Foundations of the UK’s Government
United Kingdom Overview

• Tradition of Democracy
  • Evolutionary to the current state of an Advanced Democracy

• Parliamentary Democracy
  • Unitary – Monarchy official head of UK
  • Federalist – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have national assemblies

• Constitutional Monarchy
  • Executive Chief of State – Queen
  • De Facto head of Government – Prime Minister
  • Bi-cameral legislature: House of Commons and House of Lords
  • Judicial - Supreme Court
Geographic Issues

- United Kingdom ruled by England
  - Center of wealth and population
  - Movements of devolution
    - Wales, Scotland, and Ireland pushing for greater independence
- Question of status in Europe
  - British exceptionalism – Feeling of being European, but not
    - Less risk of invasion
    - More culture homogeneity
Legitimacy Through Tradition

• Government maintains legitimacy through tradition
  • Existed in form since 927
• Power derived through crown and Rational Legal Authority
  • No formal constitution
  • **Common Law** - allows the decisions that public officials and courts make to set precedents for later actions and decisions, eventually forming a comprehensive set of principles for governance
Democratization of Britain – The Monarchy

- **Magna Carta (1215)** – King John agreed to consult the nobles before he made important decisions, in particular regarding taxes
  - Began process of attempting to limited government
- **English Civil War (1640s)** – Civil war between Monarchists and Parliamentarians
- **The Glorious Revolution (1688)** – officially established Parliament as the ruling body of Great Britain
  - Agreement between King and Parliament called “Bill of Rights”
Democratization of Britain - Industrialization

• Gradualism – Gradual rise of parliament and the extension of government participation
• Industrial Revolution (18th-19th Century) shifts center of economy to cities
• Great Reform Acts (1832, 1867, 1884) – Extends the right to vote to landowning men, urban men, and eventually rural men
  • Women mostly get franchise in 1918 (28+), All women by 1928 (21+), lower age in 1969 (18+)
• Noblesse Oblige – Idea that wealthy should watch over lower classes
Modern Developments – Post-War Era

• Collective Consensus – All-party coalition developed during World War II in order to defeat Nazi Germany
  • Beveridge Report – adopted by both parties during the war made all citizens eligible for health, unemployment, pension, and other welfare benefits
• Welfare State – Seen as extension of collective consensus
  • Set of public policies designed to provide for citizens’ needs through provision of pensions, health care, unemployment insurance, & assistance to the poor
    • Included creation of National Health Service (1948)
Modern Developments - Thatcherism

• Rise of Neo-Liberalism
  • Revival of classic liberal values that promote free competition among businesses within the market, including reduced gov’t regulation & social spending
    • In response to economic stagnation

• Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990)
  • Conservative Party
  • Privatized British industries
  • Cut social programs
  • Reliance on Free market
    • Reduced government controls
    • Limited role of Labor Unions
Modern Developments – New Labour Party

• Developed in 1990s under Prime Minister Tony Blair as the “Third Way”
  • Political Left’s shift to center
• Attempting to redefine and balance following policy issues:
  • Evolving relationship between government & economy
  • British relationship with EU
  • Balancing act between the United States and European Union
  • Devolution
Modern Developments – Conservative-Liberal Coalition

• David Cameron (Conservative Party, PM 2010 - 2016)
  • Took party in more mainstream direction
    • Tories now control Government

• 2010 Election – Hung Parliament
  • When no party has a majority of seats in Parliament
  • Led to Conservative- Liberal Democrat coalition

• “Big Society”
  • Wide-ranging initiatives to empower ordinary citizens to take control over their lives
  • Shift power downward from state to communities/citizens

• “Austerity”
  • Series of sustained reductions in public spending
  • Aimed at reducing welfare state & reducing deficits
    • Affected NHS, welfare, education