



Structure of Governance: The UK

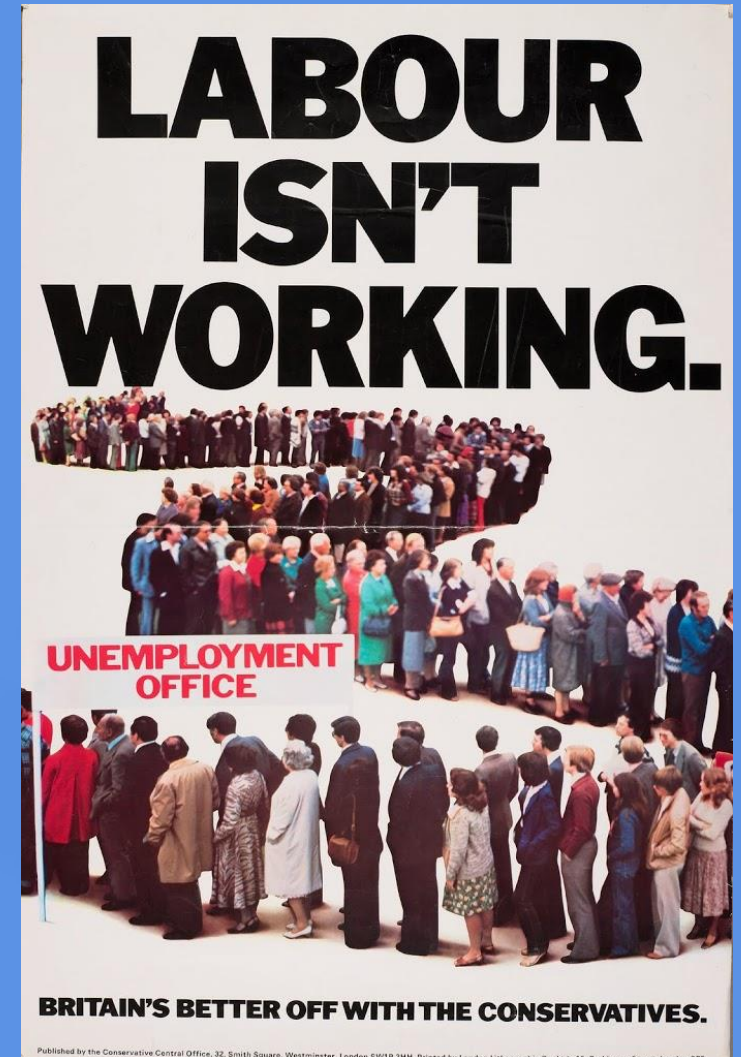
Political Parties – The Labour Party

- Left leaning Political Party
 - Started in early 20th century to support trade unions and workers rights
 - Traditionally connected to Labor Unions
 - Large sources of funds
- Since 1980s Labour Party has shifted to more centrist stance
 - Under the leadership of John Smith and Tony Blair the Labour party has shifted to a more moderate stance
 - “New Labour Party”



Political Parties – Conservative Party

- Right leaning Political Party
 - Controlled government from 1940s till 1990s
- Traditionally pragmatic as opposed to ideological
 - Historically has supported a market controlled economy, privatization, and fewer social welfare programs
- Party transitioning towards center
 - Margaret Thatcher seen as far right
 - Transition begun by Prime Minister John Major in 1990s
 - Party Split
 - Tories – Elitists in support of EU Membership
 - Thatcherite Wing – Strict conservatives in favor of British sovereignty



Political Parties – Liberal-Democratic Party

- Created in 1989 as a merger between Liberal Party and Social Democratic Party
- Attempting to form a strong moderate alternative to Labour and Conservative parties
 - Popular stances on the NHS, education, and the environment
- Difficult to gain control against Labour and Conservative
 - Secured 62 seats in parliament in 2005



Political Parties – Nationalists Parties

- Scottish National Party
 - Pushing for greater autonomy for Scotland.
 - Large movement for Scottish independence as well
- Plaid Cymru
 - Welch nationalist party
 - Wants independence of Wales
- Sinn Fein
 - Political arm of the IRA
 - Wants re-unification of Republic of Ireland with Northern Ireland

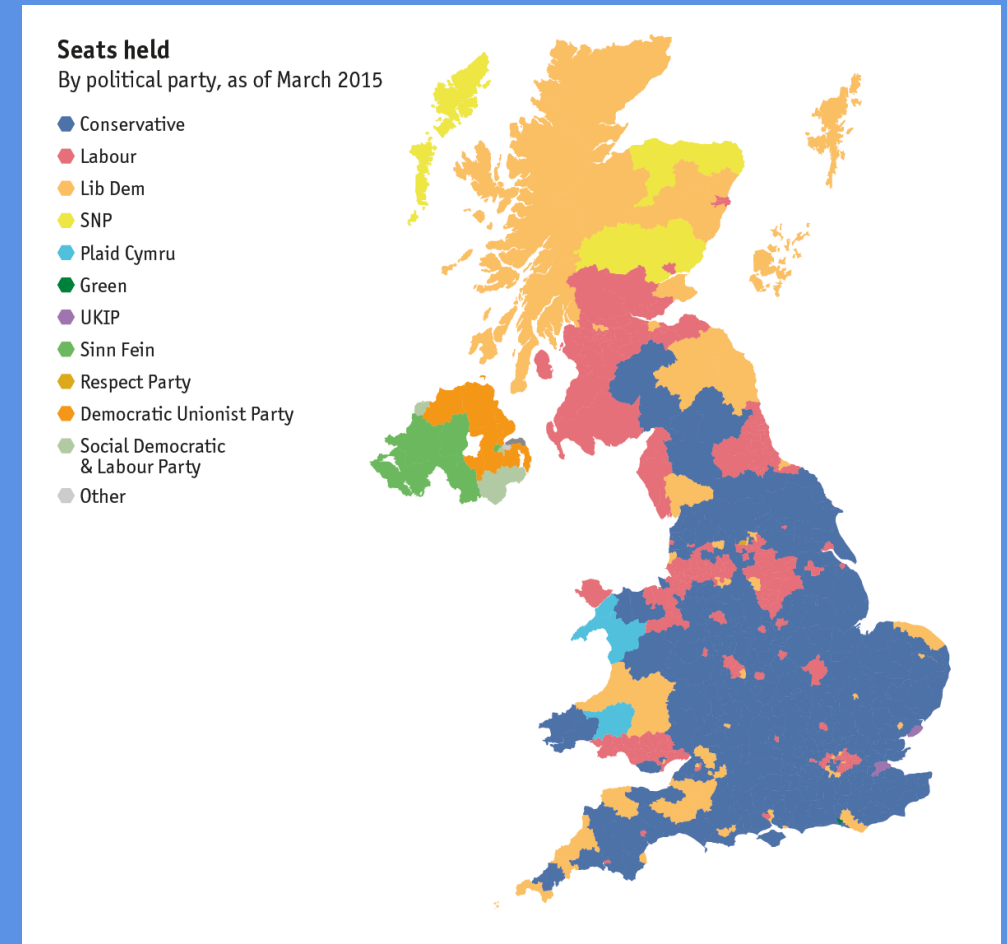


SNP 



Political Elections

- Members of Parliament (MPs) are only elected officials
 - Elections must be held at least every 5 years
 - Prime Minister can call election earlier if needed
 - First-Past-The-Post Winner
 - Popular vote
 - MPs do NOT need to live in district
- Primarily two party voting patterns
 - Conservative Party
 - Primarily Educated, Middle and upper classes, rural and suburban areas
 - Primarily English
 - Labour Party
 - Traditionally supported by working class, urban and Industrial areas
 - Appealing to Scots, Welsh



Executive Branch – The Prime Minister

- “First among equals”
- Member of Parliament and Leader of majority party
- Speaks legitimately for all Members of Parliament
 - Chooses cabinet ministers and important subordinate posts
 - Makes decisions in cabinet, with agreement of ministers
 - Campaigns for and represents the party in parliamentary elections
 - Shapes cabinet decisions into policy



Executive Branch – Civil Servants

- Hundred of thousands of civil servants in the UK
- They administer laws and deliver public services
- Most do clerical and routine work for the bureaucracy
- A few hundred directly advise ministers and oversee work of departments
- Top civil servants and bureaucrats usually stay with their departments, while ministers are party officials who move with party demands
- Therefore, top civil servants often have a great deal of input into policy-making

Legislative Branch – House of Lords

- Upper House
- Only hereditary parliamentary house in existence today
 - Hereditary peers: hold seats that have been passed down through family ties over the centuries
 - Life peers: people appointed to nonhereditary positions as a result of distinguished service to Britain
- the House of Lords' only powers are:
 - To delay legislation
 - To debate technicalities of proposed bills
 - Lords may add amendments to legislation, but House of Commons may delete their changes by a simple majority vote
 - The House of Lords includes five law lords who serve as Britain's highest court of appeals, but they cannot rule acts of Parliament unconstitutional



Legislative Branch – House of Commons

- Lower House
- Party that receives the majority of the plurality of the votes becomes the Majority Party in Parliament, the party with the second most votes becomes the “**loyal opposition**”
 - Leaders of parties literally side opposite of one another
 - Opposition party used as system of Checks and Balances to power of majority
- Made up of 650 elected members
 - Majority party leader selected as Prime Minister
 - Prime Minister changes if majority party changes
 - Cabinet members selected among majority party MPs

Powers of the House of Commons

- Debate and refine potential legislation
- They are the only ones who may become party leaders and ultimately may head the government
- Scrutinize the administration of laws
- Keep communication lines open between voters and ministers



Judicial Branch – Supreme Court

- Britain has the principle of **parliamentary sovereignty**
 - Limited the development of judicial review
 - British courts can only determine whether government decisions violate the common law or previous acts of Parliament
- By tradition British courts cannot impose their rulings upon Parliament, the prime minister, or the cabinet
 - Law lords – settle disputes from lower courts; they do not have power of judicial review, so their authority is limited
- **Constitutional Reform Act of 2005** – provides for a Supreme Court of the United Kingdom to take over the existing role of the law lords
 - Most judges are not MPs and few are active in party politics; most were educated in public schools and the Oxbridge connection