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 or 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
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