

## Tradition and Change in Politics and Society

### Monarchy and Modern Democracy (in Britain)

#### Keyword:

**British constitution:** is not set out in a single document.

It is founded on conventions that are universally accepted, but which have never been formally defined. It is also founded on numerous acts and resolutions of Parliament, as each individual act of Parliament contributes to the constitution. Thus it is adaptable to changing political conditions.

### Separation of Powers

The following three branches represent the powers and areas of responsibility:

**Legislature:** Parliament

**Executive:**

- government
- government departments responsible for national administration
- local authorities
- public corporations responsible for particular nationalized industries (controlled by Government; most of these have now been privatized)

**Judiciary:** the Courts

There are **two kinds of law:**

- common law: historic body of conventions ("it has always been like that")
- statute law: parliamentary and EU legislation

### Parliament

#### Elements of Parliament

Queen – House of Lords – House of Commons

- Agreement of all three elements is required to pass legislation.
- Parliament is directly responsible to the electorate – no written constitution.
- An Act of Parliament cannot be disputed by the law courts.

#### Functions of Parliament

- pass laws
- scrutinize government policy and administration
- debate the major issues of the day

### The House of Lords (House of Peers, Upper House, Second Chamber)

The House of Lords consists of hereditary peers, who inherit their peerage, and life peers, whose peerages are granted to them personally for their lifetime.

The political power of the Peers has been gradually reduced over the years, and they have recognized the supremacy of the elected chamber, the House of Commons.

#### Functions of the House of Lords are

- to discuss, examine or delay Bills
- to introduce Bills.

It used to be the highest court of appeal (since October 2009 this function has been served by the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom).

### The House of Commons (Lower House)

646 members are directly elected by voters in the constituencies.

The House of Commons is the actual legislative body of the United Kingdom.

### The Queen

The Queen has no overt power but is formally part of the government system.

The Queen is the

- head of State
- symbol of national unity
- head of the executive
- head of the judiciary
- commander-in-chief of the armed forces
- "supreme governor" of the Church of England.

#### Important functions

The Queen

- appoints the Prime Minister – by inviting the leader of the majority in the House of Commons to form a Government
- summons and dissolves Parliament
- gives Royal Assent to legislation (given as a matter of course)
- formally appoints ministers, judges, officers, diplomats, bishops
- can pardon people
- confers peerages (see below) and knighthoods
- represents the country at home and abroad.

### General elections

The election period extends over a maximum of 5 years. Elections are ordered by the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister calls a new election at any time before the end of the 5-year election period. The United Kingdom is divided into 646 constituencies. Voters from each constituency elect their Member of Parliament (MP) by simple majority vote. The system is also called "first-past-the-post system". The candidate who gains the most votes in each

constituency gets a seat in Parliament. The political party that gains most seats forms the government. This system is preferred by the big parties, because it secures clear majorities. Smaller parties, which may have the support of a considerable proportion of the population, are never represented according to the proportion of the votes cast for them.

**By-elections:** elections in a single constituency when an MP has to be replaced during the legislative period.

## Political parties

### The Conservative Party (Tories)

Right-wing party, associated with

- nationalism
- law and order
- private enterprise
- minimal interference of the state in the economy.

### The Labour Party

Traditional party of the "working class", formerly associated with

- state control and planning
- nationalization of key industries
- welfare
- affiliation to the trade unions.

However, with Tony Blair the party now known as New Labour changed direction away from socialist ideals towards an acceptance of the free market economy, opening itself to voters from the middle classes.

### Governments since 1979

1979	Margaret Thatcher	Conservative	"Thatcherism": ruthless application of free market principles ("Iron Lady")
1983	Margaret Thatcher		
1987	Margaret Thatcher		
1991	John Major	Conservative	
1997	Tony Blair	Labour	"New Labour": more social democratic than socialist
2005	Tony Blair		
2007	Gordon Brown	Labour	
2010	David Cameron	Conservative	
2015	David Cameron	Conservative	
2016	Theresa May	Conservative	

## Her Majesty's Government

The Prime Minister is appointed by the Queen and the ministers are appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister is always a member of the House of Commons. He or she presides over the cabinet, allocates functions to the ministers, and informs the Queen regularly at private meetings. He or she lives at Number 10 Downing Street.

### Important members of the present cabinet (April 2018)

Prime Minister	Theresa May
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Philip Hammond
Secretary of State for the Home Department	Sajid Javid
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Boris Johnson
Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union	David Davis
Secretary of State for Defence	Gavin Williamson

Ministers are traditionally referred to as "The Right Honourable" (The Rt. Hon.), e.g. "The Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP"

### Her Majesty's Opposition

The leader of the opposition forms a "shadow cabinet", which can take over at any time if the government loses the support of the majority in parliament.

### The Privy Council

The main function of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council is to advise the Queen on the approval of legislation. Its members are senior politicians who were or are members of either the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

### Local government

The system of local government differs in the four countries of the UK. The systems are much too complex to be presented here. You should keep in mind though, that political decisions have to be taken at different levels. There are county councils, district councils and parish councils, which are responsible for all kinds of local affairs, e.g. waste management, transport, traffic, housing, education, licensing, cemeteries, etc.

## Devolution

Devolution is the granting of powers to the parliaments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. At the end of the 1990s the National Assembly of Wales and the Scottish Parliament were inaugurated, with competence to rule on issues like agriculture, fisheries and forestry, education, health, and tourism, whereas Westminster (the UK government) retained power in fields such as foreign affairs, defence, taxation,

fiscal policy, and labour market policy. Because of the Troubles, devolution in Northern Ireland was only implemented in 2007. In the 2014 referendum on full independence held in Scotland there was a narrow majority for the country to remain in the UK. After the Brexit decision the Scottish Parliament has decided to ask the British Government to be allowed to hold a second referendum on independence in order to give Scotland the chance to stay in the EU.

## Society

### Class

The British are very class-conscious. Class distinctions are recognizable in speech, habits, style, tastes, and values. The Office of National Statistics produced the following socio-economic classification in 2008<sup>1</sup>. Although many top-ranking people may earn a lot of money, the classification is not based on income alone but on the distinctions mentioned above. In the last two decades class distinctions have become less obvious. The country has become more of a meritocracy, i. e. a society where achievement counts most. But traditional everyday terms are still used to refer to social classes: *upper class*, *upper-middle class*, *lower-middle class*, *working class*.

### Ethnicity

Britain has become a multinational society in the last half century (see chapter “Multicultural society”, p. 36)

## Britain and the EU

Traditionally Britain has preferred to stay out of Europe. The terms “Europe” and “the Continent” have always referred to the European mainland.

Britain has been a member of the EU since 1973 (then the EC). Britain has not joined the monetary union (i. e. they do not have the euro). Britain has not signed the Schengen Agreement, which permits travelling without border controls between 25 European countries.

On June 23, 2016 a referendum about Britain’s membership in the EU was held (cf. p. 34). There is a continuing debate on Brexit in Britain between those in favour of the EU and the “Eurosceptics”. Eurosceptics are to be found among the supporters of the nationalist right and the Conservative party, but also among Labour Party members. Anti-European propaganda is to be found particularly in the tabloid papers like the *Sun* or the *Daily Mail*.

### Main arguments of the Eurosceptics

The EU is

- expensive to run
- dominated by big countries at the expense of the smaller members
- too powerful
- trying to impose regulation in policy areas that should be the responsibility of national governments (e. g. health, education, law, tax)
- corrupt and money-wasting
- a security risk with its open borders
- host to millions of immigrants, some of them hostile and violent
- undemocratic.

### Arguments in favour of the European Union

In 2007 *The Independent* published a list of 50 reasons why the EU is good for Britain. Many points are still valid today, but a few (like point 3) are out of date.

- 1 The end of war between European nations
- 2 Democracy is now flourishing in 27 countries
- 3 Once-poor countries, such as Ireland, Greece and Portugal, are prospering
- 4 The creation of the world’s largest internal trading market
- 5 Unparalleled rights for European consumers
- 6 Co-operation on continent-wide immigration policy
- 7 Co-operation on crime, through Europol
- 8 Laws that make it easier for British people to buy property in Europe
- 9 Cleaner beaches and rivers throughout Europe
- 10 Four weeks statutory paid holiday a year for workers in Europe
- 11 No death penalty (it is incompatible with EU membership)
- 12 Competition from privatised companies means cheaper phone calls
- 13 Small EU bureaucracy (24,000 employees, fewer than the BBC)
- 14 Making the French eat British beef again
- 15 Minority languages, such as Irish, Welsh and Catalan recognised and protected
- 16 Europe is helping to save the planet with regulatory cuts in CO<sub>2</sub>
- 17 One currency from Bantry to Berlin (but not Britain)
- 18 Europe-wide travel bans on tyrants such as Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe
- 19 The EU gives twice as much aid to developing countries as the United States
- 20 Strict safety standards for cars, buses and aircraft
- 21 Free medical help for tourists
- 22 EU peacekeepers operate in trouble spots throughout the world
- 23 Europe’s single market has brought cheap flights to the masses, and new prosperity for forgotten cities

- 27 Shopping without frontiers gives consumers more power to shape markets
- 28 Cheap travel and study programmes means greater mobility for Europe's youth
- 30 29 Food labelling is much clearer
- 30 No tiresome border checks (apart from in the UK)
- 31 Compensation for passengers suffering air delays
- 32 Strict ban on animal testing for the cosmetic industry
- 33 Greater protection for Europe's wildlife
- 35 34 Regional development fund has aided the deprived parts of Britain
- 35 European driving licences recognised across the EU
- 36 Britons now feel a lot less insular
- 37 Europe's bananas remain bent, despite sceptics' fears
- 38 Strong economic growth – greater than the United States last year
- 40 39 Single market has brought the best continental footballers to Britain
- 40 Human rights legislation has protected the rights of the individual
- 41 European Parliament provides democratic checks on all EU laws
- 42 EU gives more, not less, sovereignty to nation states
- 43 Maturing EU is a proper counterweight to the power of US and China
- 45 44 European immigration has boosted the British economy
- 45 Europeans are increasingly multilingual – except Britons, who are less so
- 46 Europe has set [...] an example how properly to fund a national health service
- 47 British restaurants now much more cosmopolitan
- 48 Total mobility for career professionals in Europe
- 50 49 Europe has revolutionised British attitudes to food and cooking
- 50 Lists like this drive the Eurosceptics mad

Quelle: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/so-what-has-europe-ever-done-for-us-apart-from-441138.html>

## Brexit

### Keyword:

**Brexit:** shorthand way of saying the UK is leaving the EU – merging the words Britain and exit

Cause: A referendum on 23 June 2016 → Leave won by 52% to 48%.  
The referendum turnout was 71.8%, with more than 30 million people voting.

### UK Breakdown

England voted for Brexit by 53.4% to 46.6%

Wales voted for Brexit by 52.5% to 47.5%.

Scotland and Northern Ireland both backed staying in the EU.

### After the referendum

Prime Minister David Cameron, who was against Brexit, resigned.

New Prime Minister Theresa May, who was also against Brexit, said she would respect the will of the people ("Brexit means Brexit").

Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty gives Britain and the EU two years to agree the terms of the split. The official date at which the UK will leave the EU is 30 March 2019. The EU has offered a transition period up to 31 December 2020.

At this time (spring 2018) the process of the negotiations cannot be foreseen. You should keep up to date with the events and check e. g. [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) or [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) for topical information, especially shortly before your English exam, in order to be able to cope with a possible task on Britain leaving the EU.

### hard Brexit vs soft Brexit

no compromises ↔ many compromises ... in order to maintain access to EU single market

### Scotland

Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said it is "democratically unacceptable" that Scotland has to leave the EU when it voted overwhelmingly to remain. A second independence referendum for the country is now "highly likely" (see chapter on devolution, p. 31).

### Northern Ireland

The Republic of Ireland is part of the EU. Northern Ireland voted to remain. Some politicians see this as a reason for a vote on reunification. We will have to wait and see how this issue develops.

## Multicultural Society

### Keyword:

**Imperial Act (1914):** Inhabitants of the colonies were given British citizenship.

- Between the 1960s and 1980s many Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis immigrated to Britain. They now form the largest immigrant communities.
- Many of them settled in the Midlands or in towns in Lancashire, Yorkshire and Strathclyde, where they worked in the textile industry.

### Britain today

- Britain consists of three countries (England, Scotland, Wales). Together with Northern Ireland it forms the United Kingdom. 12.4% of the population in the UK were born abroad (2013).<sup>1</sup>
- **Ethnic diversity** enriches Britain, not only when it comes to music, fashion and food.
- Many embrace the possibilities and advantages of ethnic diversity (such as the former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who said that Chicken Tikka Masala “ ... is now a true British national dish...”<sup>2</sup>).
- Others fear that “Britishness” will eventually be lost; they interpret multiculturalism as meaning that various cultures coexist peacefully, but without having a common basis of shared values.
- **Second generation immigrants**, i. e. children born to parents who immigrated to Britain prior to (or shortly after) their children’s birth, face a variety of problems:
  - They often experience a clash of cultures. Outside their parents’ home they adopt a western lifestyle, similar to that of their white friends and classmates. At home, however, they live according to values, beliefs and traditions typical of their parents’ home countries, which many of these children and teenagers have never visited. Quite often they do not speak their parents’ language any more, either. For some, the transition between these two different lifestyles is not easy.
  - They have difficulties when it comes to living up to the expectations of their parents, friends, teachers, etc.
  - They often have to face discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/uk-perspectives-a-recent-history-of-international-migration/>

<sup>2</sup> Robin Cook’s *Chicken Tikka Masala Speech*, The Guardian, April 19, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/apr/19/race.britishidentity>

## Glossary – Traditions and Change

act	Gesetz
bill	
law	
the law	das Gesetz
agreement	Abkommen
asylum seekers	Asylsuchende
blend in	sich einfügen, integrieren
citizenship	Nationalität, Staatsangehörigkeit
clash between/of two cultures	das Aufeinanderprallen zweier Kulturen
citizen	Bürger
conservative	konservativ
Conservative Party	die Conservative Party
a conservative	ein Konservativer
constitution	Verfassung
delegate	Delegierter
democracy	Demokratie
discriminate against someone	jemanden benachteiligen/diskriminieren
elect	wählen
to be elected	gewählt werden
election	Wahl
electorate	Wählerschaft
election period	Wahlperiode
election campaign	Wahlkampf
ethnic minorities	ethnische Minderheiten
ethnicity	Ethnizität, Volkszugehörigkeit
executive	die Exekutive
federal	Bundes-...
government	Regierung
to govern	regieren
hold racist attitudes	eine rassistische Haltung/Einstellung haben
house	Kammer des Parlaments
imperialism; imperialistic	Imperialismus; imperialistisch
indefinite leave to remain	unbeschränkte Aufenthaltserlaubnis
judiciary	die Judikative
labour	Arbeit
Labour Party	die Labour Party

legislature legislative	die Legislative gesetzgebend
loss of identity	Identitätsverlust
minister prime minister (the Prime Minister) ministry	Minister Premierminister Ministerium
MP Member of Parliament	Abgeordneter
mutual understanding and respect	gegenseitiges/beidseitiges Verständnis und Respekt
office to hold office Home Office/Foreign Office	Amt, Ministerium ein Amt innehaben Innenministerium, Außenministerium
open-minded vs. narrow-minded	aufgeschlossen vs. engstirnig
outsider	Außenseiter
parliament	Parlament
party	Partei
policy economic policy foreign policy	politisches Ziel, Maßnahmen Wirtschaftspolitik Außenpolitik
pluralistic society	eine pluralistische Gesellschaft
politics political politician	Politik politisch Politiker
poll polling-station	Abstimmung, Umfrage, Wahl, Wahllokal
racial equality	Gleichwertigkeit verschiedener Rassen
receive/be granted citizenship	die Staatsbürgerschaft erhalten
referendum	Volksbefragung, Volksentscheid
representative	(Volks-)Vertreter
secretary foreign secretary	Minister Außenminister
the people	das Volk
to support	unterstützen
vote to vote voter	Stimme stimmen, wählen Wähler
wing right/left wing	Flügel rechter/linker Flügel