GV460
BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
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Lecture Schedule

1. Introduction: British Politics in Theory and in Practice
2. The Westminster Model: Constitutional Basics
3. Still a Majoritarian Democracy?: The British Party Systems
4. Voting Behaviour In Britain: From Class Voting to Consumer Choice
5. Party Organizations in Britain: The Death of the Mass Party
6. Party Ideologies in Britain: New Consensus or New Polarization?
7. Constitutional Change: Has New Labour Made a New Britain?
8. Westminster, Devolution and Local Government
9. Governing the British Economy: State and Market

Assessment

1 essay of 2000 words  25%
1 2 hour exam  75%

Readings

1. Introduction: British Politics in Theory and in Practice

Suggested Introductory Readings (read any one of these textbooks for a preliminary grounding in the key features of the British political system)

2. The Westminster Model: Constitutional Basics

Would Britain benefit from a written constitution?
Does the monarchy matter in British politics?
Is there anything democratic about the Westminster model?

Essential


Further
3. Still a Majoritarian Democracy?: The British Party Systems

What are the advantages of the electoral system used to elect the Westminster parliament?

Can British democracy remain democratic without a two-party system?

Does the introduction of new electoral process at the devolved level undermine the Westminster model of party democracy?

Essential


Further


4. Voting Behaviour In Britain: From Class Voting to Consumer Choice

Is the cleavage structure in Britain fundamentally different from the rest of Western Europe? If so, why?
What is class voting? To what extent does class influence the way Britain votes?
‘Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail’ (Pulzer). Is this view still valid in the 1990s?
What are the advantages and potential hazards of the “issue voting” approach to explaining electoral behaviour?
To what extent can the political success of Thatcherism be explained in terms of a fundamental shift in British voting behaviour?
Has the British electorate become more right-wing in the last 20 years?
Can electoral change in Britain be explained in the same terms as electoral change in the rest of Western Europe?

How would the “revisionist” and “radical” views assess the 1997 and 2001 general elections?

**Essential:**


**Further**

*On the Class Voting Paradigm:*


*On the Transformation of Electoral Politics*


**On Recent Elections:**


**5. Party Ideologies in Britain: New Consensus or New Polarization?**

Has Britain moved from consensus to conflict over the post-war period, or the other way around?
Is there anything distinctive about Blairism? Is there anything distinctive about Thatcherism?

**Essential**


**Further**
6. Party Organizations in Britain: The Death of the Mass Party

Are British parties ‘cartel parties’?
Has British electoral politics become a battle between presidential-style leaders?
What impact has constitutional reform had on British parties?

Essential
Katz, Richard and Peter Mair, ‘Changing Models of Party Organisation and Party


Peter Mair, Wolfgang Mueller and Fritz Plasser (eds.), *Political Parties and Electoral

Further

Doig, Alan (2003). ‘Political Corruption in the United Kingdom’, in Martin Bull and

into Nolan’, in F.F. Ridley and A. Doig (eds.), *Sleaze: Politics, Private Interests and

Basingstoke: Palgrave.*

Hopkin, Jonathan (2001). ‘Bringing the Members Back In? Democratizing Candidate
Selection in Britain and Spain’, *Party Politics* 7 (3): 343-61.

Contexts: The Case of Asymmetric Devolution’, paper presented to APSA annual
meeting, Chicago, September.

Webb, Paul (1994). ‘Party Organizational Change in Britain: The Iron Law of
Centralization?’, in Richard Katz and Peter Mair (eds.), *How Parties Organize*. London:

322.

Advanced Industrial Democracies.*
7. Governing the British Economy: State and Market

Can the British economy be ‘governed’?
Is postwar British economic policy best explained in terms of continuity or change?
Is there any significant difference between the British parties on economic issues?

Essential


Further


Why is social inequality such a problem in Britain?
Did the Conservative reforms of the 1980s bring about a fundamental shift in postwar British welfare policy?
What, if anything, is distinctive about the British welfare state?

Essential


*Further*


9. Westminster, Devolution and Local Government

Has devolution strengthened or weakened the British state?
What has been the impact of devolution on British party politics?
What can be done about Northern Ireland?

*Essential*


Further


**10. Constitutional Change: Has New Labour Made a New Britain?**

Why has Britain’s constitution changed so little over the last century? Could Labour have made a better job of its constitutional reform programme? Assess the implications for British democracy of the Labour constitutional reforms.

*Essential*


*Further*


**Additional Essay Questions:**

1. ‘Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail’ (Pulzer). Is this view still valid in the 1990s?
2. ‘It was issues that won the 1979 election for the Conservatives (...). Their success came from saying the right thing about the right issues’ (I. Crewe). Can the issue voting approach explain the Conservatives’ electoral dominance in the period 1979-97?
3. To what extent can the emergence of Thatcherism be explained in terms of a fundamental shift in British voting behaviour?
4. Assess the importance of ‘pocket-book’ voting in recent British elections.
5. What would be a likely ‘revisionist’ response to the recent Labour victory?
6. On the basis of available knowledge on voting behaviour in Britain, what advice on electoral strategy would you give to the Conservative Party leadership?
7. What are the implications of the decline in partisan identification amongst British voters?
8. Can Britain’s high levels of social inequality be explained in terms of the nature of the British party system?
9. To what extent can historical factors account for the British two-party system?
10. Can the electoral success of Thatcherism be explained by the decline of class voting in Britain?
11. To what extent does public opinion determine the behaviour of British parties?
12. Stephen Driver and Luke Martell describe Blairism as ‘the politics of post-Thatcherism’. Do you agree with them?
13. Does the British party system reflect British society in any way?
14. Are British parties ‘catch-all’ parties?
15. Is politics in Britain fundamentally different from politics in the rest of Western Europe?
16. Does devolution constitute a challenge to the British political tradition?
17. Can anything be done about poverty in Britain?
18. Is Britain a democracy?
19. Is British politics becoming ‘Americanized’?
20. Has the New Labour project been successful?