department. The rate of ministerial turnover in Britain is one of the highest in Europe. The minister who gets a new job as the result of a reshuffle usually arrives at a department with no previous experience of its problems. It takes time to learn how to deal with the particular problems of a department. Anthony Crosland, an able Labour minister, reckoned: "It takes you six months to get your head properly above water, a year to get the general drift of most of the field, and two years really to master the whole of a department."[29] A minister's lack of substantial expertise in his or her department has produced criticism of the recruitment system.

Higher Civil Servants

Whereas MPs come and go from ministerial office with great frequency, civil servants have a job in Whitehall for the whole of their working lives. Higher civil servants are recruited without specific

ssional qualifications or training. They are ıt to be the "best and the brightest"—a require- . that has traditionally meant getting a presti- ; degree in history, literature, or languages. The ɔn Committee on the Civil Service recom- ded that recruits should have "relevant" spe- ɜt knowledge, but members could not decide t kind of knowledge was relevant to the work of ɜrnment.[30] The Civil Service Commission tests lidates for ability to summarize lengthy prose ɛrs, to resolve a problem by fitting specific facts ɜeneral regulations, to draw inferences from a ple table of social statistics, and to perform well roup discussions of problems of government.

Because bright civil service entrants lack spe- ized skills and need decades to reach the highest ıts, role socialization into Whitehall by senior l servants is especially important. The process kes for continuity, since the head of the civil ser- e usually starts there as a young official under a ad who had himself entered the civil service ıny decades before.

In the course of a career, civil servants become ecialists in the difficult task of managing political inisters and government business. As the televi- ɔn series, *Yes, Minister* shows, they are adept at say- g "yes" to a Cabinet minister when they mean ɔerhaps" and saying "up to a point" when they re- ly mean "no." Increasingly, ministers have tended ɔ discourage civil service advisers from pointing ut obstacles to what the government wants to do; ıey are looking for "can do" advisers from outside ıe civil service as well as inside. The Blair govern- ıent has greatly expanded the appointment of two ypes of political advisers. The largest number are ıptly called political advisers, for their job is to mo- ɔilize political support for the government and for he Cabinet minister to whom they are assigned. Because their background is in party politics and the media, they bring skills that civil servants often lack. But because they have no prior experience of the civil service, they are often unaware of its con- ventions and legal obligations. The methods used by political appointees to put a desirable spin on what the government is doing can backfire and cause public controversy.

Another category of political advisers are experts with specialist knowledge about such problems as environmental pollution or experimental medical procedures such as cloning. While they may be inexperienced in the ways of Whitehall, they can contribute expertise that is often lacking in government departments, and they are often long-time supporters of the governing party too.

Most leaders of institutions such as the universities, banks, churches, and trade unions do not think of themselves as politicians and have not stood for public office. They are principally concerned with their own organization. But when government actions impinge on their work, they become involved in politics, offering ministers advice and sometimes criticism. They are thus intermittent public persons.

Selective Recruitment

Nothing could be more selective than a parliamentary election that results in one person becoming prime minister of a country. Yet nothing is more representative, because an election is the one occasion when every adult can participate in politics with equal effect. Traditionally, leaders in English society had high social status and wealth before gaining political office. Today, England has experienced the rise of the full-time professional politician. Aristocrats, business people, or trade union leaders can no longer expect to translate their high standing in other fields into an important political position. As careers become more specialized, a professional politician gains increased expertise in his or her own sphere but becomes increasingly remote from other spheres.

The greater the scope of activities defined as political, the greater the number of people actively involved in government. Government influence has forced company directors, television executives, and university heads to become involved in politics and public policy. Leadership in organizations outside Whitehall gives such individuals freedom to act independently of government, but the interdependence of public and private institutions, whether profitmaking or nonprofit, is now so great that sooner or later they meet in discussions about what constitutes the public interest.

ORGANIZING GROUP INTERESTS

Civil society—that is, institutions independent of government—has flourished in Britain for centuries. So confident are leaders of civil society of their position that they readily discuss public affairs with government officials in expectation that they can exert pressure on behalf of interests they represent.

The Confederation of British Industries is the chief representative organization of British business. As its name implies, its membership is large and varied. The biggest firms or industries usually make direct representations to ministries for trade and industry. The Institute of Directors represents the highest-paid individuals at the top of large and small businesses. Banks and financial institutions in the City of London have their own channels of representation through the Bank of England, the central Bank, and directly to the Treasury. The comparable organization of labour is the Trades Union Congress (TUC); its members are trade unions that sometimes represent workers with conflicting interests, such as between those in low paid jobs and highly paid workers. Most member unions of the TUC are affiliated with the Labour Party, and some leading trade unionists have been Communists or Maoists. None has ever been a supporter of the Conservative Party. The membership of trade unions has shifted from industrial workers in coal and railways to white-collar workers in the public sector, such as teachers and health service employees. Changes in employment patterns have eroded union membership; less than one-third of the British labour force now belongs to unions.

Unlike political parties, interest groups do not seek influence by contesting elections; they want to influence policies regardless of which party wins. Nonetheless, there do remain ties between interest groups and political parties. Trade unions have been institutionally part of the Labour Party since its foundation in 1900. The connection between business associations and the Conservatives is not formal, but its private enterprise philosophy is congenial to business. Notwithstanding common interests, both trade unions and business groups demonstrate their autonomy by criticizing partisan allies acting against the group's interest.

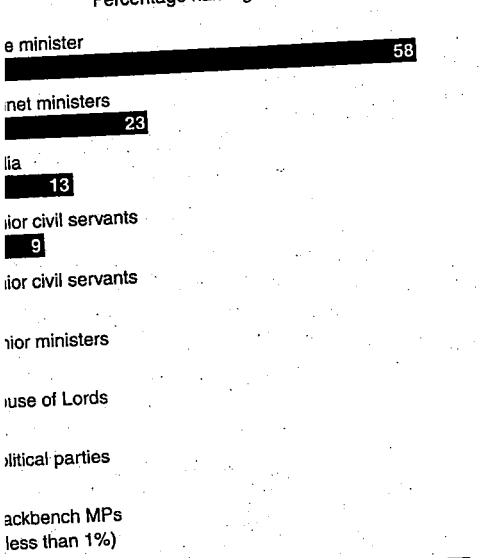
Party politicians seek to distance themselves from pressure groups. Conservatives appreciate that they can only win an election by winning the votes of ordinary citizens, including some trade union members. Tony Blair's success in distancing himself from unions by attracting big donations from multi-millionaires to finance his campaigning activities has led union leaders to attack his government as unsympathetic and threaten to withdraw cash contributions that are vital to meet the costs of the party's organizations. A few small unions have left the Labour Party.

To lobby successfully, interest groups must be able to identify those officials most important in making public policy. They concentrate attention on Whitehall. When pressure groups were asked to rank the most influential offices and institutions, they named the prime minister first by a long distance, Cabinet ministers second, the media third, and senior civil servants fourth (Figure 5.5). Less than 1 percent thought MPs outside the ministerial ranks were of primary importance. However, pressure groups do not expect to spend a lot of time in Downing Street. Most pressure group contacts are with divisions of government departments concerned with issues of little public concern but of immediate interest to the group. Groups that stir up confrontational media publicity make it difficult to gain a sympathetic private hearing from government departments.[31]

What Interest Groups Want

The scope of group demands varies enormously from the narrow concerns of an association for single parents to the encompassing economic policies of organizations such as the Confederation of British Industries and the Trades Union Congress. Groups also differ in the nature of their interests; some are concerned with material objectives, whereas others deal with single causes such as

URE 5.5 Pressure Group View of Who lds Most Power



urce: Survey of officials of business, labor, and campaign groups, as ported in Rob Baggott. "The Measurement of Change in Pressure roup Politics." *Talking Politics* 5, No. 1 (1992): 19.

violence in the media or race relations. Most interest groups pursue four goals:

1. Information about government policies and changes in policies
2. Sympathetic administration of established policies
3. Influence on policymaking
4. Symbolic status, such as being given the prefix "Royal" in their title

Whitehall departments are happy to consult with interest groups insofar as they can provide government officials with reciprocal benefits:

1. Cooperation in the administration of existing policies
2. Information about what is happening in their field
3. Evaluation of the consequences of policies under consideration
4. Assistance in implementing new policies

As long as the needs of Whitehall and interest groups are complementary, they can bargain as professionals sharing common concerns. Both sides seek a negotiated agreement. This avoids contested decisions being made by politicians who know less and care less about details than interest groups and civil servants involved in departmental administration.

Organizing for Political Action in Civil Society

The more committed members are to a pressure group's goals, the more confidently leaders can speak for a united membership. Consumers are more difficult to organize because they are interested only in goods and services, not in their relations with other customers; they are a category rather than a social group. Changes in the economy, in class structure, and in the life styles of generations have resulted in a decline in the "dense" social capital networks of villages. Individuals are now free to choose among a variety of networks. As a trade union leader has explained, "Our members are consumers too."[32]

Whitehall civil servants find it administratively convenient to deal with united interest groups that can implement agreements. But decades of attempts to plan the British economy demonstrate that business and union leaders cannot guarantee that their nominal followers will carry out bargains that leaders make. Group members who care about an issue may also disagree about what their leaders ought to do. Individuals usually have a multiplicity of identities that are often in conflict—for example, as workers desiring higher wages and as consumers wanting lower prices. The spread of mass consumption and decline in trade union membership has altered the balance between these priorities.

Even if a pressure group is internally united, its demands may be counteracted by opposing demands from other groups. This is normally the case in economic policy, where interests are well defined, well organized, and competing. Ministers can play off producers against consumers or business against unions to increase their own scope for choice and present their policies as "something for everybody" compromises.

The more a group's values are consistent with the cultural norms of society as a whole, the easier it is to equate its interest with the public interest. But in an open society such as England the claims of one group to speak for the public interest can easily be challenged by competing groups.

The centralization of authority in British government means that interest groups must accept as given the political values and priorities of the governing party. Trade unions expect to see their influence increase when a Labour government is in office and business groups have similar expectations when the Conservatives are in power. However, a prime minister seeking to broaden the government's base of support can try to build bridges with nominal opponents too. Tony Blair's Labour government has conspicuously solicited support from business leaders.

Insider pressure groups usually have values in harmony with every party. These groups are often noncontroversial, such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind. The primary concern of permanent insiders is to negotiate on details of administration and finance, and to press for the expansion of programs benefiting the group. They advance their case in quiet negotiations with Whitehall departments. Demands tend to be restricted to what is politically possible in the short term, given the values and commitments of the government of the day.[33]

Outsider pressure groups are unable to negotiate because their demands are inconsistent with the party in power. If they are inconsistent with the views of the opposition as well, then outsider groups are completely marginalized. Excluded from influence in Whitehall, outsider groups often campaign through the media. To television viewers and readers of serious newspapers, their demonstrations appear as evidence of their importance; in fact, they are often signs of a lack of political influence.

Complete outsiders are excluded from Whitehall, whatever the government of the day, because their demands go against prevailing cultural norms. For example, the Ministry of Defence does not consult pacifist groups, for there is nothing to negotiate when principles are mutually exclusive. Green pressure groups face the dilemma of campaigning for fundamental change in hopes that eventually Whitehall departments will turn their way, or working within the system in order to improve the environment to some extent but not as much as ecologists would like.

Keeping Pressure Groups at a Distance

For a generation after World War II ministers endorsed the corporatist philosophy of bringing together business, trade union, and political representatives in tripartite institutions to discuss such controversial issues as dealing with inflation and unemployment, and the restructuring of declining industries. Corporatist bargaining assumed a consensus on political priorities and goals and that each group's leaders could deliver the cooperation of those they claimed to represent. In practice, neither Labour nor Conservative governments were able to maintain a consensus. Nor were interest group leaders able to deliver their nominal followers. By 1979, unemployment and inflation were both out of control.

The Thatcher administration demonstrated that a government firmly committed to distinctive values can ignore group demands and lay down its own pattern of policy. It did so by dealing at arm's length with both trade unions and business groups. Instead of consulting and negotiating with interest groups, it practised state-distancing, keeping the government out of everyday marketplace activities such as wage bargaining and deciding prices and investment.

A state-distancing strategy concentrates on policies that government can carry out without the agreement of interest groups. It emphasizes the use of legislation to achieve goals, since no interest group can defy an act of Parliament. Laws have reduced the capacity of trade unions to frustrate government policies through industrial action. The sale of state-owned industries has removed government from immediate responsibility for the operation of major industries. The Labour government transferred to the Bank of England responsibility for monetary policy. At the same time it kept in the

asury's hands the right to set policy goals for ich the Bank is responsible.

State-distancing places less reliance on negotians with interest groups and more on the indedent authority of the Crown. Business and labor free to carry on as they like—but only within the ttern imposed by the government's policy and islation. Most unions and some business leaders not like being "outside the loop" when governent makes decisions. Education and health service essure groups like it even less, because they dend upon government appropriations to fund eir activities and cannot effectively turn to the arket as an alternative source of revenue.

While in opposition, Tony Blair often spoke bout the need to achieve "the reinvention of comunity,"[34] implying endorsement of corporatist initutions of cooperation between representatives of ifferent groups in society. However, since becomng prime minister, Blair has made sure that meetngs with groups are on terms laid down by Downng Street. When conflicts are apparent between roups, he avoids taking sides or getting involved in brokering agreements. He prefers to remain on the idelines, lecturing conflicting groups to cooperate n a vaguely defined public interest.

PARTY SYSTEM AND ELECTORAL CHOICE

British government is party government, for parties nominate parliamentary candidates and elect a leader who is prime minister or in charge of the Opposition. An election gives voters the choice of deciding between parties competing for the right to govern.

A Multiplicity of Choices

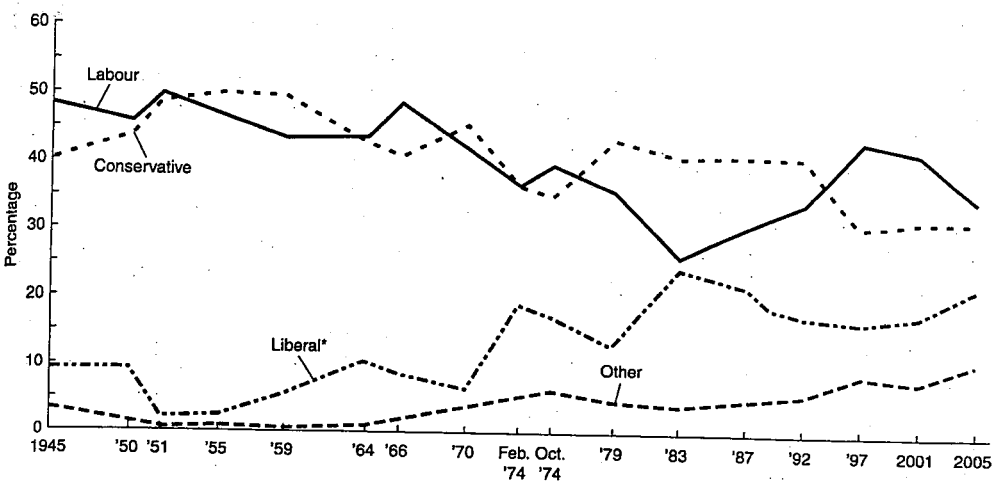
A general election must occur at least once every five years; within that period, the prime minister is free to call an election at any time. Although every prime minister tries to pick a date when victory is likely, this desire is often denied. An election offers a voter a very simple choice between several candidates wanting to represent one of the 646 constituencies of the House of Commons. The party leader's name is not on the ballot. Within each constituency, the winner is the candidate who is first past the post—that is, the candidate with the largest number of votes even though his or her plurality falls short of half the vote.

If only two parties contest a constituency, the candidate with the most votes will have an absolute majority. But since three or more candidates now contest each constituency a candidate with the most votes may still have less than half the total vote thanks to multiple competitors dividing the majority of the vote. In a hard-fought contest between four parties in Inverness in 1992, the Liberal Democrats won the seat with only 26 percent of the vote. In hundreds of seats, no candidate gets as much as half the vote and there is no provision for a runoff election, as in France, to produce a winner with majority support.

The winner nationally is the party that gains the most constituency seats. In 1951 and in February 1974, the party winning the most votes did not win the most seats and thus did not form the government. Today, the Labour Party can win an absolute majority in the House of Commons with a smaller share of the vote than the Conservative Party, because its electoral strength is concentrated rather than spread evenly through the country. Between 1945 and 1970 Britain had a two-party system, because the Conservative and Labour parties together took an average of 91 percent of the popular vote and in 1951 as much as 97 percent (Figure 5.6). The Liberals had difficulty fielding candidates to contest most seats and even more difficulty in winning votes. Support for the two largest parties was evenly balanced; Labour won four elections and the Conservatives won four.

In a two-party system the failure of one party tends to benefit its opponent. However, when both the largest parties are discredited, this gives other parties an opportunity to gain support. A *multiparty system* emerged in the elections of 1974. The Liberals won nearly one-fifth of the vote, and the Nationalists did well in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Together, the Conservative and Labour parties took only 75 percent of the vote. The 1980s saw the Labour Party vote plummet as the Alliance of Liberals and Social Democrats won almost a quarter of the popular vote. Although the Alliance broke up after the 1987 election, the fragmentation of voters and parties has continued since.

FIGURE 5.6 Votes Cast in General Elections Since 1945



*1945–1979 Liberal Party; 1983–1987 Alliance of Liberals and Social Democratic Party; since then known as Liberal Democrats.

1. In England, three parties—Labour, Conservatives, and Liberal Democrats—compete for votes and an anti-European Union United Kingdom Independence Party also fights a majority of seats. In Scotland and Wales there are normally four parties, for the Scottish National and Plaid Cymru (Welsh Nationalist) parties win seats too. In Northern Ireland, at least five parties normally contest seats.
2. The two largest parties do not monopolize the vote. Since 1974, the Conservative and Labour parties together have won an average of three-quarters of the vote and in the 2005 election gained just 67 percent of the vote.
3. The two largest parties nationally are often not the two front-running parties at the constituency level. In the 2005 election, the first and second parties in England were Labour and the Conservatives; in Scotland, Labour and the Liberal Democrats; in Wales, Labour and the Conservatives. The Conservatives won only one seat in Scotland and three in Wales. In Northern Ireland the Democratic Unionists and Sinn Fein, which is linked with the IRA, were the largest parties and all 18 seats were won by parties that did not contest seats in Great Britain.
4. More than half a dozen parties consistently win seats in the House of Commons. In 2005 "third" parties won 94 seats in the Commons.
5. Significant shifts in voting usually do not involve individuals moving between the Labour and Conservative parties but in and out of the ranks of abstainers or between the Liberal Democrats and the two largest parties.

To win a substantial number of seats in the House of Commons, a party must either gain at least one-third of the popular vote nationally or concentrate its votes in a limited number of

nstituencies. Nationalist parties in Scotland, ales, and Northern Ireland win seats because they ıncentrate their candidates in one part of the nited Kingdom. Although the Liberal Democrats in more than a fifth of the popular vote, because ıeir support is spread relatively evenly across the ɔuntry, their candidates are far more likely to fin- ih second or third rather than first.

Britain has a system of disproportional repre- entation that manufactures a House of Commons najority for one party with barely two-fifths of the ɔopular vote. The Liberal Democrats are specially lisadvantaged by the electoral system. In a totally ɔroportional system of representation, the party's vote share in 2005 would have given it 142 seats; it gained less than half this number. Even more im- portant, in a proportional representation system Labour's vote would have given it 227 seats, far short of a parliamentary majority. In a PR system, forming a government would require a coalition be- tween at least two parties, since none would have a majority of parliamentary seats. In the Scottish Par- liament, which is elected with proportional repre- sentation, coalition government is the norm.

Defenders of the British electoral system argue that proportionality is not a goal in itself. The *first-past-the-post system* is justified because it places re- sponsibility for government in the hands of a single party. This justification is used in the United States, where the president can be described as represent- ing all the people, even if he has won less than half the vote. By contrast, in countries such as Italy and Belgium proportional representation makes the choice of the parties forming a coalition govern- ment the outcome of intensive bargaining between parties that have received anything from one-third to 5 percent of the popular vote.

The strongest advocates of proportional repre- sentation are the Liberal Democrats, the party that would benefit most from a change in the electoral system. A change is also supported by those who believe that a coalition government is a better gov- ernment because it encourages broader interparty consensus.

Successive British governments have altered the electoral system for contests that do not affect the composition of the Westminster Parliament. North- ern Ireland elections have used proportional repre- sentation for more than three decades. The Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly are elected by sys- tems involving proportional representation and so are British Members of the European Parliament. The Mayor of Greater London is elected by the alter- native vote, ensuring that the winner is the first or second choice of more than half the voters.

Before winning a majority in 1997, Tony Blair encouraged talk about introducing proportional representation and proposals have been put for- ward by a government-appointed Commission. But this produced a countermobilization in defence of the current system from many MPs elected by first past the post and by trade unions who fear that a coalition government would be less sympathetic to its interests than a government consisting solely of Labour MPs. In Britain the decision about what kind of voting system to have is not determined by reasoning from abstract principles but by the inter- ests of the party in power.

Control of Party Organization

Political parties are often referred to as machines, but this description is very misleading, for parties cannot manufacture votes. Nor can a political party be commanded as an army can be commanded. Parties are like universities; they are inherently de- centralized, and people belong to them for a variety of motives.

Much of the work of party organizations is de- voted to keeping together three disparate parts of the party: those who vote for it; the small minority who are active in its constituency associations; and the party in Parliament. If the party has a majority in Parliament, the prime minister must make sure that the other parts of the party support his or her actions even if many party activists and MPs do not like what their leader is doing. The London head- quarters of each party provides more or less routine organizational and publicity services to con- stituency parties and to the party in Parliament. Each party has an annual conference to debate pol- icy and to vote on some policy resolutions. Con- stituency parties are nationally significant because each selects its parliamentary candidate. The *decen- tralization* of the selection process has allowed the choice of parliamentary candidates with a wide vari- ety of political outlooks and abilities. The Thatcher era encouraged an ideological litmus test on both the right and the left. Under Tony Blair the Labour Party has introduced more central direction in choosing candidates. Left-wing Labour activists ar- gued that central direction has been used to purge socialists and put in Blair loyalists. Blairites justified centralization on the grounds it would promote the adoption of more women candidates in winnable seats; the number of Labour women MPs rose from 37 in 1992 to 98 by 2005.

The Labour Party leader is elected by an electoral college composed of Labour MPs, constituency party members, and trade unions. As part of a drive to pre- vent criticism of the leadership and public disunity, Tony Blair has created a new party organization that increases his control of the party and reduces the in- fluence of party activists and trade unions.

The Conservative Party in Parliament has been separate from the campaigning arm of the party, Conservative Central Office, and local con- stituency associations. Until 1965, the party leader was not elected but "emerged" as the result of con- sultation among senior MPs and peers (members of the House of Lords). Since then, the Conserva- tives have elected their leader, initially by a ballot of Members of Parliament and today by this ballot identifying two candidates who are then voted on by the party membership at large. The failure of Ian Duncan Smith, chosen as leader by the party membership even though he did not have the sup- port of a majority of Conservative MPs, led to his replacement in 2003 by Michael Howard without a vote, because both MPs and constituency activists saw him as a credible leader in the House of Com- mons, and in campaigning. He resigned after los- ing the 2005 election.

The Liberal Democrats have a small central or- ganization, in keeping with their relatively few MPs. Liberal Democrats have sought to build up the party's strength by winning council seats at local government elections. At parliamentary elections, it targets seats where the party is strong locally. This strategy has paid off; it has almost trebled its MPs from 22 in 1987 to 62 in 2005 while its share of the vote fell by 0.6 percent.

The party leader is strongest when he or she is also prime minister. Constitutional principles and Cabinet patronage strengthen a prime minister's hand. Moreover, an open attack on a prime minister threatens electoral defeat as a result of conflict within the party. At the 1998 Labour Party confer- ence Tony Blair told his Labour critics that their choice was not between a Socialist or a Labour gov- ernment, but between the Labour government or a Conservative government.

Party Images and Appeals

Differences of ideology are often simplified in terms of a left-right scale, with the left representing social- ist values and the right the values of Conservatives. While the terminology of left and right is part of the language of elite politicians, it is rejected by the great majority of British voters. When asked to place themselves on a left-right scale, the median voter chooses the central position, and only a tenth place themselves on the far left or far right. Consequently, parties that veer to one or another extreme risk los- ing votes.

When public opinion is examined across a variety of issues, such as inflation, protecting the environment, spending money on the health ser- vice, and trade union legislation, a majority of Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democratic vot- ers tend to agree for the most part. Tony Blair has proclaimed the goal of making Labour a party that is "the political arm of none other than the British people as a whole." In articulating this view, Blair is denying the existence of politics—that is, debate about what the government of the day ought to do.

Big divisions in contemporary British politics often cut across party lines, for example, attitudes toward the European Union divide both Labour and Conservative MPs and so has the Iraq War. Any attempt to impute a coherent ideology to a political party is doomed to failure, for institutions cannot think, and parties are not organized to debate phi- losophy but to fight elections. Instead of campaign- ing in ideological terms or by appealing to collec- tivist economic interests, increasingly parties stress consensual goals, such as promoting peace and

TABLE 5.4 Consensual Title of Party Election Manifestos

Year	Conservatives	Labour
1964	Prosperity with a Purpose	Let's Go with Labour
1966	Action, Not Words	Time for Decision
1970	A Better Tomorrow	Now Britain's Strong–Let's Make It Great to Live In
1974	Firm Action for a Fair Britain	Let Us Work Together
1974	Putting Britain First	Britain Will Win with Labour
1979	The Conservative Manifesto	The Labour Way Is the Better Way
1983	The Challenge of Our Times	The New Hope for Britain
1987	The Next Moves Forward	Britain Will Win
1992	The Best Future for Britain	Time to Get Britain Working Again
1997	You Can Only Be Sure with the Conservatives	Because Britain Deserves Better
2001	Time for Common Sense	Ambition for Britain
2005	It's Time for Action	Britain Forward not Back

prosperity. They compete in terms of which party or party leader can best be trusted to do what people want. The titles of election manifestos are virtually interchangeable between the Conservative and Labour parties—and so too is much of their content (Table 5.4).

In office, the governing party has the votes to enact any parliamentary legislation it wishes, regardless of protests by the opposition. However, most of the legislation introduced by the government is noncontroversial or so popular that the opposition does not dare vote against the bill's principle. For every government bill that the opposition votes against on principle in the House of Commons, three are adopted with interparty agreement.[35] Prior to the 1997 general election, the Labour Party even pledged that it would not immediately alter the spending limits in the budget of the Conservative government.

Most policies of the government are not set out in its party manifesto; they are inherited from predecessors of the same or a different party. When the Thatcher administration entered office in 1979, it inherited hundreds of programs enacted by preceding governments, including some on the statute books since 1760. The median law was more than half a century old.[36] In more than a decade, the Thatcher administration introduced dozens of new programs. It also repealed programs inherited from its predecessors, and some of its own programs that were quickly recognized as mistakes. When Margaret Thatcher left office, two-thirds of the programs for which the government was responsible, such as the national health service, were those inherited from previous administrations. When expenditure is analyzed, the influence of the "dead hand" of the past is greater still. Only 11 percent of public expenditure was devoted to programs that Thatcher started and almost three-quarters went to programs based on laws enacted before the end of World War II.

The freedom of action of the governing party is limited by constraints embedded in the obligations of office. Once in office, ministers find that all the laws enacted by their predecessors must be enforced, even if the government of the day would not have enacted them. A newly elected government also inherits many commitments to foreign countries and to the European Union. As a former Conservative minister said of his Labour successors, "They inherited our problems and our remedies."[37]

CENTRAL AUTHORITY AND DECENTRALIZED DELIVERY OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES

In a unitary state, political authority is centralized. Decisions made by central government are of fundamental importance, for they are binding on all public agencies through the Acts of Parliament and

regulations prepared in Whitehall. In addition, Whitehall controls taxation and public expenditure to a degree unusual among other member states of the European Union, where coalition government and federalism encourage territorial and functional decentralization.

For ordinary individuals the actions of government are tangible only when services are delivered to them in local schools, a doctor's office, or to their home. However, Whitehall departments usually do not deliver policies themselves. Most public goods and services are delivered by public agencies outside the framework of Whitehall ministries and five-sixths of public employees work for non-Whitehall agencies.[38] Thus, making and delivering public policies involves intragovernmental politics.

There are many reasons why ministers do not want to be in charge of delivering services. Ministers may wish to avoid charges of political interference (for example, tax collection by the Board of Inland Revenue). They may want to allow flexibility in the market (the Bank of England), lend an aura of impartiality to quasi-judicial activities (the Monopolies Commission), show respect for the extragovernmental origins of an institution (Oxford and Cambridge universities), allow qualified professionals to regulate technical matters (the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons), or remove controversial matters from Whitehall (the Family Planning Association). Leading ministers, and above all the prime minister, prefer to focus upon the glamorous "high" politics of European and foreign affairs and economic management. However, since "low level" services remain important to most voters' lives, ministers are under pressure to do something when there is evidence of declining standards in schools, lengthening queues for hospital admission, and an increase of crime on the streets.

While politicians can make headlines by announcing a good intention, turning popular intentions into a programme that delivers services to citizens requires scarce resources of time and money. Running the Whitehall obstacle race is the first step in intragovernmental politics. Interdepartmental negotiations are required to get ministers to agree how credit and responsibility is to be divided up; how a new programme relates to existing commitments; what agency should administer the programme; and how much money is needed. Since most new policies must take into account the effects of existing policies in a crowded policy "space," negotiations are often time consuming. From the point of view of a prime minister who believes that popular election makes it desirable to do many things, the process of turning desires into practical programmes is often frustrating.

Because of Treasury control of public expenditure, before a bill can be put to Parliament the Treasury must authorize the additional expenditure required. Ministers in charge of spending departments dislike constant Treasury reminders that there are strict cash limits on what they can spend. The limits exist because increased spending implies increased taxation. Gordon Brown has used his position as Chancellor of the Exchequer, the minister in charge of the Treasury, to enforce his priorities on other ministers. Because Brown has a power base in the governing party, he can even enforce Treasury policies against the prime minister. Every Chancellor gains power because limits on public revenue mean that, in the words of a veteran Treasury official, "the Treasury stands for reality."[39]

A departmental minister must pilot a bill through Parliament. While the votes needed to secure passage are assured, if a matter is controversial a minister will face attacks from the Opposition and a host of amendments designed to test the minister's understanding of a policy. In addition to running the Whitehall obstacle race, a minister often must negotiate agreement with public agencies outside Whitehall, and with affected interest groups. The formally centralized authority of the Crown co-exists with a maze of institutions with varying and overlapping territorial and functional responsibilities.

Local government is subordinate to central government, for the latter has the power to write or rewrite the laws that determine what locally elected governments do and spend, or even abolish local authorities and create new units of government with different boundaries. Changes in boundaries have reflected a vain search to find a balance between efficiency (assumed to correlate with fewer councils delivering services to more people spread over a wider geographical area) and

Box 5.5 Delivering Public Services on the Doorstep

The growth of government has caused the primary activities of government to shift from debates in Westminster to the delivery locally of everyday public services such as health care, education, and environmental protection and rubbish collection. Government on the scale that we know it today could not exist if all its activities were concentrated in London, for five-sixths of the country's population lives elsewhere. As the demand for public services has increased, government has grown chiefly through pluralization—that is, the multiplication of familiar institutions delivering such as schools and hospitals. Devolution to Scotland and Wales has added to decentralization, for Westminster gives institutions in Edinburgh and Cardiff the responsibility for delivering many everyday services, while keeping overall financial control in London.

Education is an example of the combination of central authority and localized service delivery. It is authorized by an act of Parliament, financed principally by central government, and the minister in charge of education is a Member of Parliament and Cabinet. However, the delivery of primary and secondary education has been the responsibility of local government and of the school head and its board of governors. Dissatisfaction with local government has led Whitehall to establish secondary schools independent of local government but dependent on Whitehall.

Control of day-to-day activities within the school is in the hands of the teaching profession. Increasingly, central government seeks to monitor the performance of schools in nationwide examinations. But since the Department of Education employs only 1 percent of the people working in education, success depends on actions taken by others.*

*See Richard Rose, "From Government at the Centre to Government Nationwide," in Y. Meny and V. Wright, eds., *Centre-Periphery Relations in Western Europe* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp. 13–32; and Richard Rose, "The Growth of Government Organizations," in C. Campbell and B. G. Peters, eds., *Organizing Government, Governing Organizations* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), pp. 99–128.

responsiveness (assumed to require more councils with a smaller territory and fewer people). Local authorities, however organized, have been the chief institution for delivering such public services as education, police protection, refuse collection, housing, and cemeteries (Box 5.5). Collectively, local government accounts for about a fifth of total public expenditure.

Local council elections are fought on party lines. In the days of the two-party system, many cities were solidly Labour for a generation or more, while leafy suburbs and agricultural counties were overwhelmingly Conservative. The Liberal Democrats now win many seats in local elections and when no party has a majority introduce coalition government into town halls. However, being a councillor is usually a part-time job.

The Blair government has assumed that elected mayors are a good way of holding government accountable and effective and, incidentally, breaking the local power base of Labour veterans skeptical of Blair's new Labour Party. Downing Street introduced the direct election of the mayor of Greater London citing New York and Chicago as positive examples. However, it has refused to give it the independence in taxing and spending that American local government enjoys.[40] Blair's political initiative collapsed when a left-wing Labour populist, Ken Livingstone, won election as London's first mayor running as an independent against an official Labour candidate.

Local government in England is usually divided into two tiers of county and district councils, each with responsibility for some local services. The proliferation of public–private initiatives and special-purpose agencies has reduced the services for which local government is exclusively or primarily responsible. The Blair government has proposed an additional tier of regional government in England—but many local Labour councillors oppose this on the grounds that powers would be taken from local government, and a plan for a North-East regional government was rejected by voters in a referendum there. Today there is a jumble of more or less local institutions and uncertainties about surviving a future reorganization.

Acts of Parliament make councils responsible for delivering major services, and central government financial grants and subsidies are the largest source of local government revenue. There is no local income tax, since the central government does not want to give local authorities the degree of fiscal independence that American local government has. The Thatcher government replaced the local property tax with a poll tax on every adult living in a local authority. It believed this would make voters more aware of the costs of local government and keep spending down. In practice, the tax was difficult to implement, and produced a political backlash. The Major government replaced the poll tax with a community charge that once again related local taxation to the value of the house as well as to the number of people living there.[41] The continued squeeze on central government grants to local authorities under the Blair government has pushed up the community charge tax and maintained local government finance as a subject of rancorous intragovernmental politics.

Both Conservative and Labour parties are centralist. *Centralization* is justified in terms of *territorial justice*—that is, the same standards of public policy ought to apply everywhere in the country. For example, schools in inner cities and rural areas should have the same resources as schools in prosperous suburbs. This can be achieved only if tax revenues are collected by central government and then redistributed from well-to-do to poorer parts of England. In addition, ministers emphasize that they are accountable to a national electorate of tens of millions of people, whereas local councillors are only accountable to those who vote in their ward. Instead of small being beautiful, a big nationwide electorate is assumed to be better. The statement—"Local councillors are not necessarily political animals; we could manage without them"—was made by a left-wing law professor.[42]

Devolution has given a degree of autonomy to the delivery of public services in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The new Scottish Parliament has the right to enact legislation affecting a large range of social and public services of direct concern to individuals and communities, such as education, health, and roads. It is also responsible for determining spending priorities within the limits set by its block grant of money from the British Treasury. The Welsh Assembly has administrative discretion, but no legislative or taxing powers. Northern Ireland is exceptional, in that the key service is police and security—and this is kept under the control of British ministers, with the Army and intelligence services in the background.

Executive agencies are functional institutions headed by nonelected officials responsible for delivering many major public services. The biggest, the National Health Service (NHS), is not one organization but a multiplicity of institutions. It allocates money to hospitals and to doctors and dentists who operate as self-employed professionals, although nearly all their income is derived from the NHS and they must work to its guidelines. Access to the national health service is provided without charge to every citizen. But health care is not costless; central government picks up the bill. Because of this, the Treasury perennially seeks to limit the increase in health expenditure. The Treasury seeks to drive down prices for supplies, which it can do because it is a monopoly purchaser of many health-related goods and services. It has also sought to restrict the supply of medical services by limiting the number of hospital beds and the number of doctors that it trains and must pay for.

Public demand for more and better health care rises with the ageing of the population, since older people need more health care, and with the development of new and more expensive forms of medical treatment. The government's rationing of supply has led to lengthening queues, involving months of waiting before a person can see a medical specialist and months of additional waiting before a hospital operation is conducted. In its second term of office the Blair government has sought to deal with this problem by management changes intended to increase efficiency and by limited increases in public expenditure. It has not adopted the common practice of most European Union countries, asking patients to pay a limited part of the cost of seeing a doctor or getting hospital treatment.

British government sponsors more than a thousand *Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organizations (quangos)*. Some quangos simply advise on

licy while others deliver public services. All are eated by an Act of Parliament or by an executive cision; their heads are appointed by a Cabinet inister; public money can be appropriated to fi- ance their activities; and, when things go wrong, arliament has difficulty in assigning responsibility r decisions.

Advisory committees draw on the expertise of ndividuals and organizations involved in pro- rammes for which Whitehall departments are ominally responsible. Ministry of Agriculture offi- ials can turn to advisory committees for detailed nformation about farming practices; the Depart- ment of Trade and Industry can turn to business as- sociations on matters of trade and to industrial as- sociations for information about a particular industry. Because they have no executive powers, advisory committees usually cost very little to run. Representatives of interest groups are glad to serve because this gives them privileged access to White- hall and an opportunity to influence government in matters in which they are directly interested.

Administrative tribunals are quasi-judicial bod- ies that make expert judgments in such fields as medical negligence or handle a large number of small claims, such as disputes about whether the rent set for a rent-controlled flat is fair. Ministers may use tribunals to avoid involvement in politi- cally controversial issues, such as decisions about deporting immigrants. Tribunals normally work much more quickly and cheaply than the courts. However, the quasi-judicial role of tribunals has cre- ated a demand for independent auditing of their procedures, to ensure that they are fair to all sides. The task of supervising some 70 tribunals is in the hands of a quango, the Council on Tribunals.

Turning to the Market

The 1945–1951 Labour government turned away from the market because its Socialist leaders be- lieved that government planning was better able than private enterprise to promote economic growth and full employment. It nationalized many basic industries, such as electricity, gas, coal, the railways, and airlines. State ownership meant that industries did not have to run at a profit; some con- sistently made money while others consistently lost money and required big subsidies. Government ownership politicized wage negotiations and invest- ment decisions.

The Thatcher government promoted privatiza- tion, selling shares of nationalized industries on the stock market. Profitmaking industries such as tele- phones, oil, and gas were sold without difficulty. Selling council houses to tenants at prices well be- low their market value was popular with tenants. Industries that were losing money, such as British Airways, British Steel, and the coal mines, had to be reorganized, and unprofitable activities were shed to make them attractive to buyers. Industries need- ing large public subsidies to maintain public ser- vices, such as the railways, have continued to receive subsidies after *privatization*.

Privatization has been justified on grounds of economic efficiency (the market is better than civil servants in determining investment, production, and prices); political ideology (the power of govern- ment is reduced); service (private enterprise is more consumer-oriented than are civil servants); and short-term financial gain (the sale of public assets can provide billions in revenue for government). Al- though the Labour Party initially opposed privatiza- tion, it quickly realized it would be electorally disas- trous to take back privatized council houses and shares that people had bought at bargain prices.

Since many privatized industries affect the pub- lic interest, new regulatory agencies were estab- lished to regulate telephones, gas, electricity, broad- casting, and water. Where there is a substantial element of monopoly in an industry, the govern- ment regulatory agency seeks to promote competi- tion and often has the power to fix price increases at a lower rate than inflation. Even though it no longer owns an industry, government cannot walk away from obligations accepted by its Victorian forebears such as securing public safety and health. When sev- eral fatal accidents occurred on railways whose track was the responsibility of a privatized agency, the Blair government took it over.

From Trust to Contract

Historically, the British civil service has relied on trust in delivering policies. British civil servants are much more rulebound than their German counterparts and less worried about being dragged into court to justify their actions than are American officials. Intragovern- mental relations between Whitehall departments and representatives of local authorities have been re- garded as a discussion in which consensual under- standings would be arrived at and upheld by all sides without the force of law, or debate and division in Parliament. However, the Thatcher government con- sidered lengthy deliberations to be inefficient ob- structions to its political goals.

The "next steps" inkitiative has made contracts with independent agencies to undertake the day-to- day delivery of such central government services as automobile licenses, patents, and social security benefits from policymaking agencies. In addition, the government has sought to save money on capi- tal expenditure and reduce the size of the public deficit through the private finance initiative, invit- ing banks and profitmaking companies to loan money for some or all of the costs of investment in public services such as toll bridges that have a ca- pacity to generate revenue. The theory is that gov- ernment can obtain the greatest value for money by buying services from the private sector, ranging from cleaning the floors or operating staff canteens in government offices to prison services.

Government by contract faces political limits because the departmental minister must answer to Parliament when something goes wrong. The Prison Service is a textbook example. It was estab- lished as an executive agency separate from the Home Office in 1993 to bring in private manage- ment to reduce unit costs in the face of a rising "de- mand" for prison services due to changes in crime rates and sentencing policies. However, when pris- oners escaped and other problems erupted, the Home Secretary blamed the business executive brought in to head the Prison Service. The Prison Service head replied by attacking the minister's re- fusal to live up to the terms of the contract agreed between them.

The proliferation of many agencies, each with a distinctive and narrow responsibility for a limited number of policies, tends to fragment government. For example, a single parent may have to deal with half a dozen different agencies to secure all the pub- lic services to which she or he is entitled. The Blair government has reacted by endorsing the idea of "joined up" government, linking the provision of related services so that they can more effectively and easily be received by citizens. In order to achieve this goal, Whitehall must centralize powers that it has previously contracted out. Moreover, it must also centralize powers within Whitehall, a measure consistent with Tony Blair's creation of a large staff in Downing Street but inconsistent with the respon- sibility of individual Cabinet ministers for running their own departments.

The Contingency of Influence

The theory of British government is centralist: All roads lead to Downing Street, where the the prime minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have their homes and offices, and the Treasury and the Foreign Office buildings are only a few steps away. In practice, policymaking is multidimensional, for those involved can be divided horizontally be- tween ministries, executive agencies, and other forms of quangos, and vertically between central government and local authorities and other nonde- partmental public bodies that deliver services lo- cally and functionally.

Influence is contingent: it varies with the prob- lem at hand. Decisions about war and peace are taken at the very center by the highest-ranking polit- ical and military officials. By contrast, decisions about whether a particular piece of land should be used for housing are normally made by local au- thorities. Most political decisions involve two or more government agencies, and therefore require discussion and bargaining before a decision can be implemented. The making of policy is constrained by disputes within government much more than by differences between the governing party and its op- ponents. Many tentacles of the octopus of govern- ment work against each other, as each public agency claims to represent conflicting definitions of the public interest.

While the center of central government has been pressing harder on other parts of British gov- ernment, Whitehall itself has been losing influ- ence because of its obligations in the European Union. The Single Europe Act promotes British

ports, but it also increases the scope for European Union regulation of the British economy. Whitehall has adopted a variety of strategies in its European Union negotiations, including noncooperation and public dispute. Ironically, it is just these tactics that local government and British executive agencies use when they disagree with Whitehall.

Why Public Policy Matters

However a citizen votes, she or he does not need to look far to see the outputs of government: if there is a school-age child or a pensioner in the house, the benefits to the family are continuous and visible. If a person is ill, the care provided by doctors and hospitals are important outputs of public policy; so too are police protection and tight controls of land use that maintain greenery even in urban landscapes. Today the average household annually receives two significant welfare state benefits, such as education, health care, or a pension. To produce the benefits of public policy, government relies on three major resources: (1) laws, (2) money, and (3) personnel. Most policies involve a combination of these resources, but they do not do so equally. Policies regulating individual behavior, such as marriage and divorce, are law-intensive; measures such as social security, that pay benefits to millions of people, are money-intensive; and the delivery of services such as health care is labor-intensive.

Laws are the unique resource of government, for private enterprises cannot enact laws and the contracts only operate if the laws of the land are respected. The British executive centralizes within it the power to draft laws and regulations that can be approved without substantial amendment by Parliament. Moreover, many laws give ministers significant discretion in administration. For example, an employer may be required to provide "reasonable" toilet facilities rather than having all features of lavatories specified, down to the size and height of a toilet seat.

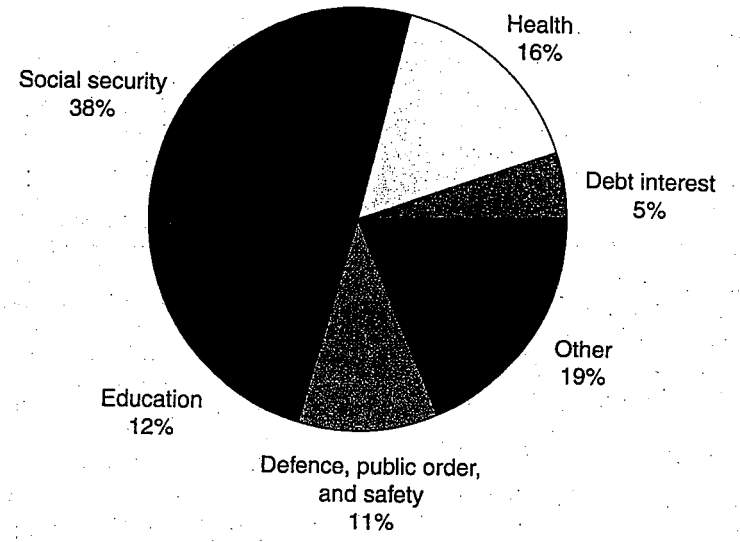
Public employees are needed to administer laws and deliver major services. Privatizing public services has reduced the number of people counted as civil servants or public employees, but it has not reduced to the same extent the number who depend on public spending for their job. In total, more than a fifth of the entire British labor force depends on government for their job.

To meet the costs of public policy, British government collects almost two-fifths of the gross national product in taxation. Income tax accounts for 28 percent of tax revenue; the top rate of taxation is 40 percent. Social security taxes are paid by deductions from wages and additional contributions of employers; these account for an additional 17 percent of revenue. Since there are no state or local income taxes, a well-to-do English person can be taxed at a lower total rate than a well-off person living in New York City.

Taxes on consumption are important too. There is a value-added tax of 17.5 percent on the sale of almost all goods and services, and gasoline, cigarettes, and alcohol are taxed heavily too. In total, taxes on consumption account for one-quarter of all tax revenue. Since profits fluctuate from year to year, the government prefers businesses to pay taxes on their gross revenues through value-added tax and on their total wages bill, through the employer's contribution to social security. Taxes on the profits of corporations claim an eighth of tax revenue. Additional revenue is generated by the National Lottery, launched in 1993; more people play the lottery than vote in a general election.

Social security is the most costly programme of British government. It accounts for 38 percent of public expenditure (Figure 5.7). It is also the most popular, for it transfers money from government to more than 10 million older people receiving pensions, plus millions of invalids, the unemployed, women on maternity leave, and poor people needing to supplement their limited resources. Spending on health and education are second and third in their claims on the public purse. Together, these three social welfare programmes account for two-thirds of total public expenditure. A classic commitment of government—defence and maintaining public order and safety through the police, fire service, courts, and prisons—are fourth in importance.

FIGURE 5.7 Public Expenditure by Program



Source: Office for National Statistics, 2004. *United Kingdom National Accounts: The Blue Book* London: The Stationary Office, pages 276ff.

Since there is no item in the public budget labelled as "waste," any government wanting to reduce public spending must squeeze existing programmes—and big savings can be made only by squeezing popular programmes such as health and education or pensions. But doing so would go against public opinion. When Margaret Thatcher entered office in 1979, the public divided into three almost equal groups: those wanting to spend more and tax more; those wanting to cut taxes even if it means a reduction in public services; and a large middle group wanting to leave things as they are. Thatcher's campaign to cut taxes and public spending produced a reaction in favour of public expenditure. By the time she left office a majority favoured taxing and spending more on social programmes and this has remained the position since (Table 5.5). Tony Blair's government entered office with a pledge not to increase income tax. However, in order to finance increased expenditure on social programmes that are popular with the electorate, it has put up less visible "stealth taxes," such as the employer's contribution to social security, and taxes on insurance funds for pensioners. The effects of these tax increases are passed on to voters—but not in a form that they can easily see.

POLICY OUTCOMES AND CHANGES IN SOCIETY

Although living conditions reflect public policy, only a totalitarian regime claims responsibility for everything that happens in society. In an open society such as England, social conditions are a consequence of the interaction of public policies, the national and international economy, the not-for-profit institutions of civil society, and individual and household activities free of state control. The term welfare state is misleading. Total welfare in society

TABLE 5.5 Public Preference for More Taxing and Spending Rather than Less (in percentages)

	1983	1987	1991	1995	2001
Increase taxes and spending on health, education, and social benefits	32	50	65	61	59
Keep taxes and spending the same as now	54	42	29	31	34
Reduce taxes and spending	9	3	3	5	3
Don't know	5	5	3	3	4

Source: British Social Attitudes surveys, as reported in Alison Park, et al., eds., *British Social Attitudes: The 19th Report* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), p. 76.

is the sum of a "welfare mix," combining actions of government, the market, and the nonmonetized production of welfare in the household.[43]

Defence against threats to security at home and abroad is a unique responsibility of government. In an interdependent world, British government seeks to guarantee national security by participating in international alliances. Britain was a founder member of NATO, and has fought alongside American forces in the Gulf War in 1991, in Kosovo, and after September 11th, in Afghanistan and Iraq. Maintaining order at home requires the cooperation of others. This is clearest in Northern Ireland, as Whitehall negotiates with leaders of armed paramilitary organizations as well as with elected representatives. Crime prevention depends not only on policing but also on whether or not there are lots of unemployed youths ready to violate the laws in pursuit of money. Over the decades the crime rate has been rising, but it remains lower than in the United States.

Both Conservative and Labour governments accept responsibility for the economy. Most firms are profitmaking, consumers can spend money as they like, and wages and prices are principally decided in the market. Government influences the market through taxing and spending policies, interest rates, and policies for growth and unemployment. Increasingly, what happens to the British economy is also influenced by what happens in other countries of the European Union and on other continents too, and government cannot isolate the country from what happens elsewhere in the global economy.

In each decade since World War II, the British economy has grown, and compounding a small annual rate of growth over many decades cumulatively results in a big rise in living standards. Per capita national income has more than tripled since 1945. Many consumer goods that were once thought of as luxuries, such as owning a car or one's own home, are now mass consumption goods. Things unknown in 1945, such as air travel abroad or VCRs, are now commonplace. Between 1993 and 2003, the British economy grew at a rate of 2.9 percent annually, and over the decade it grew by 24 percent in total. This rate was much higher than France or Germany and almost as high as the United States.

Poverty can be found in Britain; the extent depends on the definition used. If poverty is defined in relative terms such as having less than half the average wage, this is consistent with a rising standard of living in absolute terms. If poverty is defined as being trapped at a low income level for many years, then less than 4 percent are long-term poor.

On all the major indicators of social well-being, the British people enjoy a higher standard of living today than a generation ago. Infant mortality has declined by more than four-fifths since 195[illegible]. Life expectancy for men and for women has risen by 12 years. A gender gap remains, as women on average live four years longer than men. The postwar expansion of schools has significantly raised the quantity of education available. Classes are smaller in size, and after leaving secondary school upwards of one-half of British youths go on to some form of further education, usually in institutions that did not exist in 1950. More than two-thirds of families now own their own home and nine-tenths report satisfaction with their housing.

The outputs of public policy play a significant part in the everyday life of all Britons. Everyone makes major use of health and education programs. Children at school or patients seeing a doctor do not think of themselves as participating in politics. Yet the services received are designed and paid for by government. Welfare state benefits—free education, health care, or the guarantee of an income in old age or unemployment—are so taken for granted today that most people see them as nonpolitical. They do not want a change in government after an election to cause radical changes in major social policies.

Popular Expectations

For a century commentators on English society have bemoaned the relative decline in the country's achievements compared with America and leading continental European countries. But ordinary people do not compare their lives with other countries; the most important comparison is with their own past. Evaluating change across time shows great improvements in the living conditions of most English people compared with their parents or grandparents. The longer the time span, the greater the improvements. Furthermore, in the production of such political "goods" as freedom from the state, confidence in the honesty of public officials, and administrative flexibility, British government remains an international leader. The great majority of people are proud of the achievements of Britain and would not want to be a citizen of any other country.

Frustration with government arises only if people expect it to be consistently very successful. But English people tend to have low expectations of government. In particular, decades of economic difficulties lowered expectations of what government can do to make the economy grow or prevent a rise in unemployment or inflation. Paradoxically, a government presiding over high unemployment and a slow growth economy would be living up to the pessimistic expectations of many. When there are low expectations, any time in which the economy does not get worse can be considered a reprieve from bad news. English people do not hold government responsible for what is most important in their lives; they evaluate their personal circumstances differently from public policy. When people are asked each year whether they think next year will be better or worse personally than the preceding year, on nine-tenths of the occasions a majority say they expect the coming year to be all right for themselves, even when many expect economic difficulties for the country as a whole. National prosperity is desirable but not a necessary condition for personal well-being. When people are asked to evaluate their lives, they are most satisfied with their family, friends, home, and job, and least satisfied with major political institutions of society.[44]

Satisfaction with the present goes along with acceptance of political change in principle. But there are disagreements about the direction of change—for example, whether Westminster should take more responsibility for public services or devolve more responsibilities locally, and whether Britain should align itself more closely with the United States or with the European Union. Even when goals are agreed, there are differences about the particular policy that can best achieve a given goal. Politics in England is thus an ongoing debate about the direction, the means, and the tempo of adapting old institutions and inherited policies to new circumstances in the twenty-first century.

Key Terms

Cabinet
centralization
class
Conservative Party
Crown
decentralization
devolution
Downing Street
first-past-the-post electoral system
government
individualist theory